A Stronger, better partnership between the government, the community and the private sector in disaster management efforts: Giving more power and authority to local and state governments to improve business continuity

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Abstract
This paper addresses the research question, (1) how can local and state government better prepare for recovery efforts during natural disasters? This paper will provide an overview of the devastation caused by Hurricane Sandy in the City of New York and provide a window into government bureaucracy that dictates the rules of engagement and protocols that municipalities must adhere to in order to receive support from the Federal Government. This paper will further attempt to (2) demonstrate the inner workings of the intergovernmental relationship that exist between the three branches of government when a national disaster occurs and, (3) the drastic loss to small businesses and the economy.

Because small businesses are the economic engine of the economy of this City of over eight million residents, and the home to the World Financial Center (Wall Street), when such disasters hit, absent the proper coordination and resources, billions of dollars are lost. According to reports from the insurance journals, economic loss from Hurricane Sandy rose to $70 Billion dollars according to market estimates.

In order to better understand the challenges and the bureaucracy that municipalities and state governments face in dealing with the after effect of such disasters, we must first examine the governmental and administrative structures that place all the authority and decision-making with the national government and excludes the local and state government leaders.

Introduction
During the past two decades we have experienced a series of natural disasters, particularly hurricanes and floods, which have had drastic impacts including the loss of human life and property, as well as on our local, state and national economy. Hurricanes have devastated many cities in the United States since the 20th century and before, but we have witnessed such an increase that national and state leaders have begun to look more closely at climate change as a cause of this increase (Beach 2010).

Here in the U.S., we did not address the issue of hurricanes nor did we plan accordingly for such events until after Hurricane Katrina devastated the city of New Orleans, Louisiana in 2005. As Americans, our only pre-thoughts into hurricanes were as we prepared to travel abroad for summer cruises and vacations and the national weather forecasters cautioned us on the travel restrictions during the hurricane season.

It was after the lack of proper response and coordination, and a poor intergovernmental relationship during Hurricane Katrina that the United States Government and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the agency responsible for coordinating and responding to disasters and hazards, began to really focus to re-examine the coordination, response, and recovery, and re-building in a broader governmental context.
Hurricane Sandy made landfall in October 2012 and left hundreds of homes destroyed, as well as many small businesses closed for months due to the water and other infrastructure damages. It was the first time a city like New York City had to deal with such disaster at that magnitude.

Problem

Natural disasters and particularly hurricanes have caused billions of dollars in loss to our U.S. economy and continue to be a major problem. Hurricane Sandy caused great devastation to the City of New York, Katrina to New Orleans and Maria to Puerto Rico to name a few in the last decade. Local government leaders must find new ways to strategize and to be proactive by having the necessary resources and operations in place to respond. However, the problem is that FEMA laws, policies and administrative rules and procedures are archaic and bureaucratic and limit the involvement of the local and state government to be part of the decision-making process and to speak on behalf of their residents.

With the lack of funding and support from FEMA, billions of dollars are spent and still the remnants remain from these disasters. Communities, and cities for that matter, never really recover because of the delayed response and lack of coordination of the state and local governments.

Sandy and Its Impacts

By any measure, Sandy was an unprecedented event for New York City. Never in its recorded history had the City experienced a storm of this magnitude. Never had a storm caused so much damage and also affected so many lives. Below is a snapshot of the data and the impact as a result of the storm.

One challenge that we faced in New York was the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Renewal (HUD) and operated by the Mayor’s Office adhering to the administrative and regulatory rules and regulations set by the Federal Government. New York City (NYC) has the largest public housing system in the country with 400,000 residents and over 178,000 apartments. When Sandy hit, thousands of NYCHA buildings were flooded, suffered severe damage, and boiler systems were destroyed, which meant that many of the residents were partially displaced and or did not have running water or hot water.

It is required in New York that homeowners have certain insurance protections to protect their property particularly if there is an outstanding mortgage. However, these policies usually do not cover flood insurance. Most large commercial properties obtain insurance, including flood insurance through the private market. Homeowners and small business owners seeking flood coverage generally purchase policies through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) which is administered by FEMA. When Sandy struck, most New York City property owners affected by the storm did not have adequate flood insurance - or any flood insurance at all, primarily because New York is not considered a state that with the potential for these types of hurricanes and floods unless the property in question is in a flood zone. It must be understood that half of the homeowners and business owners affected by Sandy were outside of the 100-year floodplain.

