
Resilient cities require proactivity from the public sector

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The global problem of climate change is gaining attention at the local level, where its serious effects are becoming more visible and frequent. The tragedy in the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul, with its loss of life and significant material damage, has revealed a broader scenario of vulnerability throughout the country. And it has intensified the debate on how cities can adapt to the new reality.

Resilient infrastructure, buildings designed to withstand adverse conditions, efficient drainage systems, permeable pavements, and elevated buildings are among the solutions currently in vogue to prevent and reduce damage during extreme events.

However, the issue deserves to be integrated into broader urban planning and to receive an effective and decisive contribution from the government, such as public procurement that includes sustainability and resilience criteria in tenders. This would ensure that companies contracted by the public sector use appropriate materials and techniques to cope with the effects of climate change, such as storms and floods. Adapting public tenders also allows for the adoption of innovative and sustainable technologies and promotes safer and more durable building standards.

Brazil already has rules in place that allow the government to be proactive in this regard. For example, the constitutional principle of efficiency requires the government to adopt solutions that maximize benefits at the lowest possible cost. Resilient infrastructure ensures greater efficiency by reducing the cost of frequent repairs and increasing the longevity of projects, making them more cost-effective in the long run. The principle of sustainable national development included in Brazil's new Procurement Law is another

example of a rule that guides government managers to prioritize environmentally respectful materials and practices, ensuring that public procurement contributes to sustainability.

In the context of climate change, applying these principles means designing and building infrastructure that responds to new environmental realities. Although the initial cost of such projects may be higher, their durability and long-term protective capacity justify the investment required.

At the federal level, the New PAC (Growth Acceleration Program), launched in 2023, allocates resources to Sustainable and Resilient Cities, covering areas such as sanitation, solid waste management, and disaster prevention through slope containment and urban drainage. These initiatives show that Brazil's public sector can (or must) play a central role in promoting resilient infrastructure, even if their adoption as a rule in public tenders still seems a long way off.

Global examples

Around the world, countries like Belgium are already moving toward public contracts that require reliable services in the face of climate impacts. But not many are doing the same: the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) points out in a 2017 study that the Belgian example has not effectively inspired the European Union, and few countries broadly integrate climate resilience into their public procurement, despite the growing trend towards "green procurement."

At the international level, the issue is addressed by the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), which provide guidelines for integrating climate resilience into administrative practices, with the aim of creating communities that are safer and more adaptable to climate change.

Brazil is at the beginning of its journey to implement the SDGs. The first step is the drafting of a climate plan, which will set guidelines for national climate policy until 2035. In the legislative branch, a number of bills address the adoption of the SDGs by entities that

receive public funds, as well as the establishment of budgetary rules for disaster prevention through the implementation of resilient infrastructure.

Urgency and determination

Data from Brazil's Digital Atlas of Disasters shows that between 2014 and 2023, 83% of the country's municipalities were affected by climate change-related events, causing more than USD 72,96 billion in losses. In total, 1.5 million homes were damaged and nearly 5 million people were directly affected. The AdaptaBrasil platform shows that more than half of Brazil's municipalities are highly vulnerable to disasters such as floods and landslides, while 48% have low capacity to cope with droughts.

This data underscores the urgent need for adapted infrastructure that can withstand and protect cities. By including sustainability and resilience criteria in public tenders, the public sector can not only reduce future repair costs, but also fulfill its constitutional role of efficiency and environmental protection.

The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) guidelines and the progress of programs such as the New PAC are important steps, but they need to be translated into concrete practices.

To address climate change, Brazil needs coordinated action that involves all levels of government and promotes partnerships with the private sector. This is the only way to make resilience a priority and promote cities that are truly prepared for the challenges of the future.