Disaster Recovery and Response: A View from Community

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• Presentation prepared by Attorney Ranie T. Thompson and is based on personal and professional experiences and conversations with survivors and advocates on the ground, as well as FEMA staff in Louisiana and Washington DC, post-Katrina and Rita.

• There is often conflicting information from these sources.

• The intent is not to blame, but to help government agencies, NGOs, community partners, survivors, etc. in disaster planning and management for future disasters.
Disasters

- Events, natural or man-made, that disables a community’s social functioning.
- Small or large scale, can be equally devastating on a community
  - Ask any person/family/community that’s dealt with a disaster, and they’ll tell you this.
- Often results in
  - Significant physical damage or destruction
  - Loss of life
  - Drastice changes to the environment
Louisiana and the Gulf Coast Region: The last 10 years

- Ivan (2004)
- Katrina (2005)
- Rita (2005)
- Wilma (2005)
- Gustav (2008)
- Ike (2008)
- BP Oil Spill (2010)
- Isaac (2012)
- Assumption Parish Sinkhole (2012)
- Severe Winter Storm (Jan. 2013)
- Tropical Storms
- Tornadoes
Katrina

- destruction of property
- Estimates of more than 1,800 lives lost
- Category 5 storm with winds gusts up to 125 miles
- Widespread flooding
- Streets and Homes inundated with 5...7...9 feet of water
- Power outages
- Storm surges
The Levee Breaches

- The loss of life and property damage was worsened by breaks in the levees that separate New Orleans from surrounding lakes.
- Estimated that 80% of New Orleans was under flood water by August 31st.
- Caused by levee failures from Lake Pontchartrain.
- Strong winds, heavy rainfall and storm surge led to breaks in the levee after the storm passed, leaving some parts of New Orleans under 20 feet of water.
ANATOMY OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT
The Four Phases of Emergency Management

- Mitigation
- Preparedness
- Response
- Recovery
Post-Katrina Response and Recovery
FEMA: IHP and Government Grants

- Problems:
  - mistake-ridden;
  - lack of clarity and coordination;
  - Communication;
  - Bureaucratic
  - Oppressive

- Lesson: communication, transparency, consistency, recognition of due process rights of people.

- More left to do:
  - governments are now faced with reimbursement denials from FEMA.
  - Residents are facing recoupment claims
  - Sandy victims
Louisiana Road Home Program

- Disbursed $9+ billion CDBG funds

- Problems:
  - Disparate impact
  - Delay in disbursements
  - Lack of transparency
  - Administrative costs heavy
  - Bureaucratic
  - Inconsistent
  - Waste, mismanagement, theft
  - Incompetencies

- Community Response:
  - Organize
  - Advocate for change
  - Sue

- Lessons:
  - Ethics and accountability
  - Community awareness
  - Equity and Fairness
Orleans Parish City Ordinance #26031: Demolition/Bulldozing

- **Problems:**
  - Errors with inspections
  - Homes torn down in error
  - Corruption and waste
  - Notice to property owners still displaced
  - Delay in payouts of insurance claims
  - Delay in RH grant disbursements
  - Costs prohibitive to low-income, wage earners w/o the grant and insurance $

- **Community Response:**
  - Organize
  - Litigation

- **Lessons:**
  - Constitutional Rights must be protected
  - Procedures required in light of disaster impact on people effected by ordinance.
  - No room for errors.
Other Areas of Concern

- **Economy**
  - Tourism dependent
  - Lack of affordable housing, transportation and other resources affected many residents’ ability to return

- **Land-Use and Development**
  - Zoning and planning without community
  - Recovery Czar
  - Historic Preservation
  - New developments in light of future post-disaster infrastructure needs and businesses likely to return.

- **Education**
  - Pre-K issues of corruption, mismanagement, and old structures in need of repair
  - 124 public schools, 16 relatively unscathed.
  - 60k students, 4k teachers, plus other employees affected
  - Rebuilding plans challenges
    - To build or not to build
    - Location
    - Vouchers, etc.
Lessons from Katrina

Community vs. Government
(Response and Recovery)
What we (community)saw?

- Lack of preparation
- Lack of coordination
  - Preparation: evacuation/safety, shelter
  - Response: food, water, shelter, medical services, search and rescue
  - Recovery: food, housing, search and rescue, security,
- Failure to communicate or miscommunication/misinformation
- Lack of uniformity in delivery of assistance
- Focus on
  - Buildings
  - Economics
  - Personnel/staffing
  - Organizational structuring/re-structuring
  - Grants and other sources of funding
- Little attention for people’s right to return and self-determine
What we (community)saw?

- Greed, Self-interest and promotion
- Bribery
- Corruption
- Backdoor deals
- Abuse/Denial of Civil Rights
- Re-victimization
- Disenfranchisement
- Disrespect
- No thought for culture, history of community in the rebuilding process.
- A government DISCONNECTED from its people.
Lesson #1: People-centered Approach to Disaster Management

- **Goal:** Holistic, Sustainable Recovery
- **Thinking and Planning shift**
  - From: staffing, personnel, organizational and rebuilding infrastructure.
  - To: needs of the people, community
- **No community recovers and thrives without the people...from the least to the greatest.**
How do you shift your focus?

- Become culturally competent as you develop your plans.
  - Indeepth knowledge, understanding and awareness of cultures, traditions, history and relationships of each group with government.
  - Identify vulnerable members of the community.
- Collaboration and Partnership building
New Orleans pre-Katrina

- Low-income/Low-wage earners/Impoverished
- 23% of residents lived below federal poverty level
- 68% of residents were African-American
  - 35% below the federal poverty level
  - Homeowners (generational inheritances)
- Access to transportation to evacuate.
- Dependent upon social service programs
- This played a large party in the ability of people to heed the warnings to evacuate.
New Orleans

- Homeless
- Elderly
- Disabled
- Immigrants
- Nursing care facilities
- Hospitals
- Incarcerated
Lesson #2: Disasters don’t discriminate.

- Neither should your management plan.
- Holistic, sustainable recovery.
- No one group should be isolated or left out in favor of another because of some perceived view of value imposed by persons in positions of authority.
Lesson #3: Ethics, Accountability, Transparency

- Community expects you to be ethical and will hold you accountable for your actions or lack of action.
- Disaster present fertile ground for corruption.
- Community trust is at stake.
Lesson #4: Partnerships and Collaborations are key.

- Community organizers
- Legal Services/Public Interest lawyers and advocates
- Healthcare providers
- Social Workers
- Mental Health Professionals
Lesson #5: Communication is Key

- Remember the 5 W’s and the How?
  - **Who** will report the message?
  - **What** is the message? (concise, plain language; diverse)
  - **When** will it be done? (too soon, too late, frequency)
  - **Where** will it be delivered from? (location/place)
  - **Why** are you doing it? (reason)
  - **How** will it be done? (modes of communication)
Lesson#6: More work to do.

- Levees still need attention
- Coastal restoration
- Environmental Protections
- Document storage and record keeping
- Shelters (in-state and out of state)
- Transportation
- Critical Needs Staging
- Medical Care
- Communication
  - Interstate
  - Intrastate
  - Parish to Parish
  - Agency to Agency
Final Tip as you plan:

- Does it consider my 89 year old grandmother.
  - Homeowner
  - Rural community
  - No cellphone
  - No computer/internet
  - Non-driver
Resources

- Louisiana
  - La. R.S. Title 29, Chapters 6 and 9

- FEMA
  - [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)
  - 44 CFR Part 201

- Other
  - [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)
  - EJW Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMbLncaytNE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMbLncaytNE)