

Reaction Paper Elisa Jaramillo

The four readings for today focus on two topics. First, the definition of disaster as the result of the impact of a hazard (defined in the two readings as a natural event) on vulnerable people (vulnerability itself depends on socioeconomic processes that generate unsafe conditions for these populations). Two models are used to explain this relationship. The pressure and release and the access models. The later is a more comprehensive framework that not only talks about how unsafe conditions arise in relation to economic and political processes that determine allocation of resources in a given society, but manages to integrate nature into the equation. Nature (therefore hazards) also is a determinant of the pattern of assets and livelihoods among a group of individuals.

The second half of the reading concentrates on the factors associated with the extent and quality of preparedness and response activities. Such factors in a given society include the social network/capital, risk perception, disaster experience, gender and ethnicity/minority status (directly or indirectly through obstacles created by language or income inequality). There is also an ongoing debate about the importance of “generic” (technical vs natural events) and “event quality” as contributing factors.

What calls to my attention is the lack of research in all of these topics. The studies mentioned give contradictory reports and makes reaching a conclusion almost an intuitive process.