



Landslides in the squatter settlements of Caracas; towards a better understanding of causative factors

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¹ Degg, M R. (1992). "Natural disasters: recent trends and future prospects" in *Geography*, Vol 77, No 3, in press

I. INTRODUCTION

HOUSING THE URBAN poor in the cities of Latin America is already a complex task without the demands caused by so-called "natural disasters". When these occur, the loss of life and the level of disruption reveal the lack of preparedness in each country to deal with problems of this magnitude. This might also be the case for countries in the North but the much higher number of people at risk often found in countries in the South makes the overall effect worse.

This article examines the vulnerability of squatter settlements to landslides in Caracas, Venezuela. The paper is divided into three main sections. In the first, the incidence and effects of earthquake and rainfall induced landslides in Latin America are considered. The second and third sections provide an overview of the causes and effects of slope instability in the *barrios* (squatter settlements) of Caracas; the causes range from the rapid growth of the *barrios* and the attitudes of the government, to the impact of rainfall and the slope modifications caused by the settlement process. A final section presents some conclusions.

II. HAZARDS IN LATIN AMERICA

IN THE MEXICO City earthquake of September 1985 (with a magnitude of 7.8 on the Richter scale), approximately 10,000 people were killed. In October 1989, an earthquake of comparable intensity in San Francisco (7.1 on the Richter scale) killed 63 people. "...many in the San Francisco Bay area where parts of the Interstate 880 bridge collapsed"¹ Although the estimated material loss in terms of million US\$ was higher for San Francisco, what must be emphasized is that