

Country Brief

UNION OF COMOROS

2023

A better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world



A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL IN AN URBANIZING WORLD

We promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements development and the achievement of adequate shelter for all.



UN-HABITAT

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URBAN CONTEXT AND TRENDS

One of the world's smallest and most vulnerable countries, the Union of the Comoros is a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) located in the Mozambique Channel of the Indian Ocean to the north-west of Madagascar and facing Mozambique. The three islands which make up this archipelago country (Grande Comore, Mohéli and Anjouan) are located in a region highly vulnerable to extreme cross-border climatic events, in particular cyclones, floods and droughts. Compounding the effects of these natural hazards are additional threats that exist in Comoros in particular, some of natural origin, such as earthquakes and volcanic activity, and others induced by anthropogenic interventions, such as land and environmental degradation.

Socio-economic context

Comoros is one of the world's most sparsely urbanized countries with a predominantly rural population- only around 30% lived in urban areas in 2021. However, movement towards cities is increasing, with the annual urbanization rate at 2.7%.

Most of the urban population of Comoros is concentrated in the federal capital of Moroni and the two island capitals of Mutsamudu and Fomboni. The challenge in Comoros lies in the fact that urbanization is uncontrolled and largely unplanned, posing additional human-induced threats related to climatic effects and resulting in high vulnerability for its citizens.

More than half of the Comorian population (53%) is younger than 20 years of age. The HDI ranking of Comoros was 160 out of 188 countries in 2016, which puts the country in the low human development category. The poverty rate is very high in Comoros (45.6% of the total population), especially in urban areas, and the informal sector is omnipresent.

Disaster risk is exacerbated by the migration phenomenon in Comoros, which generates a large influx of people into the major Comorian cities, thus increasing demographic pressure. Indeed, Grand Comore accounts for 70.5% of immigration in the islands, of which 60.3% is to the prefecture of Moroni; followed by Mohéli at 18.4% and Anjouan at 11.1%. This movement of people increases environmental insecurity, conflict over land, water access, sanitation, health risks and places intense pressure on natural resources. Around 54.2% of the population live in at-risk areas, many in informal settlements, where floods regularly cause infrastructure destruction, disruption of livelihoods and environment, displacement and elevated risk of disease outbreaks.

Causes of flooding and climactic crisis in Comoros

Disastrous flooding is a hazard that occurs on a highly regular basis in Comoros, and it is due to various causes, including storms, cyclones, sea level rise and volcanic activity.

Climate risks listed in the country's National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) include increased incidence of heavy rains and cyclones; and a rise in sea level. Both the increased frequency of heavy rains and cyclones, and the rise of sea level are a clear consequence of climate change and are currently amongst the biggest threats to the country's citizens as they both cause severe flooding.

The Union of the Comoros was hit on April 24, 2019 by Cyclone Kenneth, one of the most devastating tropical cyclones in the country's history. A total of 345,131 people across the three islands, or more than 40 percent of the population, were affected. The damage and losses caused by the cyclone amounted to US \$ 185.4 million and are associated with a major disruption to public services.

Impact assessments have shown that damage and losses are concentrated in the housing sector (US \$ 67.5 million), agriculture, livestock and fisheries (US \$ 53.0 million), and infrastructure and transport (US \$ 21.1 million).

These figures reflect damage to around 11,900 houses, 60 percent of subsistence crops (mainly bananas, cassava) and 30 percent of cash crops (vanilla, ylang-ylang, cloves), a loss of over 13 500 head of cattle and poultry. In addition, the cyclone damaged a significant part of critical infrastructure, including roads, ports and airports, dikes, water and electricity networks, health centers and schools.

With the Indian Ocean cyclones notably increasing in frequency and intensity as a result of climate change, there is a high likelihood that Comoros will be struck by another devastating cyclone in the near future, for which the country must prepare better.

