Government Preparedness

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to find out how well the government prepares and operates in a state of disaster. The paper explains all the steps taken during the research on government preparedness. It compares opinions from government officials and its citizens describing the challenges faced after typhoon Soudelor. It explains the point of views from both sides, the similarities and differences are based on three major problems that they have endured. The first is how the inaccurate information about the typhoon affected their preparedness. The second is the problems from no power and water. The third is about how the gas station separation affected the progress of recovery.

Government Preparedness

**Introduction**

Government preparedness is a key factor during and after natural disasters. How well a government responds to its citizens is based on how prepared the government is. On August 2nd 2015 typhoon Soudelor devastated the CNMI. After typhoon Soudelor Both the Government and its citizens were left without water, power, and other important necessities. The researcher will be conducting interviews with government employees and distribute surveys to citizens to understand how they felt during this crisis and get their opinions on issues that had risen such as long lines for gas, limited water distribution and inaccessible roads (Camacho, 2015). This topic is important because the government needs a way to be better prepared for future disasters. The people of the CNMI felt that relief efforts were not as acceptable as those received from previous typhoons. A key factor to why the government and citizens might have not been prepared was due to inaccurate forecasts post typhoon Soudelor (Dizon, 2015). The government should find a more reliable way to broadcast information on issues such as typhoons.

**Background**

The researcher will have some information from newspaper articles from Saipan Tribune and Marianas Variety. Then he would also find official government reports of other places and compare it to our governments’ report. In one of the academic articles found, it states that Natural disturbances vary in size, strength, and frequency. The common type of natural disturbance to affect the CNMI is typhoons. According to *‘Ecosystems (1998) 1:511-523’ under ‘Factors influencing succession: Lessons from large, infrequent natural disturbances’ page 512*, typhoons do not need to be large to be intense. In this case typhoon Soudelor wasn’t expected to increase its strength and this might be one of the key factors to why the residents of the C.N.M.I. weren’t prepared for it.

**Literature Review**

Between the years of 1944 and 2013, 6,873 disasters were recorded worldwide. During those years 218 million lives were affected in a harmful way by natural disasters on average per year in a 20 year period (2015, CRED). Anything can happen during a natural disaster that is why it is important to be prepared. The CNMI’s homeland security and emergency management, website: http://www.cnmihsem.gov.mp/ put up a section for natural disasters. It only provides information on preparing for a typhoon or a tsunami the CNMI homeland and security leaves out preparation information for earthquake and volcanic situations.

In Saipan Tribune typhoon Soudelor was described as a unique small typhoon (2015, Dizon). The National Weather Service Tiyan Guam gave out the wrong forecast. They reported the typhoon to be a category 2 tropical cyclone. After the typhoon Soudelor was reclassified to be a 3 tropical cyclone (2015, Dizon). 2 months later National Weather Service in Guam and the University of Guam-Water and Environmental Research Institute reclassified the typhoon to be a category 4 tropical cyclone (2015, Dizon).

**Research Questions**

**Primary Research Question**: How prepared was the government after typhoon Soudelor?

**Secondary research Question**: What is the statistical relationship between the government and the residents of the CNMI’s level of preparedness after typhoon Soudelor?

**Methods**

The researcher has conducted interviews on three government officials; the acting governor who was in charge when the typhoon hit, The mayor, and parks and recreation manager who were in charge with debris clean up and road clearing. The researcher has also created a survey targeting citizens between the ages of 18-30. All genders are accepted. The surveys have been distributed to 10 people. An online version was also made available for fellow classmates and peers to answer. Despite the fact that a survey that targeted all age groups would have greatly impacted the information to be reviewed and even though it may not be the best representative sample for the entire population of the C.N.M.I., it was chosen for convenience.

The researcher had created a set of interview questions that will be used on all three of his interviewees, the questions where a compilation of major problems that were faced during the recovery of the C.N.M.I. after typhoon Soudelor. One of the questions asked was “how accurate was the prediction of typhoon Soudelor’s strength?” (Appendix A). The researcher interviewed the mayor of Saipan first on November 11, 2015. The next interview was with the director of parks and recreation on November 25, 2015. The last interview had taken place on November 30, 2015 with the lieutenant governor Ralph DLG Torres, who is currently the acting governor of the C.N.M.I. on behalf of governor Eloy Inos. The researcher had interviewed them in this order because he wanted to see if there was any variation in their answers, by interviewing the lower employees before the man in charge the researcher would clearly recognize how the workers felt vs. how the leader felt. On the other hand the surveys that had been conducted was a replica of the interview questions, it was just intended for the citizens. This was done to compare the citizens’ opinions on how well the government was prepared versus the opinions of the government on how well they were prepared. It also allowed the researcher to see whether the citizens and its government shared the same opinion.

