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THE CHALLENGES FOR
UNCONVENTIONAL RESPONSE AGENCIES
IN SERVING HAITIAN
EARTHQUAKE SURVIVORS:
THE NEEDS IN ICS TRAINING AND PRACTICES

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The Challenges for Unconventional Response Agencies in Serving Haitian Earthquake Survivors: The Needs in ICS Training and Practices

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Abstract - The Haiti earthquake of January 12th, 2010 provided a unique opportunity to further our knowledge concerning “mass invacuation” planning processes. No systematic research assessment has been undertaken to look at how host communities manage the process of receiving evacuees, providing immediate mass care, and resettling displaced individuals. This research focuses on the initial phase of the evacuation/invacuation process of the 2010 Haiti Earthquake, from the day after the earthquake (January 13, 2010) through April 2011. The data has been collected as part of an NSF-RAPID grant, a collaborative proposal between the University of Delaware and the University of North Texas, organizations are the units of analysis, and we have used qualitative interview techniques as our data collection method. Reviewing our data has highlighted the challenges faced by public sector emergency managers as they interacted with and attempted to integrate unconventional emergency response organizations into the Incident Command System. Lindell and Perry (2007) state that in order for planning and preparedness for emergencies to be effective, stakeholders at every level need to be included. Further findings may suggest how alternative emergency response organizations can plan and train for mass evacuation events or how conventional emergency responders can integrate them within the ICS modular structure. Thus, organizations that seldom play a role in disaster events may be better integrated into disaster response functions when necessary. Overall, disasters are likely to occur more often in the future, leading to more mass evacuations and increasingly complex responsibilities for organizations that, in the past, may not have played a role (Quarentelli 1990). In order to meet the needs of future invacuees/evacuees, public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders need to find new solutions towards collaboration and training while simultaneously meeting current NIMS and ICS requirements.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade or so, the United States emergency management community has developed a relatively successful planning and operational capability for moving large numbers of residents out of harm's way from hurricanes and large flooding events. The evacuation period is expected to last only hours to days, with the vast majority of evacuees being able to return to their homes and communities and resume their lives, even if there is some continuing disruption to infrastructural, governmental, and/or social systems (Quarantelli 1995; Sorensen & Sorensen 2006). The catastrophic consequences of Hurricane Katrina and the 2010 Haiti Earthquake has resulted in hundreds of thousands of people becoming long term evacuees – leaving the emergency management community, community organizations, and the political systems it supports with no appropriate plans, legal instruments, policy tools, or pre-considered options available to deal with the magnitude of these events. Improvisation for service provision has been required by federal, state, and local governments, by NGOs, and by social networks to accommodate the housing, medical, financial, and emotional needs of these victims, not for days or weeks, but for months and years.

The Haiti Earthquake of January 12, 2010 provided us the unique opportunity to further our knowledge concerning the “invacuation” process. According to US State Department estimates, at least 45,000 US citizens were living in Haiti at the time of the earthquake. US search-and-rescue efforts were made to airlift many of these citizens (and their non-US citizen family members) to the US as quickly as possible. The first planeloads of citizens to be repatriated to the US landed in Miami within a day or two after the earthquake. Similarly, Haitians (and other non-US citizens in Haiti) with major critical injuries were airlifted to the US beginning at this same time. According to media accounts, within three days after the earthquake, Governor Crist ordered the Florida Division of Emergency Management to prepare to accept refugees (the legal status of these victims was not specified at the time) from Haiti, implementing similar plans to those they had improvised to accept and settle evacuees from the Gulf Coast and New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Crist anticipated that the majority of refugees from Haiti would come to and remain in Florida, which has the largest Haitian population in the US. The Red Cross also estimated that between 100,000-200,000 Haitians—including Haitian-Americans and Haitian nationals (both legal and illegal immigrants)—would be in the US, many who would need immediate as well as long-term assistance. Given the desperate conditions in Haiti, DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano declared Haitians eligible to apply for a temporary protected immigration status (TPS) on January 15, 2010, allowing eligible Haitians in the US at the time of the earthquake (regardless of the legality of their status) and those who came to the US following the earthquake to remain in the United States for up to 18 months. These estimates and actions give a very clear picture of the magnitude of the invacuation of Haitian refugees and of the types of medical, legal, social service, and psychological and spiritual support this population would later require.

