

# Enhancing Community Resilience: Opportunities and Challenges

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## Editorial

The concepts of vulnerability and resilience have drawn much attention from hazards managers and researchers, including intensive scrutiny of their meaning and scope. Some consider them to be separate issues while others view them as interrelated. Even the tasks of reducing vulnerability and enhancing resilience have been described as opposite sides of the same coin. Either way, most agree that identifying areas of vulnerability is simply not enough --we need to use that information to make meaningful changes that will improve the situation for future events.

Major efforts to evaluate how governments can enhance resilience are underway around the world. Examples include the Increasing National Resilience to Hazards and Disasters project developed by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and the Building Resilience Amongst Communities in Europe (emBRACE) project supported by the European Commission, with members of its research consortium including the Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disaster (CRED). These types of projects will certainly do outstanding work in identifying ways to measure resilience, and make highly useful recommendations on how to implement resilience-building programs and policies. But as identifying vulnerability is not enough, identifying ways to build resilience is simply not enough either. Once again, the real challenge will be in using that information to make meaningful changes.

Although government agencies prefer the term enhancing resilience over reducing vulnerability because of the more positive approach it projects, this position does not mean that they no longer have to dedicate time and resources to identifying areas of vulnerability. The task of identifying vulnerability; social vulnerability in particular; must be addressed in order to make significant progress in the effort to enhance resilience. These efforts should include evaluating areas such as hazards

perception and awareness, and hazards preparedness (i.e., survival and mitigation actions) of the local residents. Furthermore, these issues should be evaluated based on demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, and income) as well as social-psychological characteristics (e.g., locus of control and risk-taking behavior) to provide a deeper understanding of social vulnerability within the community.

No doubt these tasks are easier said than done. Government agencies typically face barriers such as time, human resources, funding, and mission statement directives that prevent them from addressing these issues of vulnerability as comprehensively as they would like, or from addressing them at all. Nevertheless, the task of identifying areas of vulnerability must be included in modern-day efforts to enhance resilience if any real measure of success is to be attained.

In Cutter et al.'s [1] Disaster Resilience of Place Model, a critical stage is the community's ability (or inability) to learn from the experience, which leads to policy changes that enhance resilience through improvements in preparedness and mitigation. Cutter notes, however, that there is no guarantee of learning, and thus, no guarantee of enhanced resilience. Further evidence of this problem is provided by Tobin [2] in a detailed case study for Florida, U.S.A. Tobin describes the many challenges to be faced in the quest to build sustainable and resilient communities in this highly disaster-prone environment, and how failures to define meaningful objectives and to learn from past experiences have made the task that much more difficult. We should all take heed of these warnings along the path to enhancing resilience.

## References

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