



Hemispheric Dialogue on Climate Resilience & Adaptation:

*Lessons Learned, Best
Practices, and Key Takeaways*

July 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the **leading ideas, case studies, and tools** shared during the **Urban Hemispheric Dialogue on Climate Resilience & Adaptation, organized by Cities Forward in São Paulo, Brazil on June 18, 2024**. The Dialogue gathered more than 70 local and regional stakeholders from the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean, along with representatives from non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and academia, to discuss urban adaptation and resilience solutions to climate change. Focusing on replicable cases and lessons learned, the convening covered topics such as **nature-based solutions, housing risks, ecosystem-based adaptation, water infrastructure, and technology** across four thematic sessions.

The Hemispheric Dialogue on Climate Resilience & Adaptation is part of [Cities Forward](#), a collaborative program that promotes peer-to-peer exchange, the strengthening of local capabilities, and project co-development in the context of urban sustainability. The initiative is the result of a partnership between the U.S. Department of State, ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, Resilient Cities Catalyst, and the Institute of the Americas.



Source: ICLEI USA.

As participants in Cities Forward, **twelve cities from Latin America and the Caribbean were paired with local governments from the United States**, and they have been working together to address sustainability and social inequality challenges for the past year. The Dialogue represented an opportunity for paired cities to engage in-person for the second time since the launch of the Cities Forward initiative. It also immediately preceded **ICLEI's World Congress**, which took place in São Paulo June 19-21 and gathered more than a thousand representatives from local governments around the world to discuss central themes in sustainable urban development.

This report aims to **share the leading ideas** presented during the Hemispheric Dialogue by more than ten subject matter experts. It is structured around **lessons learned** from each session, **case studies**, and **key takeaways**. Ultimately, this report is expected to **disseminate knowledge on urban sustainable development** and assist in **policy design and implementation**.

You can learn more about the Dialogue [here](#) and visit the photo album [here](#)!



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SESSION 1: Insights to Urban Resilience: Reforestation, Green Corridors, and Nature-Based Solutions

Moderator	Candelaria Mas Pohmajevic , Associate Director, Resilient Cities Catalyst (RCC).
Panelists	Claudio Castro , Mayor of Renca, Chile. Cristina Romcy , Professor of Architecture and Urbanism, University of Fortaleza. Martin Perez Lara , Director of Forest Climate Solutions Impact and Monitoring, WWF-US.
Discussants	Emilio Vargas , Urban Planning Director, City of Guatemala, Guatemala. Francisco Alberto Castillo Gonzalez , Environmental Advisor, City of Cartagena, Colombia.

This first session explored methods of **urban resilience**, focusing on techniques such as **reforestation, green corridors, and other nature-based solutions**. It identified obstacles and successes in creating and implementing urban resilience strategies. The mayor of Renca, a municipality in Santiago's metropolitan area characterized by multidimensional poverty, city pollution, and industrial hubs, emphasized the importance of nature-based solutions. As an example, he highlighted the **Parque Metropolitano Cerro de Renca** for its efforts to restore degraded soils. The session also highlighted the importance of **incorporating nature into urban environments by using native species**. It pointed out that while city administrative boundaries can limit such efforts, nature itself does not recognize these boundaries.

Case highlight: Parque Metropolitano Cerro de Renca (PMCR).



City dwellers planting trees in the park.
 Source: Urbanismo Social.

- The [Parque Metropolitano Cerro de Renca](#) is an emblematic 207-hectare project focused on constructing an urban park;
- The park is uplifting communities towards sustainable development paths and increasing their sense of local identity;
- It is the result of a citizen participation process involving workshops, tours, reforestation events, and spaces for neighbors to engage with public and private stakeholders;
- The park is part of an integrated system of green corridors that aims to provide ecosystem services to Renca, such as the reduction of air pollution;

Green corridors are crucial for connecting spaces to enhance vegetation coverage, mitigate the heat island effect, and reduce air and noise pollution. They also strengthen local identity and encourage alternative transportation modes. By including elements such as active frontages and optimized space utilization, green corridors can fulfill various community needs. As the city is a complex system composed of individuals and elements that drive urban change, public policies must value the interaction between citizens and green spaces. However, it is essential that green areas do not contribute to urban segregation, as the next box explains.

