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Role of Communities in Post-disaster Recovery: Learning from the Philippines

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Abstract

The critical role of communities in post-disaster recovery and reconstruction processes is a staple of the existing literature on the subject; yet, there remains an ongoing debate on what the best practices may be for involving the community in post-disaster processes. This paper introduces into the discussion lessons learned from experiences on community participation in recovery and reconstruction projects and programmes in the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Typhoon Haiyan affected a total of 14 million people, destroyed 1.1 million homes and resulted in the displacement of 4 million people. The experience of these communities highlights the positive effects of community involvement in post-disaster processes towards long-term social and economic resilience in the area. Of particular note were the reduction of recovery and reconstruction time as well as costs incurred on the state, and other partners. This paper suggests that Governments should embrace communities as equal partners in the post-disaster recovery, and that partnerships are crucial for successful planning and recovery. This paper suggests a set of guidelines for community participation in post-disaster processes that are in line with recently adopted United Nations development agendas, including the New Urban Agenda.

Keywords

Community Engagement, Post-Disaster Recovery, Typhoon, Haiyan, Philippines, United Nations

Introduction

Community engagement in post-disaster recovery is a key principle in developing a resilient community. Existing literature highlights both the advantages and difficulties associated with involving communities in post-disaster recovery. Too often literature on disaster recovery focuses on the experiences of developed countries of the global north where the 'citizen participation' model is adopted to highlight the role of local communities in recovery. This paper considers the experience of the Philippines in recovery and after Typhoon Haiyan in order to bring into attention opportunities and challenges associated with community engagement in the global south. In addition, the case of the Philippines reveals that a disaster creates an opportunity for local communities to become more resilient, especially in a disaster-prone context where poverty and informality are themselves indicators of vulnerability. A key strength of the recovery and reconstruction projects and programmes in the Philippines, namely in cities such as Tacloban, Guian, Roxas, and others, was that the communities were able to enhance their recovery and reconstruction capacities should they ever be hit by another disaster. This paper argues that community involvement in post-disaster processes strengthens relationships and builds trust in local government, as well as produces better-fitted plans for the future development of the city.

Community-led recovery: from theory to practice

There is a strong agreement within the existing literature on the subject that community engagement in disaster management is critical and beneficial for both community and the state. While a bulk of disaster-related literature focuses on the disaster preparedness and response stages, there is less empirical work concerning the role of communities during the recovery and reconstruction stage. Literatures on disaster recovery follow two main trends from decision making to implementation. The first trend is a top-down model in which government officials directly intervene in all stages of disaster management from mitigation to recovery. This trend considers the affected communities as vulnerable and unable to cope with managing their own affairs. The second trend focuses on a bottom-up model in which community participation is considered crucial from preparedness to recovery. This trend views the affected community less in terms of their vulnerability and more in terms of their potential contribution to resilience(1).

Since the early 1980s, the participatory approach has been the staple of many scholarly works as an alternative to state directed top-down planning. However in the field of disaster management, the dominant approach remains a top-down one since decision makers (politicians and professionals) are often reluctant to hand over power to people, especially in a time of crisis when they are the subject of monitoring by the media (2). Different models following Aronstein’s ladder of citizen participation place community participation in a spectrum varying from simply ‘informing’ through consultation, involvement and collaboration, to a fully ‘empowering’ form of participation wherein the final decision making is in the hands of the community (3). However, according to Love and Vallance, while most scholarly works on participation are grounded in orthodox ‘peace-time’ models, the post-disaster situation is somewhat different (4). The complexity arises because “normal state processes of engagement may be suspended (formally under a state of national emergency, or informally due to dysfunction); the platform on which elected officials gained their mandate may have become utterly irrelevant; or the new context may generate issues about which the state is largely oblivious” (4). In addition, disasters will affect a given community’s capacity to participate rather differently from the normal state of participation. Although the idea of community participation is extensively discussed in theory, it is not thoroughly practiced in post-disaster recovery (5). The literature that addresses participation in disaster-affected communities highlights the advantages of community engagement in all four stages of disaster management. The advantages include better analysis and programming, increase in trust and accountability, faster implementation and lower government expenditures. Additionally, such participation enables the affected people to take lead in their own recovery and build a community, which is resilient and self-sufficient. Community-led recovery should empower communities to move forward and contribute to general resilience. Successful recovery, according to the literature, should be defined as:

