

Tackling Climate Change: A Global Perspective

In celebration of UN Day, *The Climate Crisis and Urban Resilience* panel at Perry World House brought together people tackling climate change in Philadelphia and across the globe. Students and community members heard from Dr. Ariadna Reyes Sanchez, Dr. Labaron Lenard-Palmer and Dr. Simon Richter (full bios [here](#)) who each presented their work addressing the global climate crisis and then responded to questions from the audience.

Dr. Sanchez works at the intersection of sustainability and urban informality and shared how climate policy disregards informal communities. Dr. Sanchez spoke about collectively organizing the community and designing creative solutions to community problems. For example, in Santo Domingo, which has no solid waste collection, a vermiculture project is now taking organic waste and making compost, making a contribution towards a more sustainable society.

Dr. Lenard-Palmer emphasized how vulnerable Philadelphia is to climate change, in particular the 19133 zip code, which includes the airport. Between now and 2050, there is an 87% chance of massive flooding in this area, which would cause the city to lose billions of dollars. Dr. Lenard-Palmer noted how climate change is often something that is viewed as an issue for “wealthier, whiter kids” and that it can be challenging to fund as it is seen as a long-term issue compared to more immediate needs like the opioid crisis and education.

Dr. Richter spoke about his work in Samarang, Indonesia and the importance of community resilience in fighting climate change. He shared how different words are used to describe the idea of resilience in different communities: in Jakarta, the word is akin to “holding the fort,” whereas in Samarang the word for resilience equates to “the city that’s tough.” Samarang is dealing with the problem of subsidence, where the ground is sinking faster than sea levels are rising, and the community is working with experts to try to ideate solutions.

During the Q&A, panelists emphasized the need for broad-scale change to impact climate change. “The best thing you can do is not fly. Once you hop on an airplane, you erase anything else you have done,” Dr. Richter shared. Dr. Sanchez was a little more hopeful, noting that families in Mexico use much less energy—and that she personally had never used air conditioning before she came to the US. “Using energy... we take it for granted,” she shared. When it comes to climate change, however, there is much to be done. In closing, Dr. Richter challenged the audience, “the unprecedented level of change we need is not at the level of individuals; it’s at the level of institutions like this university.”

The Climate Crisis and Urban Resilience was part of the graduate class International Social Policy & Social Work: Perspectives from the Global South, taught by Anastasia Shown. The panel, attended by 40 people, was supported by a [Perry World House Course Enrichment Grant](#) to make classes more policy-relevant by supporting guest speakers, case studies and creative

connections to the policy world. The event was co-sponsored by the [School of Social Policy & Practice](#), [Perry World House](#) and the [United Nations Association of Greater Philadelphia](#).

[Ellen Miller](#) is a graduate student in the [International Education Development Program](#) at Penn's Graduate School of Education.

Notes:

Ariana (from Mexico City)

Urban

Intersection of sustainability and urban informality

Housing policy does not assist poorest families

Don't have access to water, sanitation, etc (decades w/o)

Santo Domingo (no solid waste collection)

Challenge- collectively organize the community

Families adapt to the climate crisis

- They use less
- But they are vulnerable

Climate policy disregards informal communities

Ex: Santo Domingo - vermiculture project

We have been working with women because projects more sustainable

Taking organic waste and making compost

The Climate Crisis & Urban Resilience

Urban geographer

Human aspects around geography

Impact of climate change on Philly -

- Stormwater and flooding
- Combined sewer
- Increase permeability- green space
- Other mitigation methods
- Zip 19133 includes airport - 87% chance now & 2050
- City could lose billions

Temp increase- heat island effect

Public health

Gvt reaction: greenworks plan, philadelphia 2035

Problematic about cc

Cultural narrative

Dissemination of info, there aren't that many people that talk about cc every day

Viewed as something for weather, whiter kids

Positive initiatives- rain barrels, citizens planning

Barriers- everything costs money including cc initiatives

Therefore public funding is limited

Other pressing issues- opioid crisis, etc/ short v long term thinking

Figure out how - "we have to better associate cc with everyday life"

CC movement is gaining momentum - HS kids protested cc this summer/ green new deal

Sustainability isn't bad but we are at the point where bad things will happen. There are things happening now we can't push off

Cities and people need to get prepared for now instead of thinking 5-10 years down the line

Simon Richter, prof of German

Very interested in resilience

Sarang, Indonesia - about the size of philly

'Subsidence' ground is sinking faster than sea levels are rising

Jakarta - 25 cm/ year

"Waterfront homes"

There's an experience of community that is connected to resilience and we have no idea what that's like"

Resilience is not just infrastructure, what's really crucial is how resilient is the community

What word a community uses to describe resilience matters- Jakarta - national defense, "holding the fort"; Samarang - the city that's tough; Dutch -feather power

2 paradoxes-

- The best foundation for urban resilience can be found in the most vulnerable communities
- Development banks and international orgs agree that investments in resilience are required on a massive scale and that investing in resilience is more cost effective than disaster remediation - but no one has figured out how to do it

It's important to acknowledge that there are local experts

Daily life suggestions - Richter- the best thing you can do is not fly- once you hope on an airplane you erase what you have done

The unprecedented level of change we need is not at the level of individuals - institutions (this university, eg)

Ariana- families in mexico use much less energy- you can do a lot - I never used an air conditioner

Using energy - we take it for granted

Cities in europe experimenting with free public transit