

Editorial

Disaster Policies and Governance: Promoting Community Resilience

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Abstract

This brief editorial introduction highlights the importance of policies and effective governance for disaster resilience including communities, individuals, institutions, and organizations through the execution of deliberate choice and collective action. Effective facilitation of development and implementation of disaster policies can lead to more resilient communities in the aftermath of disasters. The success of design, development, and execution of disaster resilience policies require engagement of the “whole community”.

Keywords

collaborative governance; community resilience; disaster resilience; politics; whole community

Issue

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Natural and man-made hazards have and continue to cause significant loss of life and property damage worldwide. In 2011, the economic losses from disasters globally was US\$380 billion (Schiermeier, 2012). Hazard vulnerabilities and subsequent impacts over the past few decades have increased due to poor disaster policies and governance practices that lack sustainable outcomes and infrastructure. As a result, communities find themselves struggling in the response and recovery phases to provide both financial and physical resources in the aftermath of disasters. One attainable feature of sustainable development is creating resilience in the face of catastrophic events. *Community disaster resilience* is considered a function of a community’s collaborative governance, which helps develop community capacity through adaptive management and continuous learning (Comfort, Boin, & Demchak, 2010; Kapucu, Hawkins, & Rivera, 2013). Collaborative and adaptive forms of governance, as a method of collective decision-making, promote the capacity of organizations and community stakeholders to adjust and adapt their evolving relationships in a dy-

namic environment of disasters (Kapucu, 2006). A major disaster, for example, can create a “window of opportunity” for community-wide sustainable development (Kapucu & Liou, 2014). This suggests that disasters can provide the impetus for communities to develop and implement structured policies that not only withstand the pressures of politics at all levels of government, but also improve the resilience of communities’ social, physical and natural environment, and economic systems.

Resilience can be created by communities, individuals, institutions, and organizations through the execution of deliberate choice and action. To facilitate the development and governance/implementation of disaster policies that lead to more resilient communities in the aftermath of disasters, two important steps need to be taken. First, state and local governments should enact mandates on hazard and disaster risk reduction. Second, state and local governments should collaborate with all relevant community stakeholders when planning for disasters. Such a partnership should focus on identifying a comprehensive list of recovery goals for the entire community (Figure 1).

