

Extended Essay:

To what extent is the economic state of
a country the most limiting factor
when it comes to trying to recover
from a natural hazard?

-by Henry Jones

“Is anyone coming?”¹, asked the front page of *The Independent* on 15th January 2010, just three days after Haiti’s 7.0 magnitude earthquake² left the country in, “hell”³. The headline calls for help, because, as the article, “How can Haiti ever be rebuilt? And is its government capable of doing the job”⁴ seems to suggest, the main hindrance to a country’s recovery in the wake of a natural hazard is its economic strength. This essay explores the belief that poorer countries (in terms of GDP per capita (PPP)) suffer more when faced with such events because their weak economies limit their ability to respond. By reviewing the events that followed recent natural hazards in Burma, Pakistan, Haiti, the USA, and Japan, this essay will analyse the reasons for failed recovery and will aim to understand whether a country’s economic strength truly matters in the face of catastrophe.

Cyclone Nargis made landfall in Myanmar (aka Burma⁵) on 2nd May 2008. Burma is one of the poorest nations in the world. It currently ranks 170th out of 230 CIA recognised countries with a GDP per capita (PPP) of \$4,700⁶. The cyclone caused a storm surge 40 meters tall that, “reached 25 miles inland”⁷. International aid was essential because, as one BBC news article put it “Burma does not have the capacity to respond adequately on its own”⁸. There were some issues with raising aid money. The United Nations (UN) Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) reported that less than seven percent of the required shelters had been provided in the 15 months following the cyclone, and only US\$50 million of the requested US\$150 million had been donated for the Post Nargis Recovery Plan (PONREPP)⁹.

Ten days after Nargis, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake, “struck the Sichuan province in China”. At the time, it was ranked as the most costly earthquake of the last 20 years having displaced 4.8 million people¹⁰. The concern was that the international aid focus would shift to China and Trócaire, an Irish charity, even released a news bulletin that asked for Myanmar not to be forgotten¹¹. Ultimately though, Burma was not forgotten. In terms of the UN’s initial request for US\$187 million¹², the UK alone committed US\$33.5 million (£17 million) within two weeks of the disaster¹³, and the USA donated US\$16.25 million in just 10

¹ Front page of *The Independent* on Friday 15th January 2010 was entitled “Is anyone coming?”

² <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eqinthenews/2010/us2010rja6/>

³ Front page of *The Independent* on Thursday 14th January 2010 was entitled “Haiti in Hell”

⁴ Page 9 of *The Independent* on Tuesday 19th January 2010, written by Archie Bland

⁵ Myanmar is officially named The Republic of The Union of Myanmar

⁶ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2004.html#bm> (using 2014 data)

⁷ http://www.nbcnews.com/id/24526960/ns/world_news-asia_pacific/t/cyclone-nargis-embodied-perfect-storm/#.Vc4IISqF95M

⁸ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/7393270.stm>

⁹ Ideas reflect this article: <http://www.ionglobaltrends.com/2009/07/burma-gimme-shelter.html#.Vc4UICqF95M>

¹⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-22398684>

¹¹ Released on the 8th May entitled “Reports from Burma of chaos and devastation among survivors”. Available here: <http://www.trocaire.ie/news/story.php?id=1295>

¹² <http://www.oxfordburmaalliance.org/cyclone-nargis.html>

¹³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7403324.stm>

days¹⁴ (with their total reaching US\$196 million in four years¹⁵). As Dambisa Moyo says in her book *Dead Aid*, “the origins of large-scale aid transfers date as far back as the nineteenth century”¹⁶ and this tradition seems to have been honoured after Nargis.

What other factors then were at play? The junta in control of Burma was aggressively dictatorial and tragically underestimated the damage caused by Nargis. After a meeting in Bangkok on 7th May 2008, the UN and international aid agencies decided that the best aid distribution strategy was to co-ordinate the response in Thailand. However, the military junta refused help. The problem was that the junta (for whatever reason) misjudged the extent of the damage. For instance, on 14th May, the UN predicted the death toll to be 140,000 (not far from the final count of 136,000), while the junta said 38,000. Additionally, political tensions with Thailand meant that the country was further disinclined to accept any foreign help. Ever since the Second World War when the Japanese were allowed through Thailand into Burma¹⁷, political relations had not been particularly amicable. On 11th May, the Thai Prime Minister announced that he would visit Burma to try and persuade the junta to allow international intervention. The junta responded by deciding that no foreigners would be allowed in. Only basic needs like food and water would enter without the aid workers to distribute them. This caused international outrage. The French Prime Minister threatened that the aid restrictions “could lead to a true crime against humanity”¹⁸, the British Prime Minister warned of a “man-made catastrophe”¹⁹, and the Secretary General of the UN referred to the “dire consequences”²⁰ that could occur. Under pressure, the junta relented, and allowed aid workers into the country on 19th May, but only from countries in the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

