

Geophysical Research Abstracts,  
Vol. 10, EGU2008-A-02431, 2008  
SRef-ID: 1607-7962/gra/EGU2008-A-02431  
EGU General Assembly 2008  
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## **Cultural vulnerability in volcanic regions: an Indonesian case study.**

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*Understanding local culture should be considered crucial if responses to disasters are to be successful.*

Over the last decade an inter-disciplinary science has evolved in order to reduce the impact of natural hazards by incorporating social sciences into physical hazard studies. This science has revealed that a community's ability to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover from the impact of a natural hazard relies upon the society's vulnerability. The concept of vulnerability has already been divided into some key components such as wealth, age, and gender. Yet there is another element of vulnerability: the component of culture. Cultural beliefs are intensified under the stress of a potential natural hazard. Oral histories, taboos, ceremonies, and legends are created in order to explain, understand and accept potential risks. Few studies explore these traditions and yet these are the motivation for the community's action during a crisis and could be key to understanding past geological events and future solutions. In 2006 Mt Merapi in Central Java, Indonesia, entered into its most recent volcanic crisis. A lava dome collapse created a series of pyroclastic flows. One event killed two volunteers who were monitoring the volcano. The residents of Mt Merapi have a spiritual link to the volcano and many beliefs about the hazards which threatened them. Using Mt Merapi as a primary field site this project explores the cultural responses to volcanic hazards investigating the consequences of traditional beliefs for hazard awareness amongst at-risk communities and to encourage the construction of more culturally sensitive emergency procedures.