The storm shut down oil refineries for several weeks, stopped marine and pipeline transport of petroleum for three to four days and damaged storage terminals. While workers tried to make the necessary repairs, the system received no new supply for days and for almost a month after that, gas supply was limited. Once drivers were able to return to roads, only 20% of gas stations were able to sell fuel at any given time. The storm took a toll on our healthcare system, disrupted services, and affected communities across the five boroughs. Six hospitals closed, four in Manhattan, one in Brooklyn, and one in Staten Island, requiring the coordination of relocating hundreds of patients. Those that remained open credit heroic actions by their employees. Hospital staff pumped out water and siphoned gasoline from vehicles to run the generators.

As one would expect, many highways, roads, railroads and airports flooded. At the same time, all six East River subway tunnels connecting Brooklyn and Manhattan were knocked out of service. Service was also disrupted on the Staten Island Ferry. All in all, Sandy stranded some...
80,000 normal commuters, while the loss of the subway stranded another 5.4 million normal weekday riders.

Although major bridges reopened as soon as winds dissipated, over 500 miles of roads suffered significant damages and the subway system remained out of service in the days after the storm, even as crews worked around the clock. It is certain that even with minor storms, one can expect some loss of utility services. However, when Sandy hit, the devastation was much greater than expected. Close to two million people lost power at some point during the storm. At the same time, our telecommunication infrastructure suffered badly. Sandy caused outages across phone, wireless, cable and internet services. Wireless service was also affected when backup batteries powering cell sites ran down four to eight hours after the grid power was lost, resulting in the loss of cell phone service for over one million customers.

To further illustrate, based on the figures below detailing damage to New York City alone, consider the impacts that City officials had to deal with when Superstorm Sandy hit New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and the surrounding region:

- 53 Deaths
- 6,500 Patients evacuated
- 90,000 Buildings inundated with water
- $19 Billion in damages
- $8.6 Billion in direct private loss
- 25,000 Businesses inundated
- 250,000 Vehicles destroyed
- Thousands of homes partially destroyed or significantly damaged
- 100 Homes destroyed by fire
- 960,000 Residents lost power
- The Stock Market was closed
- Thousands of students were not able to attend school for several days.
- Thousands of residents that lived in the impacted areas had limited access to food for a couple of days (NYC-SIRR 2013).

Therefore, the Local Municipality (Mayor’s Office) and the Office of Emergency Management Commissioner initiated the coordination of the response and recovery process knowing that it would take days before concrete intervention by FEMA.

**Methodology**

Given that many cities and municipalities have experienced major hurricane disasters within the last decade, this research paper uses a case study approach to look at and examine the challenges that other governmental leaders and policy makers faced in their respective cities in dealing with FEMA and what solutions worked best.

**Local and state government frustration with FEMA**

“Where’s FEMA?” some evacuees have asked. Houston mayor Bill White complained to the Associated Press that FEMA wasn’t bringing ice, water and meals fast enough and that he had to turn to the county administrator to take over the coordination of efforts to hand out supplies to citizens affected after the Hurricane Ike hit the city in 2008. Thousands of evacuees were hungry and thirsty and most of them could not get through to the FEMA Hotline to register for help or were directed to register online in spite of the fact that they did not have electricity (AP 2008).

Nearly two months after Hurricane Harvey made landfall in Texas and six weeks after Hurricane Irma hit Florida in 2017, residents were still fuming after FEMA denied many residents reimbursement and many others were still waiting for payment. One of the major challenges for the agency was getting homes inspected to verify the damage in order to approve a homeowner for thousands of dollars in aid (Fernandez et al. 2017).
In an article by NBC Latino News entitled “Still waiting for power: Six months after Hurricane Maria, frustrated Puerto Ricans rally in D.C.,” around 250 people gathered in front of FEMA headquarters to rally for help given the crisis they are facing. Elected officials in Puerto Rico have contacted their Congress member to advocate for better coordination with FEMA and the local government (Gamboa and Acevedo 2018).

Federal and State comprehensive, strategic plans are desperately needed to coordinate services for Hurricane Maria evacuees from Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Orange County, Florida Mayor Teresa Jacobs expressed her frustration with FEMA’s bureaucracy and the limited response to her inquiries to the Florida Department of Emergency Management regarding FEMA assistance for hotel vouchers. Disaster funds for sheltering is a local initiative and thus won’t be covered by FEMA (Powers 2017).

