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Philanthropic Response to Disasters: Gifts, Givers, and Consequences, Edited by Alexandra Williamson, Diana Leat, and Susan D. Phillips

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In the aftermath of disasters, ordinary people, both in close proximity and far from the event, seek ways to provide assistance to survivors. This mobilization and use of resources intended to assist in the recovery from a particular event, in addition to the preparedness and mitigation of future disasters, that is provided by private actors is referred to as *disaster philanthropy*. Along these lines, these resources can take the form of goods, in-kind contributions, volunteering of time, or financial contributions. For example, in 2017 about 30% of U.S. households made disaster-related donations (Bergdoll et al., 2019). Specifically, within three months of the passage of Hurricane Harvey, a minimum of \$1.07 billion worth of donations had been given to nonprofit organizations in the U.S. to aid in the recovery from the hurricane (Bergdoll et al., 2019). Although this illustrates the outpouring of charitable donations related to disaster philanthropy in one year in the U.S., the trends and motivations for such charitable behavior on the behalf of individuals is not totally dissimilar from other forms of philanthropic behavior; although there are some differences (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Boin & 't Hart, 2010; Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006; Kapucu, 2016).

Despite people's motivations, when people provide disaster donations, typically the quantity of donations that flood into a post-disaster context is often inappropriate, unneeded, or simply too much (McEntire, 2015; Nelan et al., 2019). This often creates logistical problems related to storage and distribution for individuals and organizations tasked with ensuring donations are provided to those in need (Neal, 1994; Rivera & Willard, 2019). Additionally, McEntire (2015) warns that donations in the form of goods, can also be culturally inappropriate at times, which results in waste. However, when donations take the form of financial contributions, there are a variety of other challenges that have emerged in both domestic and international contexts. To this point, issues related to potential fraud, regulation, and organizational factors all provide challenges to the distribution of financial donations that require further investigation and understanding to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of their use and delivery.

As a result of the importance of understanding the dynamics associated with managing financial contributions in disaster philanthropy, Alexandra Williamson, Diana Leat and Susan D. Phillips have strategically decided to focus their edited volume on this type of charitable donation. With a specific focus on two related aspects of disaster philanthropy, “getting resources in and then getting them out to recipients” (p. 3), the editors have wonderfully brought together a broad range of academic and professional contributors to elucidate the varying dynamics that affect nonprofits’ and faith-based organizations’ abilities to ensure resources get to those in need. Along these lines, *Philanthropic Response to Disasters: Gifts, Givers and Consequences*, highlights issues of organizational capacity and mission, conceptualizations of ‘need’, and operational challenges that vary across disaster contexts that all influence how effectively organizations are at getting resources where and to whom they need to go. Each chapter contributes to the volume by assessing practices and research, in addition to identifying challenges and opportunities, as a means of motivating future academic research agendas and enhancing professional practice in each respective focus area.

Although the focus of this volume is to generally advance nonprofit management in the realm of disaster philanthropy, there is an underlying theme across the chapters that relates to broader discussions of the importance of social justice and equity in disaster and emergency management actions taken by philanthropic, more generally nonprofit, organizations (Diggs et al., 2023; see also, Nickels & Leach, 2021; Thompson, 2012). Along these lines, various chapters highlight how notions of disaster survivor ‘deservedness’, donor expectations to assist specific groups, and the uneven distribution of resources across communities has the potential to exacerbate preexisting social vulnerability in the future and question the ethics and morality of disaster philanthropy. As such, all of the chapters in this volume attempt to take a critical view of practices as a means of enhancing the management of disaster philanthropies that result in more equitable outcomes for disaster affected communities.

Diana Leat, in Chapter 2, and Williamson and Leat, in Chapter 4, explore some of the challenges of philanthropic responses to disaster. In Chapter 2, Leat focuses on the public responses and interests to these challenges, whereas Williamson and Leat focus on issues related to foundations in Chapter 4. As such, Leat highlights the public’s interests in donating to specific causes, in addition to when and how funds are distributed. To this end, the author argues that donors’ motivations and wishes in relation to how and when funds are distributed to those in need have been supplanted by professional and bureaucratic processes and decisions. According to Leat, this is due to a lack of clarity on the definition and operationalization of ‘need’ in the literature and professional practice. As a result, philanthropic responses to disaster are characterized under three phases: rescue, returning to a pre-disaster situation, and ‘reactive recognition’. In each of these phases, donations are used for various purposes; however, the final phase, reactive recognition, is the most interpretive, which can be attributed to a lack of clarity on who is in need of resources during the long-term recovery stage. Moreover, Williamson and Leat also argue that how and when funds are used is also a function of the type of organization that is responsible for the distribution of resources and who they are accountable to. Specifically, Williamson and Leat observe that endowed foundations are less accountable in relation to the fairness with which resources are distributed to those in ‘need’ than those organizations whose main responsibility is to act as distribution agent.

In chapter 3, Wendy Scaife discusses various aspects of disaster fundraising. Taking a practical, but critical, approach to the investigation, the author highlights many of the practices that surround philanthropic fundraising when disasters occur. Although Scaife emphasizes the importance of mobilizing large amounts of resources for those in need, the author also highlights the challenges of managing these resources in a hyper-scrutinized environment. However, one of the more interesting elements of this chapter rests in its attention to the importance of the media in raising awareness of disasters. Along these lines, Scaife highlights that although the media can bring great attention and awareness to specific

disaster events, it also has the ability to turn a blind eye. Subsequent to a lack of attention in the media, donations for disasters that are not highlighted are marginally generated. Moreover, the amount of emphasis, or lack thereof, by the media on particular disasters is related to notions of a sense of 'we-ness' or cultural similarity that is sometimes motivated by political interests. As a result, donations can be unethically generated to aid certain groups of people and not others. Scaife views this as an unethical practice, which results in socially inequitable aid distribution, that philanthropies should seek to avoid through the use of alternative mechanisms of generating public awareness, and, subsequently, disaster donations. Furthermore, when funds are generated for international situations, their distribution should rely on the expertise of local leadership to not only avoid traditional "portrayals of Western society as a kind of saviour..." (p. 60), but also to help ensure funds get to those most in need as opposed to those that potentially benefit Western interests in the long run.

