

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

I thank David Alexander for his review of *Civil Care and Security Studies* (IJMED, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 159-161) but I am disappointed at his comment that, in my chapter, I “[go] off at a tangent with [my] discussion of disasters on small islands”. Disasters on small islands are not a tangent to the book’s topics due to the importance to researchers and practitioners of small island disasters, risks, and vulnerabilities.

From the vast literature supporting this topic, I give examples of one book (Lewis, 1999) and one paper (Pelling and Uitto, 2001). Also from the research community, Godfrey Baldacchino has illustrated the importance of islands by creating a Canada Research Chair in Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island and by founding the *Island Studies Journal*. Vulnerability and disaster issues will naturally be a component of that work.

See also McCall (1994 and 1996) for the justification of nissology, the study of islands on their own terms. If more research evidence would still be of interest regarding the acceptance of small island vulnerability studies as useful and important, see the research outputs from, and sources listed by, the International Small Islands Studies Association <http://www.geol.utas.edu.au/isisa>, the Forum for Island Research and Experience <http://www.fireonline.org>, Island Vulnerability <http://www.islandvulnerability.org>, and the Small Island Cultures Research Initiative <http://www.sicri.org>

Those sources would be a good start for the topic. It would seem that no study of disaster issues could be complete without considering small islands.

From a practitioner perspective, many international documents explicitly mention the special vulnerabilities of small islands. Three examples are:

- The *Johannesburg Plan of Implementation* from the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in August and September 2002 in South Africa (see Chapter VII).
- The *Hyogo Framework for Action* agreed at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in January 2005 in Japan (e.g. paragraphs 13g and 25).
- The *Gozo Statement on Vulnerable Small States* from the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in November 2005 in Malta.

Governments are learning that they ignore small islands at their own peril, as aptly demonstrated by two British Overseas Territories which caused difficulties and international embarrassment for the UK government:

- Montserrat, due to ongoing volcanic eruptions which started in 1995 (e.g. Clay, 1999; Davison, 2003; Pattullo, 2000).
- Pitcairn Island, where a crisis resulted when, in April 2003, British authorities charged several men with sex crimes (for background, see Trenwith, 2003).

See also SIDSNet <http://www.sidsnet.org> as a start for why practitioners have an interest in small island disaster issues. It would be a disservice to disasters, development, and sustainability practitioners not to recognise their work by failing to highlight small islands.

Perhaps the more than 10% of the world's population being islanders along with their rich cultures, languages, societies, histories, and livelihoods would nonetheless still be considered "tangential" (by the non-islander majority, of course). But more than one fifth of the world's sovereign states? Over 90% of dependent territories? Disaster events which affect 100% of a country's population? The challenges of evacuation from and reconstruction of isolated areas?

As key examples of the challenges inherent in disasters, risk, vulnerability, development, and sustainability, small islands not only provide difficult scenarios to manage but also yield lessons and advice for other locations. While I am flattered at undeservedly being named one of the "more eminent authors", it would be disingenuous to apply the statement "you are all capable of doing better work" to my promotion of small island importance.

Addressing this undervalued area of disaster studies is based on

robust academic literature, draws on extensive field practice, yields original research, and assists island and non-island practitioners. Small islands deserve detailed discussion in books such as *Civil Care and Security Studies*. It is the “better work” of which this field needs much more.

Yours sincerely,

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