**Data Collection**

It was very fascinating that the lower government employees felt that they had been prepared compared to the acting governor who had admitted that he wasn’t prepared. He explained that the C.N.M.I. was not ready for this storm especially because information about its strength was so inaccurate. He explained that almost one thousand power poles had been damaged and all water well systems had been down. he explained that one of the most excruciating obstacles faced was not knowing where the exact location for all the water well systems were, but after finding them he would know which wells would be used strategically to get water running if a situation in this magnitude ever occurred again. Another main factor to the delay of recovery was the lack of resources such as heavy machinery, stated by the director of parks and recreation. The director explained that in situations like this the government has to rent equipment from private companies such as Hawaiian Rock and Black Micro (Appendix A, Pages 15-17). He explained that the government needs more resources. Another issue was that of gas. People had to line up for hours in long lines to get gas, while government employees had designated stations to get gas much more quickly. The reason for this, explained by the acting governor, was that he needed to set priorities for his employees so that they can start working on relief efforts and for emergency purposes, such as D.P.S. and E.M.S. for public safety. He explained that even though it didn’t seem fair, the government still had to play its part meaning that D.P.S. and E.M.S. needed fuel to continue civil services such as regulating peace and responding to emergencies. And also P&R, the Mayor’s office, and D.P.W. had to finishing clearing main roads for safer transportation for citizens (Appendix A, Pages 18-20). Moreover the citizens said the government did a fairly good job. The only problem was gas station line ups and almost 2 months without power.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this paper is to find out how well the government prepares and operates in a state of disaster. The researcher pointed out many areas that need more work. The government should acquire more resources to prevent future damages to infrastructure and for cleaning up. A better source of weather information should also be put into place so that information can be as accurate as can be. The government however, under extreme pressure managed to get the C.N.M.I. on a steady pace to recovery. The citizens of the C.N.M.I. should also learn to be more prepared and not wait until last minute to react. If a typhoon is predicted on a forecast, drastic measures should be taken to secure their premises in the best way possible. The citizens should realize that you shouldn’t point fingers to our leaders and take responsibility. As far as Saipan’s government goes, I agree we have some flaws, but the government still tries its best to perform in the best way it can. We took typhoon Soudelor for granted; it has opened our eyes that typhoons should never be taken lightly, so it’s better to be prepared even if weak winds are predicted because the weather is unpredictable. Preparedness is the key to a much safer, more reliable way of living. It is better to have when you don’t need it, than to need when you don’t have it.

**Future Suggestions**

If I had more time I would have interviewed CUC, because they had to deal with electricity and water and I would have also expanded my survey sample size. Meaning I would have distributed it to a more general population instead of just an 18 to 25 age group. I also would have compared government reports of other countries or places with the CNMI government report.

**Conclusion**

Based on all the information collected, preparedness is the main factor in assuring governments flexibility during and after a disaster. The government of the CNMI and its citizens may have to work more on their preparation skills. If a storm is predicted to arrive, the government should already be ready and the citizens should prepare to the best of their ability even if it’s predicted to be weak. All in all the CNMI was faced with one of the greatest obstacles it has seen in almost ten years. With the information gathered, the researcher has learned that because of this typhoons destructiveness the government has found ways to deal with future situations. We as a people have all learned a lesson, it is better to have and not need, than to need and not have. Preparation is the key and it is the only way to have a quicker recovery after natural disasters.

Appendix A- Interviews

Interview with Mayor: David M. Apatang

11/12/15 8:30 a.m

**Q1 Can I have your name, age, and ethnicity?**

**Mayor’s Response:** My name is David M. Apatang, I am the mayor of Saipan, I’m 67 years old and I’m Chamorro

**Q2 What was your role after typhoon Soudelor?**

**Mayor’s Response:** My goal as usual, The responsibility of the Mayor’s office we are responsible for helping with the after typhoon debris clean up, assisting the general public on preparedness or recovery and all that working along with the emergency management office(EMO).

