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The Evaluation of Community Participation in Post-Disaster Housing Reconstruction Projects in Malaysia

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Abstract

This research focused on post-disaster planning with a particular reference to housing. The question is on what stakeholders must learn from the ineffective implementation of existing policies and approaches. Why this issue is never acted upon? However, policy implementation tends to forget the importance of accounting for community input, especially considering that the people affected will be the end users of the product of government services and the agencies involved. This research was divided into three phases. The first phase was the Literature Review Phase during which secondary sources were compiled, reviewed, comprehended, analyzed and finally synthesized to form a reference construct. Based on this related information, a theoretical framework for this study was developed along with a questionnaire form used for the research data collection. Afterward, the second phase was the quantitative interview phase and in the last phase is the data analysis phase. This research provides a thorough analysis of the views and perceptions of the focus group at Kuala Muda and Tanjong Tokong Tsunami Victims. The outcome of this research reveals the importance of ensuring that policy makers are responsive and have a grasp on current research findings, in particular on the subject of the status of policy implementation. The research outcomes can be used to develop strategies and actions that include raising awareness and building capacity for enhancing the enforcement of current legislation.

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1. Introduction

This study took great care in measuring the main outcome measure, the current state of the involvement of disaster victims in reconstruction projects. Housing reconstruction after a disaster is a crucial issue because of physical, social, psychological and environmental effects [1]. An improved strategy is crucial for accelerating the reconstruction process for upgrading the conditions of human settlements. Community participation is a key term for understanding the social needs of communities [2]. Community participation is viewed by some as a way for stakeholders to influence development by contributing to project design, influencing public choices, and holding public institutions accountable for the goods and services they provide [3]. Some view participation as the direct engagement of affected populations in the project cycle—assessment, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation—in a variety of forms. Still others consider participation to be an operating philosophy that places affected populations at the heart of humanitarian and development activities as social actors with insights, competencies, energy, and ideas of their own [4].

Thus, the aim of the study is to find more satisfactory solutions for victims by evaluating the housing reconstruction projects of their own or authorities from the social point of view. This is an exploratory research for gaining an in-depth understanding of the issues related to building regulations: ability to comply with regulations and compare their willingness to support these regulations; benefits of community and agency engagement; and community participation. This study embarks on the following objectives as follows:

- To investigate the level of community participation in housing reconstruction after disasters;
- To investigate community understanding of building regulations;
- To determine the readiness of community participation in terms of knowledge, resources and other influences that might affect decision making; and
- To offer recommendations on the key strategies of community participation.

2. Background

From 1968 to 2004, Malaysia experienced 39 disasters. The 2004 tsunami was the worst [5]. Forty-nine percent of these disasters were attributed to natural disasters. Heavy rain (primary disaster) causing floods and landslides (secondary disaster) dominated most of those natural disasters [6]. Poorly controlled land use, the design of buildings, the maintenance of equipment and machinery and the attitudes of personnel in regulatory compliance inevitably add to the potential for disasters (secondary disaster) [7]. Moreover, failures in regulation and compliance were identified as the key causes of vulnerability and disaster in Malaysia. Organizational error and regulatory failures were the main types of hidden error that contributed significantly to the disasters with 53.6 and 37 percent, respectively [8]. Unfortunately, according to local experience in Malaysia suggested by recent academic efforts, no work has been conducted to understand community participation in housing reconstruction programs after disasters.

Reconstruction begins at the community level. A good reconstruction strategy engages communities and helps people work together to rebuild their housing, lives, and livelihoods. A very strong commitment and leadership from the top are needed to implement a bottom-up approach because pressure is strong in an emergency to provide rapid, top-down, and autocratic solutions. Engagement of the community may bring out different preferences and expectations; thus, the agencies involved in reconstruction must be open to altering their preconceived vision of the reconstruction process. Numerous methods exist for community participation, but they need to be adapted to the context; nearly all require facilitation and other forms of support.

Presently, the shelter needs in Malaysia after disasters cause different habitation modes, which can be summarized by these alternatives [9]:

- Moving to public shelters;
- Moving to shelters of friends and relatives;
- Moving to a second undamaged house or renting a house; and
- Organizing camps or tent shelters beside the damaged buildings.

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