Another source of flooding in Comoros, in addition to sea level rise, cyclones and heavy tropical storms is due to the unique geological characteristics of the three islands, as they are volcanic. The volcano Karthala dominates the island of Grande Comore, which most recently erupted four times between 2005 and 2007, affecting 245,000 people during the 2005 eruption alone. Explosive events are commonly accompanied or followed by heavy rains, which is what happened in Comoros in 2005. These eruption-induced torrential rains together with the deposition of large amounts of ash contribute to severe flooding in the areas affected by volcanic eruptions.

Compounding the problem is the fact that much of urban Comoros has been stripped of its natural defenses. Comoros has experienced one of the world's fastest rates of deforestation, witnessing the disappearance of around 400 acres of forest per year. The delicate ecosystem was disrupted when forests were cleared to make way for farmland and cities, dislocating waterways and leaving once-fertile soil exposed to erosion. Deforestation has also hampered economic development by exposing farmland to floods, droughts and resulting landslides and soil infertility. Nature-based solutions such as planting trees to increase absorption and improving soil cover with plants to reduce run-off can restore an area's natural defenses to both flood and drought.

Furthermore, these climactic and natural hazards are aggravated by human-induced hazards. Uncontrolled disposal of solid waste is one of the major contributors to flooding as trash is being disposed in existing drainage, on riverbeds and on public shorelines.

The amount of solid waste generated daily in Comoros is predicted to be 303.3 tons, or 0.5 kilogram of waste per person per day. There are relatively few technical, material, and financial resources available for municipalities in terms of solid waste management, and the current management system is proven highly ineffective and even completely inexistent especially in certain vulnerable areas and informal settlements. Less than 35% of solid garbage is removed daily, and the informal sector is still undeveloped, therefore the collection rate is still too low. The primary modes of transportation are insufficient, pre-collection tools (trash cans, containers, etc.) are scarce, pick-up vehicles cannot access a number of locations in the neighbourhoods of major cities, and lack of trust from citizens results in low tax income for this purpose.

Low disaster preparedness in vulnerable urban areas

The areas of intervention for this project are mainly informal settlements that are highly vulnerable to flooding. In informal settlements, most housing structures are of poor quality, and these areas frequently lack access to basic utilities and resilient infrastructure, such as appropriate drainage, increasing the susceptibility of these settlements to climate change. Many vulnerable or informal settlements are located on landslide and flooding-prone sites; these locations are chosen by the people since they are less likely to be forcibly removed because the land is unappealing to developers. In some cases, because these settlements are informal, authorities do not provide basic public services. In other cases, municipal administrations do make a commitment to fostering resilience but are constrained by a lack of financing, political restraints, and technical limitations.

Recurrent disasters prevent communities in Comoros from formulating disaster management plans as they are too focused on emergency response to be able to dedicate time and resources to plan for long-term resilience. Moreover, the impacts of successive shocks make recovery very hard and further erode resilience. Low community awareness and lack of information on disaster risk reduction can put people at a higher level of vulnerability to disasters. Enhancing resilience through disaster preparedness will ensure that communities have a better response plan to disaster, particularly flood, while taking into consideration the different needs of vulnerable groups, including women, men, girls and boys, and persons with disabilities.

The vicious combination of uncontrolled urbanization, high poverty rates, intensifying climate events, a waste management nightmare, depletion of natural defenses, and a lack of local-level awareness on disaster preparedness will result in more frequent and severe disasters that will continue to deeply impact vulnerable communities in Comoros. To address this complex challenge, integrated solutions are needed that combine resilient infrastructure, nature-based solutions, solid waste management, employment generation especially for the most vulnerable, and awareness raising and capacity-building at both local and national levels. This project proposes a set of interventions that have been designed to maximize positive impact on the lives and livelihoods of the populations in the target areas, and build their resilience to the devastating floods that have ravaged urban areas of Comoros.