Again, the mayor is on the local level and is responsible for coordination with the state government as well in our trio system. She is the first line of defense and the residents impacted by the disaster won’t understand or want to hear excuses about what FEMA will cover or not. In their state of desperation, they are looking towards the local elected officials such as the the mayor to help.

Hurricane Matthew clearly brought a lot of destruction to Florida and the Caribbean in 2016. Local elected officials convened a meeting with U.S. Senator Bill Nelson to share their frustration with FEMA and to push him to advocate on their behalf for reimbursement of tens of millions of dollars owed to local governments for cleanup and response. In order for local government to receive any kind of reimbursement, they were required to hire FEMA-approved contractors. Florida county governments incurred expenses of more than 22.6 million dollars but were only reimbursed about 17 million dollars by FEMA. Some cities burned through their emergency reserves and thus were left with their hands open for FEMA to assist (Pulver 2017).

In addition, many leaders on the executive county level criticize the system and point out that FEMA rules are often inconsistent and not clear on the process.

In 2013, a tornado hit the town of Guilford in Washington County, Illinois devastating the community and the surrounding area. The state coordinated with the town in preparing the required applications to submit to FEMA but a few weeks later, FEMA notified that state that its request for public assistance was denied. According to the state, the cost to local governments totaled more than $6.1 million, but that amount fell short of the federal threshold for Illinois of $17.8 million. The threshold is based on the state’s population multiplied by $1.35. State officials said that the federal formula hurts the chances of aid for geographically large states with large urban centers like Illinois.

States have thirty days to file an appeal with FEMA. However, in the interim while that appeal was being reviewed, local and county governments were forced to use reserves, take out loans or apply for other federal relief efforts to sustain the county.

To further illustrate my point, in 2018 Governor Rick Snyder of Michigan, applied to FEMA for individual assistance as result of heavy rainfall and flooding that occurred in several counties in his state. His application was denied because FEMA determined that the impacts from the severe storms and flooding at the local and state level were not beyond the combined capabilities of the state and local government. Thus, the Governor had to then seek a physical and economic declaration from the U.S Small Business Administration (SBA) (Snyder 2018).

An article published in USA Today entitled “FEMA rules can deny help to poor hurricane victims who need it most,” explains that for homeowners who cannot afford insurance to cover hurricane damage, FEMA may be their only source of aid. However, FEMA regulations trample local laws and practices to the detriment of the poorest families. Rather than help, FEMA’s Individual and Houses program blows victims into a no-man’s land full of bureaucratic doublespeak, but devoid of actual aid (Abt 2018).

The aforementioned references are a synopsis of the larger case studies developed from the myriad of local and state government leaders who have constantly complained that the rules set
forth by FEMA and the Disaster Act leave Mayors and Governors frustrated and excluded from the
decision-making process.

When elected leaders such as Governors and Mayors are not engaged to the fullest and have to
rely solely on the national government, politically it makes them powerless as their constituents and
residents look towards them to lead and restore order and normalcy.

**The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is an agency of the United States Department of
Homeland Security, initially created by Presidential Reorganization Plan No. 3 of 1978 and
implemented by two Executive Orders on April 1, 1979 (FEMA 1979).

Its primary purpose is to coordinate the response to a disaster that overwhelms the resources
of local and state authorities. The governor in which the disaster has occurred must declare a state of
emergency and formally request from the president that FEMA and the federal government
responds to the disaster. The only exception to the gubernatorial declaration requirements occurs
when an emergency or disaster takes place on federal property or to a federal asset.

FEMA has an annual budget of 14 billion dollars and is broken up into 10 national regions.
The Head of the agency reports to the Secretary of Homeland Security.

**The Stafford Act**

The Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Act (FEMA 1988) is a United States
Federal Law designed to bring an orderly and systemic means of federal natural disaster assistance
for state and local governments in carrying out their responsibilities to aid citizens. Congress’
intention was to encourage states and localities to develop comprehensive disaster preparedness
plans, prepare for better intergovernmental coordination in the face of a disaster, encourage the use
of insurance, and provide federal assistance programs for losses due to a disaster.

The Stafford Act created a system where a presidential disaster declaration or an emergency
declaration triggers financial and physical assistance through the Federal Emergency Management
Agency, FEMA. The act then gives FEMA the responsibility for coordinating government-wide relief
efforts.