**Q3 Do you think you were prepared for typhoon Soudelor?**

**Mayor’s Response:** We are always prepared

**Q4 Do you think the information about the Typhoon’s strength was accurate?**

**Mayor’s response:** Well, on the first report it was not really accurate, but you know after several studies from the weather people on Guam and other experts they came out and tried to correct the actual strength of the typhoon just looking at the typhoon itself after it passed the island of Saipan looks like and I’m still puzzled or so, I believe there is a tornado in between that also. I’ve seen trees being twisted; big trees along beach road that have been there for centuries have been demolished all over our roads here. I’m still not sure whether the weather report on the strength of the typhoon was right

**Q5 Was it stronger than anticipated?**

Mayor’s Response: Yes

**Q6 Do you think that you responded to residents in an appropriate amount of time?**

**Mayor’s Response:** Yes we did.

**Q6 cont. Can you please explain?**

**Mayor’s Response:** well we have our main priority as the mayor’s office, the same public works those who called up to the emergency management office we were activated after the typhoon our first response was to clean all access roads on the island so people can have access to their residents the main road which is beach road, middle road and of course all island roads and those families that needs to get out of their houses and all that so we pretty much reacted to those and cleaned beach road in less than a week.

**Q7 If a natural disaster in this magnitude occurred again do you think the government would have a better way of dealing with it?**

**Mayor’s Response:** I think Soudelor gave us a lesson; we need to look at and start considering additional learning as far as response and all that’s concerned

**Q8 What do you think was the greatest challenge that you have faced after the typhoon?**

**Mayor’s Response:** The greatest challenge was trying to get everybody back to their normal situations and we are still trying to recover you know the C.U.C problem, all the power lines are down, our communications down, not only that the problem with it&e before the typhoon which was we lost all communications on the island, no internet and all that because of the fiber optic issue. Then the typhoon came along and added on to additional problems which was you know we have a double whammy issue here. The first thing we needed to do back then was to get everybody back to normal and people need a lot of help. Everybody in the world I think has delivered hands to the C.N.M.I, Saipan people here; as far as help is concerned we are trying to get everybody back to at least on their feet temporarily.

**Q9 So you used gasoline power tools?**

**Mayor’s Response:** Yes we have chainsaws, we don’t have electricity, even our office here there is no power we have to struggle with the generator back here with the landlord. Diesel what else? We are limited, we were rationed out, and we had to stand in line to get fuel and all that, that’s an experience we have to look at whether we go about on a disaster like that again.

**Q10 Do you have a better idea on how things could have been done?**

**Mayor’s Response:** Well I think that with that the prepared preparations from the emergency management office (EMO), and that the policy and procedure that they have were prepared that we actually didn’t anticipate this kind of storm.

**Q11 From your perspective what places did you think needed the most attention?**

**Mayor’s Response:** Well again you know like I said E.M.O is always on top of any weather situation, that’s why whenever there is a depression coming up they are always on the lookout for that and advise the general public to be ready. I think the announcement that has been put out was adequate by the emergency management office; it’s just that the people need to adhere to the message and start getting ready for it. We don’t take time for granted here anytime that there is an advice on issues like that you need to be ready. Get yourself ready.

**Researcher Response:** That’s another point, you know how the citizens they need somebody to blame but they could have prepared too right?

**Mayor’s Response**: They need to prepare themselves; you know we live in a typhoon zone, districts and all that. People will come out about El Niño issues. The weather changes, we need to pay attention to those things and get ourselves prepare for that. Even though that we don’t think that there is typhoons we still have to prepare ourselves.

**Q12 on a scale of 1-10, 10 being the most effective and 1 being the least effective how well do you think the government did during this crisis?**

**Mayor’s Response:** Technically we rate ourselves maybe around 8. We still need some improvements. I will rate ourselves around the 8 category.

**Q13 So you see how they waited after the typhoon to replace the power poles do you think if they replaced them before the typhoon less damage would have occurred?**

**Mayor’s Response:** Well you know that’s C.U.C, they are the experts on that so they go around and check all the telephone poles and some of the poles have been up for years and years. They should go around and check which poles is hallow and all that and that needs to be changed, but again this typhoon brought us through light, it’s a good and bad, because now we have concrete poles in some of the areas. Even it&e are upgrading their systems. They are putting their fiber optic cables for the telephone and even Docomo hopefully they finish soon so we can have TV right, they are putting their fiber optic too so we can get the same program as Guam the Lite program.

