

Editorial

When O’Keefe, Wisner and Westgate (1976) in their now seminal article wanted to “take the naturalness out of natural disasters” the response from the broader academic and development communities was not very positive. How could you prevent something that was inevitable or an act of God? In essence these three authors argued that “natural” disasters had more to do with socio-economic factors than with nature. Upon brief perusal of more recent disasters literature it should be quite clear that this line of thinking has indeed become the dominant perspective on disasters. In the light of increased losses to events, brought on by a variety of different complex factors such as increases in poverty, population movements and global changes in the environment, researchers and practitioners have paid a significant amount of attention to disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness.

In the interest of new readers who may not be familiar with the field: disaster risk reduction (DRR) is a multi-disciplinary subject of practice for the most part aimed at reducing socio-economic vulnerability to natural hazards (such as drought, floods, earthquakes) and man-made or anthropogenic hazards (such as land degradation or large scale hazardous chemical spills). It is by nature developmental and thus the study of DRR may well be viewed as a relatively new appendage to a number of social and natural science disciplines. Therefore, the study of DRR will typically be a multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary endeavour drawing on various related fields of study.

This edition of *Jàmbá* offers an interesting spread of articles covering a broad range of relevant fields, ranging from more theoretical to more practice-based papers. In the first article Per Becker argues for a systems perspective as an analytic tool in Disaster Studies. He uses two case studies to illustrate that the absence of such a perspective in interventions may lead to sub-optimal interventions and hinder proper monitoring and evaluation of international development projects for DRR. Gerrit van der Walldt draws a parallel between the study of DRR and the evolution of the discipline of Public Management. He argues that the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of both fields of study share certain commonalities. Thus, he suggests that the foundational aspects of Public

Management should continue to inform DRR as a field of study. Benedict Malele investigates the consequences of the ineffective enforcement of urban planning rules and regulations in Dar es Salaam. He discusses the various coping mechanisms used by local residents and highlights the existing tension between sustainable coping mechanisms and existing livelihood practices. Buh Gaston offers a case study of the use of geospatial tools in order to identify areas most at risk of landslides and flooding in the Limbe sub-division in Cameroon. He also proposes specific mitigation strategies. Patrick Gwimbi conducts an analysis of flood risk in Zimbabwe. He argues that a more coordinated approach is required in flood risk mitigation in rural areas and offers several more specific recommendations for flood risk mitigation.

I trust you will find this edition of JAMBÁ not only informative but also thought provoking.

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Reference

O’Keefe, P., Westgate, K, and Wisner, B. 1976. Taking the naturalness out of natural disasters. *Nature*, Vol. 260, Issue 5552, pp. 566-567.