**State Relations**

The Governor is the Chief Executive Officer of the State and has the full authority of the state
executive branch of the state government. As discussed above, in reference to the FEMA statute and
guidelines, the Governor of the State in which a disaster has occurred must follow rules and
regulations and declare that in fact such a disaster has occurred in order for FEMA to begin the
intervention on behalf of the Federal government.

After the emergency declaration is made, the Governor must take the appropriate actions
under State law and proceed with the State’s emergency execution plan. Each state has an
emergency management plan in case such disasters should occur. A State’s plan should include an
estimated budget of the damages as well as resources that the Local and Municipal government have
used, all important factors in the review process before the President decides on what type of
commitment the Federal government will make (FEMA Declaration, amended 2018).

If the criteria and standards are met, the President may declare a major disaster or emergency
thus activating an array of Federal programs to assist the response and recovery effort. However, it
is determined by the assessment made during the declaration what resources will be granted to the
State. Some declarations will provide only physical assistance and some financial, or both. This
aspect of the political bureaucracy is critical because residents and business owners tend to believe
that in such crisis, our national government will be there to support, cover, and reimburse the State
for loss of damages and infrastructure rebuilding but again a lot depends on what and how
information is declared during declaration process.
Governor’s Office of Storm Recovery (GOSR)

In June of 2013, following the occurrence of Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee and most recently Superstorm Sandy, New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo established the Office of Storm Recovery. The aim of the GOSR is to address communities’ most urgent needs, while also encouraging the identification of innovative and enduring solutions to strengthen the State’s infrastructure and critical system.

The Office concentrates on four main areas: Housing Recovery, Small Business, Community Reconstruction, and Infrastructure. GOSR utilizes approximately $4.4 billion in flexible funding made available by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Renewal (HUD) Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR). This grant, paired with additional federal funding, assists homeowners and small business owners affected by disasters (Bova-Hiatt 2016).

Role of the Local Municipality – NYC Office of the Mayor

Similarly, to the structure in the State, there are rules, policies, and procedures that local governments must follow in working with the State and Federal Government in the coordination of response and recovery efforts. Cities and municipalities operate under a charter granted by the State, that grants authority and jurisdiction for cities to create and manage administrative agencies to carry out their daily functions within the terms and conditions in the Charter.

Given the geopolitical structure of New York City, it is usually the local government or municipality that is first to respond and to notify the state of the disaster.

In New York City, the Mayor has designated the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) as the lead agency working along with the Fire Department (FDNY) and the Police Department (NYPD) to respond to disasters. OEM is responsible for coordinating citywide emergency planning and response for all types and scales of emergency. It is staffed by more than 200 dedicated professionals with diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise, including individuals assigned from other agencies. The agency helps plan for emergencies through preparedness, education, and response. OEM has a system in place called City Incident Management System (CIMS) which I will discuss later.

Fig. 1: Natural Disaster Spending on Response and Recovery is Highly Intertwined (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2018)
Overview of New York City

Small businesses strengthen New York City’s economy, anchor communities, create jobs and add to the vibrancy of City neighborhoods. Of the more than 200,000 businesses registered with the City, they provide an array of services from ethnic shops, restaurants, bodegas, car services, to grocery stores to high-tech start-ups.

The City, like no other city, runs and stays open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our transportation system operates 24-hours a day, our nightlife and entertainment also operate on that schedule which means taxi and limousine, and fast food industries are also opened to accommodate the demand. That said, one can only imagine the economic loss to the City if operations are shut down for even a day due to a natural disaster, not including the time factor to rebuild.

The local government labor force is comprised an approximately 300,000 employees. Of that number, the NYPD uniformed officers number at 35,000, the FDNY-uniformed officers totals 12,000, teachers K-12 total 88,000. New York City also has the largest public-school system in the country with a population of 1.1 million students, in addition to The City University of New York (CUNY). At over 200,000 students, CUNY is the the nation’s second largest, with California being the largest. And when we factor in housing, our public housing system (NYCHA) has a population of 400,000 residents, which is the size of the city of Boston, Mass. The City also hosts the world financial center, Wall Street, Broadway, and seven world renowned sports franchises to name just a few industries and tourist attractions.
Impact on the Economy and Small Businesses

When the storm hit, right after the response and recovery process began with the first responders, the Mayor and his Commissioner of Small Business launched a series of initiatives including an Executive Order waiving fees for businesses rebuilding after suffering damage due to the Hurricane for those businesses in the designated Hurricane Zones. In addition, the Restoration Business Acceleration Teams assisted business owners by coordinating services, permitting, inspections needed to reopen as soon as possible and assigning client managers to serve as a single point-of-contact for impacted business. In addition, to help speed recovery and re-opening of their doors, $10 million of emergency financial assistance was made available.

