

ISSUE FACT SHEET: NATURAL DISASTERS

DID YOU KNOW?

“Disaster vulnerability in developing countries may very well be the most critical challenge facing development in the new millennium. Rapid population growth, urbanization, environmental degradation, and global climate change are all contributing to an increase in the frequency and magnitude of disasters. And their most deadly impact is on the lives and living environment of the poor.” – *Sir James Wolfensohn, former president of the World Bank Group, and Didier Cherpitel, former secretary general of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies*

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. How is *natural disaster* defined? There are many different causes and forms of natural disasters. Why are they grouped together under this label? How are the results and consequences similar, regardless of the type of natural disaster?
2. How can countries, governments, and/or communities prioritize education even in light of a natural disaster?
3. How does re-building and re-opening schools help to provide aid and healing to children and the community?

DEFINITION

A *natural disaster* is defined as a sudden, catastrophic event that is caused by the forces of nature and that affects many people.

OVERVIEW

Natural disasters come in many forms, such as flooding, hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanoes, and tornadoes. The types of natural disasters to which a country is susceptible depend on its location and geography.

While the events themselves are often over quickly, the recovery process, especially in poor countries, can take years. The earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010 claimed more than 220,000 lives. The subsequent months brought continued challenges, with over 2,500 lives lost to cholera. In 2013, three years later, there were still approximately 350,000 people living in temporary camps in Haiti.

These numbers are specific to Haiti, but the related issues are not. Challenges such as providing citizens with adequate housing, food, clean water, health care, sanitary conditions, opportunities to access loans to rebuild businesses, and rebuilding schools are universal.

RELATED IMPACTS: POVERTY

Unfortunately, those living in poverty are most susceptible to natural disasters of any type, and natural disasters exacerbate the challenges. Families in poverty do not have the financial resources to rebuild homes and businesses. And, in countries with large populations living in poverty, governments often lack the financial capacity to help its citizens and must rely on aid from other countries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

RELATED IMPACTS: EDUCATION

“Even if you send me away, I will come back every day until I can stay.” (Wadley)

Despite losing her home and having to live in a tent camp, Wadley was excited about returning to school. Wadley was too young to fully understand why she was not allowed to stay at school, but she was determined, and her determination paid off!

When natural disasters strike, girls are among the

groups most affected. But even when there isn't a natural disaster, in many countries families with limited financial resources choose to send their boys to school; often girls are kept home to provide the extra labor required for everyday survival. Also, in many countries school is not free and families must pay for uniforms, books, and even exams. Natural disasters make the situation worse: with the loss of income due to natural disasters, even for a short period of time, many families unable to afford the costs associated with school.

WHAT'S WORKING

So what can be done? How can a country rebuild in such extreme circumstances? How can the global community support families who were already living in poverty? How do we keep girls in school?

Here are some initiatives that are currently working in Haiti:

- CARE, a non-governmental organization, has been working in Haiti since before the earthquake in 2010. CARE is helping Haitian citizens to rebuild their homes, with the condition that for one year each family that is helped will agree to host a family still living in a camp.
- Women often do not have access to banking, so providing micro-loans for women helps them rebuild their businesses.
- Rebuilding social structures: Rebuilding institutions such as schools – and supporting regular routines for children, often through school – helps reduce stress, provides structure, and continues to empower children to grow.

RESOURCES

- CARE at www.care.org
- Video: Haiti Earthquake: Five Years Later at <http://www.pih.org/media/ophelia-dahl-haiti-5-years-after-the-earthquake>
- See Additional Resources Guide for other resources, including relevant videos (found in the Resources section).