For the purpose of this paper, we have refined our focus to attempt to understand the magnitude and types of planning and training needed, when a substantial percentage of the affected population has to be relocated in order to meet the immediate needs of shelter, medical care, and when individuals cannot return to their homes/communities for a lengthy period of time. In addition, and specifically for

this paper, we have attempted to identify what challenges these needs raised for unconventional response organizations (what Lutz and Lindell call “emergency relevant” organizations), working outside of their traditional frameworks, in dealing with the reception of Haitian evacuees and classic emergency response agencies (what Lutz and Lindell call “emergency mission” organizations), who rely heavily on the National Response Framework’s directive to use the Incident Command System (ICS) in disaster response operations (Lutz and Lindell 2008).

Lindell and Perry (2007) state that in order for planning and preparedness for emergencies to be effective, stakeholders at every level need to be included. While not attempting to be revolutionary, our research highlights the challenges faced by public sector first responders as they have interacted with unconventional response organizations, the former being familiar with the Incident Command System and having received regular NIMS training and the latter not having sufficient training or being unfamiliar with ICS’s modular format. This paper attempts to highlight the main barriers to successful coordination and to identify what can be done to improve inter-organizational cooperation amongst unconventional emergency response organizations (i.e. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement, etc.) and their emergency response counterparts. Overall, disasters are likely to occur more often in the future, leading to more mass evacuations and increasingly complex responsibilities for these unconventional response organization (Ansell 2010; Boin 2009; Lagadec 2009; OECD 2003; Quarantelli, Lagadec and Boin 2006). By using the January 12th, 2010 Haiti earthquake as a case study we hope that this paper and our research can re-highlight the deficiencies of the Incident Command System and shed new light on the importance of a solution in the new context of mass evacuation events.

2. Literature Review

No paper on the Incident Command System would be complete without first acknowledging the extensive past literature on it and other cross-organizational research. In addition, because of the novelty of the research topic, it may be beneficial to clarify the research background for what is meant by the term evacuation. In this section we will briefly review both in order to provide continuity for later sections.

2.1. Organizational Cultural Complexity

There is an expansive amount of research dealing with cross-organizational interactions. Even when not specifically analyzing ICS, the past literature can provide a beneficial background for the context of the main issues that arise when two agents, with different organizational cultures, interact with one another. While too numerous to mention exhaustively we will briefly review the most relevant literature, when it comes to cross cultural organizational interactions. One of the primary themes that comes up when looking at the past research on culturally separate organizational interactions is the consistent challenges that arise from trying to get two organizations, not familiar with one another, to successfully coordinate (Edwards 2007; Ödlund 2010; Rozakis 2007; Wilson 1989; Waugh 2000). From an emergency management perspective, Waugh emphasizes the difficulty that emergency response organizations have when they have, in the past, attempted to integrate organizations outside of the emergency management field into

a disaster event (Waugh 2000). Within the literature, there are several consistent themes that arise for successful and unsuccessful cross-organizational interactions. The first is the need for previous relationships; whether that comes in the form of exercises, networking, or inter-organizational training there is a recurring call for organizations who may have wildly different mandates, structures, and experiences to cooperate successfully during a disaster (Reid 2008; Ödlund 2010; Salmon 2011; Crichton 2009; Kapucu 2007). The other primary finding dealing with inter-organizational interactions is that of the clarity of communication channels. While having communication issues during a disaster event is unfortunately routine, research has consistently reiterated the need for stronger cross organizational ties between all organizational levels; whether dealing with decision making, fund clarity, or task division (Ödlund 2010; Shraagen 2010; Uhr 2008).

2.2. ICS Deficiencies

Going back to 1990, Wegner, Quarentelli, and Dynes suggest in their paper “Is the Incident Command System a Plan for all Seasons and Emergency Situations?” that the Incident Command System can only be successfully implemented by “quasi-military” (police, fire, etc.) organizations or those utilizing a command and control structure. While a lot has changed with the nationalization of FEMA’s ICS training programs and the expansion of the National Incident Management System, organizations who lack a proper emergency response structure (what Lutz and Lindell refer to as emergency relevant versus emergency mission organizations) continue to struggle to implement ICS during real world disaster events (Wegner 1990; Kapucu 2007; Dynes 1970; Lutz and Lindell 2007). Thus far, for unconventional response organizations to supplement their day-to-day roles and better integrate them within the Incident Command Structure, common wisdom has been for increased training depth or for more organizational specificity within ICS itself (i.e. ICS 100.PW – ICS for Public Works) (Hansen 2007; Lutz and Lindell 2007). However, Buck, Trainor, and Aguirre go as far as saying that, in its current format, the Incident Command System will be unable to fully integrate and train all necessary agencies and instead advocate primarily for the promotion of pre disaster relationships and integrated organizational cultures as the true avenues for success (Buck, Trainor, and Aguirre 2006).

