

ABSTRACT

This study examined the issue of informal settlement fires in J.B. Mafora informal settlement of Bloemfontein in the Free State, a province of South Africa. The study aims to identify, address and understand the issues and the unique dynamics involved in this type of fires at the study area. The study also illuminates the main contextual factors that contribute to the perpetuation of J.B. Mafora informal settlement fires that relates to the risk and vulnerability of the people of J.B. Mafora. A qualitative research approach is followed and a triangulation of data collection methods is used, combined with a relatively broad literature study to capture the complexity of the related issues. The contextual focus includes the macro-economic factors that contribute to the environment in which informal settlement fires occur; developmental, economic, political and social aspects and the related experience of poverty, urbanization and unemployment.

Furthermore, the study attempts to show that a relationship exists between disaster management and poorer communities.

Key findings suggest that local government in the demarcated study area has great influence on how the problem of informal settlement fires is addressed from national to local municipality level. This further relates to the view taken in the thesis that informal settlement fires are a social issue and not only an operational issue. Therefore the broad social, economic and political context and history are included; it also shows that the problem of informal settlement fires is part of a greater developmental context and related processes. A variety of vulnerability theories were chosen as a useful framework for analysis in this study and to approach issues of risk and vulnerability on a community level.