

DISASTER : MEANING, DEFINITION AND EXPLANATION

The term “DISASTER” owes its origin to French word “Disastre”, a combination of two words “Des” meaning “Bad” and “Aster” meaning “Star” thus the term Disaster refers to “Bad or Evil Star”.

The term can be used for personal tragedies also, as they may cause emotional and financial sufferings.

Disasters, however, are the catastrophic events resulting in heavy losses in terms of human, animal and plant lives, injuries and disabilities and damage to property and environment.

In contemporary academia, disasters are seen as the consequence of inappropriately managed risk. These risks are the product of hazards and vulnerability. Hazards that strike in areas with low vulnerability are not considered a disaster, as is the case in uninhabited regions.

Disaster occurs when a hazard impacts on or strikes a vulnerable community with low capacity resulting in damages, loss and serious disruption of community functioning. The widespread human, material and environmental losses exceed the community's ability to cope using its own resources.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines a disaster as “a sudden ecological phenomenon of sufficient magnitude to require external assistance”.

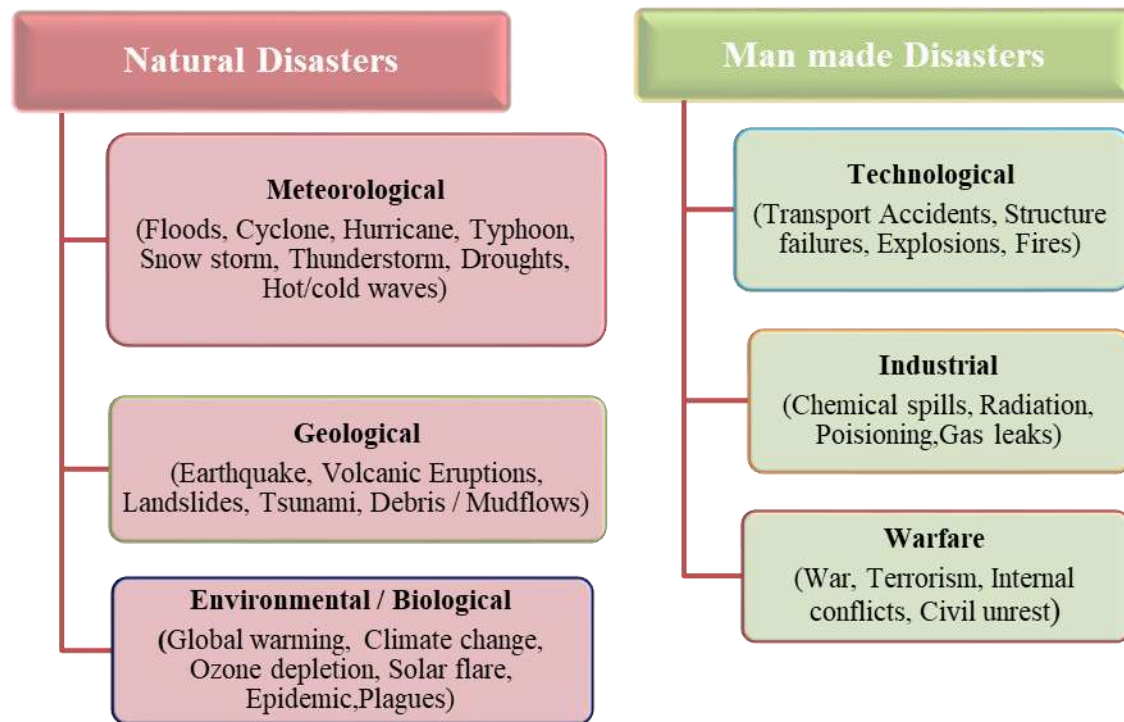
It is also defined as any event, typically occurring suddenly, that causes damage, ecological disruption, loss of human life, deterioration of health and health services, and which exceeds the capacity of the affected community on a scale sufficient to require outside assistance (Landsman, 2001).

