



# Before the Storm

MDC's Emergency Preparedness Demonstration Connects Socially Vulnerable Communities With Help

## Acknowledgements

MDC's mission is to help organizations and communities close the gaps that separate people from opportunity. We have been working to create positive change in disadvantaged communities for 42 years by conducting research and demonstrating effective programs at the community level. We focus on three areas: education, economic and workforce development, and asset building and strategic philanthropy.

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Graphic design by Rachel Goodwin

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## MDC's Emergency Preparedness Demonstration Connects Socially Vulnerable Communities with Help

A storm is coming. The National Weather Service has issued a warning. State and local authorities recommend that people prepare to evacuate. Many heed this advice: they check their insurance policies for disaster coverage, pack their cars or reserve an immediate flight, make hotel reservations, and head out of town. They are concerned and hope for the best.

Imagine, though, the people who did not hear the warnings. They are at a disadvantage because they don't have a television, radio, or access to the Internet. People who are homeless or those with physical challenges may be isolated from social networks that share the warnings. Maybe they heard emergency messages but don't trust the messengers. Perhaps they trust the messengers but have no car or other means to evacuate. Or maybe they wanted to leave but were fearful they would lose their jobs if they didn't show up for work. Some might be responsible for elderly or physically challenged relatives who were too fragile to evacuate, so they stayed behind to protect loved ones.

These people are concerned and hope for the best, too—but their chances of surviving and recovering from a disaster are limited.

Every community faces the risk of being struck by a disaster of some kind, including natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, tornados, ice-storms, wildfires and earthquakes, or industrial disasters such as chemical spills and explosions. Property damage from disasters has cost the nation billions, and losses have been increasing steadily—in part because of larger disaster events, but also because more and more people are living in hazard-prone areas.

Unfortunately, however, research shows and experience has underscored the fact that disadvantaged people—children, the elderly, those with low-wealth, the disabled, and those who don't speak English—suffer disproportionately during major disasters. For example, people with low wealth don't have sufficient resources to rebuild or move elsewhere. By virtue of their poverty, many are bound to a piece of land they already own or to a low-tax, low-service locale. Yet, there has been little attention devoted to strategies that increase the ability of disadvantaged people to prepare for, survive, and recover from disasters.





## The Emergency Preparedness Demonstration Project

According to the Department of Homeland Security, federal aid to the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 has topped \$110 billion. In addition to being the costliest disaster in U.S. history, Hurricane Katrina highlighted the vulnerability of disadvantaged populations. Even before Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast and focused the nation's attention on the nearly unimaginable suffering that disaster can inflict on the most vulnerable citizens, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had begun investigating how to increase disaster preparedness among disadvantaged groups.

Following the devastation wrought by Hurricane Isabel in 2003, FEMA launched the Emergency Preparedness Demonstration (EPD) to identify the challenges that prevent disadvantaged communities from being more aware of and better prepared for disasters. FEMA entered into a cooperative agreement with MDC to manage this project, in partnership with the University of North Carolina's Center for Urban and Regional Studies and Texas A&M University's Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center. Later, Congress asked MDC to expand the project to areas affected by Hurricane Katrina.

The EPD utilizes a community-based, participatory planning process aimed at building the capacity of disadvantaged individuals to work in partnership with the formal disaster awareness and recovery system. MDC and its partners have implemented the project in eight states affected by hurricanes Isabel and Katrina, and the District of Columbia: Alabama, Virginia, West Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas. One community from each state participated.

### Primary Goals of the EPD

1. To learn why disadvantaged communities are typically less prepared for disasters and which strategies have and have not worked to prepare these communities for disasters;
2. To raise awareness among disadvantaged residents about their vulnerability in future disasters, and to test ways that minority and disadvantaged communities can be engaged to help with disaster planning and preparedness;
3. To reduce community and household vulnerability to harm from disasters while positioning the community to undertake comprehensive and equitable disaster recovery in the future.

LEFT: Mobile County Emergency Management Agency and Cambodian community leaders collaborate to improve preparedness.

## Our Partners

### The Center for Urban & Regional Studies at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

The Center for Urban & Regional Studies conducts and supports research that helps build healthy, sustainable communities across the country and around the world. The Center's Faculty Fellows participate in both multidisciplinary research and more narrowly focused projects to generate new knowledge about urban and regional processes, problems, and solutions.

### The Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center at Texas A&M University

Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center researchers focus on hazard analysis, emergency preparedness and response, disaster recovery, and hazard mitigation. Researchers study the full range of natural disasters and technological hazards. The center is one of only two United Nations (UN-OCHA) Collaborative Centers in the world.

