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The Social Science of Hazards

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A social science perspective on hazards is critical to understanding how decisions are made at the individual, social, and community levels, where information is inherently incomplete and uncertain. In this framing, individual choice of responses for prevention and recovery depends on expected and experienced losses, the perceived ability of governments and individuals to respond, public policies including provision of insurance, communication and interpretation of scientific information, trust of authority and science experts, among other factors. (Kasperson and Kasperson, 2005)

Using the social sciences framework, this presentation illuminates issues related to risk, decision-making and hazards. The links between individual and public decision-making (Kane and Shogren, 2000); the role of science and scientists in decision-making; and responses by governments, business, and non-profit (non-governmental) groups to reduce losses following natural and man-made catastrophes (environmental, technological, or terrorist) are discussed in the context of longer-term environmental problems such as climate change.

Kane, S. and J. Shogren. 2000. "Linking Adaptation and Mitigation in Climate Change Policy," CLIMATIC CHANGE. Volume 45, Issue.No. 1, pp. 75-102. Kasperson, .J. and R. Kasperson. 2005. THE SOCIAL CONTOURS OF RISK. VOLUME 1: PUBLICS, RISK COMMUNICATION, AND THE SOCIAL AMPLIFICATION OF RISK. Earthscan (Sterling, Virginia, USA).