Group Exercise 1: Exploring Key Dimensions of Social Vulnerability

Scenario 1: The Elderly in Your Community

Older adults [≥65 years] make up 13% of the U.S. population, but are projected to account for 20% by 2040. In 2008, more than 51% of Americans ≥ 65 years of age lived in just nine states, with California, Florida, New York, Texas, and Pennsylvania accounting for the top five. While socio-economic status of older adults varies, of course, a larger proportion of older women, compared with older men, live below the poverty level in the United States.

Coinciding with this demographic shift toward a greater proportion of older adults, the rate of climate change is accelerating, bringing rising temperatures; increased risk of floods, droughts, and wildfires; stronger tropical storms and hurricanes; rising sea levels; and other climate-related hazards (e.g., air quality problems). Older Americans are expected to be located in places that may be relatively more affected by climate change, including coastal zones and large metropolitan areas. Consider also that nearly 60% of the flooding-related fatalities following Hurricane Katrina were among persons ≥ 65 years of age (Text and information excerpted from Gamble et al. 2013).

Discuss in what ways the elderly population in the communities you work for may face greater risks from climate change related hazards. Consider the following issues and concerns:

- where they live
- how they live and spend their days
- in what ways climate change and extreme events may affect them more than younger people in your community
- what their needs and capacities are on a regular/daily basis
- what their needs might be during a weather-related disaster that affects the areas where they live
- what challenges they might face in the aftermath of extreme events or as a result of the enduring impacts of climate change
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Scenario 2: The Poor in Your Community

The latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau show that poverty is greater in Los Angeles County than in the state or country as a whole, with 18 percent of individuals falling below the poverty line. In addition, a quarter of all children in the county live in poverty. Many of L.A.’s poor are low-skilled immigrants, many are undocumented. They live in sub-standard, inner-city, older housing and if they have work at all, they make below-minimum wages (text and info from Alice Walton and Shana Daloria, KPCC, 2014). Disabled males and females tend to have a greater chance of being poor than non-disabled individuals, and generally females are more likely to be poor than males. Poor people have lower home ownership rates, i.e., they are more likely to rent or be homeless. African American, Hispanic, and Native Americans are more likely to be poor than Whites or Asians, but in absolute numbers, there are more poor Hispanics than poor people of any other racial group (info from www.city-data.com).

Poorer neighborhoods tend to have fewer trees and access to green space, as well as inadequate sanitation and infrastructure; access to transportation is more limited; food security and violence can be significant problems, as is adequacy of health care (prevention, acute care, rehabilitation). Discuss in what ways the poor population in the communities you work for may face greater risks from climate change related hazards. Consider the following issues and concerns:

- where they live
- how they live and spend their days
- in what ways climate change and extreme events may affect them more than wealthier people in your community
- what their needs and capacities are on a regular/daily basis
- what their needs might be during a weather-related disaster that affects the areas where they live
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Scenario 3: The Children in Your Community

More than a quarter of the 10 million people in Los Angeles county are under 18 years of age, and more than a third of all households had children living at home. 6.5% are children under 5 years old. Poverty rates among children are higher than among any other age group, and female children are more likely to be poor than males. In fact more than 28% of all children in Los Angeles live below the poverty level. Often poor children live in families with only a female head-of-household present, with one or both parents unemployed or working part time (data from www.city-data.com).

Climate change-related or -worsened hazards (extreme heat, floods, vector- or water-borne disease, poor air quality, etc.) can worsen pre-existing health conditions in children (e.g., asthma, under-developed immune system) or affect children in unique ways due to physiological, developmental, and physical factors. The socio-economic, nutritional, educational, and domestic situation can further influence the challenges children of different ages face when they experience climate-related hazards.

Discuss in what ways the very young population in the communities you work for may face greater risks from climate change related hazards. Consider the following issues and concerns:

- where they live
- how they live and spend their days
- in what ways climate change and extreme events may affect them more than adults in your community
- what their needs and capacities are on a regular/daily basis
- what their needs might be during a weather-related disaster that affects the areas where they live
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Scenario 4: The Homeless in Your Community

People who are "homeless" are defined as those who sleep in places not meant for human habitation, including on the street, in parks, along rivers, in backyards, unconverted garages, cars and vans, along freeways or under overpasses, etc.; or who sleep in emergency shelters, safe havens, or transitional housing programs.

The 2013 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count found a total of 57,737 men, women and children without permanent homes. After several years of declining numbers, this constitutes a renewed increase in the homeless population of the metropolitan area. Of these, about one quarter are sheltered during the night, while 3/4s have no safe place to stay. Over 85% of the homeless are single adults, 13% are adults with children, and just over 1% are unaccompanied minors. 1 in 4 homeless adults are chronically homeless and 1 in 3 homeless adults have mental and/or physical disabilities. Temporary homelessness over the course of the whole year is as high as 190,000 individuals. Adult single men are the largest (nearly 70%) and fastest growing segment, while the share of veterans (1 in 9), particularly female veterans, is declining. The proportion of whites has increased rapidly over the past two years to 37%, while the proportion of African American and Hispanic homeless has decreased (all data from LAHSA).

