“Disasters” and “Disaster Recovery”
Case Study: The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami in Sri Lanka

Learning Module: Long-Term Recovery from the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami—a Comparison of Two Communities in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka

SECTION 1: “Disasters” and “Disaster Recovery” Case Study: The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami in Sri Lanka

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Key Concepts and Topics:

• What is the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami
• What is the “Sociology of Hazards and Disasters”
• What is a “disaster”?
• What is “disaster recovery”?
• How is “disaster recovery” a theoretical concept?
• What is “sustainable recovery”?
• What is “development” (in the context of disasters and disaster recovery)?
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• How are social inequalities and “vulnerability” linked to the disaster cycle?
• What is “sustainable recovery”?
• What is “development” (in the context of disasters and disaster recovery)?
  – What is “cultural competence”?
Learning Objectives:

• Understand:
  – Interpret the meaning of “disaster” as a concept that is multifaceted and has multiple definitions.
  – Summarize and compare the three different types of “disasters”

• Analyze:
  – Analyze ways in which their own communities may be vulnerable to a specific type of disaster
  – Define “sustainable disaster recovery” and differentiate it from a simplistic definition of “disaster recovery”
What is a “Disaster”?

- **DISASTER**: “a situation involving a natural hazard which has consequences in terms of damage, livelihoods/economic disruption and/or casualties that are too great for the affected area and people to deal with properly on their own...” (Wisner et al. 2012; 30)

- Three types of disasters (not mutually-exclusive categories):
  1. “Natural Disasters”
  2. “Technological Disasters”
  3. “Man-made Disasters”

- Can you think of examples for each “type” of disaster?
What is a Disaster?

• A cycle: (Tierney 2007)
  – Starting point
  – Onset of hazard event
  – Period of emergency
  – Relief & recovery
  – Long term recovery

• “Communities” in disasters
  – Social capital and social networks
“Communities” and Inequality

• Not all communities experience disasters in the same way

• Community can be defined in many different ways
  – When looking at the case of Sri Lanka in the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, we define “community” as a “Grama Niladhari division” (or GN Division)
2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami

• This video is a BBC Special Report about the tsunami immediately following the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami on December 26, 2004 (click here to open a link to the video):
**Context**

- 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami as a “megacatastrophe”
  - In Sri Lanka alone, more than 35,000 people were killed and roughly 70% of the small island’s coastline was affected

- Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009)

- “Community” defined as Grama Niladhari Divisions
  - “GN Person” or village leader is a government appointed position

*Map of Tsunami and Conflict Impacts in Sri Lanka (Kleinfeld 2007)*
Inequality and Disaster Vulnerability

• “Disasters do not affect all members of society equally” (Fothergill and Peek 2004; 89)

• “Vulnerability (to a disaster) is a function of exposure (who is at risk) and sensitivity of system (the degree to which people and places can be harmed)” (Cutter et al. 2008, 559).

• Vulnerability is a function of social class, gender, race/ethnicity, social capital, and political dis/enfranchisement among other axes of social inequity (Tierney 2007, Cannon 2000).
ANALYZE:
Vulnerability in YOUR Community?

• How and why are different communities differentially vulnerable to disasters?

• Can you think of the ways in which your own community may or may not be “vulnerable” to a specific disaster?
Disaster Recovery

- Disaster recovery is multi-dimensional and is studied by scientists and practitioners from a wide array of fields
  - Sustainable disaster recovery or “building back better” (Smith and Wenger 2007)

- Building a theory of “sustainable community-level recovery from disasters”
Vulnerability and Disaster Recovery

• Not all communities experience the same levels of pre-disaster vulnerability.
  – As such, the process of recovery following a disaster event is a function of pre-existing social inequalities (Phillips 2009, Tierney 2006).

• Disaster recovery is a non-linear process
Four Types of Disaster Recovery

1. Social Recovery
2. Economic Recovery
3. Infrastructure Recovery
4. Risk Reduction

• Can you think of specific examples of each of these types of recovery?
Two Communities and Two Different Recoveries

• This case study looks at the recoveries of two different communities on Sri Lanka’s East coast to investigate both:
  1. The interplay between “natural” and “man-made” disasters, and
  2. Differential recovery as a result of differential vulnerabilities (ethnicity and religion)

• The communities:
  – One Tamil/Hindu Community
  – One 100% Muslim Community
For Example: Infrastructure Recovery

Tamil/Hindu Community
In Kallady, Batticaloa

Muslim Community in Kattankudy, Batticaloa
Disaster Recovery and Development

• Sri Lanka and the *Golden Wave* (Gamburd 2013)
  – The massive wave of foreign aid and resources flowing into Sri Lanka following the tsunami

• “Development”

• Recovery projects as development project means *foreign influence on local cultures*
Disaster Recovery and Development in Communities in Batticaloa

• Examples of “development” embedded within recovery projects:
  – Introduction of new household technologies
  – Introduction of new economies (including tourism)

• Cultural Competence: a sensitivity to local cultural norms

• Brainstorm: How might the influx of foreign tourists affect local social structures?
Review of Key Concepts and Topics:

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