It was not until 21st May, when this ASEAN aid began to arrive, that the junta finally gave in to global pressure and granted entry to all foreign aid workers. They also agreed to accept more bilateral monetary aid (this included some US\$58 million from the European Union). It was feared however that irreversible damage had already been done. Shockingly, only 25% of the 2.4 million people that the UN predicted were in need of help had received some form of aid by this time²¹. It seems that the junta had failed to warn or evacuate residents of the Irrawaddy Delta (the worst affected region), and there was concern that they had subjected victims of the cyclone to “forced labour”²². In the following weeks, it was questioned whether a large number of deaths could have been prevented if international help had been accepted earlier; was the junta responsible for a humanitarian crime? One

¹⁴ web.archive.org/web/20080708204220/http://www.usaid.gov/locations/asia/countries/burma/cyclone_nargis/

¹⁵ https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/USAID_Burma_assistance_2008-2012_fact_sheet.pdf

¹⁶ *Dead Aid* by Dambisa Moyo, page 10, Part one, chapter 2 ‘A Brief History of Aid’

¹⁷ http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/burma_campaign_01.shtml

¹⁸ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/7405998.stm>

¹⁹ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7406023.stm

²⁰ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/7393270.stm>

²¹ <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=26741&Cr=Myanmar&Cr1=#.Vc9-6SqF95M>

²² <http://www.newstatesman.com/asia/2008/06/forced-labour-burma-work>

paper written by *Philanthropy in Action* (a Yale University based institution) even asked, “When do we start calling it genocide?”²³. In this instance then, the economic power of the country (whether or not supported by aid) seemed to be of little relevance to the question of recovery. (24)

It was a similar story in the summer of 2010 when monsoon rains flooded “one-fifth of Pakistan’s territory”, leaving “one in eight Pakistanis...directly affected”²⁵ (see fig.1). Pakistan is as poor as Myanmar. The CIA places it 174th out of 230 nations with a GDP per capita (PPP) of US\$4,700²⁶. The UN requested international aid donations of “US\$460 million to deal with the immediate aftermath of the floods” but, as *Aljazeera News* reported at the time, “charities and officials said the figure falls far short of what is needed”²⁷. Worse still, by mid-August only “half the \$460m (£295m) wanted for initial relief” had been collected and “the response remain[ed] slow”²⁸. Martin Nesirky (the Spokesperson for the UN Secretary General) even briefed the General Assembly on 18th August that, “the scale of the response is still not commensurate with the scale of this disaster of almost unprecedented magnitude”²⁹. On 7th September, Kristalina Georgieva (the EU’s Development Commissioner) told the European Parliament that she expected humanitarian workers to reach only six million of the predicted 12 million people affected by the end of the month³⁰.

Once the floods had subsided, there was time to reflect, and with this came the realisation that other elements had been at play that resulted in a less than adequate response in Pakistan. Firstly, the group named Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) caused significant disruption to aid distribution. A request to the government in Islamabad that said that if they “eschewed flood relief from Christians and Jews, the Taliban would raise \$20 million of its own money”³¹ was denied. However, the decidedly weak government had little control over the group, and soon *The Telegraph* was quoting US officials who warned of Talibani “plans to conduct attacks against foreigners participating in the ongoing flood relief operations in Pakistan”³². The World Health Organisation even said that “its work...was already being affected by security concerns”³³. At the time this was certainly worrying, but

²³ Available at: www.philanthropyaction.com/nc/when_do_we_start_call-ing_it_genocide

²⁴ Any unattributed facts and figures for the Burma case study are from this link:

<http://www.oxfordburmaalliance.org/cyclone-nargis.html>

²⁵ *Lessons from Department of Defense Disaster Relief Efforts in the Asia-Pacific Region* by multiple authors (see bibliography), Page 57, chapter 4 ‘2010 Monsoon Floods (Pakistan)

²⁶ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2004.html#bm> (using 2014 data)

²⁷ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2010/08/201081552627441712.html>

²⁸ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11020710>

²⁹ http://www.un.org/sg/spokesperson/highlights/?HighD=8/19/2010&d_month=8&d_year=2010

³⁰ See the video at 7:00 minutes: http://news.bbc.co.uk/democracylive/hi/europe/newsid_8974000/8974051.stm

³¹ As reported in Spiegel online news: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/taliban-courts-pakistan-flood-victims-race-to-provide-aid-emerges-between-west-and-extremists-a-712060.html>

³² <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/pakistan/7965241/Pakistan-floods-Taliban-vows-to-kidnap-foreign-aid-workers.html>

³³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11095267>

arguably in terms of hindrances to the attempts at recovery in Pakistan, far more concerning activity was occurring under the influence of the government.

