In the late fall of 2012 Superstorm Sandy devastated communities from the Caribbean to Canada. It followed Hurricane Isaac’s landfall on the Gulf Coast less than three months earlier. In the wake of these storms, many news reports raised the question of whether disasters are “the new normal,” especially as such events are increasing in frequency and intensity. With more than 655 major disaster declarations in the last decade and 71 percent of the United States facing disaster drought conditions in 2012, examination and public discussion of the post-disaster roles of government and nongovernmental entities are warranted. Human-created disasters are an equally important part of the analysis. The 9/11 terrorist attacks redefined governmental responses and preparedness for human-created disasters. Subsequent events like the 2010 BP oil drilling disaster, one of the largest environmental disasters in U.S. history, reigned the national debate on the impacts of these disasters and respective roles of public and private actors in post-disaster recovery.

Whether rising floodwaters, ravages of a financial crisis, oil-polluted seafood, or fatalities from terrorist attacks, the toll disasters exact on communities is immediate, profound, and long-lasting. Disasters spotlight...
many long-standing affordable housing and community economic-development questions: How and where to create housing and economic opportunities? How will these opportunities be financed? Who will benefit from them? Who will bear the environmental and economic costs of development? And who will be included in these important decisions? Lawyers and other practitioners in the field of affordable housing and community economic development confront these issues head-on, from the immediate aftermath through the long-term recovery. In facing these post-disaster realities, *Building Community Resilience Post-Disaster* calls upon practitioners to advance communities’ abilities to rebound and create stronger and healthier places to live, work, worship, and play—to be more resilient.

With enhancing community resilience as a primary goal in the post-disaster landscape, practitioners must evaluate the way disasters reshape the possibilities and challenges for affordable housing and community economic development generally. For example, disaster-recovery funding is far outpacing traditional community development resources. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funding request for Community Development Block Grants in fiscal year 2013 was $2.948 billion\(^3\) compared with the $16 billion allocation of Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery funding for areas affected by Superstorm Sandy.\(^4\) This financing reality presents important challenges and opportunities for communities and practitioners. The number of communities affected by disasters; the amount of federal, state, and local resources devoted to disaster preparation and response; and the extent of increased vulnerability, discrimination, and exclusion in post-disaster contexts require ongoing research, analysis, and focus by the affordable housing and community economic development field.

*Building Community Resilience Post-Disaster* aims to contribute to this growing body of work by detailing disasters’ various impacts on the affordable housing and community economic development landscapes at local, state, regional, and national levels. Examining disasters that span every region of the United States, the book raises and answers many pivotal affordable housing and community economic-development questions with similar and some conflicting viewpoints. Programs that are developed in one disaster are modified and often incorporated into the disaster response toolkit for a future disaster. An example is the creation of the Liberty Zone in the post–9/11 economic recovery and its evolution four years later to the Gulf Opportunity Zone following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The chapters present past failures, best practices, and a range of opportunities to improve local, regional, and national disaster response frameworks and processes.

Critical to the post-disaster framework is equity and a decided emphasis on the civil and human rights of those impacted by the disaster. Because “[d]isasters occur at the intersections of hazards and vulnerabilities,”\(^5\) structural inequalities often create the conditions that lead to disasters’ disparate effects in communities. The colonias in Texas along the Mexican border serve as an example of the lack of infrastructure investment in water and sewer lines as a pre-disaster vulnerability in many
Editors’ Introduction

low-income communities. This vulnerability regularly results in flooding and sewage backups. Disasters then compound the inadequate infrastructure, creating very hazardous conditions following a storm or hurricane: flooding communities with water and sewage.

Post-disaster responses also have long-term effects on how communities rebound from the disaster; whether the recovery includes all members of impacted communities, particularly those most vulnerable; and to what extent the communities are healthier post-disaster than they were before. As such, in the process of building community resilience post-disaster, advocates and government actors must create mechanisms that promote inclusion in disaster response as well as combat new and existing forms of economic exclusion and housing segregation through both policy and practice.