2.3. Invacuation

As previously stated, the United States emergency management community, in utilizing the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System, has developed a relatively successful track record for planning and operational capability when moving large numbers of people out of harm’s way. And while Mitchell and others worry about the risks of concentrating in megacities, evacuation has continued to be the principal means of securing immediate life safety (Mitchell 1999). Though not a megacity, Port-au-Prince evinced many of the characteristics that have alarmed hazards theorists focusing on megacities, such as a densely populated and highly urbanized population, and may be looked at as a template for such large-scale evacuation events. This initial response phase is where evacuation planning and operationalization has historically ended and to date no systematic research assessment has been undertaken to look at how host communities and localities managed the processes of “*mass invacuation*”, that is, the processes of receiving evacuees, providing immediate mass and medical

care and resettling them (Ghosh *et al.* 2007). Here is where the study of the reception of evacuees, or invacuees, on a host community was born and we hope to carry this into our analysis of the Incident Command System's use during the 2010 Haiti earthquake.

While ICS is a proven effective system, there has been a chronic question of its universal applicability and how to successfully integrate separate organizations in a unified response; by looking at ICS's use by public sector organizations during the 2010 Haiti earthquake evacuation we have attempted to test these criticisms. This section has illustrated the primary assumptions and contextual background that we have taken on for the purposes of this paper. While in no way trying to co-opt previous Incident Command research conclusions as our own, we hope to build on the previous research and breathe fresh life into it through the lens of the 2010 Haiti Earthquake mass invacuation event.

3. Methodology

In this section we will briefly review our research methodology. Our research has focused primarily on the initial phase of the Haitian evacuation/invacuation process, from the day after the earthquake (January 13, 2010) through April 2011. Organizations are our unit of analysis and organizational contacts were identified through media documents, a large number of reports (after action and others), telephone interviews, and from colleagues returning from prior trips to Haiti and Florida. Our data has been collected as part of an NSF-RAPID grant collaboration between University of Delaware and the University of North Texas. Within organizations, we have identified and interviewed 20 key informants, that is, those who had direct participation in or responsibility for processing and/or providing services on behalf of their organizations for Haitian refugees, from 17 organizations in both Florida and New York.

Our interview guide and research was developed and conducted based upon answering the following questions:

- What procedures were used to identify airlift passengers from Haiti or the Dominican Republic bound for the US?
- What organizations/agencies are providing processing and services in the cities receiving an influx of displaced Haitian earthquake victims? What specific services are needed?
- What are the roles and tasks associated with the organizations and agencies providing aid to these invacuees?
- Are these organizations and agencies adopting new roles or expanding their normal activities in the processes of receiving and providing services for invacuees?
- What are the key issues surrounding inter-organizational or inter-governmental coordination in the processes of evacuation and invacuation?
- Has improvisation occurred among these agencies/organizations when solving expected and/or emerging needs?

The ultimate purpose of these questions was to attempt to understand the magnitude and types of needs placed on a community by a mass evacuation event such as the 2010 Port-au-Prince earthquake. The interviews were conducted over the course of January 2010 – April 2011 both in person during a series of field visits and over the phone by various members of the research team. The organizations we interviewed stemmed from the public, private, nonprofit, and faith based sectors.

4. Discussion

Traditionally, communities receiving large numbers of evacuees have to function together almost as if they themselves were experiencing a disaster, in that the same kinds of needs, social service and others, will be presented to these distant communities. Local, state, and federal partners in the United States had to scramble to respond to the mass evacuation and acceptance of Haitian refugees almost as if a domestic event had occurred. During the acceptance of refugees following the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the agencies that were tasked to lead were not emergency management organizations, who traditionally would be comfortable functioning during the emergency response phase, but unconventional response organizations such as USAID and the Department of Health and Human Services. With such a multifaceted event, that required a plethora of resources from multiple organizations, these unconventional response organizations, which are not as well versed with the Incident Command System, struggled to coordinate with the myriad of emergency management and other organizations who attempted to utilize ICS themselves. In this section we will review our findings regarding the implementation of the Incident Command System, discuss their relevance in the context of the current research literature, and present our recommendations for improvement.