A paper published in a 2015 journal called *Health and Human Rights* reveals what was happening at the time. Atif M. Malik, M.D, writes about the “denial of flood aid to the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Pakistan”³⁴ and says that during the floods of 2010 there was a “blatant disregard for civil, economic, social and cultural rights”³⁵. The religious group is considered to be “a heretical sect” and Pakistani history is littered with examples of “state-sanctioned discrimination”³⁶ towards them. While the group only has a small population in Pakistan, at least “500 internally displaced families” were “denied humanitarian relief”³⁷ altogether because “official bodies in Pakistan not only tolerated but supported the demands of public figures to deny flood aid to Ahmadis”³⁸. While no figures are available for the number of deaths in the Ahmadiyya Muslim community at the time, the 500 rejected families undoubtedly suffered. As well as disrupting the aid response, the government is also suspected of allowing wealthy members of the country to “higher ground” while the poor were “stranded”³⁹ in the floods with little support. Since the floods it has become clear that despite the economic problems mentioned previously, the government arguably damaged the attempts at recovery more with a lack of control over Islamic extremism, and an attitude that encouraged religious and wealth-based discrimination that led to a denial of human rights at a time when people needed a powerful and supportive government the most.

At first sight, poverty would seem to be a limiting factor for Pakistan. However, by November 2010, the USA had singularly donated US\$561.9 million⁴⁰ and a report published by the Financial Tracking Service compiled by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) stated that the current global aid effort totals around US\$2.6 billion⁴¹. So, while the economic power of Pakistan was limited, aid money did eventually materialise. It seems clear then that the other non-economic factors highlighted above were more responsible for this disaster being ranked as the fourth most fatal flood in Pakistan’s history⁴².

³⁴ Can be accessed here: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/healhumarigh.13.1.70>

³⁵ ‘Denial of flood aid to members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Pakistan’, by Atif M. Malik, Page 7

³⁶ ‘Denial of flood aid to members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Pakistan’, by Atif M. Malik, Page 5

³⁷ ‘Denial of flood aid to members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Pakistan’, by Atif M. Malik, Page 2

³⁸ ‘Denial of flood aid to members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Pakistan’, by Atif M. Malik, Page 7

³⁹ <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2010/0812/Pakistan-floods-strand-the-poor-while-rich-go-to-higher-ground>

⁴⁰ As laid out in a report by the Congressional Research Service entitled “Flooding in Pakistan: Overview and Issues for Congress”: <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41424.pdf>

⁴¹ https://fts.unocha.org/reports/daily/ocha_R24_E15913___1508181556.pdf

⁴² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_deadliest_floods

Earlier in 2010, Haiti was devastated by a 7.0 magnitude earthquake which struck on 12th January⁴³. Again, the immediate concern was that, in such a poor country (currently ranking 207th out of 230 nations with a GDP per capita (PPP) of US\$1,800⁴⁴), its government would not be “capable”⁴⁵ of rebuilding. However, Jonathan M. Katz’ book *The Big Truck That Went By* suggests that the economic state of the country was not so important; rather the recovery attempts were damaged more severely by other factors.

Katz notes that in the first few days after the quake, President Obama promised the “people of Haiti” that they “will not be forgotten”, and announced the US’s “initial disbursement of \$100 million”⁴⁶. However, “it became clear that the aid effort could not reach everyone”⁴⁷. Katz tells harrowing stories of victims dying due to inadequate healthcare and public infrastructure, demonstrating the inability of a weak economy to mount a successful disaster recovery. However, more than enough short-term aid money was quickly collected after this initial US response, and even in early February, “the major aid groups had spent very little of the emergency money they raised”, because “people overseas”⁴⁸ kept donating due to the intense media and celebrity driven pressure (for example, George Clooney ran an, “all-star telethon [which] raised \$61 million”⁴⁹. Overall, it was, “estimated that more than \$3 billion was donated to international NGOs for relief, mostly right after the quake”⁵⁰). So, it seems that Haiti’s poverty made no odds because foreign aid was readily donated. The problem was that no one knew what to do with the vast amount of aid money, and it became apparent that the foreign responders had little strategy, focusing on emergency “relief” even after the need for this eventually diminished. Without any direction, a lot of money was wasted or ignored by organisations, and this certainly hindered a response that could have been much more beneficial.