- Context specific, in which any approach should be sensitive to the local context;
- Inclusive in a way to address all affected communities;
- Based on community knowledge and potential;
Flexible and adaptable in policies and plans, and
- Aimed at reducing future risks and vulnerability.

Therefore, good recovery efforts should move from a state of vulnerability to a state of resiliency wherein affected communities contribute to build a society more adaptable to disturbances.

While the majority of scholarly works highlight the importance of community engagement in disaster recovery, few sources deal with difficulties and challenges associated with involvement of communities in post-disaster situations (6). These challenges, according to Twigg et al., include complexity of communities, power relations within communities' cultures and social relations, communities' capacity and its resiliency toward external forces. Drawn from various case studies, literatures argue the importance of social capital and the existence of a civil society as crucial in developing resilient communities (7). For instance Othusansky, Johnson and Topping, in their discussion of recovery lessons learned in Kobe and Northridge, noted that citizen engagement is key but 'to work most effectively after disasters, community organizations should already be in place and have working relationships with the city [officials]. It is difficult to invent participatory processes in the intensity of a post-disaster situation' (8).

Community-led recovery in developing countries

Most empirically based research on post-disaster recovery and reconstruction have focused on wealthy nations of the so-called global north with often strong civil society organizations, and where the idea of citizen participation is politically and culturally embedded in society. In these societies, NGOs and community organizations have a long tradition of working with communities in times of hardship and the state is well prepared, financially and technically, to intervene in post disaster recovery. This is not, however, the case in many developing, and least developed countries, that are more prone to natural disasters, and the state is less capable of mobilizing resources to pursue an efficient recovery. According to Twigg et. al. "In developing countries, where the capacity of the state to protect its citizens may be limited, communities have to rely on their own knowledge and coping mechanisms to mitigate against disasters, as they have done for generations." (9) Therefore while developed countries rely heavily on state for recovering from disasters, the fragile and developing countries rely on formal and informal community groups as well as donors and NGOs for recovery. Apart from technical and financial issues, the governments in many poor countries face another challenge which is related to legal ownership of land as many affected communities live in informal settlements where they reside and work at the same time. In such societies, recovery plans follow different pathways and different methods of community engagement are pursued.

Typhoon Haiyan, impact and damage assessment

As Typhoon Haiyan approached the Philippines Area of Responsibility (PAR), authorities and aid agencies on the ground took immediate action by evacuating approximately 800,000 people and deploying disaster response personnel and equipment (10). Typhoon Haiyan arrived in the PAR on 7th November and lasted for 4 days, from 6 to 9 November 2013. The typhoon flattened the Eastern Visayas region crossing the region by a speed of 40.7kph (22 knots) (10).

Typhoon Haiyan affected more than 14 million people in 10,701 Barangays, in provinces previously categorized as the poorest in the country, constituting 17 per cent of the total population of the Philippines. At least 4 million people were displaced, and 130,000 people were sheltered in evacuation centers. More than 6,900 people lost their lives, and the destruction to homes and infrastructure has been immense (Photo 1) (10).

The United Nations (UN) designated its Haiyan disaster response as an L3 (Level 3) – its highest classification. UN agencies and other stakeholders faced difficulties in mobilizing quickly and initially struggled to overcome logistical challenges, such as procuring vehicles. With airports, seaports, roads and bridges rendered unusable, many aid organizations initially struggled to deliver large amounts of aid quickly.

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council of the Philippines is comprised of representatives from NGOs, the military, and all Government levels, and is structured in a way that one in four ministers are responsible for coordination of one aspect of the disaster management cycle.

