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