

Lawson, Lyndi. Vulnerability as a component of risk: A case study of the 2006 Southern Cape floods. (BSc Honours thesis in Disaster Risk Science, 2006)

Flooding is among the most damaging of natural disasters. In the last ten years the Southern Cape has experienced numerous flood events, each one causing extensive damage to infrastructure, to developmental efforts and to the natural environment. Subsequent flood events can potentially compound the damage sustained during prior floods if long term mitigative strategies are not effectively planned and implemented. The adaption of vulnerable communities to the effects of climate change is critical. Factors that contribute to and drive risk differ vastly between communities and individuals. The George/ Wilderness area of the southern Cape region can be seen as a microcosm of South African society as a whole, in terms of the inequitable distribution of wealth and of risk. This research explores the nature of vulnerability in the region and attempts to identify the interactions between the physical and social factors that drive risk there. The paper argues that a greater understanding of the factors that exacerbate both vulnerability and flood risk at a micro level is essential. Using the July/August 2006 floods as a case study, this research focuses on four different communities that experienced the same hazard due to their geographical proximity and yet were very differently affected.