

Post-Disaster Recovery in Puerto Rico and Local Participation

GUEST EDITOR: Edwin Meléndez

Puerto Rico has suffered the compounded effects of multiple disasters since the devastating impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in September 2017. At the end of 2019, the island was impacted with recurrent seismic activity in the southwest region, and in January 2020 the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

All these disasters are underscored by a crushing debt crisis and a federally mandated austerity regime since 2016. Recent disasters have revealed serious vulnerabilities in Puerto Rico's preparedness planning, institutional response capacity and coordination, resource management at various levels of implementation, data availability, and the lack of suitable and accessible mechanisms to support adequate local community engagement. The collection of studies included in this special volume of *CENTRO Journal* show evidence of how post disaster recovery is progressing in Puerto Rico, the challenges and opportunities for local participation in reconstruction programs, and the potential of nonprofit organizations, municipalities, and local businesses to contribute to post disaster recovery in Puerto Rico. To date, the available evidence leads to a portrait of an uneven recovery. The studies included in this volume indicate that the long-term impact of post-disaster federal funding for economic recovery is contingent on implementing a comprehensive strategy for reforming public policy to encourage and support nonprofit developers' participation in reconstruction programs, building industry capacity by strengthening intermediaries and CDCs, encouraging intra-industry partnerships and collaborations, and providing professional development for economic recovery.

Entrepreneurial Dynamics in Puerto Rico Before and After Hurricane María

Manuel Lobato, Marta Álvarez and Mari-nés Aponte

Entrepreneurship is crucial for the future of Puerto Rico. Hurricane María hit the Island on September 2017, in the midst of a long recession, a period of employment loss and very low rates of new business creation. This paper studies the effect of the Hurricane on the entrepreneurial activity of the island by comparing important entrepreneurial indicators before and after the event. The research is based on data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) and the Puerto Rico Community Survey. The immediate effect of the hurricane and its aftermath was unusually high levels of closings of establishments and employment contraction. After the first impact, this dynamic was combined with a sudden increase of new entrepreneurial initiatives, as entrepreneurs identified business opportunities in this new scenario. These dynamics are similar to those observed in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. [Key words: entrepreneurship, Puerto Rico, hurricane, economic development]

Impact of Hurricane María to the Civic Sector: A Profile of Non-Profits in Puerto Rico

Ivis García and Divya Chandrasekhar

Non-profit organizations can play a critical role in disaster recovery owing to their ability to motivate volunteerism, assess local needs, distribute goods, and aid. But few such organizations can successfully navigate the dynamism and uncertainty of disaster recovery. This is particularly

true of locally embedded, non-profit organizations that typically have a smaller staff, fewer resources, fewer extra-local connections, and much less experience in disaster recovery. In this study, we first created a profile of non-profits in Puerto Rico. Then, we capture the activities that relate to responding and improving their capacity to engage in recovery actions after Hurricane María. Data were collected through phone surveys of 235 responses of non-profit organizations as well as in-depth interviews with 21 executive directors of agencies, residents, and community leaders. We discuss four relevant themes in this article: (1) disaster impact on organization, (2) changes in interaction with other organizations, (3) knowledge and use of traditional recovery funding mechanisms, and (4) need for education, capacity building, and collaboration. We conclude with observations on the impact that Hurricane María had on the operations of these non-profit organizations, their knowledge-seeking behavior, new opportunities for collaboration, and access to resources in the post-disaster context. [Keywords: non-profits, Puerto Rico, Hurricane María, disaster recovery]

Centros de Apoyo Mutuo: reconfigurando la asistencia en tiempos de desastre

Jacqueline Villarrubia-Mendoza and Roberto Vélez-Vélez

Weeks after Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico, the emergence of community-based initiatives known as "centros de apoyo mutuo" (mutual support centers) across the island was evident. Based on over a year of fieldwork studying the emergence and work of CAMs, it is evident that breaking away from the

dependency cycle born out of state assistantship programs represents the biggest challenge to be faced. Our work addresses the following questions: How do CAMs transform people's expectations regarding assistance? How do CAMs create a movement toward autonomy and *autogestión* after approximately a century of policies that foster paternalism and dependency? Our study reveals that more than promoting a critique towards assistentialism, CAMs promote the assertion of *autogestión* as a vehicle of social transformation. [Key words: Hurricane María, self-management, assistentialism, mutual support, disasters, recovery]

