

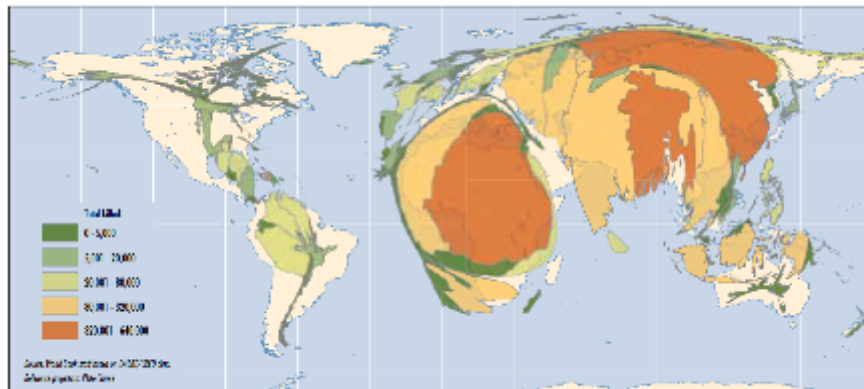


A tale of two disasters



The NAPSNet Policy Forum provides expert analysis of contemporary peace and security issues in Northeast Asia. As always, we invite your responses to this report and hope you will take the opportunity to participate in discussion of the analysis.

Map 1 Deaths shrink Asia and the Americas—but expand Africa



Note: Areas reflect cumulative deaths from disasters for 1970 to 2010 (February).
Source: World Bank staff based on EM-DAT/CREDES.

Recommended Citation

Nikhil Desai, "A tale of two disasters", NAPSNet Policy Forum, July 18, 2013,
<https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/a-tale-of-two-disasters/>

by Nikhil Desai

18 July 2013

I. Introduction

While contrasting the outcomes of two separate natural weather events in a rich and a poor country, namely the US and India, Nikhil Desai writes that "the poor suffer the climate whether or not it changes, whether the change is natural or anthropogenic, and whether or not their or anybody else's greenhouse gas emissions are reduced or constrained. The rich countries - and the rich among the poor countries - enjoy a physical and service infrastructure, and insurance protections, that sharply limits their physical vulnerability to climate....It is not necessary to "combat global warming"; the first business at hand is to curb climate vulnerabilities."

Nikhil Desai is the Energy Security contributor for the NAPSNet Weekly report.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Nautilus Institute. Readers should note that Nautilus seeks a diversity of views and opinions on significant topics in order to identify common ground.

II. policy forum BY NIKHIL DESAI

A tale of two disasters

One came from the sea in the US; waters rose. The other came atop mountains in India; waters rushed down.

Natural weather events with disparate impacts.

Hurricane Sandy is said to have caused 73 direct deaths and 14 indirect deaths in the US, and some 200 in other countries in her way. The total damage is estimated at some \$68 billion, much of it insured or subject to public compensation and reconstruction budgets.

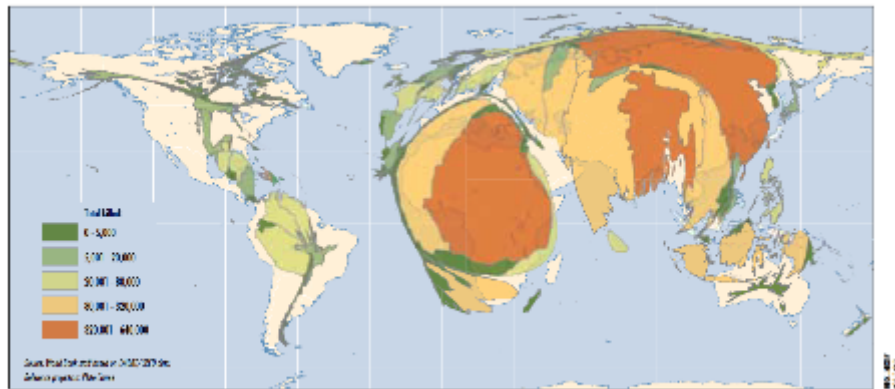
The Himalayan floods are blamed for several thousand deaths, including some 5,000 that were declared missing one month after the cloudburst and heavy rains. The exact death toll may not be known, nor the extent of economic damage, other than what the governments can afford to provide as compensation or spend on reconstruction.

With Sandy, waters in lower Manhattan rose nearly 14 feet. Over six million people and businesses were without power for varying duration. Emergency backups at some facilities failed but did not cause significant additional damage. Some damage was in fancy tourist areas - where "mobile homes are sold as condominiums, priced as high as \$650,000", and beach sand was replenished, only to be washed away when another hurricane comes. New York City alone has a \$19.5 billion plan for strengthening the seawalls and infrastructure; other jurisdiction will also be able to make up for the infrastructure losses.

In India, thousands of villages were affected. Tourists were quickly evacuated by their respective state governments, with the local people left to fend for themselves or wait for military helicopters to be airlifted. Electricity, drinking water and food supply were disrupted. Hunger and disease followed. Some people suggest that mindless pursuit of hydroelectricity - a "renewable energy" source supposed to help with climate extremes -and construction of roads and bridges to accommodate economic growth and tourism essentially set up the local population as sitting duck.