Case highlight: Green Corridors in Fortaleza, Ceará.

- Cristina Romcy introduced the concept of "A green corridor to call my own: how can we ensure that this green corridor is for everyone?";
- The concept emphasizes the importance of inclusivity in green corridor development to ensure equal access and benefits for all community members, instead of urban gentrification and segregation;
- The speaker highlighted the case of Pajeú Creek's green corridor, in Fortaleza, Brazil: luxury real estate has been developed near the new green space, while informal settlements are present in the section of the creek not surrounded by the corridor.



Source: City of Fortaleza.



Pajeú creek. Source: City of Fortaleza.

To drive positive change, [Nature-based Solutions](#) (NbS) are a great tool for cities. Learning from natural systems and processes can **guide urban policies** and help cities and local communities become **more resilient to climate changes**. It is important to consider which NbS strategies are adequate for each objective and monitor their impact through updated indicators. For the latter, [WWF's Nature-based Solutions Origination Platform](#) (NbS-OP) is an innovative vehicle, focusing on tropical forest landscapes.

Key takeaways

- **Green spaces** support biodiversity, cool urban areas, help control air pollution, and store carbon, all of which are vital for mitigating urbanization's environmental impacts.
- **Inclusive urban planning**, by ensuring that green spaces are accessible to all residents, is vital for sustainable development and fostering a sense of local identity.
- **Implementing Nature-based Solutions** is crucial for enhancing urban resilience and promoting sustainable city development.

SESSION 2: Housing Risks and Ecosystem Based-Adaptation

Moderator	Rocio Ruelas , Programs and Projects Officer, ICLEI Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean.
Panelists	<p>Hugo Mesquita, Project Director, Institute of Urbanism and Studies for the Metropolis (URBEM).</p> <p>Lucía Groos, Director of the Center for Research and Social Innovation, TECHO Argentina.</p> <p>Mariana Nicolletti, Head of Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management at the Center of Sustainability Studies, Fundação Getulio Vargas (FGVces).</p> <p>Pablo López, Urban Development Specialist, Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (CAF).</p>
Discussants	<p>Alejandra Bolio Rojas, Environment Unit Sector Chief, City of Mérida, México.</p> <p>Mauricio Mira Pontón, Director of the Administrative Department of Environmental Management, City of Cali, Colombia.</p>

The second session of the Dialogue explored the association between **housing and environmental vulnerabilities**, emphasizing how **ecosystem-based adaptation** can ameliorate urban challenges. Especially in the developing world, informal settlements tend to persist, most often with limited access to municipal services such as water and sanitation. Moreover, climate change has increased cities' vulnerability to natural disasters. In this sense, **unequal housing access and exposure to environmental risks reinforce one another**. Unplanned urban sprawl, increasing housing prices, and other social factors have historically contributed to the establishment of informal settlements in environmentally at-risk areas. As TECHO's project (presented below) shows, **40% of the informal communities in Argentina are exposed to environmental risks**. The organization developed an innovative process to collect **data** and aims to provide **resilient homes to mitigate this effect**.

Case highlight: National Registry of Informal Settlements in Argentina, from TECHO Argentina.



Each blue dot represents an informal settlement in Argentina.
 Source: Government of Argentina.

- In 2017, TECHO and the Government of Argentina started a process to identify informal settlements in the country and understand the environmental risks they were exposed to;
- They conducted surveys with community leaders and other citizens. Through social participation, they constructed a map of informal settlements for the country;
- They identified 6,647 informal settlements, distributed over 684 square km;
- Now, TECHO aims to find innovative, affordable, resilient and scalable housing solutions for these group of Argentinians.

Similarly, URBEM Institute shared information about its Urban Intervention Plan Vila Leopoldina-Villa Lobos in São Paulo, Brazil. The project aims to revitalize an area of the city through **mixed-use development, social inclusion, and green infrastructure**, as explained in the next box.

Case highlight: Urban Intervention Plan (PIU) Vila Leopoldina-Villa Lobos in São Paulo, from URBEM.

- There is a high rate of Informal settlements in the area where PIU Vila-Leopoldina-Villa Lobos will be constructed;
- URBEM is supporting the investment group that owns the land to develop the project with a social and environmental approach. It will contain a mix of residential, commercial, and corporate buildings;
- 100% of the families that reside in these informal settlements will have access to social housing in the same area;
- The project will contain green infrastructure to increase climate change adaptation.