Another issue was that a huge amount of media attention was focused on the capital, Port-au-Prince, which meant that other areas were overlooked. Whilst journalistic exaggeration⁵¹ was arguably beneficial in encouraging monetary donations abroad, it incited panic amongst the responders, giving the impression that the capital needed all the help it could get. Unnecessary expenditure on security became, “the overriding foreign concern of the response”, because people expect a disaster to cause a complete collapse of societal order. However, Katz’s experience was very different, and in fact, “the people of Haiti bound together to find and give solace”⁵². So, the thousands of extra security troops jetted in

⁴³ <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/eqinthenews/2010/us2010rja6/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2004.html#bm> (using 2014 data)

⁴⁵ Page 9 of *The Independent* on Tuesday 19th January 2010, article written by Archie Bland

⁴⁶ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 67, chapter 4 ‘The Crossroads’

⁴⁷ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 71, chapter 4 ‘The Crossroads’

⁴⁸ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 95, chapter 5 ‘Spoiled Corn’

⁴⁹ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 95, chapter 5 ‘Spoiled Corn’

⁵⁰ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 206, chapter 10 ‘Face To Face’

⁵¹ For example: “‘not nearly enough food to avoid increased malnutrition in the near term’ came out as ‘no food’” - *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 79, chapter 4 ‘The Crossroads’

⁵² These quotes are from: *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 82, chapter 4 ‘The Crossroads’

were a waste of man-power and money that only further confused efforts in the country. Also, the UN “dissuaded responders from venturing into the slums and into the countryside”⁵³. It seems that due to “the nature of a top-down” scheme that lacked the input of Haitians, “outlying areas such as Carrefour”⁵⁴ (which lies closer to the quake epicentre (see fig.2)) were mostly ignored. Despite locals hearing “people calling from under the rubble”, “no police had come...no firefighters...no UN [see fig.3].” There was enough money to help these areas, but most of the aid groups only spent a fraction of what they raised. So, it seems clear it was factors beyond any weakness in the economy that hindered the recovery.

Furthermore, in March worries were circulating that the make-shift dwellings in the capital would soon become permanent and the imminent monsoon floods would cause suffering in this new slum. The Prime Minister, René Garcia Préval, expropriated an area of land just north of the capital “the size of Manhattan called Corail-Cesselesse”, and thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) were moved there from Port-au-Prince with the promise of better T-shelters for an improved standard of living, and eventually, permanent housing. However, Katz states that this land was also prone to flooding. He discovered that Préval’s real motive for choosing this area was that the government was “negotiating a deal” with a “South Korean garment manufacturer” that would use the area for a factory with “a ready-made workers’ community on site”⁵⁵. The government was “willing to overlook the compensation” needed for the landowners, in the hope that more aid money would soon come in. Meanwhile, “the rest of the earthquake survivors were caught in the middle”⁵⁶. However, the money that the government had hoped for never came, and due to lack of space in the inappropriately chosen area, not all of the IDPs had been moved from the capital, and in late August one night “ten people drowned”⁵⁷ in Port-au-Prince. Not only had the government’s corrupt decision making slowed the recovery response, but it had resulted in the death of several families.

Foreign governments also made mistakes. Despite Bill Clinton’s initial comments asking if the international community would have failed, “if all we do is get Haitians back to the way they were the day before the earthquake”⁵⁸, he ignored the figure of US\$11.5 billion⁵⁹ that the Haitian government suggested for reconstruction costs (already a large amount of this was covered by charitable giving), and held a donors’ conference⁶⁰. A total of US\$16.3 billion in long-term aid was pledged by separate governments⁶¹, but never

⁵³ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 259, chapter 12 ‘Cardboard Palace’

⁵⁴ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 105, chapter 5 ‘Spoiled Corn’

⁵⁵ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 180, chapter 9 ‘Sugar Land’

⁵⁶ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 181, chapter 9 ‘Sugar Land’

⁵⁷ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 213, chapter 10 ‘Face To Face’

⁵⁸ Page 9 of *The Independent* on Tuesday 19th January 2010, article written by Archie Bland

⁵⁹ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 112, chapter 6 ‘Bon Dola’

⁶⁰ Held on the 31st March 210: *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 123, chapter 6 ‘Bon Dola’

