

Decision-making in Sustainable Disaster Recovery

Objectives:

- 8.1 Discuss choices made by stakeholders, including their implications
- 8.2 Discuss the politics of recovery decision-making
- 8.3 Discuss the process of planning in sustainable disaster recovery

Decision-making in Sustainable Disaster Recovery

- The recovery process is shaped by decisions made by individuals, groups and organizations before and after a disaster
 - Hazard vulnerability
 - Basic human needs
 - Affect of decisions on stakeholders
- Issues faced in the post-disaster environment
 - Equitable distribution of aid
 - Speed of assistance
 - Power

Discuss the Choices made by Stakeholders, Including their Implications

- Local governments are usually the most impacted, yet they are typically the least prepared to provide technical assistance following disasters
- FEMA, which is typically the best prepared, is the farthest removed from an understanding of local needs
- States can play an important role, linking federal assistance programs with identified local needs
- The effects of these decisions are magnified in the post-disaster environment

Factors Affecting Recovery Decision-making

- Intense pressure to distribute aid and take action
- Balancing the need to make rapid decisions with incomplete information
- Issues surrounding public health and safety
- Decision, which can dramatically affect the future of a community, are inherently political in nature

Characteristics Shaping Post-disaster Decision-making

- Framing of issues
- Role of public participation
- Negotiation
- Workplace environment
- Perspectives of individuals, groups and institutions

Additional Factors Affecting Post-disaster Decision-making

- Political power and policy dialogue
- Pre-existing societal, economic and political conditions
- Decisions often address a disaster victims most basic needs (e.g. temporary shelter or housing, food, safety)
- Complex recovery programs that may contain competing objectives
- Methods used to shape desired ends
- Influx of state or federal funding that an agency or organization may be ill-equipped to handle

Additional Factors Affecting Post-disaster Decision-making

- Decisions that differentially affect varied segments of society
- Reconstruction alternatives that alter the makeup of the community
- Costs versus benefits of recovery and reconstruction
- Determining the beneficiaries of public policy decisions
- Determining who stands to lose or bear a disproportionate share of the costs
- Determining if decisions result in equitable outcomes
- Determining the appropriate level of public input in decision-making

Stakeholder Choices and their Implications

- Choices affecting hazard vulnerability
 - Consequences of increased hazard vulnerability
- Choices affecting preparedness
 - Consequences of a low level of preparedness
- Choices affecting response capabilities
 - Consequences of a low response capability
- Choices affecting recovery capabilities
 - Consequences of a limited ability to effectively recover

Choices affecting recovery capabilities

- Uneven or inequitable recovery
- Hazard vulnerability
- Missed grant program opportunities
- Decreased economic standing
- Increased reliance on state or federal resources
- Unsustainable reconstruction practices

Post-Disaster Recovery Operations

- Federal and state recovery operations characteristics
 - Codified recovery grant programs
 - Stove-piped programs
 - Lack of recovery planning

Local recovery operations characteristics

- Assignment of emergency management duties
- Response orientation
- Post-disaster ad-hoc approach
- Adaptive planning emphasis based on limited experience
- Limited recovery planning assistance provided by state or FEMA
- Most governments fail to achieve a sustainable recovery
- Reliance on existing staff or outside experts
- Local responsibilities and disaster recovery

Disaster Field Office Characteristics

- Limited privacy and close proximity
- Excessive work loads
- Workspace
- Workplace environment
- Daily field work and evening meetings
- Public meetings
- Physical and emotional impact on staff
- Disaster Recovery Operations Center
- Disaster Assistance Employee's

Understanding of Risk

- Factors impacting risk perception
 - Temporal factors (frequency, magnitude, recent occurrences)
 - The statistical likelihood of natural hazards are frequently misunderstood
 - An understanding of risk affects decisions and behavior
 - Inaccurate information can lead an individual to assume a greater level of risk
 - Choices driven by varied options
 - The ability to educate individuals, local, state and federal officials about the nature of risk has significant policy implications

Disaster Recovery, Public Expectations and Policy Frameworks

- Disaster recovery is a difficult, confusing and lengthy process
- Stakeholder expectations regularly exceed the current design of disaster recovery frameworks
- Frequent disconnect between the recovery of individuals versus recovery at the community level
- Decisions must be made quickly, sometimes before victims are ready to assume a more active role associated with sound participatory planning
- Adroit personnel tasked with recovery must determine when and to what extent citizens can contribute to a meaningful dialogue

Disaster Recovery, Public Expectations and Policy Frameworks

- Following disasters questions are frequently raised by disaster victims concerning the length of time necessary to distribute assistance
- Recovery programs have differing implementation timelines and methods of disbursement
- In general, disaster recovery programs are not designed to make victims whole

Disaster Recovery, Public Expectations and Policy Frameworks

- The evolution of disaster recovery programs have significantly raised public expectations
- Increasing federal disaster assistance as an example of liberalism
- Unless local, state and federal leaders seriously address land use and institutionalize sustainability concepts and hazard resilience, communities and states will continue to seek large federal payouts following disasters
- Constituent groups involved in receiving and providing aid carry with them a range of perspectives concerning what constitutes acceptable assistance

