

Haynes, K. I. Kelman, and T. Mitchell. 2006. "Early Participatory Intervention for Catastrophe to Reduce Island Vulnerability". Poster in Symposium V "Risk Management" Cities on Volcanoes 4, Quito, Ecuador, 23-27 January 2006.

Abstract:

Disasters in isolated communities, such as islands, can have devastating impact. Their small size and remoteness create a situation where a relatively small hazard event can threaten an entire nation or culture, as seen from the impact of volcanic eruptions and hurricanes in Montserrat and Tristan da Cunha. In many instances generations of inhabitants might have had little or no experience of certain hazards before they cause major disruption. Similarly local authorities may be underprepared to deal with such pervasive events. Building resilience against and reducing vulnerability to extreme events which have never been experienced is especially challenging.

During a rapid-onset catastrophe, specialists from overseas are often drafted into the disaster location and hastily initiate a top-down approach to the risk awareness, with little cross-disciplinary collaboration. These campaigns tend to be of limited success due to conflict between the outsiders' strategies and interests, the decision-makers and the local community's perspectives. Little consideration is given to the distinct worldviews of the population at risk, potentially resulting in a negative cycle of distrust and disbelief along with the development of misconceptions. Once initiated, such a situation is difficult to redress.

This poster outlines a proposal designed to tackle this problem, which hypothesises that the combination of "early intervention" with a "participatory approach" would best reduce island vulnerability to both catastrophic and chronic disasters. The combination, termed EPIC (Early Participatory Intervention for Catastrophe) should occur long before a hazard threatens, but would also be essential when a crisis manifests and in the long-term aftermaths of extreme events. The methodology involves a multi-disciplinary team of physical and social scientists spending significant periods of time in the field working with local scientists, decision-makers and communities in a collaborative way, to create self-sustaining epistemic communities who are able to foster sustainability and resilience.