MDC created the opportunity for new relationships and connections in each community and guided community members through a process of thoughtful research and analysis, strategy development, and implementation. In each place, MDC focused on tapping existing knowledge and building on it with new knowledge about increasing disaster awareness and preparedness in disadvantaged communities. This report shares the principles of MDC's process, the project's successes to date, and guidance for others who might like to replicate them.

## Helping Emergency Management Connect to Community

MDC has conducted research and implemented community development programs in hundreds of economically distressed communities across the South. We have learned that transferring new knowledge to local communities and transforming peoples' beliefs in a way that leads to changes in behavior is a difficult process. Over time, MDC has developed our lessons into the community building model that is the core of the EPD. The four primary principles are:

**Conduct meaningful research.** Research can appear abstract, indifferent, and without practical application. The aim in the EPD was to conduct meaningful research that is valid and actionable to those who can

benefit most from it. A key part of this process was to ground program materials and methods in local social, cultural, and political contexts. From the outset, MDC consulted community members on process design, meeting planning, participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis. In addition, we encouraged members of each local task force to provide continuous feedback on the methods and activities used to increase understanding of awareness and preparedness in disadvantaged communities.

**“In the case of Hurricane Katrina and in many other vulnerable communities across the nation, disaster plans are not benefiting from local knowledge and are inconsistent with local conditions, concerns, and capabilities.” — John Cooper, Project Director, EPD**

**Create a safe, supportive, challenging space for learning.** Most every adult has endured learning experiences that were anxiety-inducing and counterproductive. Most also have enjoyed learning experiences that were positive, ennobling, and infectious, characterized by spirited interaction, nurturing, and challenges to conventional wisdom. For this reason, it was important to create a safe, respectful, and familiar learning environment to allow EPD participants the opportunity to test new behaviors, wrestle with new ideas, explore new relationships, and address old challenges.

**Teach so adults can learn.** New knowledge is often a critical factor for local people involved in a community-change effort, and development practitioners leading the effort function as facilitators of learning. For these reasons, in managing the EPD, we devoted particular attention to identifying participant needs, designing an appropriate curriculum to meet those needs, and delivering the curriculum in an effective, engaging manner so participants are properly equipped to go about the work of change.

**Provide the resources and support necessary to sustain the work.** A community-change initiative takes more than a dedicated, skilled group of local participants committed to a common vision of the future. It also takes a variety of resources and support to build and maintain the momentum necessary to make it through to the end of the process. In the EPD, this required an understanding of the politics of change, enough financial support and technical assistance to get the work done, and a critical mass of team members.



## Building Capacity for the Present and the Future

Traditional disaster planning tallies shelters, transportation vehicles, pounds of food, medical supplies, emergency management staff, and in many cases, numbers of frail people in a given location. But members of a community are assets, too. Culture, history, faith, family, and structure also are assets. MDC believes communities are best defined by their assets and not by their deficiencies. Tallies have their place and are important in the overall picture of readiness, but people are what create change.

MDC's community building experience shows trust is best built through working together. Successful collaboration becomes possible through three core approaches:

1. **Communication** – helping people see what is worth doing, and why;
2. **Relationship building** – helping people work with others to leverage human talent; and
3. **Technical assistance** – helping people put ideas into action through technical and organizational support.

The EPD infused standard practices of emergency management with MDC's principles of community building. The work in each community began with a task force composed of:

- citizens representing disadvantaged groups,
- a project site leader to coordinate and manage local activities,
- the people in each community who are legally responsible for managing disasters, and
- the broader network of agencies and organizations that come to the aid of the most vulnerable members of society before and after disasters.

EPD project site leaders were coached to go where the people are and tap into already established and trusting relationships to discover the needs of disadvantaged groups who are often distanced, and to engage them in the work of the local task force to address those needs. The EPD focused on task force members as participants capable of taking action for themselves and not as helpless victims.



## Coaching Communities

In keeping with the guiding principle of providing the support necessary to sustain community work, MDC often utilizes community coaches. A community coach is a guide who leads communities through a process of identifying and achieving their goals. Among many other things, a coach helps communities identify internal capacities and external resources. When necessary, a coach provides moral support and advice to help communities resolve disputes, avoid roadblocks, and recover from setbacks. A coach also connects communities to technical assistance and acts as a sounding board for strategy development.

