Condemned to live with one’s feet in water? A case study of community based strategies and urban maladaptation in flood prone Pikine/Dakar, Senegal

**Purpose** – The number of poor and informal urban settlers in the world is rapidly growing, and they are increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of a changing climate. Therefore, understanding the nature and sustainability of locally adopted coping and adaptation strategies are key, yet still under-researched areas.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Based on ethnographic research conducted in two poor, flood-prone municipalities in Pikine/Dakar, this paper identifies such coping and adaptation strategies and examines their prospects for maladaptation.

**Findings** – The paper shows that poor urban dwellers are not mere passive spectators of climate change. With the very limited resources they have at their disposal, it is found that local actors respond to perennial flooding with very diverse strategies, which have varying degrees of success and sustainability. A key finding is that local coping and adaptation strategies are mainly maladaptive because they divert risks and impacts in time and space and have detrimental effects on the most vulnerable. Unless there is a broad assimilation of all groups in decision-making processes locally, individual and even collective coping and adaptation strategies may easily put the most vulnerable households at greater risk. The findings reveal that community-based adaptation is not a panacea per se, as it may not, by itself, compensate for the lack of basic services and infrastructure that is forcing the urban poor to cope with disproportionate levels of risk.

**Originality/value** – The paper, hence, contributes to address a central question in scholarly debates on climate adaptation, vulnerability and disaster risk management: Are local coping strategies a stepping stone towards adaptation or are they on the contrary likely to lead to maladaptation?

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