

Factors Affecting Community Empowerment During Disaster Recovery

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore and identify the factors for empowering the community during the Disaster Recovery phase. It is very important to recognize the community (decision makers) as being empowered of their fate but not to inform, consult and having others to decide their fate. The study investigates the important role of the project manager who coordinates and communicates with the community members in order to empower them to achieve a long-term sustainability. The findings obtained from the literature review and the case studies allow identifying the factors for empowering the community during Disaster Recovery, such as: participation in decision-making; use of social capital within the community; thinking and doing SMART; recognizing community power; building capacity; and helping your neighbors. The results of this study provide guidelines for Project Managers to empower the community as decisions makers in the disaster recovery phase.

KEYWORDS

Community, Disaster, Empowerment, Survivors

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the online Cambridge Dictionary, empowerment is “the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you.” In other words, the community is to be given the freedom and power to control what happens to themselves during disaster recovery and long-term sustainment. The community participates in the decision-making of their recovery and responsible for their actions with the major stakeholders in the disaster recovery project. Involvement in decision-making should take place at all phases of the project from initiation to closure.

The community is the first and often remains the sole line of response for weeks during a disaster (Brennan, 2005). Furthermore, numerous studies from Asia have stressed effective community participation in all phases of disaster management (Chandrarsekhar, 2012; Crawford, 2013; Magnin, 2007; Olofsson, 2007; Twigg, 2009; World Bank, 2005, 2008). The members within the community help each other at the local and national level to rebuild the community, as shown in disasters that occurred at New Orleans, Tacloban City and California (Anderson, 2008; Bolin, 2006). Community collaboration has been successful in Asia (Ainuddin, 2012; Bornstein, 2013; Chandrarsekhar, 2012) by government and community working closely together in different types of influence/power relationships from ad hoc to empowerment; but unsuccessful in other parts of the world, such as indicated in Davidson’s work (Davidson, 2006) and in New Orleans with Hurricane Katrina (Barnshaw, 2006). Communities in New Orleans turned the situation around in which people restored their personal and community lives (Anderson, 2008; Barnshaw, 2006; Bolin, 2006) by working together to rebuild their community.

Rowlands (2013) indicates that empowering the community and maximizing the community’s participation at the local level will give the community control of the process and enable it to take charge of its rebuilding. This means tapping into the community’s resourcefulness; tapping local providers to supply materials and services (such as psychology and social work); and tapping workers to rebuild the community is required to ensure meaningful disaster recovery projects. Araki (2013) observed that some communities might have the ability to promote such processes by themselves, but the majority need a facilitator to assist and empower them.

This paper investigates how the community is engaged during disaster recovery and how they can be empowered in order to explore and identify key empowerment factors for their sustainment. In summary:

- Community is the First Responder within the first 72 hours.
- Community has inner strengths to regroup, restore and rebuild for the future.
- First step for family, kin, strangers and community members to work together.
- Community recognize as being empowered (decision makers) of their fate; not have others to decide their fate.
- How can the Project Manager can ensure the empowerment of the community will take place during the various disaster recovery projects, such as roads, community centers, churches, and houses?

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