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**Reaction paper 1**

1. Pelling, M. "Assessing Urban Vulnerability and Social Adaptation to Risk: Evidence from Santo Domingo."

Physical safety is not only dependent on the environmental risk but also on social vulnerability. We must consider the influence of social structures that determine the individual and collective access to assets (e.g. secure land and housing, social services, information flows, health services). This access is in turn dependent on the individual/household's hold on economic resources, social claims and political rights.

One way to explore this is by evaluating the "adaptive potential" or the capacity to reduce vulnerability that people and groups have. It comprises two types of human response to environmental risk: coping and institutional modification. Both responses can be either purposeful if directly responding to the environmental hazard stress or incidental if it acts to a background stress. The response choices available may be constrained by the developmental process (again: access to economic, political and social assets, institutional framework). Building this adaptive potential requires certain measures. The most important of which are:

- Maximize limited public resources through a successful cooperation between state and non-state actors at all levels

- Restructuring institutions in order to redistribute power

- Build social capital including nurturing trust between different political actors so that it may develop into constructive social organizations (CBOs, national NGOs). Pelling suggest an external agent as a catalyst.

Comment: The magnitude of a disaster does depend on the environmental (physical) hazard and the vulnerability of individuals/communities. I would place more importance on the later of the two not only because by building adaptive potential can we minimize the negative impacts of an event but because it is the only element on which we have some control. I would also consider the influence of cultural norms and traditions in determining vulnerability. Some societies may have access to assets but refuse to use them. Also, I am concerned about the development of dependence on external catalysts and the consequential deterioration of the trust on government institutions. In my limited experience working with an international NGO, I have seen little if any sustainable effects of activities after projects are closed.

2. Pelling, M. "Chapter 3, Social Vulnerability in the City"

Continues to build on the theories of social vulnerability and adaptive potential. Vulnerability is defined as having three components: Exposure, resistance and resilience.

Here Pelling goes into depth about the "entitlement perspective" that explains how when assets that are key for coping (labour, housing, possessions, tools of trade and social networks) are lost through any form of stress (including environmental) this will cause a reduction in the income capability of a household which represents a reduction in the household's range of entitlements making it more vulnerable to subsequent stressful events. This is linked to the ratchet effect where each new hazardous event makes the individuals/communities impacted more vulnerable to future events.

Comment: Is the entitlement perspective the only explanation? It places households in a vulnerable and dependant situation as the access to key assets really does not depend on the members of the household but on external social institutions.

3. Bull-Kamanga et cols. "From Everyday Hazards to Disasters: The accumulation of Risk in Urban Areas"

The reading points out two important reasons why there has been an insufficient link between disasters and urban development (in Africa). First, there has been a reluctance of urban and disaster specialists to work in collaboration. They have focused on different scales of the problem: Urban specialist on risks that are constantly present while disaster specialists concentrate on risks from exceptional disaster events. It is important to integrate both so that urban management also includes identification of disaster risks and measures to reduce vulnerability.

Second, not enough importance has been given to "small" disasters and everyday events (which may represent more accumulative deaths). This is relevant as these events are becoming more frequent and global, may evolve to larger events and will help develop local and national capacity to respond to larger events.

Comments: Where do disaster specialists traditionally base their work? What indices or sources of information do they use to determine risk? I don't understand how it has been possible for these two types of

specialist to have worked with limited collaboration in the past. How far has this collaboration improved?

Though I understand why it is important to consider “small” disasters and everyday events in the prevention of larger events, isn't the magnitude of this task unmanageable? How to begin and how to link small events to larger?