

## REACTION PAPER

### Blaikie, et al - "Disaster Pressure and Release"

The linkages between risk, security and resilience illustrate some of the major challenges facing societies throughout the world today. Blaikie *et al.* have provided us with the Disaster Pressure and Release Model (PAR), taking into account a combination of global factors, dynamic national pressures and local conditions, which generate vulnerability to disasters. In the PAR model, root causes are often linked to global forces over which local communities have little or no influence, but which determine access to power, land and resources. Root causes emerge from the economic and political spheres, where policies and structures are enacted that promote social exclusion, concentration of wealth and targeted use of force against marginalized groups through military or police structures. Root causes also determine to a large degree the tenure over land and resources. Dynamic pressures are seen as linkages between larger structural causes and local conditions, "translating the effects of root causes into the vulnerability of unsafe conditions" (Blaikie, *et al.*).

Macro-level dynamic pressures include population growth, rapid urbanization, deforestation and loss of biodiversity, decline in soil fertility and the relative scarcity of key resources such as water. All these dynamic pressures contribute to create unsafe conditions, including a fragile physical environment, a fragile economy, vulnerable social groups and inadequate public action due to low income, limited access to resources and weak local institutions. As a result, natural hazards can result in major damage through such agents as floods, droughts or earthquakes. The PAR model is an analytical tool that illustrates how disasters occur when these pressures, both global and dynamic, compounded by unsafe conditions, are released by natural hazards. This model also serves to identify the policies and measures that must be taken to reduce the risk of disasters. An analysis of the social construction of risk reveals how well (or ill) adapted and resilient social institutions and practices are to hazards.

An important set of factors in resilience to disaster is the relative vulnerability of livelihoods, in terms of access to land, resources and wealth (Blaikie *et al.*). Achieving safe conditions at the local level therefore hinges on creating more resilient environments, sustainable livelihoods, healthy and capable people. That said, while communities throughout the world have developed coping mechanisms and local institutions which enable them to improve their co-existence amidst natural hazards, there are processes and root causes which can only be addressed on a broader scale. In their effort to devise policy advice for disaster reduction, Blaikie *et al.* provide us with key guidelines for making mitigation measures more effective. The model presented here argues for deepening our understanding of the contribution non-structural hazard mitigation measures—in particular, targeted environmental conservation initiatives— can have in lessening the impacts of extreme meteorological and hydrological events like Hurricane Mitch in Central America.

### Blaikie, et al - "Access to Resources and Coping in Adversity"

The term 'natural disaster' is often used to refer to natural events such as earthquakes, hurricanes or floods. However, the phrase 'natural disaster' suggests an uncritical acceptance of a deeply engrained ideological and cultural myth. Two analytical models are provided as tools for understanding vulnerability. One links remote and distant 'root causes' to 'unsafe conditions' in a

'progression of vulnerability'. The other uses the concepts of 'access' and 'livelihood' to understand why some households are more vulnerable than others.

The article focuses on the underlying social causes of disasters, and suggests ways to integrate them with the natural science causes. It examines vulnerability, which is central to an understanding of disasters and their prevention. The authors analyze access to various resources, which gives a precise measure of a community's vulnerability, and then applies the concepts laid out to various "hazards that become disasters:" famines and drought, floods, biological hazards, coastal storms, earthquakes, volcanoes and landslides. The final section draws on the findings to suggest practical and policy solutions for a safer and less vulnerable environment.

Tierney, et. al. - "Factors Influencing Disaster Preparedness and Response"

The combination between structural and non-structural interventions is considered as the main force to develop effective procedures to manage and prevent flood risk. City zoning, flood plain regulations, building codes, flood warning systems, emergency preparedness planning, and communication processes represent strategic actions to mitigate and reduce floods. As showed in the past, heavy physical damages and human losses occurred after flood events although engineering works and structural measures were realized. Some remarks regarding cultural, social and organizational factors influencing disaster preparedness and response are also developed. As the current literature shows both technical and socio-organizational aspects have to be considered to develop decisions concerning strategies and procedures devoted to the disaster management. In fact, people can influence the implementation of the expected procedures when a flood event happens. An extreme event can determine the crisis of the existing social relationships and generate new different social organizations during the emergency response. These new social structures are the result of behaviors, knowledge, individual capabilities and collective interdependences distinguishing people involved during the crisis itself.