After the Typhoon Haiyan, some of the Government’s highest ranked officials were sent to the field to oversee relief operations. At the same time, a task force was being formed that began drafting an action plan for all stages of the post-disaster process. At first, there was no designated leader overseeing the process for a full 24 days after the disaster. As a response started, some of the community leaders stated that delays in aid to their communities were due to the municipal government favoring those with closer ties to the government (11). The appointment of Senator Panfilo Lacson on 2 December, to oversee the recovery and rehabilitation efforts, was viewed by some as a positive development.

Although there was an effort to do joint and coordinated damage assessments, many stakeholders in the post disaster processes were doing assessments for their own purposes and donor liaison. As an example, in Iloilo, maps were drawn by hand by several barangays (communities) across the province detailing each home in the community, the extent of the damage, and other landmarks in the area. Their supporting visuals and first-hand accounts have been instrumental in United Nations damage assessment (12).

Later assessments were presented to the Government Officials, Shelter Cluster members and other stakeholders to inform them on specific needs of the communities.

Post-crisis governance

The Philippines Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010 established the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC) with civil society and private sector participation. NDRRMC
was mandated to prepare the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan that identified the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) as the lead agency in decision making. Due to the devastating impact of Typhoon Haiyan, the President of the Philippines created an agency to work only on rehabilitation and recovery, despite the fact that NEDA already had that mandate. The Presidential Assistant for Rehabilitation and Recovery (OPARR) is set to unify the efforts of all actors involved in the rehabilitation and recovery process for two years. When the National Government took the lead in the coordination of post disaster processes, the agency established, in this case OPARR, was organized in clusters. While NEDAs mandated work concerns rehabilitation and recovery following four conventional disaster cycle themes, OPARR work concerns sectors. The national government requested that each Local Government Unit (LGU) develop a recovery and rehabilitation plan (RRP) following Typhoon Haiyan and submit it to OPARR. This provided the basis for the Government to allocate funds to national and local agencies so that they can take action on the ground.

Interventions: Planning, and the role of communities

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), LGUs and key stakeholders worked on rapidly developing Recovery and Rehabilitation Plans for most of the affected cities within the first six months after the typhoon. It was done by establishing forums to coordinate recovery planning activities. More than 4 months after the disaster, the Mayor of Tacloban, and other affected cities presented their Recovery and Rehabilitation Plans to the general public in their respective cities (Photo 2). The plan was a product of several planning workshops and consulta-
tion meetings chaired by city officials, and co-chaired by UN-Habitat. After months of meetings and consultations, stakeholders designed a plan which was presented to more than 2000 stakeholders in Tacloban only (13). In Tacloban, the plan called for more than 2200 temporary shelters for survivors that still lived in tents and evacuation centers. Around 40,000 housing units required repair and reconstruction, in addition to 4,800 temporary shelters for those living in makeshift houses. The medium-term plan called for industrial development, tourism, and economic infrastructure development. After the presentation of the proposed recovery and rehabilitation plan, the floor was opened up to members of the public who had the opportunity to express their questions and concerns. When the rehabilitation plans were finalized, they were submitted to OPARR for approval and were included in the national government’s Comprehensive Recovery and Rehabilitation Plan (CRRP). Plans were also used for updating the city’s Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) (14).

As UN-Habitat was requested by the national and local Governments to further support planning, UN-Habitat supported establishing the Recovery and Sustainable Development Groups to lead the planning process which included members of affected communities. Ties were further established through community members over social media, providing a platform for concerns of suggestions, and to facilitate a continuing dialogue with the public on recovery and reconstruction efforts (15).

