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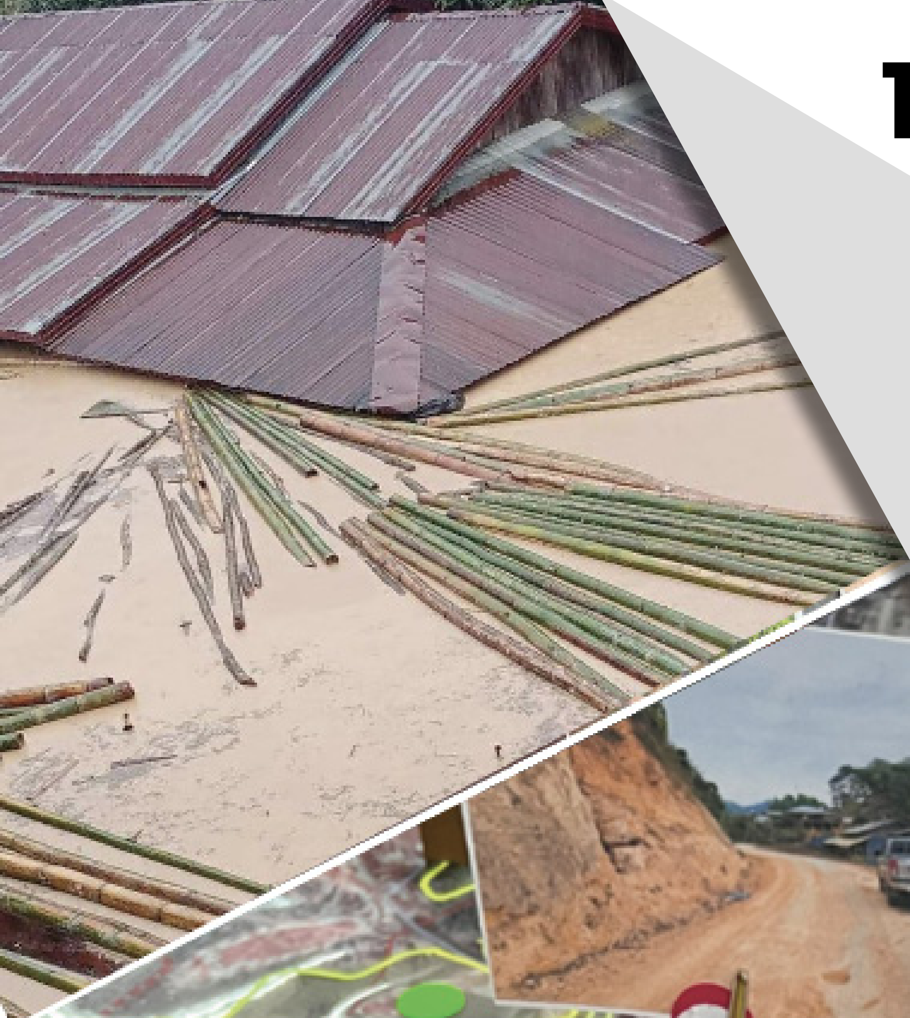
Tackling Loss and Damage



Editorial

Climate change-induced loss and damage refers to the permanent and irreversible harm caused by climate change-related extreme weather events or slow-onset processes such as sea level rise that go beyond the adaptive capacity of people and systems. Over the past years, at the international policy level, Loss and Damage (L&D) has emerged as the 'third pillar' alongside climate change adaptation and mitigation, and has become a core topic in climate change debates and processes.

2025 stands as the third-warmest year on record, following unprecedented temperature highs in 2023 and 2024. The climate crisis is one of the most pressing challenges of our time, with marginalised urban populations being among the most affected. In its *Sixth Assessment Report*, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) underscores the heightened vulnerability of urban dwellers – particularly those living in informal settlements, which are highly exposed to hazards and have limited adaptive capacity. Recent research on cities in the Global South confirms that residents of informal settlements face disproportionate risks due to exclusion from formal urban planning, funding mechanisms, and disaster risk management processes. As a result, vulnerable households experience losses and damages, with profound impacts on housing, health, and financial security, and, in consequence, raising serious human rights concerns. That includes both economic losses and damages such as property of infrastructure and non-economic ones, which are more difficult to quantify,or monetize but which are equally important, such as cultural heritage or local knowledge. Against the backdrop of increasingly frequent and intense extreme weather events and continued urban population growth, and despite ongoing mitigation and adaptation efforts, climate-induced losses and damages have become a severe reality, and the way they manifest for inhabitants of informal urban settlements is very specific. With the forthcoming IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities, and building on insights from the Misereor and UNU-EHS study about "Loss and Damage in Informal Urban Settlements" in 2024, Trialog, TRIALOG is dedicating this special issue to climate-related Loss and Damage, focusing on informal settlements that are too often overlooked in policy debates.