Under the guidance of a community coach, each EPD task force completed the engagement, research, planning, and implementation process based on MDC's guiding principles. In carrying out community engagement activities, coaches do not attempt to impose a pre-determined set of methods and procedures that do not fit local conditions. Instead, coaches are sensitive to how local people define their needs, goals, aspirations, and capabilities, and are responsive in adapting the model as the work progresses.

MDC guided each local task force through a process to identify the knowledge, skills, and capacities necessary to plan and implement successful emergency preparedness and recovery programs in their community. We then created the learning opportunities and practical experiences that would allow task force members to build the necessary skills and capacities for carrying out their plan of action successfully. A professional advisor, or community "coach," associated with MDC worked with each task force, providing expertise in recruiting, research, planning, and implementation.

This approach empowered those who have been disadvantaged and are at risk in a disaster to identify the related issues, participate in collection and verification of field data, collaborate in its analysis, and develop strategies to resolve the issues. They developed new, trusting relationships while building their own capacity and their community's capacity to cope not only with emergency preparedness and recovery, but with any kind of community challenge in the future.

"An important byproduct of disaster preparedness work is connecting people to the decision-making center of their communities. The act of getting them involved in the disaster preparedness process can lead them to other types of involvement," says John Cooper, MDC's EPD director. "They feel more comfortable calling up their leaders, and formerly isolated community members have new access. We create a link that wasn't there before. Once you have a foot in the door, it can give way to other kinds of collaboration."

## THE EPD IN PRACTICE

### Making Gains in Hertford County

Hertford County, N.C., worked with MDC for 18 months and invested significant efforts in an extensive community engagement program. One local participant noted they were able to do more things than ever before, working side-by-side with others in the community to break down barriers to building trust and establishing respect for one another. Breaking down these barriers was essential to success in an area struggling with physical, social, racial, and economic disadvantages.

Hertford County is in northeastern North Carolina and borders Virginia. It is a rural, inland county vulnerable to multiple natural hazards such as thunderstorms, tornadoes, hurricanes, and winter storms. Between 1995 and 2003, residents experienced seven flooding events. The last three (Hurricane Floyd, Tropical Storm Allison, and Hurricane Isabel) were federally declared disasters.

Hertford County ranks among the most economically distressed counties in North Carolina. The median annual household income in 2000 was just over \$26,000—well below U.S. and North Carolina averages. Many low-wealth, rural counties like Hertford struggle to provide the local emergency management office with enough staff and resources, often at the cost of outreach efforts to target and engage socially vulnerable populations.

In response to staff, time, and resource limitations, many rural, low-wealth counties in North Carolina, including Hertford County, rely on the expertise of outside consulting firms to prepare their hazard mitigation plans. Though this option allows low-resource counties to remain in compliance with the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, the resulting plans are often cookie-cutter versions of other plans written by the same consultant and do not necessarily address the unique needs of socially vulnerable populations within the particular jurisdiction.

Utilizing a variety of tools developed to identify and approach a wide array of agencies, community groups, and residents, MDC was able to systematically walk community leaders and residents through a process of preparedness and empowerment.

## Hertford County

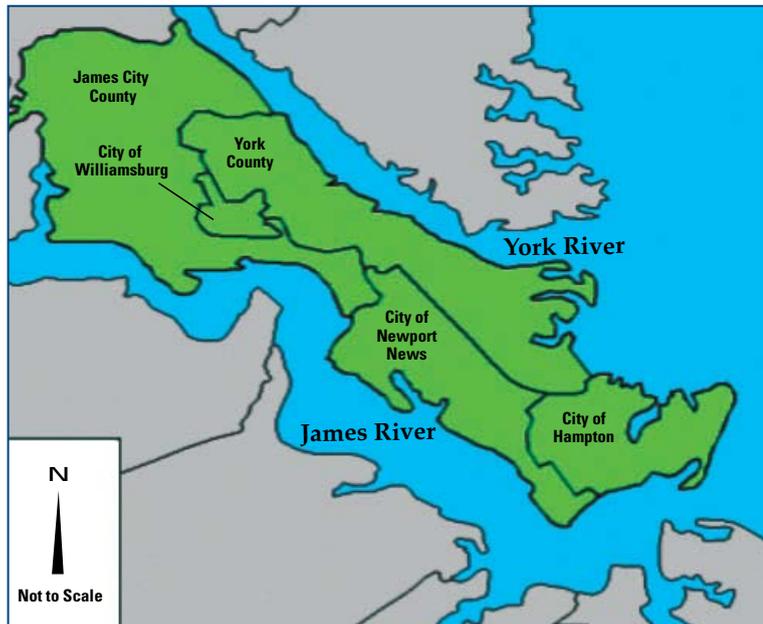
### How a community prepares for the next disaster

