Chapter 15
Empowering Crisis Response-Led Citizen Communities:
Lessons Learned from JKFloodRelief.org Initiative

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ABSTRACT
Crisis times are characterized by a dynamically changing and evolving need set that should be evaluated and acted upon with the least amount of latency. Though the established practice of response to rescue and relief operations is largely institutionalized in norms and localized; there is a vast sea of surging goodwill and voluntary involvement that is available globally to be tapped into and channelized for maximum benefit in the initial hours and days of the crisis. This is made possible with the availability of real-time, collaborative communication platforms such as those facilitated by Facebook, Google and Twitter. They enable building and harnessing real-time communities as an amorphous force multiplier to collate, structure, disseminate, follow-through, and close the loop between on-ground and off-ground coordination on information, which aids both rescue as well relief operations of ground response organizations. At times of emergencies, amorphous online communities of citizens come into existence on their own, sharing a variety of skill sets to assist response, and contribute immensely to relief efforts during

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INTRODUCTION

According to Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer (1998), crises have defining characteristics that are specific, unexpected, and non-routine events or series of events, creating high levels of uncertainty and threat or perceived threat to an organization’s high priority goals. More loosely, it is an escalated “emergency event”, and in this chapter’s context, for natural hazards. An emergency is defined as an exceptional event that exceeds the capacity of normal resources and organizations to cope with it (Alexander, 2002).

Considering the online community knowledge source - Wikipedia, a crisis is defined as any event that is, or is expected to lead to, an unstable and dangerous situation affecting an individual, group, community, or whole society. Crises lead to negative changes in the economic, societal, or environmental affairs of a region, and therefore, require a systematic approach to management. Crisis management is the process by which organizations deal with the crisis. It may include activities such as identifying the nature of the crisis, intervening to reduce or nullify damage and streamline rehabilitation efforts.

As of today, there are proven practices and guidelines adopted to respond to a crisis and aid rescue and relief operations. These are often localized for each country or region, and often highly institutionalized under a variety of complex norms and processes of responding organizations. However, every large-scale crisis event brings unique and unexpected situations, which challenge the response management to engage with citizens and respond efficiently.