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“Building Capacity for Disaster Resiliency in Six Disadvantaged Communities.”

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Disaster plans rarely benefit knowledge and values from disadvantaged people who are often not represented enough in disaster planning processes. Because of this, the plans are mostly different with regard to the conditions, concerns, and capabilities of disadvantaged people. The Hurricane Katrina case is an example of this and points out many other cases where disaster plans don't properly consider disadvantaged communities which leads to inequality. Public involvement is necessary to improving community resiliency, but the problem of general lack of interest in disaster preparedness and reduction makes participatory initiatives harder to create.

Findings

The study presents an approach to community-based participatory planning aimed at involving marginalized and distrustful communities to help them be more disaster resilient. The study looks at the experiences of six disadvantaged communities under the Emergency Preparedness Demonstration (EPD) project. The EPD experience revealed the need to use strategies aimed at building a network, made up of diverse supporters that represent different kinds of people, early in the planning process. Successful recruitment needed both personal contacts that were assisted by trust and one-on-one relationships and recruitment strategies be able to adapt to fit the local situation. The study finds that the imbalances between disadvantaged people and the general population are deeply set and can't be undone with a single participatory initiative.

Implications

To remain necessary and capable of meeting needs, a plan and the involvement has to be examined again and again. The most impressive feature of building disaster resiliency is in looking at who defines vulnerability problems and who generates analyses, represents, owns, and acts on the information wanted. Asking the 'who' question lets planners look more closely at what it means to be able to involve people. EPD's experiences in strengthening resilience capacity highlights an approach that focuses on flexible recruitment early-on, accepting experts and local people as equal partners in co-developing information, the role of coaches as relational organizers, and responsibility that strengthen networks to maintain progress.