

# RETHINKING THE CITY IN A MULTI-HAZARD RESILIENCE CONTEXT

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## Institutional-Actor Relationships: Influences on inclusive disaster risk management in Urban Poor Settlements

**The Challenge:** More than **1 billion people** in low-lying settlements face hazards such as sea level rise, subsiding coasts or flooding at high tides (IPCC, 2022). **350 million** urban dwellers live with the threat of water scarcity at 1.5 C° & **410.7 million** at 2° C (IPCC, 2022). An **additional 2.5 billion people** are expected to live in cities by 2050 (IPCC, 2022), approx. **1 billion in Africa** (UNDESA, 2019). In Africa, urban growth is mainly in small cities and towns < 500,000 people (Pieterse & Parnell, 2014; Güneralp, et al., 2017).

**The Opportunity:** **60 percent** of the urban footprint that will exist in 2030 still does not exist, and **75 percent** of the infrastructure that will exist then is yet to be built (SCBD, 2012; Muller, 2013; Seto, et al., 2012). Moreover, **urbanisation offers a time-limited opportunity** for widespread transformational adaptation & climate resilient development (IPCC, 2022), effectively addressing both development and risk issues (Pelling, 2019). However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, this opportunity window is constrained by limited knowledge; financial and institutional incapacities; weak governance at the city level to plan for and manage rapid urban growth and disaster risks (Leck et al., 2018; Satterthwaite, 2017; GFDRR, 2010; Turok, 2014; Barofsky et al, 2016; Fraser et al, 2017), and multi-level capture of city visioning.

**Aim:** To understand how relationships between institutions and actors in urban development influence inclusive disaster risk management in urban poor settlements.

## Intellectual Puzzle

This study addresses is a processual puzzle, illuminating the processes of urban change, especially the ways in which urban development decision-making is negotiated, how institutions change, interact with organisations, agency and other institutions, the ways in which they contribute to risks, and how these become new inputs.