4.1. Observations

Lutz and Lindell put it best when they observed that ICS does have deficiencies, but it is vastly superior to the consortium of response models it has replaced (Lutz and Lindell 2007). One of the main purposes of our research, and this paper more specifically, has been to review these criticisms (such as those posed by Lutz, Lindell, and many others), frame them in the context of our research questions, and discuss our findings through that lens. In this section we would like to accomplish this through analyzing our data based off our six research objectives.

Regarding the first objective (What procedures were used to identify airlift passengers from Haiti or the Dominican Republic bound for the US?), on the surface it seems as if there was no solid procedure in place for identifying airlifted passengers. For example, those receiving evacuees, in Florida, had no clear idea of whom or how many evacuees they were receiving. This was one of the most prevalent criticisms throughout the event. Whether this was due to the reverse role of federal to local communication channels, an incident command system failure, or simply a lack of information; in the scope of this research this was never sufficiently answered.

In answering the second objective (What organizations/agencies are providing processing and services in the cities receiving an influx of displaced Haitian earthquake victims? What specific services are needed?), emergency management organizations were the ones who primarily served in a processing role. Invacuees needed to be directed to services, given temporary shelter, and given transportation to link up with family members. In addition to simple processing, on a limited basis, emergency managers also facilitated permanent relocation of particularly vulnerable individuals (i.e. dementia patients who had to be entered into assisted living). Basically, the emergency management departments served as a waypoint between invacuees and the services they required.

As far as the third objective (What are the roles and tasks associated with the organizations and agencies providing aid to invacuees?), it seems as if, at the immediate reception sites, the event was completely improvised. There was no pre-planning and for the most part the majority of functions were outside of the day-to-day activities at the local level. On the other hand, for those organizations operating outside of the immediate invacuation area (Florida), respondents indicated they were operating within their normal scope and actually avoided the Incident Command System altogether.

Regarding the fourth objective (Are organizations and agencies adopting new roles or expanding their normal activities in the processes of receiving and providing services for invacuees?), as a result of a lack of experience and no local repatriation annex the vast majority of activities were reported as being in an improvised and ad hoc fashion. The reverse role, in the emergency management sector, of having aid requested from the federal to state to local level provided for a confusing dynamic and additionally hampered normal NIMS/ICS functioning. There seemed to be a general lack of communication channels between organizations operating in Haiti, federal to state communications, and state down to local interactions, which required organizations to turn internally and improvise. For example, in Seminole County the local airport was never intended to receive evacuees of any kind and thus the emergency management department there had to drastically expand their day-to-day functions.

Answering the fifth objective (Identifying the key issues surrounding inter-organizational or inter-governmental coordination in the processes of evacuation and Invacuation?), it seems the overwhelming issues were centered around a lack of communication and training. In Florida there was a lack of communication from Federal organizations to the state, from organizations in Haiti to the U.S., and from state to local departments. For example, according to local emergency managers, the receiving airports had never received flight manifests, flight times were never confirmed, and other pertinent details failed to reach local organizations. Put bluntly, state after action reports stated clarity of flight information was "never achieved". Beyond simple flight issues, at the local level, the emergency management departments repeatedly had their resource requests denied without explanation and were never informed of reimbursement procedures. From a nonprofit perspective, there was a general lack, both in New York and Florida, of communication between NGO's (NGO's and churches in New York) and governmental organizations. Another issue, expressed in Florida, was the need for expanded ICS training amongst federal and nonprofit organizations. Respondents and multiple after action reports cited organizations who, during the extended EOC operation, did not have appropriate staff depth and/or individuals who were familiar with emergency response operations (Fed DHSS specifically), and thus hampered operations.

And finally, regarding the sixth objective (Has improvisation occurred among these agencies/organizations when solving expected and/or emerging needs?), with all the organizations we interviewed none seemed to have any type of plan laid out for a mass evacuation event of the scope required by the 2010 Haiti earthquake. Specifically, Seminole County Florida and the Department of Health and Human Services previously did not have an approved or uniform mass evacuation plan and had to settle for the spontaneous planning of response activities. According to multiple interviewees, because of the novelty of the event, there was a lack of even basic emergency operation guidelines to assist emergency managers.

