

Climas Extremos y Desigualdad por Adithleidy Lopez-Magallon (SPECIAL MENTION WINNER)

When we think about extreme weather, our focus often centers on our own negative experiences. However, seldom do we pause to consider those who had few resources and find themselves with nothing in the wake of a natural disaster. Some people may face inequality during severe weather conditions due to the lack of basic resources such as water and food, and lack of access to transportation to be able to evacuate to a safe place.

In Southeast Texas, hurricanes are the most prevalent extreme weather event. During these natural disasters, people who lack essential resources can encounter significant challenges. When families in Southeast Texas receive notifications of an approaching hurricane, the first thing they do is to obtain vital survival items such as water and food. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory identifies five fundamental categories that people are governed by: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-realization. According to Maslow, needs at the physiological level are considered primary; nevertheless, individuals with low incomes face inequality as they struggle to acquire these indispensable elements. It is imperative to address these inequalities and ensure that everyone has access to the resources needed to survive and remain safe during extreme weather events. One effective approach to giving people the opportunity to meet essential needs is to establish sites where those facing financial difficulties can obtain needed items free of charge. During Hurricane Harvey, numerous organizations set up sites to give basic resources to disadvantaged individuals.

Following Maslow's hierarchy, the second category is safety, which can be compromised by a lack of transportation. The absence of transportation during extreme weather events can create inequality by restricting people's abilities to safeguard themselves and reach safety during emergencies. Lack of transportation hinders the creation of a clear and accessible evacuation plan, making it challenging for some individuals to find safe shelter or receive adequate aid during natural disasters. As a result, this poses a greater risk to the life and well-being of less privileged individuals, compared to those with access to financial resources, support, and transportation. It is important to ensure that everyone has access to the necessary resources for a safe evacuation during extreme weather events, thereby reducing inequalities in the face of emergencies. In the example of Hurricane Harvey, we saw our community come together to rescue individuals in vulnerable situations.

It is essential to acknowledge that during extreme weather events, individuals without basic resources such as water, food, and transportation become susceptible to inequality. Nevertheless, it is inspiring to witness our community coming together to address these inequalities and assist those who are most in need.

Translated into English by Dania Santana