

Paper name: Environmental Geography and Disaster Management

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Topic: Hazard: Meaning and Characteristics

Meaning and Definition

Environmental hazards may be defined as those extreme events either natural or man-induced which occur rarely and exceed the tolerable magnitude within or beyond certain time limits, make human adjustments very difficult, result in colossal losses of property, human and animal lives, destruction of settlements and vegetation, etc.

Hazards have however been defined differently as processes or causes which lead to extreme events, as natural or man-induced events which cause disasters, as a synonym of disaster, etc.

The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) of the United Nations (U.N.) defines a hazard as “*a potentially damaging physical event, phenomenon or human activity that may cause the loss of life or injury, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation.*”

It is apparent from the above definition that hazards are physical events, i.e. causes or processes of disasters whether natural or man-induced.

Characteristics

Hazards could be, natural (geological, hydro-meteorological and biological) or induced by human processes (environmental degradation and technological hazards). Hazards can be *single*, *sequential* or *combined* in their origin and effects. Accordingly, Hazard Analysis entails the identification, study and monitoring of a hazard to determine its potential, origin and characteristics. Thus, hazards have the following characteristic features:

- 1) Hazards are natural or man-induced extreme events
- 2) Hazards are physical events or causes or processes of disasters,
- 3) Hazards have potential for damaging different forms of lives, mainly human life,
- 4) Hazards represent latent conditions for future threats to all types of biota,

- 5) Hazards are of varying origins; natural origin or of anthropogenic origin,
- 6) Hazards may or may not become disasters, etc.