Drainage capacity development in La Coulée; work in progress. Credit: OXFAM

Our Thematic Focus

We contribute to the achievement of sustainable urban development in the Union of Comoros through the following areas:

Policy and Legislation



Develop legal and legislative tools for urban resilience. Establish legal and policy frameworks, based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination, to enhance the ability of Governments to effectively implement national urban policies, as appropriate, and to empower them as policymakers and decision makers, ensuring appropriate fiscal, political and administrative decentralization based on the principle of subsidiarity. Strengthening the normative framework in Comoros is a crucial step towards adequate land tenure security in Comoros.

Urban Planning and Design & capacity-building at municipal and national levels



Build capacities of the MATUAFTT through the Directorate for Land Use, Urban Planning and Housing (DATUH) to prepare maps (e.g. cadastral), land use plan or outline to plan the implementation of the infrastructure or facilities necessary for the development of the country's large urban areas. Improve existing informal settlements through increasing access to basic services such as water supply and solid waste management and identify risk zones prone to disasters. Control expansion of major cities through the development of urban development plans (last one from Moroni dating from 1997). Furthermore, to respond to the urban planning and development needs for housing and habitat, the Government has recommended the integration of a decent housing development programme in the next United Nations Sustainable Development Country Framework.

Our Thematic Focus

Strengthened climate action and improved urban environment



Effective adaptation of communities and infrastructure to climate change, as urban residents in Comoros are predominantly located on the shoreline of the sea and thus especially vulnerable to climate change. Efforts to plan and design based on participatory approaches and vulnerability assessments to reduce the exposure of populations to disasters such as cyclones and landslides and reinforce the Urban Resilience.

Innovative finance mechanisms for climate-resilient development



Accompany municipalities of medium-sized cities to access resources to finance climate-friendly infrastructure. Not only help plan for climate action, develop climate projects, but also expand their financing options, by assisting cities making other steps such as maximizing their own-source revenues, and redefine governance mechanisms. Foster stronger coordination and cooperation among national, subnational, and local governments, including through multilevel consultation mechanisms and by clearly defining the respective competences, tools and resources for each level of government.

Leverage the potential of green and blue infrastructure



For effective climate adaptation, innovative financing mechanisms need to be put in place for local authorities to implement alternatives to grey infrastructure such as Nature-based Solutions in and close to urban environments to preserve natural resources, for health of citizens, mitigation and adaptation efforts.

About Our Projects

Close and Ongoing
Projects



AF/SEA Building urban climate resilience project on South-Eastern Africa- 2020-2024



Donor: Adaptation Fund



Budget: 2,311,300 USD in Comoros

This is a project financed by the Adaptation Fund to assist four (4) countries (Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, and the Union of Comoros) to build their urban resilience including a mix of city-level infrastructure projects and national-level capacity-building.

Project Component: In Comoros, Moroni is the beneficiary city of four (4) interventions, namely:

- Reinforcing the drainage capacity in La Coulée neighborhood (in construction phase)
- Establishment of community-managed rainwater harvesting systems in La Coulée neighborhood (in progress)
- Improving solid waste management in La Coulée and Médina neighborhoods (in progress)
- Setting up a flood early warning system in La Coulée neighborhood (in progress)

Post-Kenneth Recovery and Resilience Project (PRPKR) – Technical assistance from UN-Habitat to the Ministry of Urbanism (MATUAFTT):



Donor: UN Habitat, World Bank through the Government of Comoros



Budget: 438,145 USD

The Post-Kenneth project intends to support the rehabilitation of targeted public and private infrastructure in areas affected by Cyclone Kenneth (2019) and increase their resilience to natural and climatic disasters in the long term. More specifically, UN-Habitat is contributing to the sustainable development of a normative, legal, and institutional framework to strengthen the resilience of the Comorian territory.

Project Components:

1. Strengthening the policy and legal framework while taking into account resilience to natural hazards and issues related to housing, land and property.
 - OP1. Development of a National Urban Planning and Housing Policy.
 - OP2. Revision of the Town Planning and Construction Code.
2. Strengthening of institutional, technical and operational capacities in land use planning and management with a focus on resilience to disasters.
 - OP.3 Draft terms of reference for the urban development plans of the cities of Moroni and Mutsamudu.

