

Reaction Paper Elisa Jaramillo

The readings discuss the role of focusing events in policy change. Such events, when reinforced by a preexisting perception of a problem, can become important instruments to change dominant issues on policy agenda. In some other instances, focusing events actually act as an early warning of something that could develop into a problem consequent to a widespread condition that needs attention. In both cases, a focusing event provides important opportunities for politically disadvantaged groups to highlight and bring to public light messages that had been traditionally suppressed by the more dominant groups/stakeholders. It must not be forgotten though that in order to maintain the momentum during interevent periods, a coherent, organized and ongoing policy community is indispensable (e.g. the earthquake community single advocacy coalition). When public interest around an issue is high, a focusing event will trigger extensive interest group mobilization for policy change. This is not the case in a situation where the public interest over an issue is low and the expansion of such an issue will depend on the effort of professionals (scientific community, academics, government agencies) who must seek to induce other actors to change policy.

The readings are a painful reminder of two realities. One, for many important policy domains policy change continues to require catastrophic focusing events. Two, economic and political influence continue to be main-driving forces of policy change (or protection of status quo).