A virtual image of the project. Source: URBEM.

Both TECHO and URBEM's case studies are aligned with the solutions for disaster risk management that FGVces and CAF presented. These two latter organizations highlighted the importance of updated **planning instruments and housing policies** based on **climate, environmental, and socioeconomic indicators**; creating an **institutional framework** through which adaptation plans can persist over time and combining **social participation** with the technical expertise of environmental professionals.

This would help ensure city governments can better implement **ecosystem-based adaptation**, a strategy to prepare neighborhoods and citizens for climate change with a focus on underserved communities. Examples include the creation of **adaptive zoning, restoration of biodiversity in urban settings to improve ecosystem services**, and the **establishment of [green](#) and [blue](#) infrastructure**.

Case highlight: Ecosystem-based adaptation in Monte Serrat, Santos, Brazil.

- FGVces' presentation emphasized the possibility of using natural materials and ecosystem services to achieve slope stabilization, using the Monte Serrat hill, in Santos, Brazil, as an example;
- Informal settlements established in Monte Serrat and landslides after extreme rainfalls occurred in the area;
- Workshops increased knowledge of the local community about current risks and potential solutions, and some families located in vulnerable sections of Monte Serrat relocated to social housing;
- Ecosystem-based adaptation is now being implemented to prevent future landslides, through the restoration of local vegetation;
- The initiative will be developed by the city government and GIZ.



Areas susceptible to landslides in Monte Serrat. Source: Coffani-Nunes 2022.

Key takeaways

- **Housing and environmental vulnerabilities are two interconnected phenomena** that reinforce one another.
- **Ecosystem-based adaptation can be highly effective** in improving neighborhoods' resilience to climate risks. However, these techniques need to be aligned with housing policies for those in informal communities.
- **Updated data and environmental indicators are fundamental** for developing effective planning instruments.
- **Social mobilization is key** to include and inform citizens on planning processes and familiarizing them with the environmental risks they are exposed to.

SESSION 3: Building Resilience for Critical Water Infrastructure

Moderator	Luis Jesús Ruiz , Technical Secretary, ICLEI Mexico, Central America and The Caribbean.
Panelists	<p>Atha Philips, Senior Policy Advisor for Mayor Pro Tem Leslie Pool, City of Austin, Texas.</p> <p>Luciana Lobo, Secretary of Urbanism and Environment, City of Fortaleza, Brazil.</p> <p>Ravinder Bhalla, Mayor of Hoboken, New Jersey.</p>
Discussants	<p>Chevonnia McBride, Senior Project Manager & Investment Officer, Ministry of Grand Bahama, Freeport-Grand Bahama.</p> <p>Ruth Moncayo, Director of Operation and Maintenance at the Public Water Company, City of Moncayo, Ecuador.</p> <p>Tamoy Sinclair, Parish Coordinator Disaster Preparedness at St. James Municipal Corporation, Montego Bay.</p>

This panel focused on **building resilience for critical water infrastructure** in cities, which are at the frontline of various climate risks and becoming increasingly vulnerable. Key challenges include flooding and storm surges, making it imperative to **enhance infrastructure resilience**. This involves implementing strategies to mitigate environmental impacts and ensure **sustainable water management practices** in response to evolving climate challenges.

During Hurricane Sandy in 2012, the city of Hoboken was severely affected and almost completely submerged, showcasing its vulnerability to flooding. Since then, Hoboken has transformed its challenges into opportunities by integrating **water-absorbing infrastructure**. Read more about it in the next box.

Case highlight: Dealing with flooding in Hoboken, New Jersey.

- Hoboken enhanced stormwater management to adapt to environmental challenges;
- The city rebuilt its sewer infrastructure, increasing its capacity to mitigate flood risks;
- Flood barriers were integrated into the urban landscape, instead of building the usual gray infrastructure. Cisterns and basins are part of every new park and playground, effectively managing stormwater;
- The city government constructed parks with underground tanks and pumps to store and regulate excess water from rain and tidal surges, with the capacity to release it post-storm;
- Hoboken implemented measures to elevate vulnerable power lines and developed flood protections against future inundations.



Source: Dattner Architects.