**Q14 Do you feel that when the fiber optic cable was down before the typhoon that the CNMI Responded to that on time?**

**Mayor’s Response**: I think the EMO did a good job on that, they worked with it&e in getting the system back in line because without the cable the internet and all that were crippled even business. Even you and I we spend a lot of time on facebook and on the internet to communicate. We pretty much depended on those communications.

**Q15: So we would have been on a deeper state disaster if they wouldn’t have done that on time?**

**Mayor’s Response:** Yes

Interview with Parks and Recreation, Person in Charge: Eddy Cabrera

11/25/15 1:00 p.m

**Q1 Can I have your name, age, and ethnicity?**

Eddy Cabrera, I’m from parks and recreation. I’m Chamorro and I’m 58 years old.

**Q2 What was your role after typhoon Soudelor?**

**Eddy Cabrera’s Response:** Debris clean up/removal. My role here is to make sure we do the cleaning. As the Parks and Rec. we are the ones chopping and cutting all the debris, the fallen branches and trees on the main road, all around the island we try to do as much as we can.

**Q3 Do you think you were prepared for typhoon Soudelor?**

**Eddy Cabrera’s Response:** It all depends on how you look at activity. Meaning if we have enough resources. We have some resources. Can I say enough? I don’t know. Maybe not enough. The government doesn’t have heavy equipment; the government is out renting equipment.

**Q4 Do you think the information about the Typhoon’s strength was accurate?**

**Eddy Cabrera’s Response:** Depending on the satellite so I guess pretty much.

**Q5 Do you think that you responded to residents in an appropriate amount of time?**

**Can you please explain?**

**Eddy Cabrera’s Response:** Yes because I am involved with the mayor and the public works. Almost every minute of the day there’s posts coming into the mayor, this and this and that. I asked them and said you know what you cannot respond to every post, get there name and location and the degree of their needs meaning are they in the serious category or are they like just clean their yard because we are in this typhoon together we are in this as a whole island. So for the respond, yes but we cannot respond to every request on a daily basis. We have to schedule 10 or 15 houses a day.

**Q6 If a natural disaster in this magnitude occurred again do you think the government would have a better way of dealing with it?**

**Eddy Cabrera’s Response:** If the government has the resources/equipment, right now the government doesn’t have resources on the heavy equipment, we are depending on renting the equipment from the private companies. Hawaiian rock, Black Micro, and so forth.

**Q7 From your perspective what places did you think needed the most attention?**

**Eddy Cabrera’s Response:** They are all equal. First we had to give up all the primaries then we move into the villages.

**Q8 On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the most effective and 1 being the least effective how well do you think the government did during this crisis?**

**Eddy Cabrera’s Response:** 7, it would be better maybe we would be a 9 if we had all the equipments

**Q9 So you see how they waited after the typhoon to replace the power poles do you think if they replaced them before the typhoon less damage would have occurred?**

**Eddy Cabrera’s Response:** The telephone poles are very unpredictable. After the typhoon I noticed there are some telephone poles that are hallow already. We cannot determine when and how soon we are going to replace the telephone pole because we don’t have the supply of the poles, but if we do have the supply I believe C.U.C will do it.

**Q10 Do you feel that when the fiber optic cable was down before the typhoon that the CNMI Responded to that on time? So we would have been on a deeper state disaster if they wouldn’t have done that on time?**

**Eddy Cabrera’s Response:** Probably, Yes because when we fixed it in July typhoon something, lucky that it was repaired or else we are going to be in the same old thing we can’t have outside communication to ask other people for help.

