

# Hazard and Disaster Management

Disaster Investigation

# Earlier Approach

- Disasters are often portrayed as acts of God, acts of Nature, force majeure or more recently as consequences of climate change. The recently adopted Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 explicitly recognizes that a range of underlying causes and drivers participate in the social construction of disaster risk. However, in the media, policy discourse and research, disasters are still frequently characterized as unexpected, unforeseeable, overwhelming and fundamentally exogenous events

# Earlier Approach

- This objectification of disasters as externalities has been gradually codified over the years into sets of institutional and administrative practices which now characterize an increasingly professionalized and structured disaster risk management sector. The dominant focus of these practices is to reduce the impact of such externalities on communities, society and the economy. Research and case studies often tend to reflect and reinforce these codified practices, focusing more on the impact of disasters rather than provoking a serious enquiry into their causes.

# Need for a New Approach

- Emerging empirical evidence on disaster loss patterns and trends, however, unveils a radically different picture.
- Ballooning investment in the disaster risk management sector at all scales has been accompanied by equally rapidly increasing levels of disaster related loss and damage, in particular associated with frequently occurring, localized extensive risks.
- Extensive risks are those that are most closely associated with underlying drivers, such as environmental degradation, social and economic inequality, poorly planned and managed urban development and weak or ineffective governance. This points to a fundamental contradiction in the contemporary practice of disaster risk management.
- Viewed from this perspective, transforming the direction of disaster research in a way that unveils the social construction of risk could potentially contribute to a profound redefinition of disaster risk management.
- Forensic Investigations of Disasters (FORIN) conceptual framework holds the promise to trigger such a change.

# Need for a New Approach

- Disaster risk is usually defined in terms of three other variables, namely hazard, exposure and vulnerability. However, these in turn are also dependent variables. Most hazard is a reflection of both socially constructed as well as physical processes; exposure is a reflection of how social relations of production unfold in territory and geography; while vulnerability characterizes a range of social, economic, political and cultural conditions.
- The essence of the FORIN conceptual framework, therefore, is that all disaster risk is socially constructed. From that perspective disasters are not merely not natural, they also don't exist independently as things or as objects. They are only moments of space-time compression within broader social and historical processes