

Dilemma of recovery in new orleans



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New Orleans often called " The most unique city in America" is one of the oldest cities in the United States, the largest city in Louisiana and one of the most popular tourist destinations in the US owing to its rich heritage in terms of architecture music, cuisine , festivals , celebrations and its annual Mardi Gras. Its unique and great heritage is a matter of pride not only to the citizens of United States but to the entire United States making it a great place to visit and live.

On August 29th 2005 this beautiful and unique city was affected by one of the most biggest natural disasters in the history of United States and is still recovering from the disaster that left some permanent , deep scars.

Hurricane Katrina struck the United States on August 26th 2005 in Florida as a category 1 Hurricane with 80mph winds and continued its disastrous journey touching Gulf Of Mexico , Mississippi and finally Louisiana.

By the time it reached New Orleans on August 29th 2005 it has evolved to a Category 4 storm with a speed of over 145 mph rapidly flooding the city and creating mass destruction and havoc even as relief operations were being initiated. By the time Katrina had wreaked its havoc and had subsided New Orleans was flooded like a bowl and many parts were under more than 15 feet of water. Major roads in and out of the city were damaged. Levee Failures left almost 80% of the city flooded.

More than 1700 fatalities were recorded as direct and indirect casualties of the floods and many were left homeless and destitute even as the world and the US watched helplessly unable to combat the fury of nature. Majestic New Orleans seemed to have fallen never to recover again. All these

catastrophies were immediately followed by relief operations and aid pouring in from not only the US but from all over the world. Current recovery process Funds were approved to the tune of 51. 8\$ Billion by the federal government. Federal Emergency Management Agency(FEMA) handed out cards worth 2000\$ to thousands of survivors.

Various countries from across the world such as Mexico , Middle East, Europe, Africa, Latin America were involved in sending relief in terms of money and supplies. Singapore sent planes to carry survivors to safety and Greece sent ships . Help also came from the United Nations. Evacuation of existing survivors mainly to Texas was also done as there were concerns that the water from floods was toxic causing harm . Many people in other states opened up their homes to survivors and help poured in in terms of cash and supplies. Now in the last 2 years these people are returning to New Orleans.

Population has now reached to around 300000 . Initial recovery efforts comprised of repairing breaks in levees which caused 80% of the city to be submerged in water. Later emergency workers started pumping 60, 000 gallons of water per second out of the city. Later \$7 Billion was approved for the Army Corps of Engineers to repair the city's flood protection system. Organisations such as Red Cross , Salvation Army, Food Not Bombs, Common Ground Collective, Habitat for Humanity , Catholic Charities were instrumental in providing immediate relief supplies and help to repair and restore houses and other constructions.

Repopulation of the city is also a major problem as the city is still in ruins and is disaster prone. Residents who evacuated prefer not to return. Various

programs were launched such as the “ Blue roof program” where the Army Corps of Engineers set up blue tarps over damaged roofs. FEMA trailers were distributed which served as temporary homes However there were several functional and other problems with these trailers that rendered many useless. There are various programs that are started called as Road Home to help New Orleans citizens rebuild their homes.

Agencies such as the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority (NORA), Orleans Parish Recovery Advisory Committee, Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) coordinated efforts to rebuild citizens homes and maintain redevelopment information . Homeowners were offered the option to either accept an aid of \$150, 000 or to sell their homes to the government. However it was seen that the program was short of \$5 Billion and many questioned the utilization and shortage of money. Water and sewage systems were made functional by 9 October 2006 and highway roads and other basic public utilities were also restored gradually. Entrustment to Edward J Blakely

On December 4th 2006, more than a year after tragedy had struck New Orleans , Mayor Nagin selected a new Recovery Chief or rather the new ‘ New Orleans Recovery Czar’ called Edward J. Blakely. Blakely is a UCR graduate and an Urban Affairs minister and he directed the recovery process in California after 2 natural disasters. After being introduced in his new role he was bombarded with questions regarding his recovery startegy for New Orleans and his replies clearly showed his no-nonsense approach at the start itself Blakely was elected to serve as the primary contact point for all regional , state and federal agencies for recovery .

He is also the mayor's appointed official on any recovery related issues.

Strategy for recovery and criteria for success In order to ensure that the recovery process is speedy and effective the recovery czar needs to consider the following factors while directing the recovery process and planning a strategy for it. Combined Effort It is essential to understand that recovery from a disaster on the scale of the one that occurred in New Orleans requires combined and consolidated effort and aid not only from state government and federal agencies but also from local officials and the general public to even initiate an effective recovery process.