Reconstruction and the role of the communities

Developed plans required relocation of the city’s population away from coastal areas to sites inland. While communities did participate in developing urban planning and housing for new city extensions, 4 years after the typhoon, relocation is still happening slowly, as the majority of residents living in the prohibited zones close to the water had rebuilt their homes where they used to live before Typhoon Haiyan. Communities are concerned with the social impact of moving to a new site. A study conducted by King argues that the relocation site is too far from people’s livelihoods, as most of them are fishermen (16). Therefore, the fear of losing their livelihood is the primary concern of people relocating themselves to safe sites. Other factors that make the relocation difficult are the proximity of the new site to the school, and the emotional ties to the previous site (16). In order to cope with these challenges, the government is investing in skills training initiatives, and new work programs to substitute people’s livelihood. For instance in cities such as Roxas, hundreds of semi-skilled carpenters from communities were trained in resilient housing construction. Training was conducted by UN-Habitat with the Governments Housing and Urban Development Coordination Council (HUDCC), and the Social Housing Finance Corporation (SHFC). Trained community members worked on building safe homes in their communities, and later supported neighboring settlements, becoming financially stable. Communities were also trained on house assessment in accordance with the principles of disaster risk reduction. Post-disaster processes also brought on board newly formed organizations, such as the community-led the Philippines Movement for Climate Justice (FMCI). PMC believed that the state plan was very expert-driven, and so they engaged with typhoon survivors through a series of grassroots consultations to define what rehabilitation means to the survivors themselves, and to bring their voices to the attention of policy makers (17).

Conclusion

This paper documents a case of post disaster recovery and reconstruction in one of the economically poorest regions of the world, wherein the community was heavily involved. This occurred in conjunction with the efforts of one of the UN’s lead agencies on urban issues, UN-Habitat, which supported the joint work of the communities and their local governments and other stakeholders, with the backing of UN-Habitat’s traditional donors. These efforts produced a series of urban planning workshops and prepared recovery and rehabilitation plans following Typhoon Haiyan. This paper argues that community involvement in disaster planning strengthens relationships, builds trust in local government, and produces better-fitted plans. In addition, community engagement in recovery and reconstruction is very context-specific, in which the methods of participation and a given community’s expectations are different. In the case of Ta-
cloban, Guivan, Ormoc, Roxas and other cities in the Philippines. Informality and economic hardships were contributing to the vulnerability of the community. Therefore, empowering the community through training programs and enabling them in long-term recovery efforts contributed to more resiliency and sustainability. The key lessons derived from the experience in post-disaster recovery and reconstruction efforts in the Philippines are as follows:

- Post-disaster damage assessment should include local community participation;
- Post-disaster recovery and reconstruction processes should entail a shared responsibility between government, the local communities, and other relevant stakeholders. Elected local community representatives should play a critical role in any plans or negotiations during the recovery and reconstruction process;
- If the community is involved in the designing and implementation stages of the post-disaster processes, they are far more likely to accept even relocating to new housing if ultimately needed. Resettlement plans must include jobs training, and employment programs in order to ensure that newly settled members of the community regain meaningful employment and a satisfactory standard of living;
- Community involvement enhances the level of monitoring for the implementation of the planning documents through a greater attention to detail; and
- Community involvement in post-disaster recovery processes increases the likelihood of efficiency and speed in reconstruction should another disaster occur in the future.

Such recommendations are also in line with the New Urban Agenda, an outline to tackle sustainable housing and urban development over the next 20 years, formulated and adopted in 2016. The New Urban Agenda, and other development agendas suggest shifting from reactive to more proactive risk-based, all-hazards and all-of-society approaches, and promoting cooperation and coordination across sectors, as well as build capacity of local authorities, communities and other stakeholders to develop and implement disaster risk reduction and response plans.

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Ricostruire camminando: il progetto ViaSalaria
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Introduzione
Si è diffusa progressivamente nel corso dell’ultimo decennio un’attenzione a guardare al camminare come occasione per viaggiare, scoprire territori, promuovere stili di vita salutari, a contatto e nel rispetto dell’ambiente, molto spesso connessa ad un rigetto, più o meno esplicito, di circuiti e abitudini del turismo di massa. Nel periodo recente, progetti, iniziative, eventi hanno veicolato la potenzialità turistiche e culturali del cammino, ragionando spesso sui benefici che il camminare è in grado di portare nel quadro di una politica di sviluppo complessiva volta ad incentivare l’attrattività delle aree interne e a compensare le condizioni di marginalità che le caratterizzano.

