

## *Natural Disasters: How can we improve?*

### **Challenge Overview Sheet**

Geographers define a natural hazard as a potentially dangerous physical event occurring close to a population (who are said to be at risk). A Disaster is the realisation of this hazard risk. Natural disasters are thus a function of both the magnitude of a physical event and the state of preparedness / coping capacity of the society that has been exposed to risk. Poorly prepared societies or groups of people – who are often in such a state on account of their own poverty – are described as having a high level of **vulnerability**.

**Vulnerability** partly forms the focus for this scheme of work. Hazard risks (especially the threat of direct mortality) tend to be much lower for societies that possess the knowledge and financial capital to insulate themselves from the worst effects wrought by the natural environment, such as the United States (which routinely experiences both earthquakes and hurricanes). In contrast, societies such as Haiti remain highly vulnerable to the worst social and economic effects of natural hazards such as the earthquake that struck very close to Port-au-Prince, the capital city, on 12 January 2010.

The **response** to disasters such as the Haitian earthquake – with a particular focus on the role that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can play – is the second focus for this scheme of work. Architecture for Humanity is an NGO that features throughout this scheme of work. It operates in almost 40 countries, with a stake in nearly 300 (re)building projects. 40% of this NGO's efforts are currently focused on Haiti.

This information is **relevant to AS-level students for all of the major exam boards**, whether their course emphasis is on natural hazards in general or on tectonic threats in particular. All boards require students to evaluate the effectiveness of human responses to natural disasters and because it is a well-rehearsed exam topic, it is important that students who want to *really* impress examiners can provide good details of real-world governance and the response actions of a wide range of local and global players.