

A.3 Hurricane Sandy – 2012 - Overview

Overview

Summary of emergency:

Hurricane Sandy, one of the largest Atlantic hurricanes on record, passed through the Bahamas, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Jamaica in October 2012, before making its final landfall on the eastern seaboard of the United States.

Table summarising impacts of Sandy

Region	Fatalities	Damage (USD)	Houses damaged/destroyed
Cuba	11	\$2 billion	220,000 damaged and 22,600 destroyed
Dominican Republic	3	\$30 million	24,559 damaged, 200 houses destroyed
Haiti	54 (50)	\$750 million	24,348 damaged, 6,666 destroyed and 9,352 flooded
United States	73 (87)	\$65 billion (estimated)	Over 650,000 damaged/destroyed
Jamaica	1	\$100 million	(no information)
The Bahamas	2	\$700 million	(no information)
Totals:	148 (138)	≥\$68 billion (estimated)	

Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate indirect deaths. Because of differing sources, totals may not match. Adapted from: wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurricane_Sandy



Media attention and Silent Disasters

Many of the projects detailed in *Shelter Projects 2013-2014* have been undertaken in some of the world's highest-profile disasters, but for each disaster which grabs the world's attention, there are many more which remain 'silent', with limited or no international media coverage. This may have significant effects upon the amounts of funding afforded to the response, how well a comprehensive national response strategy is developed, and the level of participation of international humanitarian actors.

Hurricane Sandy provides a clear example of how a catastrophe can achieve blanket news coverage across the world, and yet for some countries be a 'silent' disaster.

Research commissioned by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) found that stories relating to

the impact of Sandy specifically in the USA accounted for almost 90% of the media coverage of twelve selected disasters. Next was the passage of the storm through the Caribbean, which attracted 6.76% of the coverage, and then 11 other ongoing disasters around the world, which accounted for 3.83%.

While the fundraising efforts for the response to the disaster in New York exceeded US\$ 40 million within a few days, according to UNOCHA's Financial Tracking Service (fts.unocha.org) the request by international organisations for US\$ 10 million to respond specifically to shelter needs in the whole of the Caribbean only reached 40% of its target over a year later.

Some adjustment should be made for the relative differences in both damage caused and cost of living, but the overall response has been unequal. For example, although the USA experienced three times as many

damaged homes as Cuba, it received more than ten times as much media attention.