Decision Making and the Media

- Public perceptions are shaped by technical experts and the media
- During recovery, stories are frequently framed in a negative context
- Stories that attempt to explain the recovery process are not typically deemed newsworthy
- This, in turn, limits the breadth of discourse and possible opportunities to improve what are chronic problems in the current design of the recovery system

Decision Making and the Media

- Antagonistic relationships limit the ability of the media to assist in the identification of tangible evidence of problems in the recovery system
- Those tasked with recovery often become defensive when confronted
- Local, state and federal officials must become more adept at utilizing the media to assist in the formulation of positive change

Use of Data to Shape Policy and Decision-making

- Information available in the post-disaster environment is limited or incomplete, yet decisions have to be made rapidly given the dire and immediate consequences of inaction
 - Recovery plan allows decision makers to take time to assess differing disaster scenarios, their potential impact, and develop a range of measures to address them
- Pressure on federal, state and local officials to provide aid quickly
- Short-term strategic planning and capitalizing on short policy window
 - Opportunity to reduce vulnerability, improve housing and infrastructure, enhance the economy and environment and improve recreational opportunities

Use of Data to Shape Policy and Decision-making

- Examples of tasks requiring detailed information
 - The deployment of resources post-disaster
 - The assessment of long-term recovery needs
 - The rapid disbursement of funding to individuals and local and state governments
- Balancing needs with programmatic rules
- Scrutiny of federal and state dollars
 - State and federal audits
 - Speed of disbursement
 - Use of data to help identify community needs

Politics of Recovery Decision-making

- Political factors
 - Differential balance of power and the allocation of scarce resources
 - The ability to alter local budgets to meet the needs of disaster victims
 - The ability to lobby state or federal emergency management agencies
 - The equitable distribution of assistance
 - The pressure to act quickly, often with incomplete information
 - The allocation of state and local assistance in non-declared events

Politics of Recovery Decision-making

- The federal disaster declaration process can be highly politicized
- The fallacy of federal assistance supplementing state and local capabilities
- Rising disaster costs and the continued reliance on congressionally appropriated supplemental funding

See Disasters and Democracy (Platt 1999)

Politics of Disaster Recovery Decision-making

- Disasters can shape political careers
 - Visiting disaster areas
 - Opportunity to directly impact the lives of citizens (voters) via the provision of disaster assistance
 - Local
 - State
 - Federal

Process of Planning in Sustainable Recovery

- Disaster recovery as a complex process
 - Post-disaster planning is essential
 - Pre-disaster planning is not a guarantee of success nor does it accurately describe the actions of most communities, states or the federal government
 - Adaptive planning
 - US recovery is a loosely knit array of programs, many of which run counter to one another

The Planning Process

- Elements of planning
 - Mission statement
 - Goals
 - Objectives
 - Policies

Planning Benefits

- Engaging in a process
- Developing a strategic approach to achieve desired ends
- Developing an action oriented framework
- Involving stakeholder groups
- Identification of complimentary objectives

Recovery Planning

- Recovery planning problems include
 - Plans do not place sufficient emphasis on recovery and reconstruction
 - The importance of the planning process is underemphasized
 - Plans are not used during recovery to guide decision making
 - Public officials may not be aware of the plan

See Berke and Beatley (1997)

Recovery Planning

- The results of failing to create a plan
 - An ad hoc, uncoordinated approach to solve complex problems
 - Limited stakeholder involvement
 - Missed opportunities
 - Adaptive planning approach

Adaptive Planning

- Emphasis on the importance of pre-disaster recovery planning versus the realities of adaptive planning
- Adaptive planning does not preclude a sustainable recovery, nor does the development of a pre-disaster plan guarantee success
- Most pre and post-disaster recovery planning does not go beyond the basic administration of existing programs

Adaptive Planning and Disaster Recovery

- Planning for disaster recovery must remain flexible, capable of capitalizing on opportunities that present themselves with little warning
- Successful recovery necessitates moving beyond the over-reliance on federal and state programs
 - Identifying innovative approaches / recognizing system limitations
- The degree to which adaptive planning is used varies based on three factors:
 - The comprehensiveness of the recovery plan
 - The degree to which the plan has been used (e.g. exercise or disaster implementation)
 - The nature or complexity of the disaster

Adaptive Planning and Disaster Recovery

- Organizational structure and the infrequency of disasters can result in an adaptive planning approach
 - Lack of state and local institutional memory
 - Need for sound recovery planning
 - Loss of employees during a disaster

Adaptive Planning and Disaster Recovery

- Local and state governments must adapt to changes in federal and state policy following disasters
 - Post-disaster policy shifts (see Rubin 2001)
 - Data-driven change
 - Inaccuracies in information
 - Altering policy decisions

Adaptive Planning and Disaster Recovery

- Local and state governments must adapt to changes in federal and state policy following disasters
 - Assigning priorities
 - Policy change can significantly disrupt the recovery process
 - State-level leadership and policy change
 - Political power and policy change
 - Political will and disaster recovery

Class Discussion

- Describe specific steps that could be taken by FEMA to better educate state and local officials about recovery planning