⁶¹ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 203, chapter 10 ‘Face To Face’

materialised. Four months after the conference “less than two percent of the rubble had been cleared” and only 13,000 of “a promised 125,000”⁶² temporary shelters had been built nationwide (with no sign of development in Corail-Cesselesse). In the year after the earthquake, only \$2.3 billion was collected and of this, “at least 93 percent would go right back to the UN or NGOs to pay for supplies and personnel”⁶³. Aid money was spent poorly with huge sums being wasted (for instance, US\$50,000 was spent on “elevator maintenance, in a country with a dozen elevators in all”⁶⁴), and the main beneficiaries were American companies like Walmart whose garment factories were repaired⁶⁵. The figures look even worse another year on, when, “two-thirds of the funds pledged” were yet to appear, and only one-tenth of the US money for 2010 had arrived⁶⁶. It is certainly not that America lacked the funds. In fact, they spent \$806 billion on the “reconstruction of Iraq”⁶⁷. It just seems that whether it was due to a crippling fear of corruption that made the donors wary of giving aid⁶⁸ or maybe even intense apathy, Haiti was forgotten, just as Obama had promised it would not be.

Of course Haiti could have managed better if it was wealthy, but aid pledges more than “double Haiti’s total yearly economic output”⁶⁹, and so this money went well beyond redevelopment. The real issue was that the donors’ conference encouraged Préval to expropriate the land as he expected the imminent arrival of bilateral aid, but this led to some rather unfortunate consequences. Furthermore, the money raised the hopes of the nation, only to disappoint, spurring a lack of trust in the government that can only have undermined the country’s ability to recover.

Other mistakes were made too. For instance, the UN refused to admit that poor sanitation in their base had brought cholera to the country (where it had not been for a hundred years) from Nepal; killing 7,500 Haitians while making the disease endemic⁷⁰. All of these foreign mistakes cost Haiti far more than the country’s weak economy did, and sadly international intervention not only disappointed the country but left it in a state of civil unrest⁷¹, when it could so easily have done some good.

What then of wealthy nations suffering disasters- do they cope more easily? The example of how the US failed the people of New Orleans when Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the 29th August 2005⁷² seems to suggest not. There were of course benefits to

⁶² *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 203, chapter 10 ‘Face To Face’

⁶³ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 204, chapter 10 ‘Face To Face’

⁶⁴ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 205, chapter 10 ‘Face To Face’

⁶⁵ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 204, chapter 10 ‘Face To Face’

⁶⁶ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 264, chapter 13 ‘All Together Now’

⁶⁷ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 203, chapter 10 ‘Face To Face’

⁶⁸ See pages 126-127- *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, chapter 6 ‘Bon Dola’

⁶⁹ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 204, chapter 10 ‘Face To Face’

⁷⁰ *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz, page 244, chapter 11 ‘A Gut Feeling’

⁷¹ See chapter 13 ‘All Together Now’, specifically page 264- *The Big Truck That Went By* by Jonathan M. Katz

⁷² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/americas/05/kuatrina/html/default.stm>

being the 19th richest country (in terms of GDP per capita (PPP)⁷³). For instance, victims of the hurricane were able to choose if they would pay income tax over the following two to five years, or pay them at later date without interest in order to achieve “the [most] beneficial result” for them as an individual⁷⁴. This allowed victims to recover quicker because they had access to a larger amount of their income for a few years; a luxury that can only really be made available in a wealthy nation, because poorer countries cannot afford to wait five years for taxation payments. Also, the government, amongst many things, was able to “order five navy ships and eight navy maritime rescue teams to the Gulf coast to bolster the relief operation”⁷⁵, and this, again is something that a rich nation can afford. However, despite benefits like this, the recovery response to the hurricane was classed by many as seriously below par.

Firstly, the response leading up to the expected landfall of the hurricane was insubstantial. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) only positioned “seven of its 28 urban search and rescue teams [in] the area before the storm hit”⁷⁶ and it is fair to say that “the situation might have been considerably less dire if all of Louisiana’s and Mississippi’s National Guard had been mobilised before the storm”⁷⁷. Furthermore, of the efforts that were made, the response was not of the scale it could have been because, “not only was the money [of the country] depleted by the Bush folly in Iraq; [but] 30% of the National Guard and about half its equipment...”⁷⁸ were there, and not on US land at the time of the hurricane.

