

CHALLENGES OF TRANSFERABILITY OF DISASTER REDUCTION SOLUTIONS WITHIN THE PACIFIC BASIN: LESSONS FROM THE U.S. DISASTER MITIGATION ACT OF 2000

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The world is experiencing long-term changes such as sea level rise, reduction in water supply and quality, and bigger, more frequent natural disasters. In the face of these inherent threats, the world's populations and governments are challenged to plan for the future to create safer, more sustainable cities and to protect our natural environment. As the costs of disasters escalate worldwide, governments, financial institutions, and insurance companies are focusing new attention on encouraging measures mitigating natural hazards before disasters happen. Unplanned local development is fostering a growing volume and severity of repetitive losses from natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, landslides, and wildfires in recent decades. Many losses are avoidable through intelligent urban planning and better control of land use and construction practices. A central question is how to reduce repetitive disaster losses through effective land use-related hazard mitigation? A related question is whether it is possible for national governments to effectively conduct hazard mitigation through direct regulation?

Because the U.S. is so large and politically decentralized, the federal government has largely avoided centralized land use regulation found in other Pacific Basin countries. The major exception has been the National Flood Insurance Program which for three decades has financially supported flood insurance sold by private companies while creating federal regulations providing direct incentives for mitigating flooding hazards through local land use controls. However, a recent law passed by

the U.S. Congress, the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (DMA 2000) is aimed directly at curbing unplanned local development fostering repetitive losses from natural disasters. DMA 2000 requires state and local governments to prepare hazard mitigation plans by November 2004 if they wish to receive certain federal relief funds after future disasters. DMA 2000 is designed to reduce federal government relief payments after disasters by encouraging local hazard mitigation before disasters. Rather than relying on federal agencies to undertake mitigation directly through centralized land use controls, it places direct responsibility on state and local governments to mitigate natural hazards through better urban planning and development practices.

This paper examines basic statutory requirements of DMA 2000 and progress in implementation. It further assesses how DMA 2000 can reinforce integration of land use-related hazard mitigation with urban planning theory and development practice. Finally, it asks to what extent might this decentralized approach be transferable to other Pacific Basin countries?

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