

Natural disaster: A threat to human security

Climate change is increasingly being called a 'security' problem, and there has been speculation that climate change may increase the risk of violent conflict.



Natural disasters are the natural hazards that actually cause significant damage to humans and their societies. Natural disasters can be very difficult to predict and have incredibly far-reaching consequences for the safety and wellbeing of individuals and communities. As in previous natural disasters such as the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Australian bushfires in 2009, Haiti earthquake in 2010, Pakistan floods in 2010 and Uttarakhand flash floods in 2013, the impacts on people and society in affected areas are immediate and devastating.

Such catastrophes tend to exacerbate pre-existing problems and inequalities, with vulnerable parts of the population often disproportionately impacted.

Why are developing countries impacted more by natural disasters?

Developed countries are better prepared to handle the impact of disasters as well as the aftermath. In developing nations, natural disasters trap people in a cycle of poverty because they do not have the resources to rebuild their homes and meet other basic needs, making them less able to recover in the long run. Certain factors present in poverty environments will turn a natural hazard into a disaster:

- Poorly constructed buildings
- Poor sanitation
- Rapid population growth/high density population
- Lack of economic safety nets
- Limited resources for disaster response and rebuilding

Due to population growth, poverty, and land shortages, people are increasingly living in areas that are more exposed to natural hazards. Likewise, the economic effects of natural disasters are long lasting and wide reaching in scope, particularly for developing countries.

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Impact on humans

- The consequences of natural disaster can be felt for many years, with people suffering as refugees or being displaced within their own country, their livelihoods gets destroyed, and they face long-term health issues.
- People struggles for years to resume normal & productive lives.
- The impact of a natural disaster may also cause inequalities. The poor, who suffer from income fluctuations, and also have limited access to financial services, disaster erodes their coping ability and therefore, undermines their ability to escape poverty.
- Spread of diseases.

As a relatively young concept, human security is still being explored and debated by academics and practitioners. Thinking about its application to natural disasters is an important step in further developing the idea.

While we cannot avert most natural disasters, our preparation for, and responses to their human impacts can be improved. The human security approach has much to offer by facilitating a focus on human vulnerabilities, thereby reducing the grave consequences of natural disasters for human safety and wellbeing.

These four tips can help you stay safe during a disaster



1. If you have not been ordered to evacuate, stay in a safe area or shelter during a natural disaster. In your home, a safe area may be a ground floor interior room, closet or bathroom. Be sure you have access to your survival kit in case you are in an emergency event that lasts several days.



2. Listen to your portable radio for important updates and instructions from local authorities. Remember to have a battery-powered radio in your survival kit.



3. If power is lost, use generator with caution. Make sure conditions are safe before operating a portable generator. Only operate it outside – away from windows, doors or vents. Follow all manufacturer's instructions.



4. Stay in your safe area and do not drive until the danger has passed. Resist the temptation to check on your property until you are sure it is safe to do so.