

Experience of the storm

Initially the prospect of a category 4 hurricane was frightening, although for the most part, I was focused on my university work. It wasn't until after the storm that I realized the magnitude of the problem and the suffering that it had caused. I never imagined that the following months would be as challenging and difficult as they proved to be.

Challenges and Obstacles

As a full time student and resident of Puerto Rico, I witnessed many difficulties that the island faced on its path towards recovery. The most impacting ones to me were the shortage of food, the difficulties receiving economic help, access to transportation (many of our towns are not designed for pedestrians), and safety (the possibility of somebody breaking into our house was frightening, since my family wouldn't have been able to alert the authorities due to the lack of cellular phone services across the island).

Benefits and Takeaways

If there is one thing I take with me after living through hurricane Maria, it is to never underestimate natural disasters. I realized that Puerto Rico needs more efficient plans of action to help its citizens in the first days after the storm. As an architecture student I also observed how difficult it is to navigate the city without a vehicle as well as how important proper implementation of construction codes has on the safety of our buildings.

Recommendations

What can students do? Raise awareness. Students can help by sending first aid relief.

What can universities do? Coordinate with local institutions in order to create initiatives which students and faculty can support. Local universities should have the goal of being present in recovery efforts and providing students the possibility to contribute.

How can the challenges I faced be overcome in the future? I think the most crucial moment to help is during the first week after the hurricane. This help may consist of financial assistance, transportation and food.

What can be done to improve post Maria activities? Publicity. Many of the people who need the help most are not aware of the ongoing initiatives.

New activities? It would have been an interesting experience, as an architecture student, to contribute in the re-construction efforts that took place across the island after hurricane Maria. Every university student should have been able to volunteer through their college to work alongside the different agencies that aided in the reconstruction efforts throughout Puerto Rico.

A WINDING PATH