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Reaction Paper #1

### Pelling - "Assessing Urban Vulnerability and Social Adaptation to Risk"

This paper argues that social cohesion plays an important part in a community's ability to respond to disasters. As a community invests more in social capital, it builds its adaptive potential which allows it to make a better, more community-driven response. The paper uses the case study of the Los Manguitos *barrio* in Santo Domingo to demonstrate a close-knit community with high social capital coming together in the wake of Hurricane Georges in 1998.

While the case study is interesting, I feel that the author's point could be made stronger by contrasting Los Manguitos with an area of low social capital and discrediting alternate explanations for the strong local response. What does local response look like in areas where people don't know their neighbors and aren't involved in the community? Could the high level of altruism be linked to the resident's religion as opposed to their social interactions?

### Pelling - Chapter 3 in The Vulnerability of Cities

This chapter focuses on human vulnerability as it applies to social adaptation in the face of a disaster. It revisits the ideas of adaptive potential, and how it can apply to livelihoods.

### Bull-Kamanga, et al - "From Everyday Hazards to Disasters"

This paper identifies some of the special considerations that must be given to disaster management in urban areas, with a special emphasis on poverty-stricken areas. It also argues that high-frequency small disasters are occurring everyday, even if they are not identified as disasters. It concludes by advocating local involvement in disaster risk reduction.

In reading this, I wonder how impoverished communities view their own role in risk reduction. Do day-to-day concerns outweigh their desire to be prepared for major disasters? How do they view the government's role of protecting them?

### Pelling - "Natural Disasters"

This chapter analyzes what is meant by "natural disaster" and challenges some common beliefs about the nature of disasters (for example, that chronic disasters are just as viable as catastrophic disasters). It also provides several frameworks with which we can view disasters and emphasizes the importance of the human component in response and mitigation. Pelling concludes by recommending that we refocus attention from techno-engineering solutions to humanistic solutions.

I agree with Pelling's suggestion that disasters must be viewed through a humanistic lens. I especially liked the following quote, as it made me rethink my own views on disasters: "it is more accurate to refer to 'natural disasters' as *humanitarian disasters with a natural trigger*."

### UNDP-Reducing Disaster Risk

This report links natural disaster risk to levels of human development, showing how urbanization can both positively and negatively impact risk, depending on management. It then proposes a proactive risk-management approach to new urbanization and development.

I like the report's treatment of risk as a quantifiable, measurable, and mitigatable entity, but I wonder if its conclusions take into account the limitations and abilities of third-world governments.