About Our Projects

Close and Ongoing
Projects



Strengthening the capacities of African, Caribbean and Pacific SIDS for a green, resilient and pro-poor COVID-19 pandemic recovery (DA14 Project):



Donor: 14th tranche of the Development Account, UN DESA



Budget: USD 570,000

This project targeting all SIDS across the globe is funded by the 14th tranche of the Development Account of UN DESA. Comoros is one of the two pilot countries, together with Sao Tomé and Príncipe, for the African region. The project includes activities at the national level, at the regional level (African SIDS) as well as globally. A core approach of this project is the adaptation and testing of tools on local climate finance to advance innovative financing mechanisms for pro-poor climate action in urban upgrading. Through inclusive and participatory processes (thus hand-in-hand with vulnerable communities), local governments was guided and trained to unlock innovative climate financing by developing fundable proposals and a resource mobilization plan based on donor/investor mapping exercises.

Project Component

- OC1: Enhanced capacity of selected national and city governments in SIDS in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific to articulate and develop urban, fundable, green, resilient, and pro-poor climate change and pandemic recovery plans.

OP1.1: A Multistakeholder capacity development workshops on articulating and developing urban, fundable green, resilient, and pro-poor climate change and pandemic recovery plans using UN-Habitat tools;

OP1.2: Targeted technical experts' capacity development through the provision of advisory services with emphasis on data collection and mapping.

OP1.3: Development of pro-poor urban climate change and pandemic recovery plans and climate resilient strategies.

- OC2: Enhanced capacity for intraregional exchange between African, Caribbean and the Pacific SIDS on post-COVID-19 economic recovery towards climate change resilience.

PIPELINE PROJECTS-

Concept Notes



Prevent Flooding Together – Strengthening City Resilience in Comoros

This project leverages the existing activities being conducted at the national and municipal level of ongoing UN-Habitat projects on climate resilience. One outstanding activity carried out by the agency for several years has been the implementation of a participatory planning methodology for identifying urban resilience priorities in cities, using a tool called CityRAP (City Resilience Action Planning tool). UN-Habitat has built several projects on the outcomes of the planning that happens during CityRAP and has carried out CityRAP in multiple cities in the country: Moroni in 2018, in Fomboni in 2020 and in Mutsamudu in 2022/23. The CityRAP process in these cities has led to the identification of priorities for resilience building agreed to by the communities and the municipality, as well as building a broad knowledge and evidence base including both quantitative and qualitative data, on resilience needs in Comoros. Some of the priorities identified through CityRAP, especially the earlier applications, are already being executed by UN-Habitat in Comoros, for example with funds from the Adaptation Fund, while others are still yet to be financed. Oxfam is already a partner to UN-Habitat in Comoros in these resilience building activities.

This project aims to:

- Further strengthen urban climate resilience in Moroni based on replicating successful interventions in more areas and
- to apply a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach to tackling climate change exacerbated by migration effects on the island of Anjouan and Mohéli as a response to frequent flooding.

Urban resilience is to be reinforced by enhancing adaptive measures, including nature-based solutions, and expanding key resilient infrastructure interventions related to flooding in Moroni, Mutsamudu and Fomboni, all three cities frequently impacted by this type of disaster due to both climactic activity and human-induced risks.

