



# ENHANCING INCLUSIVE DISASTER **HEAT** GOVERNANCE

## LESSONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

### SUMMARY

**Extreme urban heat**, a growing consequence of the twin challenges of urbanisation and climate change, represents a global issue requiring collaborative solutions. Shared challenges like these can spark unexpected moments of co-learning across cities. This Policy Brief reflects an evolving, reciprocal learning partnership between the UK and India, specifically **London and Delhi as sources of knowledge co-production**.

Developed through a collaboration between University College London's Department of Risk and Disaster Reduction and the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (School of Public Policy), this work was supported by the UCL-IIT Delhi Strategic Partner Funds in 2024.

The theme of **inclusive governance** for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) served as a lens to examine the gaps, silences, and issues of invisibility that complicate equitable responses to climate change.

The insights presented in this Policy Brief are drawn from a combination of a literature review and interactive workshops involving academics, urban practitioners, and policymakers across Delhi and London.

### LONDON-DELHI POLICY PRIORITIES

#### **1. Enhance Cross-Sectoral and Multi-level Coordination**

Align urban planning (prevention) and disaster management (alleviation) tasks.

#### **2. Leverage and Improve Data Systems**

Need for better sharing and deployment practices to democratise decision-making.

#### **3. Unpack Socio-Spatial Inequalities**

Better connect spatial and socio-economic vulnerabilities into DRR and adaptation.

#### **4. Define Mandates and Accountability**

Clarity on roles and responsibilities is a crucial way of promoting inclusion.

#### **5. Creative Community Engagements**

Communities have varied knowledges on space and disasters, and could be part of innovative collaboration strategies.

#### **6. Boost Nature-Based Solutions (NBS)**

An eco-friendly way to tackle urban heat, NBS can help tackle multiple hazard risks while promoting health and wellbeing.

City-specific recommendations on pg 4...

## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

Urban heat poses a significant and growing challenge globally, exacerbated by climate change, rapid urbanisation, and deep-seated socio-economic inequalities in cities. This issue is particularly acute in large cities like London and Delhi, which, despite their differing socio-political and climatic contexts, face intersecting challenges related to rising temperatures and their unequal impacts on urban populations.

**Delhi** struggles with a highly fragmented urban landscape, where different types of settlements - from formal planned colonies to unauthorised or informal housing - shape access to basic services and disaster preparedness. The city's first Heat Action Plan (2023) reflects the urgent need for adaptation, though its integration with disaster management policies remains limited.

**London**, while experiencing less extreme heat compared to Delhi, faces significant challenges due to socio-economic disparities and housing conditions that exacerbate vulnerability. The income of the bottom 10% of London households is approximately 30% lower than that for the rest of the UK. These disparities highlight how housing insecurity and limited access to green spaces can worsen heat-related risks for vulnerable populations and marginalised urban groups.

Conversations in the scope of this research aimed to promote **co-learning between distinct urban contexts** - London and Delhi - using heat as a shared challenge. This exercise helped to break assumptions about types of cities that can collaborate, and how knowledge should travel. Inclusion was used as a critical theme to raise questions on data, cross-sectoral/multi-level collaborations, and community engagement for impactful disaster governance.

Photo: Delhi



## ACTIVITIES

The initiative was rooted in a series of interconnected activities aimed at fostering learning, dialogue, and innovation:

- **A Literature Review** - connecting critical justice theory and disaster governance debates—refined research questions that guided subsequent stages.
- **Informal and Semi-Structured Conversations** with practitioners and policymakers helped map critical stakeholders in each city and identify context-specific challenges.
- **Workshops** in Delhi (July 2024, hosted by IIT Delhi) and London (September 2024, hosted by UCL) brought together actors from academia, and local and national government to shift discussions from identifying challenges to co-creating solutions.

Although framed around similar questions and a shared hazard (heat), the workshops had distinct focuses, reflecting an evolving dialogue.

**The first workshop in Delhi** explored institutional barriers and opportunities for collaboration between disaster prevention and management mandates. For instance, it examined how planners might support disaster managers, and vice versa.

Insights from Delhi informed the **London workshop**, which emphasised data's role in inclusive governance and the need for forward planning to meet cities' future needs in light of escalating heat.

Where possible, the recommendations in this brief are high-level, stemming from challenges found in both cities. This enhances their relevance to other contexts, particularly mega-cities. Yet, context-specific challenges helped to illustrate how these recommendations may lay differently on the ground.



**COMMON** YET DIFFERENT **LESSONS**

**1 Enhance Coordination**

**London** must strengthen communication between borough-level agencies and the Greater London Authority to align mitigation and preparedness strategies. **Delhi** should address the lack of lateral coordination across municipal departments to improve implementation of plans (e.g., Heat Action Plan).

**2 Leverage and Improve Data Systems**

**London** heat risk maps are underutilised for targeting vulnerable populations and require integration into local planning decisions. **Delhi** needs to address the lack of updated, granular data at the ward level.

**3 Unpack Socio-Spatial Inequalities**

Acknowledging how a spectrum of housing legality and settlement types contribute to vulnerability is crucial to promote inclusive DRR in **Delhi**. In **London** challenges stem from limited, unequally distributed green and cool spaces, which bring additional heat risks to marginalised groups.

**4 Define Mandates & Accountability**

Bridging governance gaps entails rediscussing mandates and elaborating accountability mechanisms. **Delhi** can improve legal mandates for disaster management plans at the district level that ensure inclusivity in all phases of DRR. **London** can establish accountability mechanisms for long-term urban heat resilience commitments that integrate health and intergenerational equity.

Photo: London





## 5 Creative Community Engagements

Communities have valuable knowledge and can contribute by helping to frame disaster challenges and priorities, and by acting as first responders and co-designers of resilience. In **Delhi** groups such as migrants and informal workers can be activated through community-based organisations and grassroots networks in marginalised settlements. In **London** there are opportunities to increase outreach to vulnerable groups via trusted local actors like schools, faith leaders, and community organisations.

## 6 Boost Nature Based Solutions (NBS)

NBS - tree planting, green infrastructure - were identified in the two cities as a key mechanism to address multiple hazards, including heat, flooding, and air quality.

Participants in both cities highlighted the potential of urban greening strategies, such as **pocket forests in London** and **green corridors in Delhi**, to enhance resilience and improve living conditions. However, these interventions must carefully consider potential unintended consequences, such as rising land and housing prices, which could exacerbate socio-economic inequalities.

### A KEY POLICY PATHWAY

Participatory mapping and **open, shared data platforms** emerged as essential pathways to enhance the visibility of vulnerable places and people, and their challenges. These mechanisms enable a nuanced and intersectional understanding of vulnerability, and may help pinpoint risk hotspots with more precision, guiding targeted and effective interventions to build resilience and reduce inequalities.

## CONCLUSION

Urban heat governance offers a lens for looking into the challenges and opportunities for transforming disaster risk governance into a more inclusive, equitable, and innovative process. By connecting the experiences of Delhi and London, this initiative demonstrates how **mutual learning and data-driven collaboration** can tackle systemic exclusions and enhance resilience across diverse urban contexts.

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