

# 2.3.0

**SERIES 2**  
Understanding  
Vulnerability & Risk



## TRENDS ANALYSIS

### Past, Present, and Future

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Cities are constantly evolving, and as those changes take place, the nature of vulnerability also shifts. It is useful to examine historic development trends from the last 20 to 50 years to understand how certain forces, such as economic development, urban planning, and rural-to-urban migration have affected the way your city is structured, operates, and is vulnerable today. In addition to a changing climate, social and economic forces of change will continue to impact your city and help shape its future vulnerability.

#### IN THIS SET YOU WILL:

- ✓ Review historical photographs or stories about your city and use this as a starting point to explore, in small groups, how your city has changed over the past several decades;
- ✓ Discuss what the future city could look like if current trends continue;
- ✓ Imagine the best possible future for your city;
- ✓ Discuss the difference between these two futures, and what it will take to get from the extrapolation of trends to the best possible future; and
- ✓ Map your city's development trends over the past few decades.

## Overview

Cities grow in response to population growth and economic growth. This growth results in changes to city infrastructure and land use, changes in available natural resources, and changes in social structure. However, even in the most rapidly developing cities we can forget the scope of changes that have occurred even during our lifetimes. Systematically reflecting on these changes is the fundamental basis for any vulnerability assessment. It is only by assessing the factors that have brought us to where we are today, and the rate at which that has occurred, that we can fully understand both how we have arrived at our current vulnerabilities and what future vulnerabilities might look like.

However, where we have come from is clearly only half the problem at best. We also need to assess where current conditions are likely to take us if we take no action, where we would like to be, and what is required to get from one to the other. This requires a realistic examination of what the future would look like if past trends continue, particularly if elements of those past trends include poor governance, poor urban planning, highly restrictive policies or laws, social or political conflict or unrest, or poor economic conditions. It also requires hope and the ability to envision the best possible future in spite of current limitations and challenges. You will be best equipped to build resilience armed with a clear picture

of where you are currently headed, coupled with a solid vision of where you want to be. Resilience actions are the individual activities that will begin moving your city and its citizens from the trends to the vision.

There are a number of ideal city models developed over the past century (e.g. Garden Cities, Sir Ebenezer Howard 1898; The Contemporary City, Le Corbusier 1922). Although interesting and useful in terms of generating thinking about alternative ways to structure cities, it is important to remember that these remain theoretical models. It is neither feasible nor sensible to try to erase our current cities and redo them. What we have to do is to make improvements and build resilience with what we already have. The activities that follow are designed to begin the exploration of what it will take to get from where you are to something more resilient, fully acknowledging current limitations and challenges.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Dr. Friend's work at ISET-International is focused on urban climate resilience. He has a PhD in social anthropology and development studies based on extensive fieldwork in southern Thailand. He has been working in the Mekong Region for 20 years in areas related to human development, governance, and natural resource management, with particular interest in sustainable livelihoods, climate change, water resources, and fisheries. He has led regional implementation and capacity building programs as well as research networks, working for international NGOs, donors, inter-governmental organizations, and independent think tanks. He speaks Thai, Lao, and English.