Shifting the focus, Chapter 5 by Moran, Dwyer and Seibert, provides an exploratory glimpse into the role private sector organizations play in disaster management. The authors argue that although there is considerable literature and international frameworks, such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), that focus on the role and enhancement of governments' role in disaster management, the enhancement of the private sector contributions is more limited. Along these lines, the authors engage in an exploratory investigation of the private sector's contribution to disaster response and recovery, using Australia as a case study. Unique to their study is the authors' use of community-centric approaches to studying the role of the private sector in disaster management as opposed to traditional firm-centric approaches. This provides insight into how private sector organizations have benefited society or communities in more broad ways in the context of disaster management, as opposed to how do organizations deal with managing disasters for their own benefit. As a byproduct of their investigation, Moran, Dwyer and Seibert observe that private sector organizations have and continue to make important contributions to disaster response and recovery; however, there needs to be greater emphasis on and enhancement of their role in disaster preparedness.

In Chapters 6 and 7, the contributors separately delve into the role that public policies and regulations have on disaster philanthropy. Along these lines, McGregor-Lowndes in Chapter 6 explains that regulations surrounding disaster philanthropy are designed to mitigate four general issues: fraud, confusion related to who the beneficiaries of aid are, the amount of money collected by philanthropies for specific purposes, and distribution constraints. Through the author's legal analysis across four disaster cases and three countries (i.e., England, Canada, and Australia), it is observed that digital fundraising and other activities facilitated through social media have developed outpaced respective common law to regulate it. This finding is also reflected by Phillips and Pue in Chapter 7, where the authors maintain that public policy related to disaster philanthropy has developed to deal with these challenges and others, but still requires continual augmentation to deal with emerging issues.

Turning their attention back to issues related to enhancing social equity and reducing social vulnerability, Chapter 8 helps provide a better understanding of the importance of community-level philanthropic capacity. Specifically, Conway defines community philanthropy as "the generation and distribution of resources to address a local community's challenges" (p. 169). Although the author is discussing the role of community philanthropy in the context of disaster response and recovery, the role of philanthropic capacity to address local community challenges reaches far wider. Along these lines, local knowledge and networks are needed for the ethical distribution of funds. Conway proposes that overcoming, but preferably breaking, inequitable local power dynamics is key for communities to recover from disasters using philanthropic resources. However, the author points out that in order to address the systematic issues that contribute to inequity, both in times of normalcy and after disasters, community philanthropy specified for aiding communities in disaster should deal

with 1) specifically addressing 'larger-scale systematic change', 2) identifying more 'daring strategies' to generate better outcomes for the most vulnerable, 3) working to develop better coordination across the charitable sector at the local level, 4) investing in disaster planning activities and engagement with emergency management organizations, and 5) engage in better representative bureaucracy initiatives that seek to alter the current demographics of community philanthropic leadership. As a result, this chapter not only provides guidance for moving disaster philanthropy forward, but the philanthropic sector more broadly.

Additionally, in Chapter 9 Witkowski explores the role of nonprofit organizations in disaster response. Although the focus is on the U.S. context and the lessons learned from 9/11, in which nonprofits provided faster relief to victims and were more flexible with providing services in comparison to governmental organizations, the author argues that nonprofits need to be better coordinated in the aftermath of disasters to be more effective with serving hazard effected communities. Along these lines, the author maintains that coordinating organizations are an important entity in disaster relief delivery. Witkowski maintains that organizations like the 9/11 United Services Group (USG) can overcome the capacity limitations of individual nonprofit and charitable organizations to enhance the process through which disaster victims are served. As such, not only does this chapter argue for a more coordinated effort in disaster philanthropy to enhance service provision, it subsequently can also help to deal with the social equity implications of limited capacity organizations working in this field.

Finally, Chapters 10 and 11 help to tie all the preceding contributions together by summarizing what has been observed in the field of disaster philanthropy and directions policymakers, practitioners, and scholars might move in to enhance practice. As a byproduct of all the contributions to this volume, *Philanthropic Response to Disasters: Gifts, Givers and Consequences* moves our understanding of the challenges related to the sector forward. Guidance is provided by the editors and individual chapter contributions for practitioners and policymakers alike. The volume not only provides guidance on enhancing the management of disaster philanthropy, but to do so in socially equitable ways. Moreover, the book is written in a way that is accessible to students at every level, practitioners, and decision-makers. As a result, I would encourage those that teach, discuss, and consult on the interaction and importance of the third sector in disaster and emergency management to use this book to inform conversations, future research, and policy discussions.

Disclosure Statement

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Jason D. Rivera is an associate professor of public management at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY. He is the lead of the emergency management specialization in the MPA program and an affiliated faculty member of the MS in emergency management program at John Jay College. Rivera's research continually focuses on the nexus of social equity, public administration, and emergency management practices and policies. Samples of his work can be found in *Public Administration Review*, *State & Local Government Review*, the *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, and the *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, to name a few. In 2022, Rivera published his most recent edited volume, *Disaster and Emergency Management Methods: Social Science Approaches in Application*.