

Field Survey on the Recovery Process after the Hurricane Katrina Disaster

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1. Outline

In April 2011, we carried out a field survey on the recovery process following the Hurricane Katrina disaster in the USA (August 2005). Our aim in doing so was to derive new lessons in terms of recovering from a heavy inundation disaster, to assist the recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11th last year.

The specific details enumerated in the survey were: (1) the system of budgets and content of measures for recovery both by the federal government (through FEMA, USACE and other bodies) and by the state government, as well as the actual state of recovery; (2) the process whereby recovery policies and plans were drawn up at the various levels of federal, state and local government (county, city, community) and the system of support; (3) the situation of population recovery in New Orleans, the city at the center of the disaster area; and (4) implications for Japan based on the above.

A more detailed analysis can be found in the NILIM Technical Note referenced below. This paper will introduce just two particularly interesting results to emerge from this survey.

2. The rationale on functional strengthening (long-term recovery)

Efforts to restore infrastructure and individual housing (which accounted for a significant proportion of the Katrina disaster) were mainly handled by the system of support (PA, IA) from FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency. In contrast, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development is playing a central role in aspects of long-term “functional strengthening” going beyond restoration (although there is also the FEMA-HMGP program funded by FEMA). A characteristic of CDBG is that it provides blanket grants with no specific purpose of use specified by the central government. The Louisiana State government decides the content of CDBG spending, on condition that recovery plans drawn up at local level are consistent with the policy and vision set out by the Louisiana Recovery Authority

(LRA) at state level.

Even the recovery of levees by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) was not simply a case of restoration, but involved the introduction of a more robust structure. Basically, levees were designed to withstand floods at an intensity occurring once every century, but would not be completely destroyed even by 1-in-500 year floods.

3. Present situation of population recovery in New Orleans

Five months after the disaster, the city of New Orleans announced a recovery plan that would involve integrating residential districts under the guidance of the then mayor. Owing to strong opposition from local residents, however, the plan was withdrawn, and a new plan for recovery of all districts with resident participation was drawn up 22 months after the disaster.

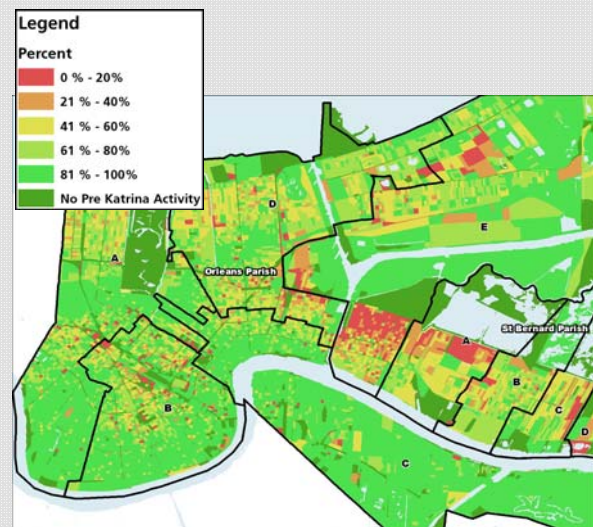


Figure Situation of population recovery in various districts of New Orleans (as of July 2010). Coloring indicates the population ratio compared to pre-disaster levels in each district; dark green areas are non-residential land.

But now, more than five years later, population recovery in some districts is still very slow, as shown in the image below; the population of New Orleans as a whole is still only 75% of what it was before the disaster. In view of this, a new flexible Master Plan with incentives aimed at integrated habitation – not coercive but based on various measures – was drawn up in 2010.

4. Conclusion

Today, more than six years after the Hurricane Katrina disaster, functional strengthening and recovery of population are still in progress. This merely serves to underline the fact that recovering from a disaster is a long process, one that requires support based on long-term commitment.

[Reference]

Ryuichi Shibasaki, Recovery Process from Hurricane Katrina Disaster – Implication for Recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake, NILIM Technical Note No. 650