For this it is essential for the Recovery chief to initiate programs that would educate the public of the scale of the disaster that occurred, what the general public can do to recuperate from the disaster and how they can contribute to the recovery operations rather than hinder it and immediate steps that need to be taken in case of similar disasters or emergencies and basic know-how on whom to contact and the order of escalation in case help is required.

Success in the recovery process includes effective education of the public which can be seen in terms of the number of awareness programs launched and public education drives. Although this might seem like a low priority task it is essential to create awareness and raise public spirit and motivation essential for recovery and to repopulate the city. The ultimate goal of bringing relief to citizens faster and in a more effective manner will at least be partially served by better communication with the public and more clarity and transparency in the government.

However like any major task this faces a number of challenges mainly due to the number of people who have to be educated and their various locations as most of New Orleans has relocated to other states. Also this has not been currently identified as a priority task by the Recovery Chief and failure in this quarter is to be expected. Repopulation of New Orleans is perhaps one of the most important possible outcomes and measures of the success of the recovery process and this will probably be affected adversely as the public will lack awareness due to lack of public awareness drives.

Co-ordination across government agencies An effective communication and co-ordination process must be established across federal, state and local government agencies. In order to ensure recovery is fast and effective it is essential that the Recovery Chief harnesses help from various government and non government agencies in a coordinated and in the best way possible. Various organisations such as the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority (NORA), Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO), FEMA, Office of Recovery management and other federal resources have to be coordinated and in some cases monitored.

It is essential for the Recovery Chief to ensure that their manner of communication, process of work, escalation is carefully defined to ensure that work takes place effectively and rapidly. This has already been identified by the Recovery Chief as one of the key factors contributing to the success of the recovery process and we see him succeeding in this quarter as processes are either in place or are being worked out as a high priority task. Effective laws

The Recovery Chief should ensure that laws intended for recovery and to help citizen after the major disaster serve their purpose well and do not hinder the recovery process. Eg The Stafford Act which needed to be amended in order to meet the needs of the situation after the major disaster . It is essential for the Recovery Chief to ensure that the required government agencies examine the act and whether it is adequate and amend it and also that various organisations like FEMA interpret them correctly and consistently in order to ensure that the recovery process is smooth .

The Recovery Chief has identified that certain laws are inadequate or are being interpreted or framed improperly in the current scenario. This is the first step towards the success of these laws in helping the recovery process. However changing existing laws will take up time as they need to be examined thoroughly by government agencies before amendment in the best possible way and then need to be put into effect and this might hinder the recovery process led by the Recovery Chief.

A certain amount of flexibility and forethought is required to combat failures if any in terms of laws. Public safety and confidence a priority It is essential for the Recovery Chief to take into account breaches in design of levees and other flood protection systems. New Orleans is susceptible to floods due to natural disasters similar to Katrina hence it is essential to ensure that proper investments are made in the direction of proper design of levees and other flood protection systems to gain public confidence and to ensure that disasters of the same nature do not occur again.

For this it is essential to give proper authority and funds to organisations involved in rebuilding them such as the Corps of Engineers. Public confidence is essential to ensure that those who evacuated from the city on account of the disaster return to the city and help rebuild it. Also it is essential for the Recovery Chief to highly prioritize the maintenance of law and order in the city which broke down post disaster. All these are essential steps in the direction of recovery however many of them require time to be realized as the magnitude of the disaster is huge

Rebuilding New Orleans the best way It is essential that New Orleans be rebuilt in the best way possible by taking into consideration future challenges, disasters and scenarios . It is essential that areas in the city which need to recuperate and recover first be identified and be harnessed as resources for the recovery of the rest of the city. Important utilities such as roads , water , sewages and communication systems have to be restored completely to gain the confidence of citizen who wish to return to New Orleans again. Schemes for the financial recovery of the city should also be developed.

It is essential to prioritize on the areas that would need to or can recuperate immediately. Funds that are available through the federal government and other agencies should be utilized through proper planning and strategy to ensure maximum utilization. The main criteria for success of the recovery process is the repopulation of New Orleans. Citizens who return will bear testimony to the fact that the recovery process succeeded. However it is impossible to expect complete success mainly due to the magnitude of the disaster from which New Orleans has to recover.

Also there are various areas such as public awareness, effective laws and so on that need more attention and hence will face lapses. The Recovery Chief needs to examine previous measures such as providing trailers as temporary homes , and levees that do not guarantee safety despite huge funds being pumped into them to understand why they failed and to learn from them. New Orleans is on the road to recovery although a lot still needs to be done and the new Recovery Chief seems competent enough to make this journey easier though not completely successful.