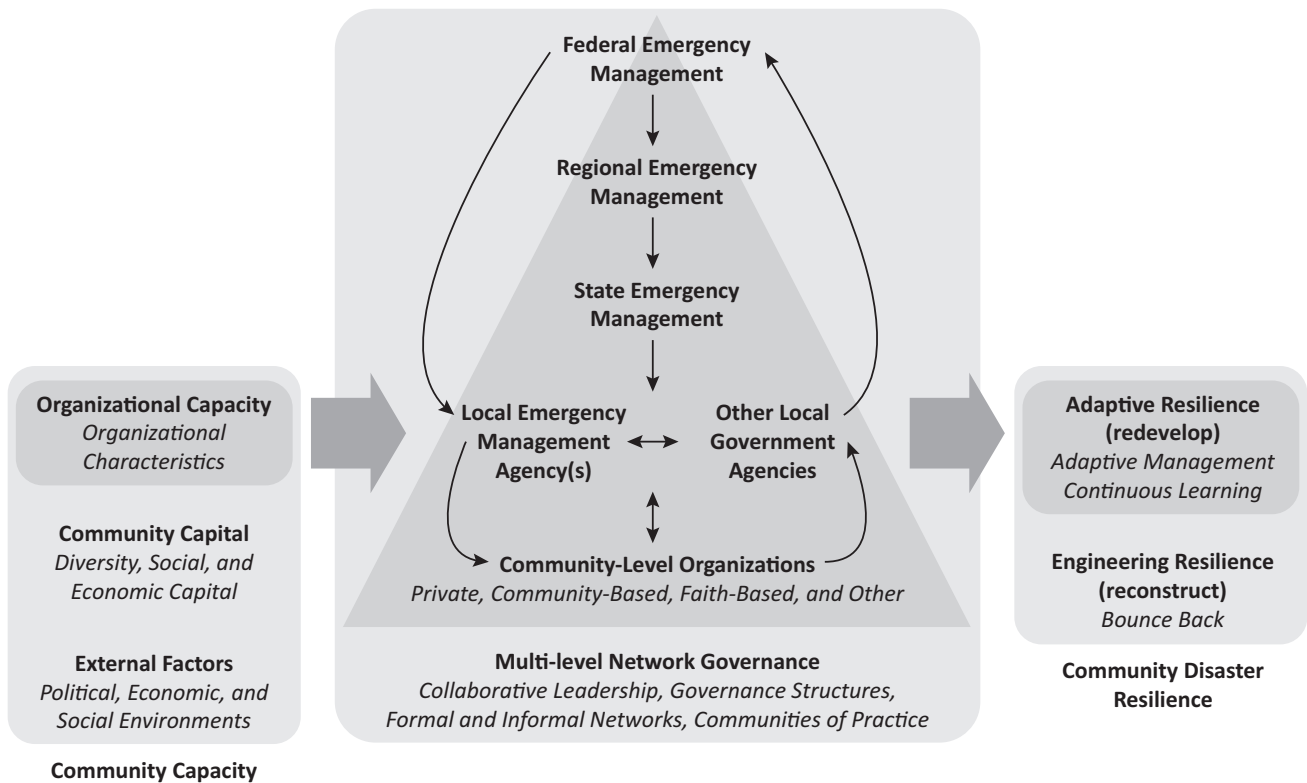


Figure 1. Collaborative governance for community disaster resilience.

To reduce community vulnerabilities to disasters and stem disaster-related losses, governments at all levels have begun to promote community resilience as a possible panacea. As a result, the concept of “resilience” has become the buzzword among academics, practitioners, government officials, and the public. However, there is little consensus on what this concept entails or how to measure it. Moreover, there is limited understanding on ways to promote community resilience at the local level. Hence the purpose of this thematic issue is to put together an excellent collection of articles that will shed light on the conceptualization of resilience, its measurement, and the identification of strategies for promoting community resilience.

Effective community disaster resilience outcomes involve not only government agencies across all levels, but also multiple groups of non-governmental stakeholders such as non-profit organizations, faith-based groups, private sector organizations, individuals, families, and communities (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2011; Kapucu et al., 2013). Organizations work with others to share information and other resources, and to coordinate efforts in building community disaster resilience. During this process, multi-level emergency management networks form and evolve, which not only include inter-governmental networks, but also involve cross-sector inter-organizational networks and partnerships. These extend beyond formal networks, with roles and functions defined by government planning and policy documents, to encapsulate informal networks and community partnerships characterized by flexible

structures and communication channels. This perspective highlights the importance of organizational capacity and multi-level collaborative governance, adaptive management, and continuous learning to build disaster resilient communities.

Earlier this year, a call for papers was issued, and scholars from various disciplines submitted several relevant and important studies. After a rigorous peer review and selection process, five papers that provide significant insights on community resilience were selected for publication in this thematic issue. In the following paragraphs, we provide a brief summary of this collection of articles, representing different cultures, geographies, and disasters.

Elizabeth Carabine and Emily Wilkinson (2016) used the Social-Ecological Systems Theory to understand how local governance systems can help strengthen community resilience in the Sahel and Horn of Africa. These scholars were interested in studying how local risk governance structures and institutional arrangements—diversity, polycentricism and connectivity, decentralization and flexibility, participation and community engagement, and learning and innovation—mediated individuals’ access to the goods and services provided by climate and disaster resilience programs. Using evidence collected via a thorough literature review, the researchers developed a set of testable hypotheses necessary to build a body of knowledge on the role of risk governance structures in promoting community resilience outcomes.