Building **climate-resilient communities** requires the **capacity to respond to emergencies, including multiple concurrent crises**, and making substantial efforts to reduce risks through **long-term investments in resilient infrastructure**. Enhancing water resilience is critical to tackling local challenges and ensuring safe, secure, and inclusive water and sanitation services for all residents. Austin, Texas has formulated a comprehensive 100-year plan in response to extreme drought conditions and climate change. This initiative aims to secure a **diversified, sustainable, and resilient water supply** for the city, addressing the challenges of today and preparing for those of the future.

Case highlight: Austin Water Utility’s Plan to Respond to Drought in Short & Long Terms

The [Water Forward Plan](#) incorporates at least six key sustainable water management elements:

- Water demand analysis integrating onsite reuse;
- Reliance on local water supplies;
- Conservation and efficiency programs;
- Climate science-based planning;
- Clear performance metrics for accountability and progress tracking;
- Public and stakeholder engagement;



Source: Google Photos.

Reducing vulnerability to climate impacts and building resilience requires at least three critical actions: accelerating development, enhancing resilience in development practices, and implementing targeted adaptation measures. Equally important is empowering frontline communities to take **locally-led, context-specific actions** in response to climate change impacts.

Parque Rachel de Queiroz in Fortaleza, Brazil, is another initiative that illustrates the implementation of Nature-based Solutions to **enhance quality of life**. Besides improving the park’s landscape, **the wetlands strategies implemented serve as a crucial process for environmental recovery** in the area.

Case highlight: Parque Rachel de Queiroz in Fortaleza, Brazil.

To improve the water quality of the Cachoeirinha Creek and create a flood mitigation system, Fortaleza developed the *Parque Rachel de Queiroz*. The park encompasses 14 neighborhoods across 12 kilometers and 19 sections. Wetlands technology is a highlight of the sixth section of *Rachel de Queiroz*:

- Following hydrological studies, nine interconnected ponds were proposed to naturally filter the waters from the Cachoeirinha Creek;
- Stormwater is drained through sedimentation and phytoremediation;
- This process benefits from the action of microorganisms fixed on the soil surface and within the roots of aquatic plants in the ponds.



Source: Arch Daily.

Moreover, it is crucial to highlight that financial mechanisms play a pivotal role in driving investments, particularly in emerging markets and developing countries—like most of those in Latin America and the Caribbean. Mapping stakeholders and investors is essential to fund a range of adaptation solutions, including water infrastructure, enabling cities to identify strategies and scale them effectively.

Key takeaways

- **It is fundamental to empower local communities** with the knowledge and resources needed to lead and implement locally-appropriate adaptation measures.
- **Critical water infrastructure integrated into the city's landscape** can improve climate resilience while also promoting the well-being of city dwellers and their use of public green spaces.
- **Long-term planning** is crucial for building effective climate-resilient water infrastructure in cities.

SESSION 4: Leveraging Technology for Adaptation: Data Analysis, Modelling and Satellite Imagery

Moderator	Shane Christensen , Diplomatic Fellow, Institute of the Americas (IOA).
Panelists	<p>Jeb Brugmann, Founding Principal, Resilient Cities Catalyst (RCC).</p> <p>Virginia Burkett, Chief Scientist for Climate and Land Use Change, United States Geological Survey.</p> <p>Olayinka Lawal, Strategic Partnerships Manager, Google.</p>
Discussants	<p>Silvina di Nucci, Environmental Engineer, City of Rosario, Argentina.</p> <p>Jose Carrillo, General Director of the Municipal Institute of Urban Planning (IMPLAN), City of Hermosillo, México.</p> <p>Antonio Ademir Stroski, Secretary for the Environment, Sustainability, and Climate Change, City of Manaus, Brazil.</p>

The fourth and last session of the Dialogue explored the **use of data and technology to build resilience for a changing climate**. It showed that data-based initiatives, technological tools and measurements, and adaptation frameworks can be used to improve urban resilience to climate risks such as floods and heat island effects.

Examples include the development of **prediction and early warning systems** and the **collection of data to map and monitor vulnerable communities**, as the U.S. Geological Survey presentation emphasized. International organizations and agencies, national and local governments, and other stakeholders can cooperate to exchange and co-create projects, methodologies, and technology for adaptation. The **Initiative for Enhancing Capacity for Climate Risk Assessment and Catalyzing Partnerships to Inform Decisions in Latin America (LACI)** is a great example.

