

PREFACE

Natural hazards are believed to cause major disruptions of the functioning of affected communities, often triggering widespread human, material, and economic losses. Yet, at the same time, they often testify to the capacity and energy of local organizations, social groups, and individual citizens to self-organize and to find creative and effective ways to cope in the face of disaster and its aftermath. Following the immediate disaster response and in the course of the long-term recovery process, communities and individual tend to adopt numerous strategies to diversify their resource and livelihood base, to rebuild social networks, and to improve disaster preparedness, often with the assistance of NGOs and other external organizations.

The main questions addressed by the contributions in this volume are as follows:

- How do individuals, families, and social groups in rural and urban communities perceive natural disasters, their underlying reasons, and their effects on their livelihoods?
- What are specific factors that determine the degree of vulnerability and resilience among disaster-affected communities?
- How can external expert knowledge and local wisdom and experience be creatively combined to enhance risk communication and local communities' preparedness for natural disasters?
- What are the most vulnerable groups in local communities and how can their resilience to disasters be strengthened and their long-term livelihoods be secured?
- How can institutional and policy frameworks in support of local disaster risk management be designed?
- What is the role of social capital and collective action in enhancing disaster preparedness, mitigation and adaptive capacity at the local level?
- How can community organizations be linked more effectively with regional, national and international organizations?
- What are the interfaces and possible tradeoffs between individual, community and state responses to natural disasters?

The idea for this book emerged from three sessions on “Local Responses to Natural Disasters” organized by the editors under the theme “Risk and Conflicts” at the 32nd International Geographical Congress held in Cologne, Germany from 26 to 30 August 2012. It comprises five selected papers presented in Cologne and five papers that were added because their content appeared to fit well to the common theme of this book.

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The editors hope that this volume stimulates a more informed debate on the various roles that local organizations, community self-help groups and engaged citizens can play in fostering disaster preparedness, response and recovery at the local level if they are provided with the right institutional frameworks and well-focused external assistance.

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