Despite both federal, state and local grants provided, the average time businesses took to reopen was approximately four months while thousands of others did not re-open. According to the U.S. Census, these businesses were most likely to close after such disaster. In addition, they account for 50% of employment as a part of the American fabric of encouraging entrepreneurship.

In the age of climate change and unpredictable weather, small businesses and startup companies do not possess the resources or the capacity to purchase the required flood insurance, neither are they equipped for storms, floods and hurricanes. Here is where the vision and the leadership of local government leaders should invest in creating subsidies, grants, and loans available to entice small businesses and start-ups who may be reluctant to rent space or purchase office retail space in geographical locations that may be vulnerable to storms and other disasters (Collier, 2016). According to data by the NYS Labor Department there was a substantial increase in unemployment claims from small to medium size firms after Super Storm Sandy devastated the area. With these businesses employing between 1-4 workers and with 25,000 businesses reporting loss of income, that number could easily affect 100,000 workers and impact the consumers unable to purchase goods and or receive services.

Within the last two years, we witnessed Hurricane Harvey in Texas and Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico destroy business sectors and result in billions of dollars of losses to homeowners. Many small business homeowners had to rely on the federal government to assist them as well as the local government in re-establishing their businesses that were lost as a result of the hurricane. As a result, today all new enterprise focuses on the issue of climate change. Current businesses must plan accordingly, adapt to the risk factors and rely more frequently on weather forecast to help inform business decision. According to the Red Cross, major disasters such as earthquake, hurricanes and floods are so damaging for small businesses that 40% of those that are impacted shut down.

Local Government System and Coordination

The City of New York utilizes the City Incident Management System. Adopted in 2004 and mandated by executive order one year later, the Citywide Incident Management System (CIMS) establishes roles and responsibilities and designates authority for City, State, other government entities, and nonprofit and private sector organizations performing and supporting emergency response. The CIMS Protocol is New York City's implementation of the National Incident Management System (NIMS). NIMS compliance is a requirement for future federal domestic preparedness funding for local governments. While CIMS has been developed to address New York City's unique incident management requirements, its full compliance with NIMS ensures compatibility with incident command systems in use in other states and federal agencies. CIMS is designed to be scalable and facilitates the involvement of additional organizations such as private sector and nonprofit entities.

CIMS primary component is listed below and demonstrates that the local government has a sophisticated management system in handling all type of disasters and therefore, is more than equipped and ready with the tools, systems, and coordination with the first responders to address such incidents.
Fig. 2: CIMS ICS Core Competencies (NYCEM, 2004)

**Core Competencies** are functional areas of expertise that relate specifically to tactical operations managed by the Operations Section. Agencies have the authority to direct operations related to their Core Competencies at incidents. If more than one agency is capable of performing the same tactical operations, the agency with the Core Competency will give tactical direction, by the ranking officer, to other agencies performing operations within that competency.

