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Rethinking the engagement between physical and social sciences in developing an EWS: a case study from the LANDSLIP project

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Using the case study of the LANDSLIP project this presentation would seek to explore creative and innovative ways of engaging physical and social science researchers in developing an Early Warning System (EWS). The field of EWS has arguably been led by physical geographers. However, more recently human geographers have been called upon to facilitate effective implementation of the EWS - or put simply, for 'translating' the EWS to the intended users. As a human geographers' team working in the LANDSLIP project, we identified the need and scope to extend this engagement (between physical and human geographers), such that the proposed EWS can become a tool to shift policies and have impact beyond its immediate context.

During the field work carried out for LANDSLIP project we unpacked the complex institutional structure for disaster management in India. We found that the institutional expectations set the criterion for a successful EWS. The work further explored the assumptions (about disasters and about vulnerability) which shaped the expectations of these institutions - and the historical factors that led to these assumptions. We encountered an approach to disaster management at district level that was dominantly response-based, which leads to a focus on physical vulnerability. In this context, careful negotiation is required in order to ensure that the EWS is effective and facilitates a movement of stakeholders towards preparedness (in accordance with the Sendai Framework). The evolution of the institutions and the regulations that govern them was partly responsible for the response focus.

In this presentation we share these findings to argue for the need for innovative ways through which human geographers can bring in these rich inputs at the early stages of developing an EWS as well as in its communication and dissemination.