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## **RELEASE: New Research Finds Climate Adaptation Is an Opportunity for Transformative Change in Cities**

***Urban adaptation should incorporate climate risks into planning, work with vulnerable communities and focus on nature-based solutions***

**COPENHAGEN (October 9, 2019)** — By 2050, two-thirds of the world’s population will live in urban areas, which will face the gravest risks from climate change: sea-level rise, flooding, heat and water stress, loss of biodiversity and other impacts. With the most rapid growth occurring in global south cities with large vulnerable populations, it is vital that cities seek climate adaptation solutions that are truly transformative in shifting them on track towards more equitable, more sustainable growth, according to new research from WRI.

“Urban development that is blind to climate risks has ended up significantly increasing exposure to climate hazards in cities,” said **Anjali Mahendra**, co-author of the report and Director of Research at WRI Ross Center for Sustainable Cities. “But successful urban adaptation is about more than just withstanding storms, floods and heat; we must plan, deliver, and finance infrastructure and core services in cities differently, relying significantly on nature-based solutions and more closely engaging vulnerable communities.”

The paper, [\*Unlocking the Potential for Transformative Climate Adaptation in Cities\*](#), was launched today at the [C40 World Mayors Summit in Copenhagen](#). It is part of a series of background papers commissioned by the Global Commission on Adaptation to inform its flagship report, [Adapt Now: A Global Call for Leadership on Climate Resilience](#), which finds that changes in five key areas, including in cities, could generate \$7.1 trillion in net benefits between 2020 and 2030. The commission is convened by 20 countries and co-chaired by 8th UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Co-Founder of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Bill Gates and Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund Kristalina Georgieva.

There are already more than 880 million people living in informal settlements worldwide, with limited access to shelter, electricity, clean water, sanitation and employment. Climate impacts are likely to worsen access to such services, especially for vulnerable populations, including women, children and the elderly, migrants, indigenous populations and minorities. Sea-level rise and storm surges alone could cost coastal cities \$1 trillion each year by midcentury, affecting more than 800 million people. Urban areas in drylands, with over 2 billion people, face increased water stress and frequent droughts that exacerbate health and food insecurity, while the impacts of excessive heat continue to increase.

“Climate-linked changes can easily be a new pathway to good quality inclusive development that also fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals,” said **Sheela Patel**, a Commissioner with the Global Commission on Adaptation and Chair of Slum/Shack Dwellers International. “The challenge is to produce new strategies and partnerships that include the poor to produce the new normal that provides better quality of life for all and improves the health of the planet.”

“Transformative adaptation reorients urban climate actions around addressing entrenched equity and climate justice challenges,” said **Eric Chu**, lead author of the report and Assistant Professor in the Department of Human Ecology at the University of California, Davis. “It focuses



on systemic changes to development that improve people’s quality of life, enhance the social and economic vibrancy of cities, and ensure sustainable, resilient, and inclusive urban futures.”

The paper highlights three key action areas that cities can focus on to help advance transformative urban adaptation:

1. **Mainstream information on climate risks into planning and delivery of urban infrastructure and services**, while strengthening local capacity to act on that information. In Surat, India, the Surat Climate Change Trust is helping to coordinate the dozen-plus organizations previously responsible for flood management in the city, for example.
2. **Build climate resilience by upgrading living conditions in vulnerable communities and informal settlements**, drawing upon local experience and community knowledge. The Asian Coalition for Community Action program has supported community-led upgrading in over 2,000 communities in 207 cities in 18 countries, for instance.
3. **Prioritize nature-based solutions to holistically manage water and heat risks**. In São Paulo, the reduction of sediment flow from restoring 4,000 hectares of forests near the city’s watershed was estimated to be \$4.5 million cheaper than the cost of dredging reservoirs to improve urban water quality.

Coordinated governance and integrated planning by accountable institutions are keys to success. Partnerships across communities, private sector, and civil society across scales of decision making are necessary to achieve progress on adaptation priorities. Transformative adaptation allows cities to achieve synergies across multiple goals, including provision of core services and infrastructure (water mains, sewerage lines, electricity grids, transportation networks), climate mitigation, ecosystem protection, economic growth, and sustainable development.

“Cities are a fantastic opportunity to get adaptation right,” said **Ani Dasgupta**, Global Director of WRI Ross Center for Sustainable Cities. “But cities must adapt in ways that correct underlying inequalities. Done carefully, transformative adaptation can put cities on a stronger, safer path that offers opportunity and a higher quality of life for all.”

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### ***About WRI Ross Center for Sustainable Cities***

WRI Ross Center for Sustainable Cities helps create accessible, equitable, healthy and resilient urban areas for people, businesses and the environment to thrive. Together with partners, it enables more connected, compact and coordinated cities. The Center expands the transport and urban development expertise of the EMBARQ network to catalyze innovative solutions in other sectors, including water, buildings, land use and energy. It combines the research excellence of WRI with 15 years of on-the-ground impact through a network of more than 250 experts



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