The problem in New Orleans was that on the Monday that the hurricane passed through the state, people thought that they had not fared that badly, but by Tuesday morning they woke to a broken levee and extreme flooding⁷⁹. 52,000 thousand people were displaced⁸⁰ and 24,000 of these IDPs were “huddled in increasingly grim conditions as water and food were running out”⁸¹ in the Superdome. There were descriptions of rape and murder in the arena, and for an HIC, people living with overflowing toilets, broken

⁷³ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2004.html#bm> (using 2014 data)

⁷⁴ www.irs.gov/uac/Tax-Law-Changes-Related-to-Hurricane-Katrina,-Rita-and-Wilma

⁷⁵ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response* (a digital book) by several authors: This information can be found at Loction.126 (abbrev. Loc.126) in chapter 2 ‘New Orleans is now off limits; Pentagon joins in relief effort’ by Joseph B. Treaster and N. R. Kleinfeld (August 31st 2005)

⁷⁶ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.583- chapter 11 ‘Breakdowns marked path from hurricane to anarchy’ by Eric Lipton, Christopher Drew, Scott Shane and David Rohde (September 11th, 2005)

⁷⁷ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.367-373- chapter 5 ‘Editorial: The man-made disaster’ by The Editorial Board (September 2nd 2005)

⁷⁸ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.406- chapter 7 ‘Opinion: United States Of Shame’ by Maureen Dowd (September 3rd 2005)

⁷⁹ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.139- chapter 2 (see footnote 75 for more details)

⁸⁰ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.116- chapter 1 ‘Hurricane Katrina slams into Gulf coast; dozens are dead’ by Joseph B. Treaster and Kate Zernike (August 30th 2005)

⁸¹ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.126- chapter 2 (see footnote 75 for more details)

generators, and a seeming lack of outside help was completely unacceptable (some people were there for up to a week)⁸².

The issue was that there was a failure of leadership: “local officials assumed Washington would provide rapid and considerable aid”⁸³, but this help took too long to arrive. It took several days for the government to come up with a contingency plan that involved the use of buses to evacuate people, and even then, “to get people out of the dome took [another] 3 days”⁸⁴. In all 10 people died in the Superdome⁸⁵ and 24 died in other centres for citizens⁸⁶; arguably, an “inept government” caused these deaths. There was talk of racism due to the fact that the, “victims were almost invariably poor and black”⁸⁷. However, what seems more shocking is that a year after the hurricane, a study showed that the “White house knew [of the] levee’s failure on the night of the storm”⁸⁸ and failed to inform the people of New Orleans. “The tragically inept response to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath...tells us [that] the nation is far from prepared to successfully meet that threat”⁸⁹. The needs of the people were repeatedly ignored. For instance, as many as 100,000 people without cars were not considered when a, “mandatory evacuation”⁹⁰ was ordered, and the, “state even turned down an offer for patients evacuation assistance from the federal government”⁹¹ leaving 70% of the nursing homes in the area without help⁹².

The message is clear: no matter how wealthy a country is, a recovery response can still suffer from serious limitations.

The March 2011 Tōhoku earthquake in Japan (ranking 43rd out of 230 countries with a GDP per capita (PPP) of US\$37,400⁹³) provides a further example of a rich country’s response to a disaster. Four minutes after the quake, a tsunami occurred (first hitting Kamaishi); in which 20,000 people were either killed or remain missing⁹⁴. Due to its economic strength and the “extensively networked and interlinked”⁹⁵ character of the modern volunteer system, Japan’s recovery response to the earthquake and tsunami was

⁸² *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- see chapter 3 ‘Superdome: haven quickly becomes ordeal’ by Joseph B. Treaster (September 1st, 2005)

⁸³ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.577- chapter 11 (see footnote 76 for more details)

⁸⁴ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.663- chapter 11 (see footnote 76 for more details)

⁸⁵ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.683- chapter 11 (see footnote 76 for more details)

⁸⁶ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.703- chapter 11 (see footnote 76 for more details)

⁸⁷ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.356-361- chapter 5 (see footnote 77 for more details)

⁸⁸ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.854- chapter 14 ‘White House knew of levee’s failure on night of storm’ by Eric Lipton (February 10th 2006)

⁸⁹ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.850- chapter 13 ‘Opinion: blood on their hands’ by Bob Herbert (September 19th 2005)

⁹⁰ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.643- chapter 11 (see footnote 76 for more details)

⁹¹ *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.948- chapter 13 (see footnote 89 for more details)

⁹² *Hurricane Katrina: the failed response*- Loc.663- chapter 11 (see footnote 76 for more details)

⁹³ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2004.html#bm> (using 2014 data)