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<th>AGENCY</th>
<th>CORE COMPETENCIES</th>
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<td>FDNY</td>
<td>- Fire Suppression</td>
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<td>- Pre-hospital Emergency Medical Care</td>
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<td>- Search and Rescue</td>
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<td>- Structural Evacuation</td>
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<td>- CBRN / Haz-Mat Life Safety and Mass Decontamination</td>
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<td>- Arson Investigation (Cause and Origin)</td>
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<td>NYPD</td>
<td>- Law Enforcement and Investigation</td>
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<td>- Intelligence Collection and Analysis</td>
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<td>- Crime Scene Processing / Evidence Preservation</td>
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<td>- Site Management</td>
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<td>- Perimeter Control</td>
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<td>- Traffic Control</td>
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<td>- Crowd Control</td>
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<td>- Site Security and Force Protection</td>
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<td>- Evacuation (Area and/or Law Enforcement related)</td>
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<td>- Water Search and Rescue</td>
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<td>- CBRN / Haz-Mat Assessment and Investigation (Crime Scene / Terrorism)</td>
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<td>- Accident Investigation</td>
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<td>- VIP Protection</td>
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<td>- Arson Investigation (Major Case)</td>
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<td>DOB</td>
<td>- Damage Assessment (Structural)</td>
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<td>- Building Re-occupancy (Structural)</td>
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<td>DGAS</td>
<td>- Public Buildings: Infrastructure Assessment, Repair and Reconstruction</td>
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<td>DDC</td>
<td>- Technical Debris Management Operations</td>
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<td>- Technical Stabilization, Remediation and Demolition</td>
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<td>- Public Buildings, Roadways, Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Assessment, Repair and Reconstruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEP</td>
<td>- Environmental Monitoring, Sampling, Evaluation and Analysis</td>
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<td>- Environmental Mitigation (Chemical)</td>
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<td>- Environmental Law Enforcement</td>
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<td>- Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Assessment, Repair and Reconstruction</td>
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<td>HPD</td>
<td>- Stabilization, Remediation and Demolition</td>
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<td>- Tenant Relocation</td>
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<td>DOITT</td>
<td>- Telecommunications: Infrastructure Assessment, Repair and Reconstruction</td>
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<td>OCME</td>
<td>- Fatality Management Operations</td>
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<td>NYCEM</td>
<td>- Interagency Coordination and Support</td>
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<td>- Parks: Infrastructure Assessment, Repair and Reconstruction</td>
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<td>DSNY</td>
<td>- Debris Management Operations (Non-Toxic and Non-Hazardous Debris)</td>
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<td>- Snow Removal Operations</td>
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<td>DOT</td>
<td>- Bridges and Roadways: Infrastructure Assessment, Repair and Reconstruction</td>
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<td>- Staten Island Ferry Operations</td>
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<td>ConEd</td>
<td>- Electric, Gas and Steam: Infrastructure Assessment, Repair and Reconstruction</td>
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<td>National Grid</td>
<td>- Electric and Gas: Infrastructure Assessment, Repair and Reconstruction</td>
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<td>Verizon</td>
<td>- Telecommunications: Infrastructure Assessment, Repair and Reconstruction</td>
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The Sandy Timeline below presents a clear look at the interactions that occurred while the Local and State Government were monitoring the storm and the coordinated and not-so-coordinated actions that took place while the Local government followed rules and regulations set forth by FEMA. You will also observe the lapse in some of the response times when the federal government could have intervened sooner (Boyle 2013).
Both Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Cuomo used reserve budgets to pay for overtime, equipment, supplies, and to jumpstart many initiatives such as “Build it Back NYC” which provided impacted homeowners with basic heat, hot water and electricity during the first couple of weeks after the storm. While the Local administration embarked on such programs, many homeowners simultaneously were standing in lines and meeting with FEMA representatives to submit their claims (Giles, 2018).

**Reports and Assessments of FEMA’s Performance**

In June of 2013, Bloomberg issued a comprehensive report and analysis of the impact of the storm and all steps taken to address the health, safety and welfare of the residents of the City. The report discussed what occurred, what was done to rectify the damage, what could be done better and more importantly, what we need to do in advance of another Superstorm (NYC-SIRR 2013).

FEMA coordinated a large-scale mobilization of Federal teams, supplies, and other assets, both before and immediately after the storm’s landfall. The President emphasized that the full resources of the Federal Government were available to support response and recovery operations and directed federal departments and agencies to cut red tape to speed assistance to survivors. However, the magnitude of the disaster revealed several areas needing improvement related to integrating and coordinating emergency support functions and refining the mission. Addressing these areas will ensure that FEMA and partners efficiently deliver Federal support (FEMA AAR 2013).
In July of 2015, the General Accounting Office (GAO) of the Government reported that states and localities affected by Hurricane Sandy were able to effectively leverage federal programs to enhance resiliency during their recovery. However, States experienced continued challenges in implementing certain FEMA recovery programs, such as Public Assistance (FEMA PA 2016). The GAO, also found that there were no comprehensive, strategic approaches to identifying, prioritizing, and implementing investments for disaster resiliency.

