

What does Vulnerability mean?

Vulnerability is the inability to resist a hazard or to respond when a disaster has occurred. For instance, people who live on plains are more vulnerable to floods than people who live higher up.

In actual fact, vulnerability depends on several factors, such as people's age and state of health, local environmental and sanitary conditions, as well as on the quality and state of local buildings and their location with respect to any hazards.

- ▶ Families with low incomes often live in high-risk areas around cities, because they can't afford to live in safer (and more expensive) places. This is what we call **economic vulnerability**.
- ▶ Similarly, a wooden house is sometimes less likely to collapse in an earthquake, but it may be more vulnerable in the event of a fire or a hurricane. This is what we call **physical vulnerability**.

What human actions can increase our vulnerability?

There are several situations that can increase our vulnerability to disasters.

One example is when people cut down too many trees at a faster pace than nature can replace them. This is what we call deforestation. It increases the vulnerability of many communities to rain which, when they fall on unprotected soil, cause mudslides, landslides, floods and avalanches.



Building homes in high-risk places makes us more vulnerable. For instance, if you live too close to a river and people have been throwing garbage into it so that the water cannot flow on through, you will be more vulnerable to floods.

A well-informed and well-organized community, that meets to talk about what they are going to do about the natural hazards, is less vulnerable than a community that is unaware of them.