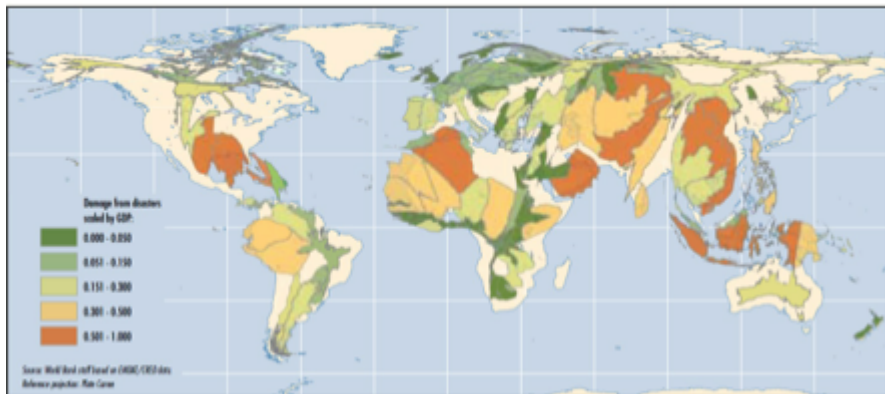
This is not surprising. As the below maps from a World Bank publication show, disasters in rich countries cause property damage rather than loss of life. It is the opposite in the developing countries.

Map 1 Deaths shrink Asia and the Americas—but expand Africa



Note: Areas reflect cumulative deaths from disasters for 1970 to 2013 (February).
Source: World Bank staff based on EM-DAT/CREDES.

Map 2 Damages shrink Africa but expand middle-income countries



Note: Areas reflect cumulative damage from disasters scaled by GDP for 1970 to 2008.
Source: World Bank staff based on EM-DAT/CREDES.

Many climate scientists deny that any single weather event or even the group of disasters throughout the world in the last year or several years together can be attributed to climate change, leave alone *anthropomorphic* climate change (a distinction we cannot measure yet). This does not prevent other such as Al Gore to claim that 500-year or 1,000-year events are now occurring on a regular basis and that the world must urgently engage “to combat global warming” meaning, essentially, a shift to higher-cost energy supplies.

Some climate models claim that cleaner air in the developed countries has increased the frequency of extreme climate events. Whether or not that is true, the lesson of this tale is rather clear: the poor suffer the climate whether or not it changes, whether the change is natural or anthropogenic, and whether or not their or anybody else’s greenhouse gas emissions are reduced or constrained. The rich countries – and the rich among the poor countries – enjoy a physical and service infrastructure, and insurance protections, that sharply limits their physical vulnerability to climate. The poorer people among the poor countries face climate vulnerabilities daily in the form of persistent food, water, energy insecurities and lack of quality health and social protection services. It is not necessary to “combat global warming”; the first business at hand is to curb climate vulnerabilities.

III. Supplemental Reading

[Climate change: When rain, rain won't go away](#), Dan Vergano, USA Today [1 May 2013]

[Racing the clock in the Rockaways](#), Lisa Foderaro, New York Times [18 May 2013]

[Rebuilding the coastline, but at what cost?](#) Jenny Anderson, New York Times [19 May 2013]

[Prepare now or face flooding, report warns Jersey Shore](#), Kirk Moore, USA Today [22 May 2013]

[Heavy rains disrupt electricity generation at hydropower projects](#), Utpal Bhaskar, Livemint and Wall Street Journal (Delhi), [19 June 2013]

[Gore: 'Energy release' equal to '400,000 Hiroshima atomic bombs going off' every day](#), Penny Starr, CNS News [24 June 2013]

[Uttarakhand, not Switzerland](#), Mohan Murti, Hindu Business Line, [25 June 2013]

[Tensions swelling as beach erodes](#), Jim Rutenberg, New York Times [27 June 2013]

[To save city from storm surges, no miracles required](#), Jim Dwyer, New York Times [27 June 2013]

[The scene at ground zero of Uttarakhand floods](#), Hari Kumar, New York Times blog India Ink [28 June 2013]

[Uttarakhand floods: Locals struggle for food, shelter in flood-hit region](#), Daily News and Analysis [28 June 2013]

[Uttarakhand: a case against hydel power? – Yes](#), Himanshu Thakkar, Hindu Business Line [28 June 2013]

[Where is India's relief going? Uttarakhand is starving](#), Prahlad, OneIndia News [28 June 2013]

[India floods: A journey through Uttarakhand's flooded landscape](#), Sanjoy Majumder, BBC News [28 June 2013]

[The scene at ground zero of Uttarakhand floods](#), Hari Kumar, New York Times blog India Ink [28 June 2013]

[India floods: A journey through Uttarakhand's flooded landscape](#), Sanjoy Majumder, BBC News [28 June 2013]

[Uttarakhand floods: Death toll could cross 3,000 mark, 1,400 still stranded in Badrinath](#), Daily Bhaskar [29 June 2013]

[Uttarakhand: Rescue ops in full swing as weather in Joshimath improves, 1400 still stranded in Badrinath](#). Daily Bhaskar [29 June 2013]

[4,000 Still Missing in Indian Floods](#), Hari Kumar, New York Times blog IndiaInk [9 July 2013]

[Uttarakhand: Existing, under construction and proposed Hydropower Projects: How do they add to the state's disaster potential?](#), South Asia Network for Dams, Rivers and People, blog [10 July 2013]

[Networks do 92 climate change stories; fail to mention 'lull' in warming all 92 times](#), Julia A. Seymour, Wall Street Journal [16 July 2013]

IV. NAUTILUS INVITES YOUR RESPONSES

The Nautilus Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this report. Please leave a comment below or send your response to: nautilus@nautilus.org. Comments will only be posted if they include the author's name and affiliation.

View this online at: <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/a-tale-of-two-disasters/>

Nautilus Institute

608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:

nautilus@nautilus.org