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Danger Need Not Spell Disaster But How Vulnerable are We?


Abstract

This research is extracted from a book proposed for publication by United Nations University Press in 2006 that examines our vulnerability to hazards of natural origin, and explores the opportunities for adopting a pre-emptive rather than a reactive approach to natural disasters. The world may suddenly turn its attention to the suffering victims of catastrophes such as Hurricane Katrina and the Asian Tsunami, but by that time the disaster has already struck and we have failed to prepare for it. This document asks important questions about the very nature of vulnerability. How do we define vulnerability—does our definition relate to how susceptible we are before a disaster or how well we cope afterwards, or both? How can we measure vulnerability accurately, and how can we begin the process of making society—from local communities to the whole world—more disaster-resilient?
Natural disasters affect millions of people every year. From the destruction of buildings to disease, natural disasters can devastate entire countries overnight. Natural disasters affect the number of people living below the poverty line, increasing their numbers by more than 50 percent in some cases. The problem is getting worse; up to 325 million extremely poor people are expected to live in the 49 most hazard-prone countries by 2030. Millions of people are affected by natural disasters every year, and their impact can be calamitous. From the destruction of buildings to the spread of disease, natural disasters can devastate entire countries overnight.