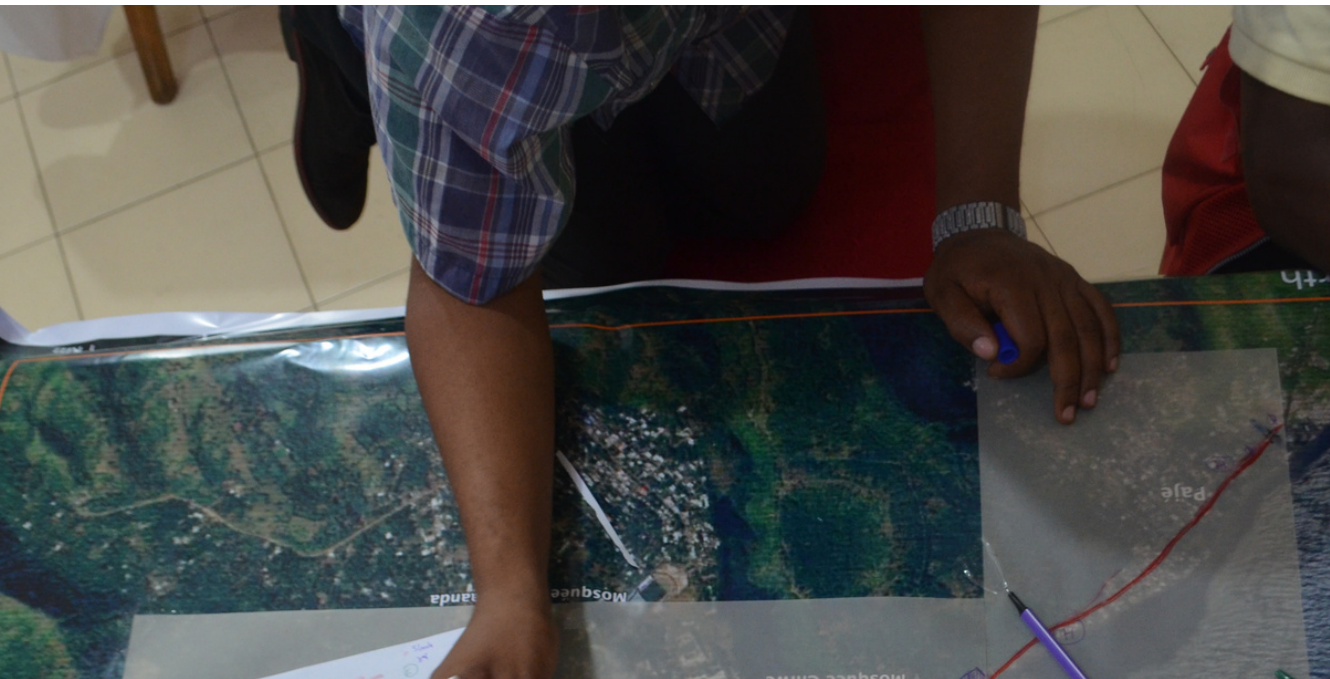
Objectives

-Strengthen adaptive measures in an integrated manner in Comorian cities related to resilient flood prevention infrastructure including solid waste management

-Develop local and national capacities in terms of climate adaptation and disaster risk preparedness with the goal of sustainability of actions and scaling-up opportunities.

Project Components

- Outcome 1: Capacity of resilient flood prevention infrastructure is developed or strengthened in the main cities of Comoros
- Outcome 2: Municipal solid waste management system in the three main Comorian cities is improved
- Outcome 3: Communities at risk have an improved knowledge, skills, understanding and awareness on Community-Based Disaster Risk Management for enhanced resilience
- Outcome 4: National capacity on adaptive measures related to flooding has been enhanced, and dissemination of knowledge promoted through cross-fertilization between cities and regional exchange



UPCOMING EVENTS

May 2023

- Local validation workshops in each island of the Union of Comoros for the diagnostic of the Town Planning and Construction Code
- Local validation workshop for the diagnosis in preparation of the Elaboration of the new National Policy for Urbanism and Housing

July 2023

- Multi-stakeholder capacity development workshop on Urban tools and recovery plans

September 2023

- Capacity-building workshop on Urban Resilience, Climate adaptation and climate financing & launch of the new Guides for the municipalities on Climate action
- Opening ceremony of the drainage infrastructure in Comoros

Donors and Partners



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