That being said, generalizing the Incident Command System's struggles to all unconventional response agencies would be a misrepresentation of our research. There were several distinct success stories that need to be mentioned to justify our recommendations and cleanly present our data. The local airports, by all accounts, integrated masterfully within local emergency operations centers and indeed successfully utilized the Incident Command System. Unified command, in this respect, was successful in that the airports cleanly operationalized the incident action plans coming out of the emergency operation centers, had sufficient incident command staffing depth to maintain extended EOC operations, and maintained open communication channels despite receiving often flawed information regarding incoming flights. The other success story came with the Department of Children and Families and local hospitals. By all accounts, they successfully maintained appropriate around the clock staffing depth, eliminated duplication of efforts through close coordination, and opened communication channels with receiving emergency management organizations. The general consensus from interviewees was this level of coordination was achieved and maintained primarily as a result of previous relationships and even though a local repatriation annex was not in place, these previous relationships and training helped integrate these unconventional response agencies into the incident command system (reinforcing the previous research on how to successfully implement ICS).

4.2. Recommendations

Primarily our research has reinforced the long time criticism that the Incident Command System works best for quasi-military (command and control) organizations and struggles when applied by those organizations who operate day-to-day under a more civilian structure (Buck, Trainer, Aguirre 2006; Lutz and Lindell 2007). After reviewing the data we have been able to conclude our comparative analysis of the past Incident Command System research and our present Evacuation research. While the Incident Command System is generally considered superior to the coordination systems it has replaced, it continues to struggle in certain ways; including failing to sufficiently integrate certain unconventional response agencies at the highest level, weakening during events that require an extended staffing depth, and requiring constant staff training to remain effective. And specifically from an evacuation perspective, our research seems to confirm both Lutz and Lindell and Wegner, Dynes, and Quarantelli's findings that the Incident Command System does not work as well when applied by emergency relevant organizations, simply because it was designed to be used by organizations using a command and control/quasi-military structure (Lutz and Lindell 2008, Wegner 1990). Our research confirms and we wish to reiterate the following recommendations and issues:

- There is a need for increased prevalence of NIMS training for federal agencies who do not typically take the lead in disaster response events (USAID, DHHS, etc.).
- ICS trained staffing depth was an issue throughout the extended response phase for many organizations who do not typically respond to events directly (i.e. NGO's).
- There is a need for central control (i.e. Federal ICS). Federal lag and communications conflicts between lead organizations and those they were directing below (FEMA, USAID, DHHS) hampered the early response phase.

Beyond these recommendations, and more unique to our data, we have developed the following general recommendations for the improvement of the use of NIMS and the Incident Command System by unconventional response agencies during a disaster event:

- There is a need for expanded bottom up communication channels between state and local departments for refugee events (i.e. clear communication regarding reimbursement).
- Since HSPD-5 only directs NIMS to be used in domestic events, NIMS should be directed for international responses such as the mass reception of evacuees. Along these lines there is a need for a consistent disaster declaration to activate the national disaster medical system (NDMS) for invacuation events.
- The addition of a repatriation annex to local plans would be helpful in clarifying roles and responsibilities.
- Incident Command System staffing cycles should be unified across organizations to maintain a sense of continuity at emergency operations centers.

5. Conclusion

After performing a review of the most pertinent documents and interviews, at least in the scope of our study and in the case of mass Invacuation events such as the 2010 Haiti earthquake, you cannot help but reiterate Buck, Aguirre, and Trainor's conclusion regarding ICS that "the system is more or less effective depending on specific characteristics of the incident and the organizations in which it is used". And while our research has a number of flaws, including a rather limited sample size (17 organizations), not obtaining interviews with specific federal agencies, and our discussion primarily being focused on one state (Florida) we still believe the consistency of our results, reinforced by two decades of Incident Command System research, combine to show that our findings - of the need for increased or more effective ICS training for unconventional response organizations, a higher frequency of joint exercises involving all partners and a consistent way to implement NIMS during international incidents - are valid. In addition, beyond reinforcing past research, we believe our findings also fill the unique gap of being framed in the new context of mass invacuation events.

Overall, disasters are likely to occur more often in the future, leading to more mass evacuations and increasingly complex responsibilities for those organizations who may not have played a role in the past (Ansell 2010; Boin 2009; Lagadec 2009; OECD 2003; Quarantelli, Lagadec and Boin 2006). From a

practical perspective, this translates into a need to further investigate how to plan for and respond to such events. And if ICS is not a panacea for multi organizational responses, in order to meet these needs, public sector organizations, nonprofits, and disaster researchers should continue to work towards finding increasingly practical solutions for collaboration and relationship building.

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