

Breakout Session Report

Breakout Session Title: Community Resilience, Social Structures, and Social Capital

Discussion Leaders and Recorders: John Bevington and James Kendra

Session participants: Johan Bollen, Ann-Margaret Esnard, Robert Fleischman, Nazife Emel Ganapati, Guitele Rahill, Alka Sapat

Session Overview

The January 12, 2010 Haiti earthquake revealed many challenges to community resilience, challenges grounded in a complexity of environmental, social, cultural, economic, and political pre-conditions. The earthquake showed the importance of resilience not only as a feature of disaster response and early recovery, but as an important ongoing feature of long-term recovery that should be considered in research initiatives. Session participants considered aspects of resilience at multiple scales, from individual psychological and emotional resilience through levels of collective resilience at group, community, and national scales. Overall research themes that need attention are ways in which resilience can be developed, grounded in a broad conception of types of resilience (e.g., physical, social), including local concepts. The principal research need is in understanding the conditions that lead to enhanced resilience/reduced vulnerability with due regard for social justice.

Specific considerations would include:

- Further conceptualizing resilience and vulnerability, understanding that these are contested terms in the theoretical literature
- Understanding how local capacity mobilizes under stress, especially across institutions and sectors (public, private, non-profit, faith-based)
- Building a concept of community (also a contested idea) that includes a transnational dimension
- Developing infrastructure that is responsive to immediate needs but suitable for long-term conditions

Research opportunities would include:

- What are the benefits and downsides of social capital? And how do we understand relative components of social, human, economic, and physical capital in overall resilience? To what extent are they substitutable?
- Mapping pre-disaster versus post-disaster social capital
- How do we map and analyze the social networks to understand effects of system disruption? What is needed for “graceful degradation” and optimized interventions from internal or external sources?

- How do we evaluate social capital (how social capital develops, grows, or dissolves; negative social capital or negative consequences)?
- How do we define resilience in Haiti, and how do local conditions affect concepts of resilience?
- What are the elements of local capacity that have displayed resilience in the past? To what extent did that capacity extend persist after the earthquake?
- What are the prospects for grassroots economic initiatives, such as microcredit and microenterprises?
- What is resilience? What is the transferability of resilience metrics and thresholds?
- How do we identify existing resilience (multiple scales; rural/urban).
- What is the relationship between/integration of social capital and human capital
- How to develop restored infrastructure that is responsive to immediate needs but suitable for long-term conditions