

Porto novo environmental sustainability

Taking action against climate change is hugely important in the developing countries. This is particularly true for African countries, where the impacts of climate change will hit harder. It is also where development challenges and poverty alleviation needs are most severe.

The lack of funding and capacity for climate change mitigation is a sore point for cities everywhere. But despite these barriers, cities globally--including in Africa--are taking action as best they can to prepare for the effects of climate change.

Porto Novo in Benin, Rouen in France and Da Nang in Vietnam are three examples of cities that are particularly vulnerable to climate change. All three are particularly prone to flooding. This is not surprising in coastal cities such as Porto Novo and Da Nang, or in cities located on the banks of a major river like Rouen.

All of the infrastructure that is clustered around the banks of the river Seine, in Rouen, can't, realistically, be removed. The best many cities can do with their existing at-risk infrastructure is try to protect it in some way. One of the best opportunities for preparing for the effects of climate change comes from new urbanisation and development plans.

Rouen has taken this approach with its new, mixed-use eco-district Luciline--Rives de Seine--which is being built on an industrial wasteland. Rouen has integrated climate change adaptation into the project by creating specific infrastructure requirements in order to protect the area against floods, both from the river Seine as well as those caused by extreme rains.

Ground floor levels must be built above the level of the Seine. Green roofs will trap rainwater and water ditches. All developers have to commit themselves to the specifications laid down by the city if they want to invest in the new neighbourhood.

Vietnam's Da Nang is revising the city's 2030 master plan. It plans to widen the flood plains and allow more land for green areas and lakes.

Da Nang also adopted an innovative approach to retro-fitting existing buildings that are heavily affected by typhoons. The city has a fund in place to provide loans to people in vulnerable areas who generally are those with least resources for strengthening their houses against typhoons, repayable after three years.

In Porto Novo, the capital of the West African nation of Benin, the creation of appropriate urbanisation and development plans that take climate change into account is key to protecting the city.

Where Porto Novo stands out is in the opportunity it has to develop a city-wide response to adaptation--as

expressed by the initiative's name, "Porto Novo, Green City".

With 310,000 inhabitants as of 2013, Porto Novo's rapid geographic spread is at odds with its low growth in terms of demographics and the economy. In its peri-urban areas, the majority of the population lives in poorly structured, informal settlements and is encroaching upon flood-prone wetlands and marshy areas.

The city is geographically large but under-developed. Only a small proportion of its area is built-up. This gives the city a chance to develop in a far more climate-compatible way than many other cities whose early urbanisation patterns have not been informed by climate change.

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