Disasters are events that occur when significant numbers of people are exposed to extreme events to which they are vulnerable, with resulting injury and loss of life, often combined with damage to property and livelihoods.

Disasters, commonly leading to emergency situations, occur in diverse situations in all parts of the world, in both sparsely populated rural and densely populated urban

regions, as well as in situations involving natural and man-made hazards. Disasters are often classified according to their speed of onset (sudden or slow), their cause (natural or man-made), or their scale (major or minor).

Types of Disasters



Natural Hazards (and the resulting disasters) are the result of naturally occurring processes that have operated throughout Earth's history. Natural disasters are beyond human control. Natural disasters are often termed an “Act of God”.

If the natural process that poses the hazard occurs and destroys human life or property, then a natural disaster has occurred. Among the natural hazards and possible disasters to be considered are:

Geophysical (result from phenomena beneath the Earth’s surface; earthquakes, landslides, tsunamis and volcanic activity)

Hydrological (avalanches and floods)

Meteorological (cyclones and storms/wave surges)

Biological (disease, epidemics¹ and insect/animal plagues)

Climatological (extreme temperatures, drought and wildfires)

Disaster Subgroup	Definition	Disaster Main Type
Geophysical	Events originating from solid earth	Earthquake, Volcano, tsunami, landslides. Mass Movement (dry)
Meteorological	Events caused by short-lived/small to meso scale atmospheric processes (in the spectrum from minutes to days)	Cyclones, Storm
Hydrological	Events caused by deviations in the normal water cycle and/or overflow of bodies of water caused by wind set-up	Flood, Mass Movement (wet)
Climatological	Events caused by long-lived/meso to macro scale processes (in the spectrum from intra-seasonal to multi-decadal climate variability)	Extreme Temperature, Drought, Wildfire
Biological	Disaster caused by the exposure of living organisms to germs and toxic substances	Epidemic, Insect Infestation, Animal Stampede

Man-made/ Anthropogenic :

Technological (the failure or breakdown of systems, equipment and engineering standards that harms people and the environment; structural collapses, such as bridges, mines and buildings)

¹ AN EPIDEMIC is a disease that affects a large number of people within a community, population, or region; when COVID-19 was limited to Wuhan, China, it was an epidemic.

A PANDEMIC is an epidemic that's spread over multiple countries or continents; COVID-19

Industrial (disasters caused by industrial companies, either by accident, negligence or incompetence; Chemical and nuclear explosion²)

Warfare (disasters caused by sociopolitical conflicts that escalate into violence; war, intra society conflicts)

Socio-natural Disaster:

This term is used for the circumstances where human activity is increasing the occurrence of certain hazards beyond their natural probabilities.

The phenomenon of increased occurrence of certain natural events, such as landslides, flooding, land subsidence and drought, that arise from the interaction of natural hazards with overexploited or degraded land and environmental resources.

It is the phenomenon of increased occurrence of certain geophysical and hydrometeorological hazard events, such as landslides, flooding, land subsidence and drought, that arise from the interaction of natural hazards with overexploited or degraded land and environmental resources. This term is used for the circumstances where human activity is increasing the occurrence of certain hazards beyond their natural probabilities. Evidence points to a growing disaster burden from such hazards. Socio-natural hazards can be reduced and avoided through wise management of land and environmental resources [United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. Terminology. Geneva, Switzerland: UNISDR; 2009. <http://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/terminology>]

²On April 26, 1986, a nuclear reactor exploded at the Chernobyl nuclear plant near the city of Pripyat (now Ukraine), poisoning the air and soil in several districts of Ukraine, Russia, and Belaru. The Bhopal disaster, also referred to as the Bhopal gas tragedy, was a gas leak incident on the night of 2–3 December 1984 at the Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) pesticide plant in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India. It is considered to be the world's worst industrial disaster.