Despite increasing awareness about the urban dimensions of climate change, the debate on urban L&D is still in its early stages. Therefore, this special issue kicks off with two introductory chapters. **Douwe van Schie** provides a short overview on the international policy debate on Loss and Damage and reflects on advances and gaps in scholarship – including the hitherto limited understanding of losses and damages in cities and informal settlements. **The editorial board** follows suit with an introduction on the ongoing discourse surrounding the definition of informal settlements, noting that climate and resilience dimensions are gaining increasing prominence in these debates.

While international policy mechanisms and a Fund for responding to Loss and Damage have been established, the exact modes of access to support remain to be clarified. The article of **Antje Illberg** proposes criteria and potential pathways for the operationalisation of loss and damage funding, amongst them the eligibility of relocation and land compensation for loss and damage funding. Pointing out some key takeaways from the 2025 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP30) in Belém, Brazil, and with respect to L&D, **Clara Luisa Weichelt**'s blog/comment is also concerned with relocation. During the conference, policy propositions to consider relocation as an indicator for successful adaptation were strongly contested by civil society. Noting the limited applicability of existing L&D instruments for informal settlements, **Samuel Okorie** and **colleagues** present practical and context-specific innovations from sub-Saharan Africa that could help close this gap.

Several articles of this special issue place a focus on the root causes of climate-related vulnerabilities. The paper of **Lucas Turmena** and **Jaffar Abbas** shows how tenure insecurity elevates risks before – and hinders equitable recovery after – shocks in an informal settlement in São Paulo, Brazil. Hence, strengthened tenure security is considered a systemic driver for climate-resilient development. **Eva Dick** presents a debate on the 2023 UN-Habitat Assembly resolution *Recovery from Urban Crises*, originating in a workshop co-organised by TRIALOG. The panellists of this debate call for global resilience frameworks and interventions which more effectively account for structural vulnerabilities. Reminding us of urban migrants as a particularly vulnerable group, **Susan Ekoh** and **Abeeb Ajagbe** propose to conceptualise climate (im-)mobility as a distinct form of loss and damage. In their fieldwork in Accra and Lagos, they have found economic and non-economic losses and damages to be directly associated with migration situations.

Involving residents of informal settlements in the measurement of losses and damage can enhance data accuracy and breadth. **Dulari Parmar** and **Roshni Nuggehalli** highlight Indian case studies in which participatory data production exposes hidden losses and damages due to infrastructure-induced evictions, exclusionary development planning, as well as informality, and promotes transformative governance. **Irene Kinoti, Samuel Olando** and **Tobias Ngo'ng'a** trace historical and structural drivers of informal settlement development in Kenya, demonstrating that community-led data and resilience strategies are crucial for addressing climate-related losses and damages. Finally **Adrian Hogdson** and **Ania Wilk-Pham** examine Southeast Asian secondary cities, showing how participatory, water-sensitive planning and nature-based solutions reduce L&D.

Local and autonomous responses may significantly contribute to dealing with losses and damages, but are rarely integrated in institutional responses. With regards to climate-induced migration in Khulna, Bangladesh, **Naimul Aziz** and **Apurba Podder** show that community-led autonomous adaptation strategies to recover from losses and damages must be recognised to ensure inclusive and context-sensitive urban resilience. **Bassey Bassey** documents economic, social, and cultural impacts in Abuja's (Nigeria) informal settlements and highlights the need to link community-led adaptive strategies with government-led urban planning. **Rebecca Keuss** relates loss and damage debates to the urban context of Beira, Mozambique, showing how urban authorities, supported by development partners and partly building on coping strategies of communities, adjust to recurrent flooding to date.

The special issue closes with a broader reflection on the evolution of the climate change debate. **Franziska Laue** traces TRIALOG's publishing history from local environmental management to global climate resilience debates, noting a persistent need for inclusive, transdisciplinary epistemics and action.

Finally, the editors view this special issue as a point of departure and work in progress within the global discourse and advocacy on loss and damage. They warmly invite further contributions, reflections, and collaborations to help shape this evolving and urgent field, and encourage readers to engage critically and constructively with the perspectives presented here.