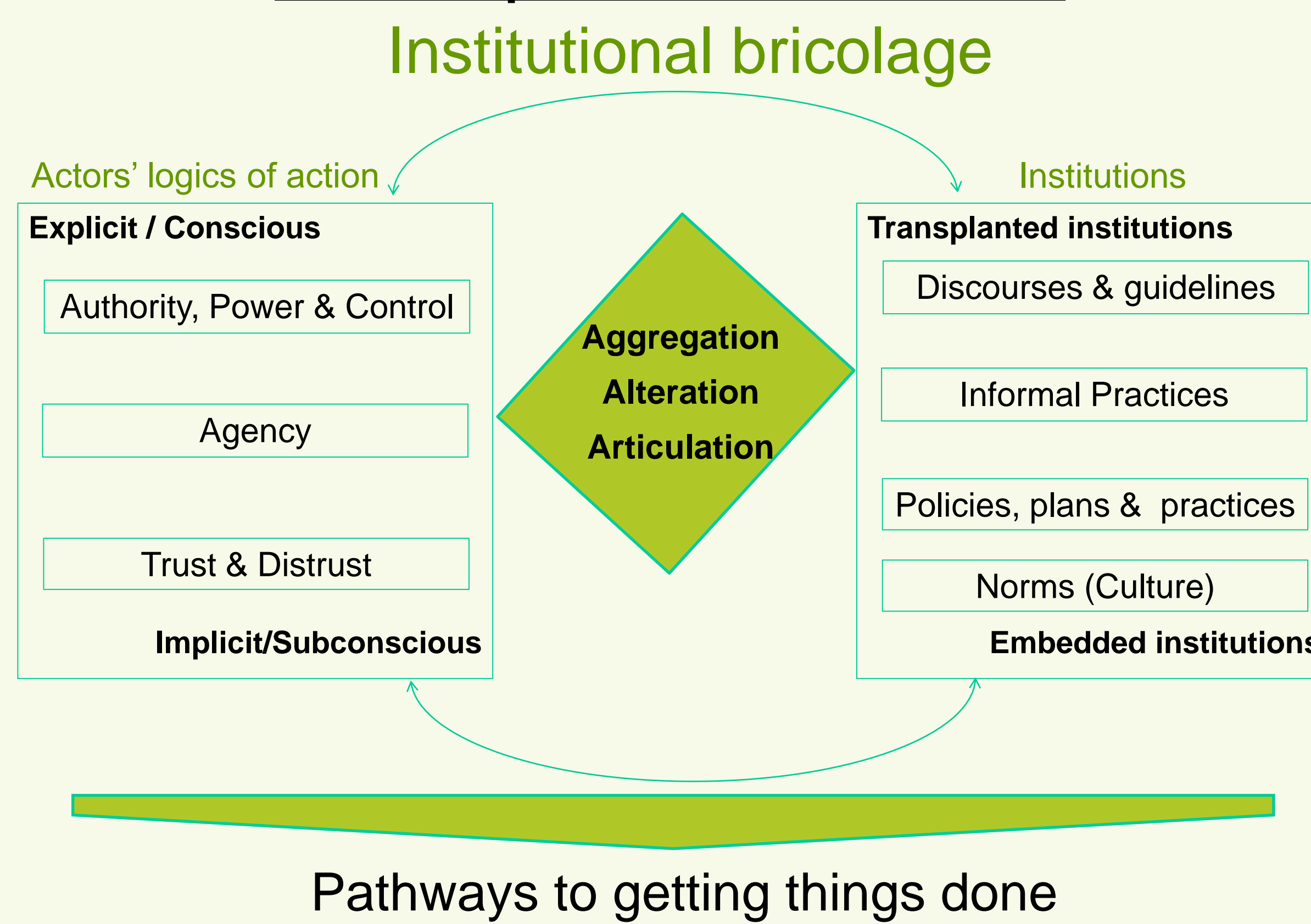
## Research Questions

**Central Q:** How does decision-making in urban development influence inclusive disaster risk management in urban poor settlements?

### Supporting Questions:

1. Who has the power to set the urban development policy agenda in Nairobi?
2. How are pro-poor urban development decision-making and implementation spaces in Nairobi produced?
3. What transformative practices were brought into pro-poor urban upgrading in Nairobi between 2015 to 2022?

## Conceptual framework



Demolition of urban poor settlements along Nairobi Rivers amid Floods in April-May 2024. Image © anfoz.com

## Empirical context

The study site is Nairobi. Originally a swamp, Nairobi is the capital and the largest city in Kenya. The city has a population of 4.39 million (KNBS, 2019) and a growth rate of 4.1% per annum (UN DESA, 2016). 60% of residents live in urban poor settlements located in flood-prone areas. Persistent water scarcity and recurrent floods are a constant reminder of the origins of the city, its modernization journey, laissez fair attitude to urban development planning & decision-making, blindness to disaster risks posed by geographical setting, and continued lack of foresight

## Methodology

**Data collection: Document analysis & in-depth, semi-structured interviews.**

Covered reports, plans, guidelines, policies and legislations on urban development, climate change, and disaster risk management at the global, national and city levels. There were 44 interviews with 46 national and city level policy actors, and community actors.

**Data analysis: Text and thematic analyses.**

NVIVO and manual qualitative data analysis were applied in coding, drawing patterns, and relating themes.

## Preliminary findings

- Widespread reliance on project-based forms of organising influences and co-constitutes the current visioning of pro-poor urban development in Nairobi. This results into **varying levels of vulnerabilities, exposure and capacity for risk reduction**.
- The urban development decision-making and implementation space in the city is riddled with **multi-level capture** by powerful bricoleurs, constraining **agency of** community and city-level policy actors **to shape their urban futures**, define acceptable risk, and deciding on adaptation actions.
- Decision-making and action 'bubbles' **compound distrust and are redefining relationships** between national and city-level actors.
- Top-down politics enables transformation. However, transformative institutional processes and physical transformation do not align well, inhibiting large-scale change.

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