

**11.941 - Disaster, Vulnerability and Resilience**

**REACTION PAPER 1**

Pelling - "Assessing Urban Vulnerability and Social Adaptation to Risk"

There is a gendered division in the CBO as per the article. Thus there is a need to give more preference to the women and young people to take on leadership roles. This article mentions the involvement of young people in drugs and crime due to lack of education and jobs. This may get resolved if they get involved in these organizations. There is also a need to enhance the public private partnerships which seems to be absent due to a lack of trust between government agencies and civil society actors. In Santo Domingo, planning is directed by presidential whim and there is no urban development plan. Also the financial and transaction costs of registration of the NGOs are very expensive, thus excluding them from receiving support from the international donors. The style and content of contemporary urban politics in Santo Domingo remain profoundly influenced by almost 60 years of neo-paternalistic rule which could be devastating for the economy.

Another way of addressing the important issue is to distinguish between current and future vulnerability. Current vulnerability, determined by past adaptation and the current availability of coping options, provides a baseline from which a system's future vulnerability will evolve. This evolution will be mediated by the system's adaptive capacity and the extent to which this capacity is realised as adaptation. At any given time, we may view a system as exhibiting a certain degree of vulnerability to a specified hazard, and as having a certain ability or potential to adapt so as to reduce its vulnerability to that hazard within any given time frame, constrained or modulated by a range of external factors.

Pelling - Chapter 3 in The Vulnerability of Cities

Work needs to be done for the upliftment for the poor as it is the poor who are vulnerable and suffer the most from environmental stresses and risk. I also agree with the statement that 'whilst age may increase vulnerability, experience can enhance coping.'

Two cases have been cited in the text. Firstly Wendy is a motivated and able woman but is held back from moving out of vulnerability by a lack of livelihood assets. At the same time, Ina is a determined family head with access to a modest level of financial capital. Ina was thus able to protect her family and herself from the effects of frequent flooding. Thus the susceptibility of an individual indeed seems to be an outcome of their access to economic, social, political, physical and environmental assets.

The adaptive capacity of poor communities in developing countries(India as per this article)is typically low as local people lack the income; access to basic social services and natural resources; and empowerment needed to rebuild their lives in response to (for example) the loss of food crops due to an increase in the number of drought years. Increasing the adaptive capacity of these communities requires ensuring access to resources; income generation activities; greater equity between genders and social groups, and an increase in the capacity of the poor to participate in local politics and actions. In other words, increasing adaptive capacity requires

promoting many activities associated with sustainable development. Thus, climate adaptation, sustainable development and improved equity can all be mutually reinforcing if policies are advanced that lessen resource pressure, improve environmental risk management and increase welfare for the poorest members of society.

#### Bull-Kamanga, et al - "From Everyday Hazards to Disasters"

The urban specialists and the disaster specialists have paid too little attention to disasters which are too small to fall within most official disaster statistics and which are not everyday statistics. There is a need to concentrate on disasters of small scale which may lead to more damage and loss of lives as compared to the larger ones.

I fully agree with the fact that the more powerful vested political and economic interests and the wealthier households are often protected from disasters. Politicians like in Bihar, India, may even benefit from disasters, by being seen to respond when a disaster occurs, when they should have acted before it occurred to reduce the risk.

There is often a failure to perceive how serious the risks are until a disaster event occurs. This was actually seen recently with the occurrence of Tsunami which caused widespread damage and devastation. The disaster could have been reduced in intensity especially in areas where it hit later.

#### Pelling - "Natural Disasters"

There is a need to identify which disasters are natural. Natural disasters affect the lives of many thousands of people each year. Within minutes, a natural disaster can rip apart a community, and change the lives of its residents forever. People who understand disasters and know what to do beforehand and after a disaster hits can significantly reduce disaster deaths and property damage. It is patently impossible to discuss social engineering without implying extensive objectives of social control and destruction of human life, i.e., slavery and benevolent genocide. When a silent weapon is applied gradually, the public adapts to its presence and learns to tolerate its encroachment on their lives until the pressure becomes too great and they crack up.

Bihar appears to be the most vulnerable state to riverine flooding in India. A great amount of resources have been spent to improve the natural drainage, but profit hungry contractors often use faulty materials which can increase the flood risk. Local political influence can also be seen in embankments, so that a politician can win the votes of a community. Thus there is a need to reduce the corruption and to generate awareness amongst the mass about the ill effects of the system.