Puerto Rico Housing and Community Development Industry's Capacity for Disaster Recovery

Edwin Meléndez

My main goal with this case study of disaster policy implementation is to provide an assessment of the capacity of the nonprofit sector to become an active participant in the long-term economic recovery of Puerto Rico. And, more generally, I wish to examine barriers hindering nonprofit sector participation. The study is intended to take advantage of this window of opportunity to strengthen the housing and community development industry in the island. In the first section of the study I discuss the relative size and strength of the housing and community development industry in the context of the nonprofit sector in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico has robust nonprofit and cooperatives sector but a smaller housing and community development sub-sector. In the second part of the study, I identified three significant barriers that have hindered the development of the housing community development industry in Puerto Rico: the exclusionary role of federal and local recovery funding policy; the relative weakness of the industry ecosystem; and, the relative scarcity of professionals with the understanding of reconstruction programs. The final section of the study presents conclusions, and policy and industry development

strategies recommendations. I conclude that post-disaster federal funding for economic recovery offers Puerto Rico a unique window of opportunity to restore its economy and infrastructure in a more resilient fashion while strengthening the nonprofit sector capacity for community planning, housing and economic development, and neighborhood revitalization. However, such an opportunity is contingent on reforming public policy and implementing a comprehensive strategy to encourage and support nonprofit developers' participation in reconstruction programs, as well as building industry capacity by strengthening intermediaries and community development corporations, encouraging intra-industry partnerships and collaborations, and providing professional development for economic recovery. [Key words: Puerto Rico, housing, community development, nonprofit, economy recovery]

Community Development Corporations and Reconstruction Policy in Puerto Rico

Ramón Borges-Méndez

After the destruction caused by hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, and the earthquakes of January 2020, community-based organizations (CBOs) in Puerto Rico (PR) intensified their activity in accessing economic and capacity-building resources allocated by the federal government. This investigation of twelve case studies of Puerto Rican community development corporations (PRCDCs) addresses several critical questions relevant to the reconstruction of the island. First, why should policy makers explicitly involve PRCDCs in the short-term and long-term reconstruction of communities in the island? Second, what are PRCDCs currently doing in Puerto Rican communities, and what can we learn from them? Third, what are the challenges faced by PRCDCs in participating effectively in the future recovery and reconstruction at local, municipal, and regional levels? Our findings indicate that the prevailing narrative of centralized post-disaster planning and

government recovery policy underestimates the PRCDCs' experience and capabilities. While PRCDCs might have limited experience with specific federal funding and programs, they have accumulated legitimate experience in implementing projects with state and federal agencies. PRCDCs have the entrepreneurial drive, and the professional, community-based talent, to participate directly in the reconstruction of communities and municipalities. PRCDCs' collective experience represents a strong foundation from which it is possible to "scale-up from the bottom-up" the processes of reconstruction and resilience-building.

[Key words: Community Development Corporations, Puerto Rico, Disasters, Reconstruction, Housing]

What Is Possible? Policy Options for Long-term Disaster Recovery in Puerto Rico

Ariam I. Torres Cordero

Policymakers, practitioners, academics, and community leaders can often identify unjust outcomes resulting from disaster policies that fail to satisfy basic needs or that underserve disadvantaged populations. What is less clear is how to design and implement successful programs that result in better and more just outcomes. To shed light on this matter, this paper explores CDBG-DR governance models across different U.S. jurisdictions and examines strategies that promote equity by targeting the most vulnerable and prioritizing local needs, knowledge, and capabilities for long-term recovery. The paper uses a policy assemblage framework and draws on key stakeholder interviews and analysis of various secondary sources about disaster recovery planning and policy. Findings suggest that a great deal can be improved through (a) an equity-oriented interpretation of federal guidelines and the exercise of bureaucratic discretion, and (b) enabling networks to build local capacity for community and economic development. [Keywords: CDBG-DR, governance, disaster recovery, planning, advocacy, equity]