

# Book review: Participatory planning for climate compatible development in Maputo, Mozambique

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*This book is accessible in the best sense of the term and yet offers complex ideas and challenges to traditional planning norms that have shaped a geography of vulnerability across Maputo, says Jonathan Silver.*

The climate crisis is not an uncertain future or purely scientific debate but a frighteningly real present that particularly threatens coastal, low-lying cities that an estimated one billion globally reside in. Maputo is one of these coastal metropolises that has experienced rapid and often under-planned development demonstrated by [the 2000 floods](#) which left parts of Mozambique's capital city devastated. As Christina Figueres, UNFCCC Executive Secretary writes in the forward, "Right now, the world's poorest and most vulnerable people are keenly feeling the impacts of climate change" (p. v)

Responding to such climate change imperatives is vital in Maputo but opens up a whole series of new challenges for communities and authorities in making sure the city and its people are prepared for the climate instability of the 21st century. While in cities like Maputo this planning has been ongoing for much of the last decade, there still remain too few accounts of such processes, on how urban authorities and neighbourhoods have faced these challenges and the vital learning that has emerged. It is into this space that a new publication by UCL press has emerged. In a collaborative endeavour led by Vanesa Castán Broto, the detailed and interesting book about the actions taken in Maputo provides an essential account of the front lines in humanity's response to limit the full horrors of climate change along coastal, urban regions. This book is fascinating to those interested in such responses, and an all but necessary read for planners, social scientists, climate experts and activists well beyond the streets of Mozambique's capital.

The book is structured into five succinct chapters that examine why participatory planning is essential in addressing climate change in Maputo. It goes on to show how climate change concerns can be brought into the planning process, the knowledge production process, the partnerships required and a final concluding chapter. The book's contributions make it clear that it is "not guidance for urban management, but inspiration in the research for alternatives" (pg 3). In honest reflection of their experimental and explicatory participatory approach, the book has much to offer readers that might not have considered the challenges of urban planning and climate change. It is equally suitable for the practitioners and activists to whom this publication and its writing seem to have been written with the aim of sparking a broader movement in Maputo and beyond for climate compatible development.

This book is accessible in the best sense of the term and yet offers complex ideas and challenges to traditional planning norms that have shaped a geography of vulnerability across the city. The book is fully referenced and behind each section lies a series of interesting ideas from disciplines including urban studies, planning, climate science, development studies, geography and others, brought together to anchor the reflections on the process described in the book.

Part of the success of the book can be attributed to the use of clear figures, tables and explanatory boxes that offer an alternative to pages of text. With over 20 full colour photos of Chamanculo C, the reader gets a real understanding of this poor but popular neighbourhood and the challenges it faced in relation to climate change. These include the textured nature of the area's development and its people that help bring the particular



topographies of climate change to a neighbourhood level. The key lessons that conclude each chapter add to this accessibility and illustrate how it might be used by policymakers pressed for time and more inclined to search for the highlights of such publications.



The dual English/Portuguese language is perhaps the most prominent component of the book that illustrates the attention and ethical care that has gone into both the research process and the reflective writing that the reader encounters. All too often publications about African cities are written in English, limiting the audience and failing to connect with local policymakers and concerned citizens.

Poor and marginalised populations stand staring at the climate change crisis as they struggle with an existing plethora of everyday development issues. Planning will be essential to navigate these issues, but, as this book shows, involving those on the frontline in which there have often been overly technocratic exercises is the only way to ensure that cities like Maputo are not overwhelmed in the Anthropocene. But participation is not enough and the book makes clear that being able to recognise power imbalances and “the risk of co-option” (p 69) are equally important. The book explores the many facets of undertaking such planning that shows climate change is as much a political issue as it is a planning issue.

This book is a guiding light for planners, communities and anyone concerned with climate change in our cities. It will join a growing but still limited collection of studies and is likely to become an important guide to living in our climate-changed present. Participatory action planning might not be the only way to involve urban residents in addressing this new landscape, but it offers a deeply considered approach that is needed across Maputo and cities more widely.

**Participatory planning for climate compatible development in Maputo, Mozambique. Vanesa Castán Broto; Jonathan Ensor; Emily Boyd; Charlotte Allen; Carlos Seventine; Domingos Augusto Macucule(eds). UCL Press. 2015**

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**The views expressed in this post are those of the authors and in no way reflect those of the Africa at LSE blog or the London School of Economics and Political Science.**