*Building Community Resilience Post-Disaster* begins with a post-disaster snapshot, through a journalist’s eye, that highlights uneven recovery, multiple vulnerable communities, and numerous parallels between disasters separated by time and geography. Part 1 examines the components of the disaster recovery framework that exists in the United States. With specific attention to housing and economic development, it focuses on the multiple roles of federal, tribal, state, and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and religious organizations in first response, financing recovery efforts, and ensuring a more holistic and equitable recovery. The first two chapters highlight the current federal and tribal government framework for disaster relief and the significant funding devoted to disaster recovery, discussing the specific role of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as a key federal agency in the housing and community economic development recovery. Using a civil and human rights framework, the next two chapters offer an expanded view of the role of the federal government in disaster response and underscore the importance of equity as central to greater community resilience. Part 1 ends with the roles of first responders—local government and nonprofit and religious organizations—in filling the gaps in the recovery systems and reaching those most vulnerable.

Part 2 emphasizes the federal, state, and local economic development incentives that fueled business and economic recovery following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, Hurricane Andrew in 1992, the Los Angeles Riots in 1992, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, the Iowa disasters in 2008, and the BP oil drilling disaster in 2010. Whether the disaster is human-created or natural, these chapters stress the need to restore local and regional economies and the important roles of multiple government entities in sustainable economic recovery. The recovery of local economies is dependent not only on jobs and business development but also on ensuring communities have accessible, affordable housing as the bedrock for strong and resilient communities.

Part 3 focuses on the recovery of affordable housing for those most economically insecure, very low-income residents of public housing. With case examples of 2008 Hurricanes Ike and Dolly and 2005 Hurricane Katrina, these chapters highlight the
Editors' Introduction

importance of housing recovery for all residents and bring into clear view many of the challenges, stakeholders’ roles, and questions in ensuring meaningful housing access.

Part 4 accentuates the challenges and opportunities disasters pose for community resilience. The challenges include new predatory housing practices and discriminatory practices with short-term and long-term fair housing consequences, which undermine community resilience and can lead to greater inequities than existed before the disaster. Disasters simultaneously can be opportunities, as discussed in the final two chapters. These chapters identify innovations in new housing models that meet the needs of local communities and investigate expanded workforce development options for vulnerable populations to become full participants in and benefit from the local and regional economy.

Finally, the book concludes with a resources section, which mirrors the book’s chapter topics and provides practitioners with additional tools and disaster-specific information.

As practitioners in multiple roles and phases of post-disaster response and recovery, the nearly two dozen authors reveal many valuable recommendations for all those engaged in disaster response, recovery, mitigation, and preparation:

- Begin with an equity framework in which the goal is to expand the economic and housing opportunities and safety net for more members of the community.
- Pay attention to the existing disaster recovery frameworks at the community, local, regional, state, tribal, and national levels, along with their shortcomings.
- Involve communities most affected by disasters in the needs assessment, funds allocation, and evaluation phases of planning and recovery. This is central to effective, equitable, and sustainable recovery.
- Allocate and disburse funds through mechanisms that are transparent and traceable, ensuring accountability, assessments of equitable distribution, and long-term evaluation of effectiveness.
- Plan to assess the preexisting vulnerabilities in communities that lead to long-term, and sometimes fatal, effects post-disaster.
- Enforce civil and human rights laws and standards to promote equity in immediate response, recovery, and redevelopment, and educate the public about these laws and standards.
- Ensure nonprofits at the local, regional, and national levels are fully engaged, communicating with one another, government entities, and communities.
- Leverage the philanthropic resources of individuals, corporations, and foundations to develop a strategic and coordinated approach using the experience, community-based knowledge, and relative strengths of local, regional, and national nonprofit and religious organizations.
Editors' Introduction

• Create a means of communication that ensures affected communities remain an integral part of the decision-making processes, despite post-disaster challenges such as displacement and disrupted traditional communication mechanisms.

• Be prepared to combat the multiple ways disasters can create opportunities for predatory housing and consumer practices, and broadly communicate this, in multiple languages, to disaster survivors.

• Develop systems to document and replicate housing and community economic-development innovations that emerge in the post-disaster response.

Affordable housing and community economic development practitioners continue to play vital roles in post-disaster recovery as advocates, regulators, planners, developers, and financing agents. Building community resilience requires a commitment to ensuring interconnected systems, effective communication, strong community engagement, public and private collaboration, and equity that lifts up those most vulnerable and advances all members of communities in the process.

Although acute natural and human-created disasters are the focus of this book, the lessons and warnings are important for addressing the long-term disasters of disinvestment, predatory financial practices, and discrimination that have led to decline in too many cities and towns throughout the country. These long-term disasters and those detailed in Building Community Resilience Post-Disaster remind us that a community’s ability to thrive in the aftermath of disaster depends on a collective commitment to a broad and shared vision of every community as a healthy and resilient community.

Notes