⁹⁴ See beginning of the More4 documentary *Japan’s Tsunami: caught on camera*

⁹⁵ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan* by several authors- Page 67, chapter 3 ‘From Kobe to Tōhoku’ by Simon Avenell

relatively well organised. There was a “regular number of around 5000-7000 weekend volunteers”⁹⁶ that was made possible by the economic giants of Japan like the Mitsubishi Corporation who “established a ¥2 billion grant for NPOs [Non Profit Organisations] and voluntary groups”⁹⁷. These volunteers not only acted as immediate response teams, but they helped prepare for the expected earthquake, and their work provided social “cohesion in local communities”⁹⁸ which is so important when people have lost everything. Another support was the power of the media. Due to the fact that the country is economically and technologically strong, almost everyone had access to a mobile phone and the internet. There was a plethora of warnings online about “the identification of dangerous and safe places”⁹⁹ that made it easier for people to find family members and keep safe, which arguably made the recovery response a lot more successful.

However, the media also caused some problems. It seems that the media’s portrayal of “‘victims’ was working to distort or give a very one-sided view of who the victims [were]”¹⁰⁰. As a result, relief payments were only allotted to those who needed to rebuild a house, and no support was given to “a family which [had] not lost its house but which [had] lost the means of making its livelihood”¹⁰¹. If relief payments had been given more generously, then perhaps the recovery response could have been better. Furthermore, experts have said that the sheer amount of information online in social media and on news networks may have been counterproductive to any benefits it provided, because “panic, emotional shutdown and erratic behaviours are all well-known responses to this sort of information overload”¹⁰². Also, this kind of mass hysteria can “trigger trauma or PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder]”¹⁰³.

Luckily there was some awareness of the psychological issues that can occur, and there was a “coalition of psychologists”¹⁰⁴ that aided victims in affected areas. However, due to Japan’s volunteering system being so “embedded” in the culture of the country, people were disinclined to donate to NPOs that could provide the professional help needed, and in certain areas like Rihuzentahata, victims reported that they received no help for their psychological trauma¹⁰⁵. Another issue was that at first the media activity discouraged volunteers from donating their services¹⁰⁶. They were worried that it would lead to “disaster

⁹⁶ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 66 (see footnote 95 for more details)

⁹⁷ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 67 (see footnote 95 for more details)

⁹⁸ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 83, chapter 4 ‘Civil Society and the Triple Disasters’ by Kawato Yūko, Roberty Pekkanen, and Tsujinaka Yutaka

⁹⁹ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 94, chapter 5 ‘Social media in disaster Japan’ by David H. Slater, Nishimura Keiko, and Love Kindstrand

¹⁰⁰ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 49, chapter 2 ‘Recovery in Tōhoku’ by J. F. Morris

¹⁰¹ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 49 (see footnote 100 for more details)

¹⁰² *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 103 (see footnote 99 for more details)

¹⁰³ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 103 (see footnote 99 for more details)

¹⁰⁴ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 49 (see footnote 100 for more details)

¹⁰⁵ 80 minutes into the More4 documentary *Japan’s Tsunami: caught on camera*

¹⁰⁶ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 65 (see footnote 95 for more details)

area tours"¹⁰⁷ rather than any real help; however, it can be argued that they should have been allowed to help, because the problem with this kind of discouragement is that it "may constrain the otherwise limitless potentialities of human altruism"¹⁰⁸. Due to this media bias, there was a shortage of volunteers in the first four months, with the number reaching 499,300, whereas over 1.3 million helped in the same time period after the Kobe earthquake of 1995¹⁰⁹. So it seems that despite the strength of the Japanese economy, the media and the way in which the Japanese people donated seriously hindered the attempts at recovery.

The tsunami caused a nuclear meltdown in the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station that led to the displacement of some 80,000 people¹¹⁰. This was arguably the largest hindrance to the recovery response, and arguably was the fault of the government. The location of a nuclear power plant should be chosen in terms of safety, but it seems that "all of Japan's nuclear power plants are situated along the nation's coastline". Sadly, it looks like the government chose the locations to maximise "the likelihood that [the plants] will come online quickly"¹¹¹. Officials decided that profit outweighed the population's well-being, and regrettably this resulted in a seriously deficient recovery response. For safety reasons, some areas that were contaminated by the nuclear explosion became "No-Entry zones"¹¹² for volunteers, which made the recovery response even harder. To make this worse, "many resident evacuees were exposed to radioactive contamination because they were not given vital information"¹¹³ about where not to travel, or because the "national system for checking radiation contamination in food"¹¹⁴ was not utilised correctly. So, not only had the government neglected the population once by placing a nuclear power plant in a low-lying area, but they did it again when they failed to provide the adequate measures for recovery. In terms of the entire response to the earthquake, the Japanese economy certainly enabled a great many things that could not have been done in a poorer nation, but what is also apparent is that media and governmental actions hindered the recovery.