Lex Drennan, Jim McGowan, and Anne Tiernan (2016) investigated how to incorporate economic re-

silience into a resilience framework using information collected via interviews of community and business leaders from three regional centers in Australia impacted by the 2009 Victorian bushfires and the 2010–2011 cyclones and floods. The authors found, among other findings, that the current disaster policy on recovery does not take into account the complexity and understanding of recovery. For example, the authors noted a lack of provision in the recovery policy for business recovery. The authors concluded that in the Australian context, economic recovery is given less attention in comparison to other streams of recovery such as infrastructure. This study highlights the important contribution economic recovery plays in promoting overall community resilience to disasters.

The United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which began in 2000 and ended in 2015, was criticized for not being able to adequately consider the interactions among the MDGs (Waage et al., 2010). Hence, a major focus of the SDGs developed from 2015 to 2030 is to fully consider the interactions among the SDGs (Waage et al., 2015). Kristine Belesova, Ilan Kelman and Roger Boyd (2016) were the first to explore the interactions among three SDGs: climate change (SDG 13), economic growth (SDG 8), and health and wellbeing (SDG 3). These scholars identified economic concepts like externalities, short-term profit targets, reliance on the Gross Domestic Product, and positive discount rates as primary sources of tension between climate change and economic goals. The authors argue that these tensions can be alleviated through intersectoral governance mechanisms. A better understanding of the tensions among the SDGs can help academics and practitioners develop strategies to enhance synergies among the SDGs and in the process, improve community resilience.

The use of home buyout programs is an effective tool in reducing a community's vulnerability to flood disasters. Despite the benefits of home buyout programs, little is known about its impact on a community. Sherri Brokopp Binder and Alex Greer's (2016) study provided critical insights into the implications of home buyout program design and implementation. Using data collected via observations, surveys, and in-depth interviews, the authors examined the implications of a home buyout program implemented in Oakwood Beach, New York after Hurricane Sandy. The authors found that the design of the home buyout program in Oakwood Beach had a significant impact on citizens' understanding of, progression through, and experience with the program. The authors conclude by recommending ways to improve the effectiveness of future home buyout programs. For example, the authors suggested that the design of future home buyout programs should include inputs from local residents.

Finally, Vicente Sandoval and Martin Voss (2016) studied the relationship between disaster governance and vulnerability using Chile as a case study. Specifically, the authors employed the disaster Pressure and Release Model to examine whether the centralized Chilean

model of Disaster Risk Management increased disaster vulnerability in post-disaster Chaitén, Los Lagos Region, Chile. Chaitén was used as a case study due to the significant economic and social cost inflicted by a volcanic eruption in May 2008. Using information from in-depth interviews and government documents, the authors found that residents did not trust their authorities. This is an important finding in the sense that a lack of trust between a government and local residents can exacerbate inherent vulnerabilities to future disasters. For instance, residents may not heed evacuation orders issued by authorities for lack of trust. If residents do not evacuate, this could lead to a bigger disaster loss for the community than if residents had evacuated the hazardous area.

Thomas Birkland (2016) also provided a commentary, which focuses on the intersection of policies and governance in disaster resilience. In this commentary, Thomas Birkland argued that disasters can grab the attention of policymakers, and lead to changes in disaster policies based on lessons learned from past disasters. However, he pointed out that such changes may or may not improve community resilience to future disasters. In conclusion, Thomas Birkland suggested that developing countries should learn from developed countries in terms of strategies to implement community resilience, and emphasized the need for such strategies to be driven by local groups and citizens in order to be successful.

In summary, this collection of insightful articles examined the interplay between disaster policies and governance and community resilience using different types of hazards to include flooding, cyclones or hurricanes, and bushfire. These articles also utilized information from both secondary data (e.g., government documents and academic resources) and primary data (e.g., interviews, surveys, and observations), and used contexts from different geographical locations—Sahel and Horn of Africa, Australia, United States, and Chile—as testbeds. Finally, this collection of impressive articles employed various lenses (e.g., the Social-Ecological Systems Theory, the Pressure and Release Model, and the Reductionist Paradigm) to provide critical insights into how the concept of resilience can be used as a meaningful framework to identify important conditions that lead to stronger, safer, and more sustainable communities with effective disaster governance policies.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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