Country strategies

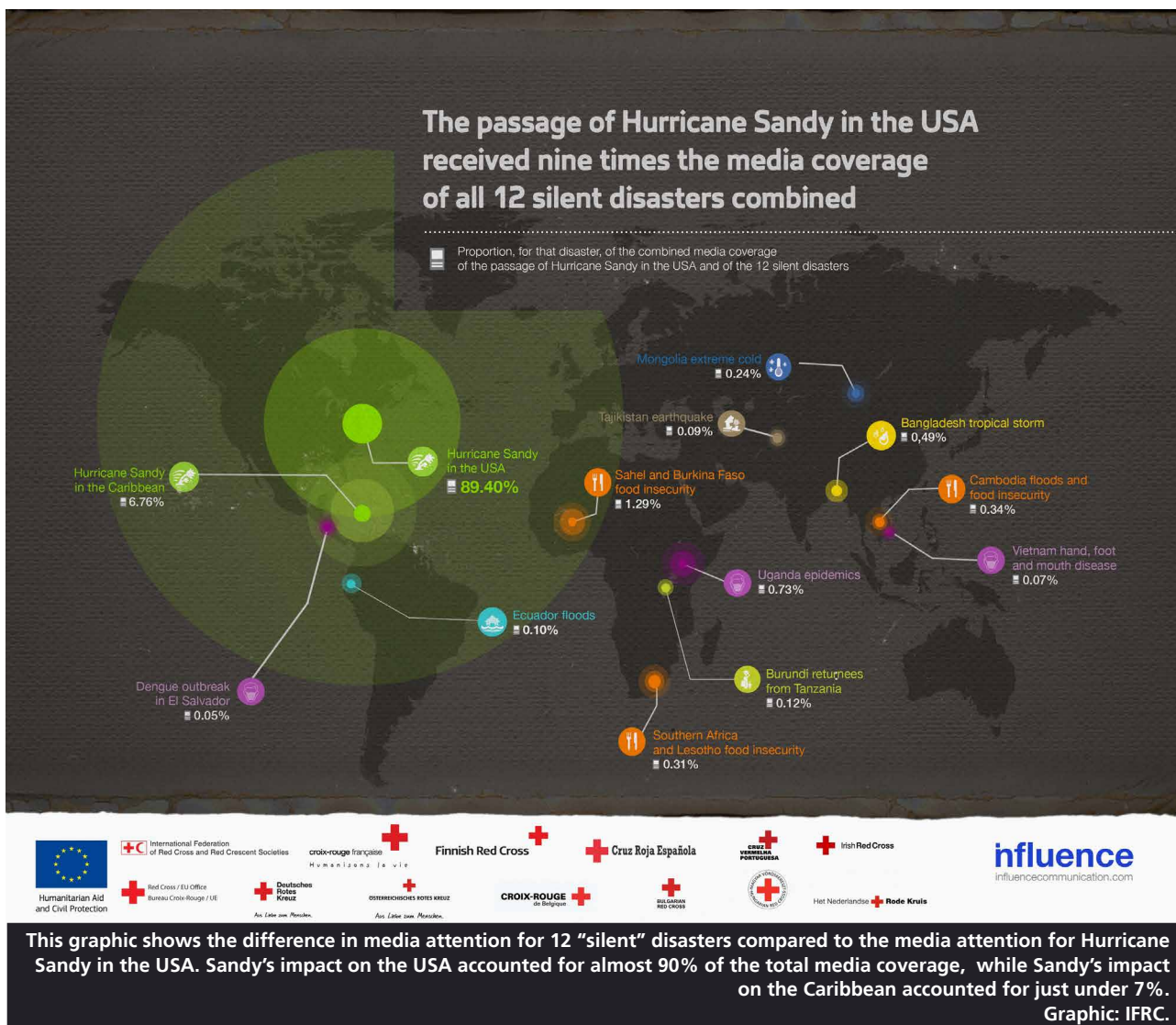
Both the USA and Cuba have clear government-led strategies when responding to a natural disaster like Hurricane Sandy, even if the two countries have very different levels of resources available to mobilise.

The other countries affected had a much less structured approach to their responses.

USA

The response in the USA was led by the national government, with support from civil society, international humanitarian actors, private sector initiatives, and significant donations from private individuals.

The USA has a National Response Framework (NRF) led by its Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that establishes an



overarching structure for managing response capabilities to save lives, protect property and meet basic needs during an emergency.

A significant reform of the USA's emergency management following the 2005 hurricanes, has been the introduction of a National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) to enable a flexible approach for local, state and federal government agencies to help communities recover from disasters. The NDRF works as a companion to the NRF.

The US NRF has noted that the United States has a "bottom-up" approach to both managing and providing assistance during a disaster. The responsibility for responding to disasters begins at the local level with survivors, elected officials, and emergency service personnel. If local government and

local non-governmental resources are overwhelmed, the state governments can supplement the response with additional resources, and can then call for federal assistance if there proves to be overwhelming need.

NGOs were involved in a wide range of activities including: providing meals for volunteers and survivors; providing temporary shelter;

One US organisation measured the impact of part of its response to Sandy in "overnight stays". Every night a person stays in a shelter counts as one overnight stay. A family of four staying in a shelter for three nights counts as 12 overnight stays.

removing debris and cleaning up damaged areas; making repairs and providing reconstruction assistance; and providing legal assistance and advocacy.