“Local government and community leaders are the frontlines of disaster recovery, and it is the job of the Federal Government to have their back by supporting their efforts, providing guidance when necessary, and delivering resources to help. To be successful, everyone needs to be involved. We must use all the great ideas coming from academic institutions, businesses and community leaders including the talent and perspective from vulnerable communities,” said Shaun Donovan, Housing and Urban Development Secretary in his report (HUD 2013).

Despite the tremendous support from FEMA in handling these complex disasters, the agency still clearly could do better with the suggestions above in the respective government reports by involving community leaders and members of various sectors of the community.

**Business Leaders Call for a New Paradigm**

Since the debacle of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when FEMA mishandled the response and recovery effort, as well as failed to provide adequate leadership, management structure and coordination in place, many business leaders at all levels have expressed strong dissatisfaction with the overall management of FEMA and have called on the national government to include leaders in the private sector in some form of decision-making process. In essence, they should have a seat at the table or at least a voice.

This approach in integrating the business module in the decision-making process has been looked at and written about quite magnificently the 2008 book entitled *Megacommunities: How leaders of Government Business and Non-profits can Tackle Today’s Global Challenges Together*. The authors, all from the corporate sector, have great experience in business and management and present an interesting concept of integrating civil society, government and the private sector to work together to address complex problems such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and other natural disasters (Gerencser et al. 2008).

The Megacommunity concept calls on all three sectors to interact according to their common interest, it does not call on them to compromise their unique priorities. And it does not call on them to eschew their responsibilities to whatever unique constituencies, stockholders, contributors or beneficiaries they serve.
It was right after Hurricane Andrew struck the Bahamas, Florida and Louisiana in 1992 that Florida State Governor Jeb Bush, realizing the challenges as the Governor of Florida and relying on FEMA, moved to a new approach incorporating public sector, corporate, nongovernmental and faith-based organizations in its emergency planning activities.

In an article published by Harvard Business Review right after Sandy entitled “Should Companies care if Hurricane Sandy was “Caused” By Climate Change?” the author argues that this type of disruption will only continue to grow, so the corporate sector cannot ignore it. Smart companies will begin to look closely at their supply chains and operation closely for risk associated with water shortage, floods, storms and resource constraints (Winston 2013).

Findings

It is clear from the aforementioned information from the various reports from government leaders and policymakers who have had to respond to natural disasters in their respective cities and counties that:

FEMA current rules and regulations including their reimbursement formula is not conducive to local governments;

FEMA does not have the bandwidth today with so many disasters to respond in a timely and effective and systematic way to local governments and their residents;

FEMA budget from the Executive should be increased;

The Disaster Relief Act and other rules set for by FEMA to request funding hampers the recovery and rebuilding efforts;

There is a need for a better coordination with the local and state governments; and,

There is a need to have input in the decision-making process prior and after with the private sector business leaders.

With FEMA acting as the chief principal agent in charge of disasters, it leaves very little for Local and State Government leaders who are the first to respond to the disaster. When such a disaster hits, residents and voters look to the Local and State elected officials for response. Frustrations and criticisms are directed to those government leaders that they know and can reach and not towards FEMA;

The business sector should be part of the decision-making process with the Federal, State and Local Government leaders.

Recommendation

According to authors Mark Landy and Jessica Goley (2017), establishing an Officer in Charge (OIC) will perform three essential tasks: (1) Work with officials from FEMA, the Coast Guard and other relevant federal agencies to coordinate the federal response effort and take the lead in resolving interagency disputes and conflicts with state and local emergency responders; (2) convene deliberations among the relevant federal, state, and local actors regarding recovery and planning; and, (3) determine whether or not to propose a national recovery plan to the President and, if a plan is called for, what that plan should contain. In the event, the OIC would be required to submit such plan to the President within six months of the OIC appointment.

Having an OIC in charge would have eliminated a lot of the bureaucracy and provided the local and state elected officials a partner in the process. Tip O’Neil, former speaker of the U.S. Congress once said, “All politics are local.” That said, whether it’s a federal matter or local matter, the voter votes on what affects them locally. The homeowner whose house is inundated wants help and not answers and is not interested in which level or branch of government has that authority to act, they just want results (Landy and Goley 2017).

Conclusion

Before the next national disaster hits, policy makers should convene a summit to review FEMA’s management policy and the Stafford Act to amend sections of the provisions that are too
bureaucratic, explore the OIC option, and establish and place the decision-making process with FEMA combined with the Mayor and Governor of the State.

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