A country with a strong economy should be capable of swift recovery. However, as the US and the Japanese examples show, mistakes made by the government and the media that can hinder the ability to heal. In poorer countries like Haiti, Burma, and Pakistan, aid donations were so vast that their economies did not seem to matter; bigger problems lay elsewhere. In Pakistan, the government and Islamic extremists slowed the response with discrimination; in Burma, the military junta seriously undermined efforts through the denial

¹⁰⁷ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 68 (see footnote 95 for more details)

¹⁰⁸ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 71 (see footnote 95 for more details)

¹⁰⁹ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 88 (see footnote 98 for more details)

¹¹⁰ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 127, chapter 7 'Networks of power' by Daniel P. Aldrich

¹¹¹ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 130 (see footnote 110 for more details)

¹¹² *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 218, chapter 16 'Can post-3/11 Japan overcome twenty years of drift?' by Tōgo Kazuhiko

¹¹³ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 192, chapter 11 'The politics of disaster, nuclear crisis and recovery' by Jeff Kingston

¹¹⁴ *Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan*- Page 191 (see footnote 113 for more details)

of foreign aid; and in Haiti, the government was “coerced [into] their donor governments’ bidding”¹¹⁵ and suffered from the mistakes made by the USA and the UN. So, while the economy of a country is evidently important, the greatest hindrances to these attempts at recovery were the mistakes that resulted in mistreatment of citizens and caused more problems than already existed.

¹¹⁵ *Dead Aid* by Dambisa Moyo, page 7, Part one, chapter 1 ‘The Myth of Aid’

Additional material:

Fig.1: the map shows the areas of Pakistan that were flooded in 2010¹¹⁶

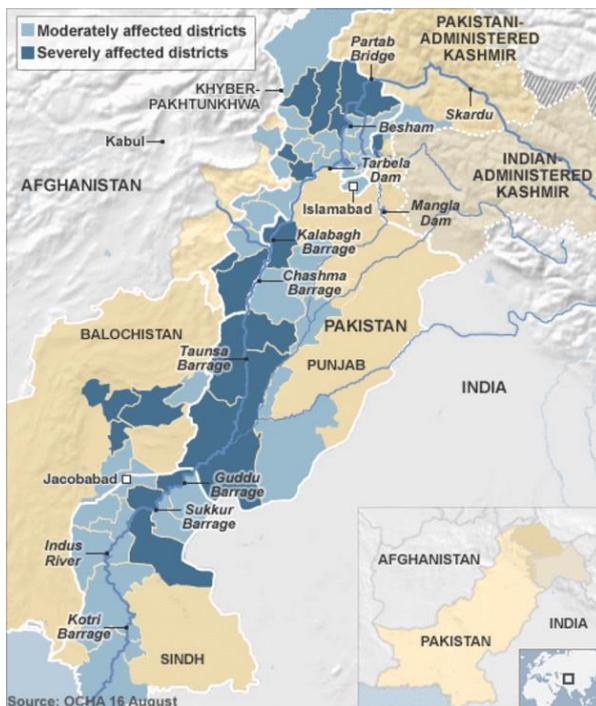
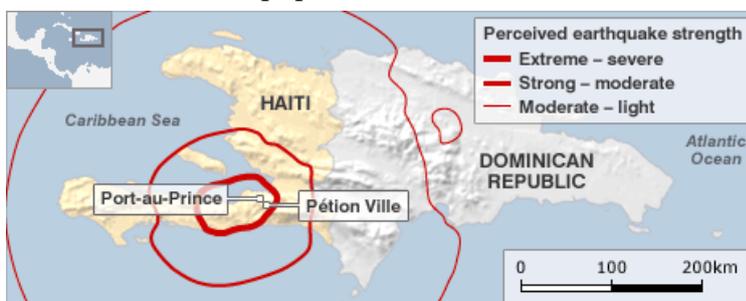


Fig.2: map of Southern Haiti- demonstrating Carrefour's location to the epicentre (signified with the red circle) compared to Port-au-Prince



Fig.3: The map demonstrates the fact that the media remained ignorant of anywhere other than the capital. It was released by the BBC on 13th January and only depicts Port-au-Prince and Pétiion Ville (a popular town with British tourists)¹¹⁷



¹¹⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-10986220>

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