This US approach to disaster response and management can result in a fragmented decision-making process across an area as large and diverse as the region hit by Sandy. Control of the post-disaster process increases over time for local government leaders, especially if they are eligible to receive Community Development Block Grants to implement a wide range of activities.

Disaster-impacted communities in the US also typically have to deal with new federal regulations on development. In the case of Sandy, many residents have been apprehensive about rebuilding their homes, due to changes in the federal flood insurance

programme, which is connected to updated flood zone maps and elevation requirements in their areas.

At the federal level, the housing recovery aspect falls not just on FEMA but also on the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and other agencies. Ultimately these agencies are only able to provide technical assistance (and funding to a certain extent) to drive community recovery. In December of 2012 President Barack Obama established a Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force (led by HUD) "to provide appropriate resources to support affected state, local, and tribal communities to improve the region's resilience, health, and prosperity by building for the future."

A year later, the Task Force had noted progress on some of the 69 recommendations it stated in its initial report, but it remains to be seen how successful the overall recovery effort has been as many survivors (particularly in New York City) have experienced delays and setbacks in their ability to recover.

Cuba

Emergency response in Cuba is coordinated by the Government through Civil Defence Committees and the military. International NGOs, donors and UN agencies can only act with approval from the government.

The national shelter strategy, which informed the work of the Cluster, has two stages:

- Immediate emergency response: evacuation and provision of temporary shelter solutions while basic services are restored at the same time (led by the Cuban Government).
- Recovery: risk and vulnerability are to be reduced through support for sustainable housing recovery and improved capacity for planning and risk-management (led by the Cuban Government with support from the international community).

No Shelter Cluster was initiated and the few coordination meetings that did occur took place in Havana and not in the affected region.

Common messaging on DRR capacity-building and Building Back Safer messages was developed amongst the organisations, for use in Information, Education and Communications (IEC) materials which were then disseminated by NGOs and international organisations.

Haiti

In Haiti, the area worst hit was Grand'Anse Department, a part of Haiti that had not been significantly affected by the 2010 earthquake. Consequently, most organisations were not operative in the area and few intervened after Sandy hit. The disaster attracted a limited response from donors.

No coordination strategy was officially activated, and the Shelter and CCCM Cluster in Haiti did not dedicate a working group to the Sandy response.

Dominican Republic

There was no national government shelter strategy. The government concentrated its response on repairing infrastructure such as roads and providing health-care services to those affected.

Preparedness

In the US the conversation around Hurricane Sandy has helped usher in an increased focus on resilience in communities. This includes not just the built environment, but also focusing on adding capacity to the residents and their social or organisational networks as well. HUD has announced a \$1 billion National Disaster Resilience Competition to fund innovative resilience projects in a large number of communities.

Local and federal government have tried innovative tactics to address the immediate shelter concerns of a dense area, and these are likely to be adapted again in future large-scale disasters. The opportunity still remains to better integrate emergency assistance placed quickly in the hands of survivors, with HUD assistance, to ensure that survivors and communities can effectively use these resources to recover.

Across the other countries affected by Sandy, for every failure

to attract international attention for a post-disaster response, there is the associated risk that any efforts to prepare for any future disaster, through disaster-preparedness programmes, or through the incorporation of resilience into reconstruction techniques, will also be 'silently' forgotten, or under-resourced, thus setting that country at risk for a further cycle of being caught in yet another emergency, sometime in the future.

A common strategy taken by international organisations responding to the needs of those affected by Sandy in the Caribbean was to try to motivate the communities themselves to take as many cost-effective measures themselves to increase their disaster preparedness in the future.

The success of this often relies on the social and political situation context, with international organisations able to plug-in to, and build on, well-organised response mechanisms in Cuba but finding it much harder to work against a culture of aid-dependency in some Haitian communities.

More information on silent disasters can be found here: www.ifrc.org/silentdisasters.