Case highlight: LACI project in El Salvador, La Plata Basin, Amazonia, and Jamaica.

[LACI](#) promotes the sharing of tools and methodologies between governments in the Americas, in addition to the co-creation of pilot initiatives to build capacities to assess climate risks.

- In **El Salvador**, local experts are sharing knowledge and tools with professionals from Chile and the United States to co-develop an **atlas on climate change vulnerability and risks**. The atlas will be used to support local action on climate adaptation;
- In the **La Plata Basin**, governments and partner organizations are cooperating to establish a **data and information observatory**. Its goal will be to monitor climate events and inform public policy;
- In the **Amazonia region**, **climate-informed tools to support and inform land use planning** are being created in partnership with local and indigenous communities. They are based on geospatial data;
- In **Jamaica**, the pilot project is focused on **disaster risk reduction** through the establishment of a **stakeholder map and the creation of an early warning system**.

When it comes to specific technologies that governments can use to improve urban resilience, **Google's Environmental Insights Explorer Tree Canopy** is a notable tool. It allows cities to map their tree canopy and expand the benefits that nature brings to urban dwellers.

Case highlight: Environmental Insights Explorer (EIE) Tree Canopy, from Google.



Source: Google.

- Google's solution combines satellite imagery with artificial intelligence to categorize pixels into different types of terrains;
- The Tree canopy is estimated as the percentage of pixels regarding trees;
- In partnership with American Forests, it is also possible to create tree equity scores and planting targets and plans, besides monitoring progress.
- Austin, Texas is one of the cities that has used the EIE Tree Canopy tool effectively to inform policy (image on the left).

Lastly, Resilient Cities Catalyst's presentation highlighted how **tested frameworks** for the **design and implementation of adaptation projects** can help cities strengthen their impact. The organization, alongside Gold Standard, has developed its own guidelines. Following 18 requirements, governments can create a climate adaptation project and submit it for certification with [Gold Standard](#) and [IUCN-NbS](#), as the next box shows.

Case highlight: Framework & Standard for Adaptation, from Resilient Cities Catalyst and Gold Standard.

- Resilient Cities Catalyst and Gold Standard co-created a [framework & standard for adaptation](#);
- It works on a local project scale, has a multi-hazard approach, and applies to different risks;
- The steps consist of data collection and analysis, stakeholder engagement, risk assessment, definition of "unacceptable" risks, design of climate adaptation measures, and project certification;
- Pilot projects have been developed in Pittsburgh, United States, and Galapagos, Ecuador;



Workshop as part of the pilot project in Galapagos, Ecuador.
 Source: Resilient Cities Catalyst.

Key takeaways

- **Data modeling, technological tools, frameworks, and standards** are key to inform public decision-making, ensuring that adaptation strategies are based on evidence and replicate successful and carefully planned case-studies.
- **Promoting the exchange of knowledge, tools, and measurements, and local capacity building** between different governments are fundamental for leveraging the benefits of technology for adaptation.

CONCLUSIONS

The Cities Forward Initiative demonstrates the **power of collaborative efforts** in addressing cities' challenges related to sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience. By facilitating **peer-to-peer exchanges**, capacity building, and engagement, the program has effectively **brought together local and regional policymakers, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and academia** from the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

The focus on **replicable projects** and **thematic sessions** related to **nature-based solutions, housing risks, water infrastructure, and technology** provided a comprehensive approach to enhancing **urban resilience**. A **holistic strategy** is essential for preparing and preventing future climate-related disasters locally, including proactive and integrated measures in **urban planning** and policy development.

Success depends on sharing case-studies, lessons learned, and best practices as urban settings are going through similar challenges around the world. This was the main goal of the **Urban Hemispheric Dialogue on Climate Resilience & Adaptation**. In the first half of 2025, Cities Forward will hold a second Hemispheric Dialogue, in Washington, D.C., focused on Technologies and Solutions for Urban Sustainability. We look forward to seeing you there!



For more information on Cities Forward, please contact [Marisa Kellogg](#).

For more information on the Institute of the Americas' Environment and Climate Change, please contact [Tania Miranda](#).

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