Interview with Lt. Governor: Ralph DLG Torres

11/30/2015 3:30 p.m

**Q1 Can I have your name, age, and ethnicity?**

**Lt Governor’s Response:** Ralph DLG Torres, age 36, born on Aug 6th, 1979, Chamorro.

**Q2 What was your role after typhoon Soudelor?**

**Lt Governor’s Response:** I was the acting governor, the time when the typhoon hit us, that morning I got picked up by the department of Homeland Security. It took me almost 2 and a half hour from my house in Koblerville up to Capitol Hill. That’s where we met with homeland security, FEMA, and department of engineer to discuss about the emergency declaration of disaster so I declared the disaster of that day

**Q3 Do you think you were prepared for typhoon Soudelor?**

**Lt Governor’s Response:** Of course not.

**Q4 Do you think the information about the Typhoon’s strength was accurate?**

**Lt Governor’s Response:** No by any means in fact I emphasized that also to FEMA and the weather service on Guam that information that we received here was not what we got. There is no way that 80, or 90 miles an hour will uproot all the iron wood down at beach road. So I emphasized that, I just want to make it clear also that we here, the government here, even as the acting capacity as the governor, the information when we declare condition 3, condition 1, or typhoon those information we received from Guam and the National weather so whatever they give us is what we announce out to the community.

**Q5 If a natural disaster in this magnitude occurred again do you think the government would have a better way of dealing with it?**

**Lt Governor’s Response:** By far yes, when we first got hit with the Soudelor, all of our well systems were down, we have no power, utility and all the roads were inaccessible. So now that we know exactly where those well, we’ve known them, but strategically like one for example in Kagman we can tap one of the well out from Lau Lau golf course by the road, we already have now generators that will generate and energize to wells that are strategically across the island.

**Q6 What do you think was the greatest challenge that you have faced after the typhoon?**

**Lt Governor’s Response:** During those times was 1 the lack of utility to generate wells and to have water distribution across the island. Well the first priority was to make sure that the hospital was operational, 2nd was to get water across the island which is very difficult, 3rd the utility because of all the power poles and all the lines that fell, cracked or snapped.

**Q7 From your perspective what places did you think needed the most attention?**

**Lt Governor’s Response:** Right after that I know for a fact that Kagman was one of the greatest areas that got affected. So we focused a lot of effort on Kagman, Garapan, well the southern side wasn’t hit as much as hard, although because of the utility issue island wide suffered. Kagman was one of the priority, Garapan, and the north side.

**Q8 On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the most effective and 1 being the least effective how well being the least effective how well do you think the government did during this crisis?**

**Lt Governor’s Response:** Into the recovery after the typhoon, I would say with the resources that we have and the disaster that we incurred and the lack of man power and resources I think we are about 8.

**Q9 How do you feel about being the one in charge?**

**Lt Governor’s Response:** It was overwhelming, like I said its waking up one day and you have over a thousand telephone poles snapped, all the power lines and mainlines are down, no water distribution to the community those are real issues that we were facing. So it was overwhelming but priorities had to be drawn and that was the difficult part. Gas station for example we had issues with that. The complains why government were gassing their own separate gas station, while having the community gas on separate gas stations, one of that was making sure that the government provides public safety, medical care, and the access to that. The hard part was communicating with our community letting them know that the government has to separate our duties as a government to prioritize those safeties to the community.

Appendix B- Survey questions

1. What is your gender?

Female

Male

2. What village do you reside in?

3. What is your age?

18 to 24

25 to 34

35 to 44

45 to 54

55 to 64

65 to 74

75 or older

4. What is your ethnicity? (Please select all that apply.)

American Indian or Alaskan Native

Asian or Pacific Islander

Black or African American

Hispanic or Latino

White / Caucasian

Prefer not to answer

Other (please specify)



5. Were you prepared for Typhoon Soudelor? If yes how did you prepare, if no how did it affect you?

6. Do you think the information about the typhoon's strength was accurate before and during the storm?

7. Do you think the government responded to residents in an appropriate amount of time? Please explain

8. Do you think the government was prepared for the aftermath of typhoon Soudelor? please explain why your answer.

9. If a natural disaster with the same magnitude as Typhoon Soudelor occurred again, do you think that the government will have a better way of dealing with it?

10. What do you think was the greatest challenge that the government faced after Typhoon Soudelor? Please explain your answer.

11. Do you think that it was fair for government employees to reserve a gas station only for them to avoid having to wait hours in long lines for gas?

12. Do you feel that the government was efficient in their efforts to get the CNMI back on its feet after typhoon Soudelor? Why?

13. Do you think that the government could have done a better job on prioritizing relief efforts to residents? Please explain your answer.

14. Do you think that the government leaders/officials are fully committed and devoted to helping the citizens of the CNMI? Please explain.

Government and Citizen Preparedness + Stress level for Typhoon Soudelor

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