

Yumiko Nakagawa

“Vulnerability”

I have never imagined the depth of term “vulnerability.” However, alas, I now find myself in a midst of vast ocean of definition of vulnerability!

Swimming smoothly in this complexity of vulnerability, Anderson presented five “critical” characteristics of vulnerability. Anderson’s framework is surely a useful and practical tool for policy makers in every level. Morrow and Peacock illustrated in their articles that certain people living in the richest country of the world may become vulnerable. However, the perception seems top-down despite the fact that three authors focus on people with higher vulnerability. As important as it is to identify the vulnerable, it seems to me that more focus should be paid for how people can *realize* that they are vulnerable. Either characteristic(s) of yourself is vulnerable or the circumstances you live in prevents you from responding appropriately, people who are vulnerable should realize that they are vulnerable to certain disaster. Then they should ask questions to reduce their vulnerability: What is the absolute minimum thing do I need to do when disaster occurs? What am I capable of doing as a response?

It might not be an appropriate example, but when I was on the UN flight to Kabul, an information sheet on mine risk made me realize that awareness is the very simple but powerful step for reducing vulnerability to a hazard. If you have been on UN flight between Dubai and Kabul, you have probably seen it. It is a mine risk education sheet placed in a seat pocket. When I read it, I realized that I became less vulnerable to the risk of mine compared to 10 minutes ago, because then I knew what is the risk of mine, how to minimize the risk, what to do when I step on a landmine field by accident.

Especially in the country where you cannot expect the government to function well enough to identify the risk and point that to you (like Afghanistan), public awareness of one’s own vulnerability seems very important. The assumptions of the readings seem to be that a country is equipped with functioning government (which, by the way, legitimate). I am intrigued to learn more about vulnerability reduction in, say, post-conflict settings. As the article by Kamanga et.al (from last week class) touched upon, people in a post-conflict setting or any situation with various hazard than natural disaster might not see the clear distinction between natural disaster and “everyday hazards (communicable diseases or accidents).”¹ However, if an area is accustomed to a certain natural events, they would probably have, I imagine, customary coping system and may have developed certain mentality to cope with the loss from the disaster. I would love to hear from professor and classmates on the vulnerability reduction attempt (any examples or thoughts) in post-conflict setting.

¹ P.198. Bull-Kamanga, L., Diagne, K., Lavell, A., Leon, E., Lerise, F., MacGregor, H., Maskrey, A., Meshack, M., Pelling, M., Reid, H., Satterthwaite, D., Songsore, J., Westgate, K., Yitambe, A. 2003. “From Everyday Hazards to Disasters: The Accumulation of Risk in Urban Areas.” *Environment and Urbanization*, 15(1): 193-203.