Discuss in what ways the homeless population in the communities you work for may face greater risks from climate change related hazards. Consider the following issues and concerns:

- where they live
- how they live and spend their days
- in what ways climate change and extreme events may affect them more than people with permanent homes (rental or owned) in your community
- what their needs and capacities are on a regular/daily basis
- what their needs might be during a weather-related disaster that affects the areas where they live
- what challenges they might face in the aftermath of extreme events or as a result of the enduring impacts of climate change
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Scenario 5: Hispanics and African Americans in Your Community

Los Angeles is an incredibly diverse city, home to people from over 140 countries who speak more than 220 languages (worldpopulationreview.com). Hispanics and Latinos now constitute nearly half of the entire population of Los Angeles County, whereas African Americans (traditionally the largest non-white racial group) now make up only about 10% of the population. Significant shifts occurred during the 1990s in terms of where most Blacks lived and worked, but many still live in south L.A., whereas Hispanics are predominantly concentrated in East L.A. (info from LA Times).

Educational attainment of African Americans is generally high or higher than among the general population, yet 40% of those 16 years and older are not in the labor force, and unemployment rate is several percentage points higher than among other groups. Nearly 16% have no health insurance coverage (http://blackdemographics.com/cities-2/los-angeles/). Hispanics and African Americans are proportionally the poorest segments of Los Angeles’ population, and Hispanics also constitute the largest in absolute numbers (data from the US Census and www.city-data.com).

Discuss in what ways the African American and Hispanic population in the communities you work for may face greater risks from climate change related hazards. Consider the following concerns:

- where they live
- how they live and spend their days
- in what ways climate change and extreme events may affect them more than white people or other people of color in your community
- what their needs and capacities are on a regular/daily basis
- what their needs might be during a weather-related disaster that affects the areas where they live
- what challenges they might face in the aftermath of extreme events or as a result of the enduring impacts of climate change
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Scenario 6: Recently Immigrated Populations in Your Community

Of Los Angeles' population, 3.5 million or ca. 35% are immigrants. More than 75% of them have arrived since 1980, predominantly from Mexico. While only 1 in 14 children is an immigrant, 58% have at least one immigrant parent, and 44% of households are headed by an immigrant. Linguistic isolation – the proportion of immigrant-headed households in which no person over 13 speaks English only, or very well – is quite high at 34%.

Los Angeles has created a welcoming environment for its immigrant population, culturally and institutionally. Los Angeles’ dynamic and large immigrant population makes integration both possible and difficult. On the one hand, immigrants find upward economic mobility over time; on the other, the continuous flow of migrants into a struggling regional economy depresses the economic outcomes of the group, as a whole. Integration could be improved by help with language, improved access to health insurance, and opportunities for homeownership. But the most may be done by building on immigrant strengths, energies, and labor force attachment to forge a stronger regional economy that can raise economic outcomes for everyone (text and information taken from USC (2011), http://csii.usc.edu).

Discuss in what ways the recently immigrated people in the communities you work for may face greater risks from climate change related hazards. Consider the following issues and concerns:

- where they live
- how they live and spend their days
- in what ways climate change and extreme events may affect them more than younger people in your community
- what their needs and capacities are on a regular/daily basis
- what their needs might be during a weather-related disaster that affects the areas where they live
- what challenges they might face in the aftermath of extreme events or as a result of the enduring impacts of climate change
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Scenarios prepared by Susanne Moser, Ph.D., April 2015
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Scenario 7: The Physically or Mentally Impaired in Your Community

According to the U.S. Census, there are over three-quarters of a million individuals with disabilities living in the City of Los Angeles. Of the half million individuals with disabilities between the age of 21 and 65, over a quarter had incomes below the federal poverty level; Another 158,000 seniors (age 65 and older) considered themselves disabled--about 15 percent of these people had incomes below poverty; and of the nearly 70,000 children and youth with disabilities, age 5 to 20, about one-third lived in households with incomes below the poverty level (text and info from http://lahd.lacity.org/).

The population of special needs individuals is very diverse, including homeless individuals with disabilities; but also renters and home owners with physical, mental and developmental disabilities; persons living with HIV/AIDS; people of all ages, ranging from children to the elderly. About 1/5 of all disabled men and a quarter of all disabled women live below the federal poverty level, and the disability rate is higher among poor people than among those not considered poor. African Americans have higher disability rates than other racial groups.

Discuss in what ways the physically or mentally impaired population in the communities you work for may face greater risks from climate change related hazards. Consider the following issues and concerns:

- where they live
- how they live and spend their days
- in what ways climate change and extreme events may affect them more than younger people in your community
- what their needs and capacities are on a regular/daily basis
- what their needs might be during a weather-related disaster that affects the areas where they live
- what challenges they might face in the aftermath of extreme events or as a result of the enduring impacts of climate change
- what their capabilities and means are to participate in disaster preparedness and adaptation