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A Lesson of Recovery and Resilience Post-Disaster

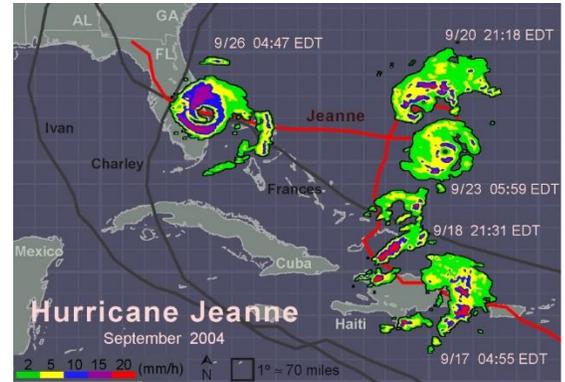
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Every May, Floridians begin a ritual of dusting off and ramping up their disaster preparedness plans as we ready our families and property for hurricane season which extends from June through November. This year will mark the 15th anniversary of what the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) described as the most destructive hurricane season in Florida history, with the biggest disaster-relief effort in U.S. history at that point. In 2004, Florida experienced an unprecedented hurricane season with four named storms making landfall in 44 days during August and September. Three of those hurricanes, (Charley, Frances, and Jeanne), left behind damages to the state totaling over \$45 billion. Indeed, Hurricane Charley alone was measured on the Saffir-Simpson hurricane wind scale as a Category 4 storm.

Volusia County Encounters Hurricanes Charley, Frances, and Jeanne

Florida is recognized as one of three "home-base sites" for immigrant farm laborers along with Texas and California. Across the state, a number of Florida counties provide agricultural work for seasonal and migrant laborers, including Volusia County. Volusia is an important agricultural area situated on the Atlantic coast of northeastern Florida. With a population approaching 500,000, its rich farming industry attracts a large concentration of migrant laborers who engage in field and orchard harvesting, food packing and sorting, and horticultural work. Certainly, the coastal location of the county increases the threat from a number of climatic factors, thus placing an already vulnerable farmworker population at considerable risk to coastal hazards. In 2004, the total damage caused to homes and businesses in Volusia County by hurricanes Charley, Frances, and Jeanne reached \$560 million.

Likewise, accumulated storm damage took a heavy toll on the agricultural industry in Volusia County thus impacting the livelihoods of its' many migrant farm laborers.



Triple Jeopardy and Disaster Recovery: A Story of Resilience

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations have gradually gained attention in the hazards literature with particular attention given to Hispanics, Haitians, and Asians. Still, a gap remains with regard to Spanish-speaking migrant farm laborers and their families, including those with undocumented status. This vulnerable group is often a silent voice in community disaster planning. Data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey suggests that speaking Spanish at home and speaking English less than very well or not at all, correlates with a series of indicators linked to increased social vulnerability. Indicators include having less than a 12th grade education, being over age 60, living in poverty, and having a disability. These multiple factors negatively impact resilience. With

this in mind, I set out to explore the issue of "triple jeopardy"—the intersection of gender, economics, and language—and community disaster resilience. Specifically, I studied the impact of the 2004 hurricane season on female migrant laborers speaking limited English and residing in Volusia County. This case study illustrates several key lessons for post-disaster recovery of this hidden and vulnerable population.

Starting from the Grassroots

In response to a series of three hurricanes that impacted the rural agricultural areas of Volusia County, Florida in 2004, a small group of women spontaneously organized, known as Alianza de Mujeres Activas (AMA) [Alliance of Active Women]. This grassroots group had strong ties to the migrant farm worker community, with members of their households engaged in this work. The primary mission of AMA was to bridge a gap by providing outreach and assistance to the LEP community which had been overlooked by the government sector of emergency management. Destruction of crops meant loss of employment; damage to housing left people needing shelter as well as food, clean water, and supplies for children such as diapers and formula.

As a call went out through social networks in the LEP community, people began to gather whatever items they could spare and an informal humanitarian distribution site was launched in someone's front yard. Outreach teams of women delivered care packages into the impacted areas of the community and, while handing out supplies, also searched for those in need who had been passed-over by the traditional disaster serving organizations. AMA then initiated a second

mission which involved developing a resource list of all existing social service agencies, volunteer and faith-based groups in order to link those in need with resources.

The work of AMA promoted a sense of unity within the community including building bonds of trust with outside assets. The result was a tangible collective resilience for a vulnerable and heretofore hidden population. Over time, AMA has continued to expand its capacity through volunteer efforts and partnerships with others entities. AMA members regularly participate in health fairs and media promotions through Univision and Telemundo television to educate the LEP community on disaster preparedness. The efforts of AMA, led by a group of determined women, have contributed to the creation of a bilingual volunteer community emergency response team (CERT), and the formation of El Grupo Comunitario de Respuesta a Desastres (Community Disaster Response Group). "El Grupo" now represents a broader mix of community members (e.g. male/female, bilingual, youth/adults) engaged in identifying and planning for the needs of the LEP and farm labor communities with emergency management leaders to promote resilience and post-disaster sustainability.

Components of Community Disaster Resilience

Grassroots organizing and mobilization skills support efforts for collective action through social networking and set the stage for collective efficacy. The women of AMA were able to quickly identify and mobilize available resources to meet immediate needs for health and safety. The impetus of AMA was to provide outreach and assistance to the LEP community which had been overlooked by the government sector of emergency management. These women relied on close social ties within their migrant community to offer mutual support to those in need. Damage from the hurricane resulted in the need for safe shelter, unspoiled food, clean water, and supplies for children such as diapers and formula. The women described their work in gathering donations from fellow members of the migrant community in the form of household items that could be salvaged and distributed to those in need. Teams of women organized the donated goods into care packages, which were delivered to impacted areas of the community. The outreach task was twofold, as those handing out supplies also searched for those in need who had been passed-over by the traditional disaster serving organizations.



While much of the literature on disaster resilience mentions the importance of identifying local assets, creating networks through social capital, and working together to enhance collective efficacy. Another component of community resiliency is "adaptive capacity." In order to be adaptive, you have to be able to know what your assets are, how you're going to use those assets, and then what it is that you're going to put into place to be able to make a difference so that you come through the disaster stronger and in a better place. Adaptive capacity is really about asking, how am I able to change, what strengths do I have going for me, and what strengths can I find within my community?

The ability for a community to work together before, during, and after a traumatic event like a hurricane is important because government can no longer provide all the services an impacted area might need. Indeed, this was made apparent in 2017 when Hurricane Harvey inundated Houston, Texas with flooding from rainfall. FEMA repeatedly asked people in Texas to help each other out before government officials could get there. The reality is that FEMA cannot do disaster response and recovery alone. These kinds of massive disasters require collective effort. A new breed of community responders—volunteer citizen responders—are needed to support government efforts. This includes you, me, the people next door to us, across the street from us, anyone that can come out to lend a hand, neighbor helping neighbor. We have to rely on each other to be able to help in rescue and recovery efforts. Everyone has something that they can give.

Returning to Volusia County, we found an impoverished community of female immigrant farm laborers who came together to help each other in 2004 after a series of hurricanes rattled the area. These women demonstrated resilience through adaptive capacity as they rallied together to help each other recover through the identification and redistribution of existing assets and resources. Fifteen years later, we prepare our communities in that spirit of resilience.