Shocks and Politics: The Political Economy of Natural Disasters in Africa

Jennifer Bussell & Adam Colligan - September 28, 2012
Background

• Third course-based research initiative in CCAPS program
• Goal: to evaluate the causes of variation in African governments’ efforts to reduce the risk of, prepare for, and respond to natural shocks
Existing Research

• Rich literature on incentives to invest - in development generally and natural shocks in particular
  – Large number of potential explanations for variation

• Empirical testing re: hazards typically:
  – Relies on questionable quantitative data
  – Focuses on a single case study
  – Rarely considers interactive hypotheses

• Limited comprehensive evaluation of arguments
Medium-N Case Study Approach

• Five paired case studies of African countries
• Qualitative research, including fieldwork, conducted by graduate students at the LBJ School of Public Affairs
• Evaluation of a wide range of potential explanations for variation in national capacities to respond to natural hazards
Case Studies

CCAPS ICCEA TEAM
CASE STUDY COUNTRIES

Kilometers
0 500 1,000 2,000 3,000
## Capacity Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>H1: Political Priority</th>
<th>H2: Assessment/Monitoring</th>
<th>H3: Culture of Safety</th>
<th>H4: Risk Reduction</th>
<th>H5: Response Preparedness</th>
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Hypothesis Categories

- Perceived risk
- Economic strength
- Electoral incentives
- Political development
- Moral hazard
### Overall Findings

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Perceived Risk & Economics

- Countries with high perceived risk are more likely to invest in DRM, even if poor.
- But a lack of resources constrains most African states.
- And some with economic resources have failed to invest.
Democracy, Elections & Political Development

- Politics matters, but democracy often supports response over preparedness
- Political development matters regardless of democracy...
- ...and helps to explain otherwise puzzling cases
Moral Hazard

• This may be a risk in theory...
• ...but there is little evidence in practice
• Active focus on preparedness by international actors may explain why
Conclusions

• Comprehensive, qualitative assessment of African government capacities in DRM
• Evidence to support a number of dominant arguments...
• ...but more compelling is the interaction of multiple variables
• Moral hazard findings highlight importance of IOs and donors in ensuring DRR and preparedness