Nel 2016, proclamato Anno Nazionale del Cammino dal Ministero dei Beni Culturali, centinaia di iniziative sparse per l’Italia hanno riscosso il 6.600 km di cammini naturalistici, religiosi, culturali e spirituali, molti dei quali spesso poco conosciuti e frequentati, in un impegno spesso congiunto di soggetti pubblici e privati volta a valorizzarle le diverse potenzialità (MIBACT, 2016).

L’8 ottobre 2017, più di 100 eventi in simultanea hanno portato migliaia di cittadini a celebrare la sesta edizione della Giornata del Camminare, evento promosso da Fedecom, con il sostegno di una rete di associazioni e amministrazioni locali, unite dall’obiettivo di diffondere un ‘turismo in punta di piedi’, promuovendo un diverso rapporto fra l’uomo e l’ambiente, nel tentativo di riscoprire la bellezza delle città e dei borghi italiani attraverso la cultura del camminare. Sette giorni dopo, il 14 e 15 ottobre si è tenuto a Milano il primo “Festival del Social Walking”, due giorni dedicati al viaggiare lento e a riflettere e discutere sul turismo responsabile e sui riscovoli che possono scaturire da un diverso modo di concepire l’esperienza del viaggio.

Oltre la dimensione esplorativa o ricreativa, negli ultimi anni il cammino è diventato anche un’occasione per raccontare con occhi diversi un determinato “stato delle cose” (Di Giacomo, 2016), documentando aspetti che spesso sfuggono al primitivo sguardo. Era metà marzo di quest’anno quando Paolo Rumiz iniziava il suo cammino attraverso le montagne del Centro Italia per riflettere e realizzare per La Repubblica il reportage “Vivere sulla faglia. Un viaggio nel cuore dell’identità del paese”, cercando di capire “quali [possono essere] gli spazi per i ritorni dopo un abbandono che è durato decenni e di cui il terremoto è stato soltanto il sigillo” (Rumiz, 2016). Dando voce alle donne e agli uomini che continuavano ad abitare le aree del cratere. Rumiz ha costruito una riflessione sulla quotidianità dello straordinario e del ritardo causato dall’inertia dell’operatività nel post-sisma, utilizzando il camminare come occasione per osservare e comprendere il territorio, le sue fragilità e la continua ricerca di riscatto delle comunità.

In urbanistica, parlare di cammino significa studiare il territorio dal basso, “tra le cose”, guardando alle pratiche e alle modalità quotidiane di abitare lo spazio, che rappresenta un’insieme conosciuto in grado di guidare la costruzione del territorio urbano e territoriale, pensare alle possibilità di modificare la città esistente (Merlino, 2009). In questo contesto, questa “lettura dal basso”, carattere fondativo di una certa stagione di studi sui paesaggi abitati (Bianchetti, 2003), è in grado di liberare il processo di indagine sulla città dal predominio della vista, conferendogli una voluta dimensione esperienziale, utilizzando anche a studiare le traiettorie biografiche degli individui che la abitano (Secchi & Viganò, 2013).

Il presente contributo è organizzato in quattro parti. La prima introduce il cammino come pratica vitale nelle operazioni di descrizione e narrazione della città contemporanea in urbanistica. La seconda descrive l’esperienza di ‘ViaSalaria’, sottolineando gli aspetti di originalità del progetto. La terza parte e una breve rassegna di microstorie dal cratere del centro Italia che restituiscano alcune traiettorie biografiche incrociate nel tragitto. In chiusura, si riflette sul cammino come metodo e occasione per riallineare l’urbanistica alle domande e alle fragilità del territorio.

Spazi di enunciazione e processi di modificazione
Il cammino è esercizio fortemente interrettativo. Produce conoscenza, veicola letture del territorio, articola una riflessione, e atti-