<b>February 2006</b>	Kickoff Meeting held to present a project overview and to clarify roles and responsibilities
<b>April 2006</b>	A two-day retreat to begin in-depth discussion about vulnerability in Hertford County, teambuilding, and the planning process
<b>April 2006</b>	Two-day meeting with FEMA, MDC, UNC, key informants from Louisiana and Florida, and representatives from 6 project states to reflect and respond to early work at Hertford pilot site
<b>May 2006</b>	Three UNC interviewers partner with four Hertford County residents to conduct 39 household interviews
<b>May 2006</b>	A consultant from Eplan LLC, hired to update Hertford County plan, attends Emergency Preparedness Team (EPT) meeting after invitation from the Emergency Management director
<b>June 2006</b>	Results from household interviews presented to the EPT members, interview participants, and the larger community
<b>July &amp; August 2006</b>	Team begins creating and prioritizing possible strategies to address vulnerable populations
<b>August 2006</b>	UNC Center for Urban and Regional Studies presents principles for guiding emergency preparedness strategies and best practices from the field of emergency preparedness
<b>September &amp; October 2006</b>	Team further investigates possible strategies, including: Citizen Emergency Response Team (CERT) training, the possibility of becoming a Citizen Corps Council, and the barriers and opportunities for disseminating information to socially vulnerable populations
<b>September 2006</b>	Citizen Corps Council application submitted
<b>October 2006</b>	Team drafts Vision, Community Goals, and Strategy Documents
<b>December 2006</b>	Hertford receives \$8,500 grant from the state for the development of the Hertford County Citizen Corps Council and CERT.
<b>January 2007</b>	EPT addresses the Hertford County Board of Commissioners to propose a resolution to have an emergency preparedness and awareness campaign
<b>February 2007</b>	Hertford County commissioners adopt a resolution in support of the Hertford County Citizen Corps Council and designation of Emergency Preparedness and Awareness Week
<b>February 2007</b>	EPT's proposal for \$27,500 to train CERT volunteers and disseminate emergency information approved and funded
<b>June 2007</b>	Representatives from six project sites convene in Maryland to discuss their progress, challenges, and successful strategies, and to reflect on the planning process

## City of Hampton Builds on Strengths

Hampton is the oldest continuously settled, English-speaking community in the United States, and is the site of the first free public schools in the United States. Bordered by the Chesapeake Bay and Hampton Roads, Hampton's location on the Lower Peninsula of Virginia increases its susceptibility to a number of natural hazards including hurricanes, coastal flooding, storm surge, flash flooding, and tornados. Records show that Hampton has suffered from eight significant flood events since Hurricane Floyd in 1999, including Hurricane Irene, Hurricane Isabel, and Tropical Storm Gaston. Hurricane Isabel, which prompted the EPD project, was one of most significant disasters to hit Virginia since Hurricane Hazel in 1954. Damages from Hurricane Isabel were estimated at \$925 million.

Both before and after Hurricane Isabel, the City of Hampton undertook a number of physical hazard mitigation activities, including beach nourishment, the installation of storm water retention ponds, the relocation of critical facilities such as fire stations outside of the floodplain,



MAP: City of Hampton's location on the Lower Peninsula of Virginia; courtesy of Peninsula Multi-Jurisdictional Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan, 2006; RIGHT: David Fukutomi of FEMA's Federal Coordinating Office and Hampton, Va., Mayor Mamie Locke help with ice distribution at Hampton High School after Hurricane Isabel.  
PHOTO BY: Andrea Booher/FEMA



the elevation of at least 12 residential structures scattered throughout the area, and the designation of open space in floodplains as parks. Hampton is one of only five communities in Virginia to obtain the Storm Ready designation offered by the National Weather Service—a designation indicating a community commitment to better preparedness.

The City of Hampton was selected to participate in EPD because of its longstanding initiatives to create and maintain partnerships with city residents. In 1994, the Hampton City Council created the Neighborhood Office to lead and staff the Neighborhood Initiative, a program to create healthy neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Initiative has contributed to a citizenry with substantial capacity in partnership creation, neighborhood organizing, and planning processes.

# City of Hampton

## Partnerships and Clear Role Expectations

### Participants and their Roles

- Hampton Government
- Emergency Preparedness Department
- Neighborhood Office
- Citizen Corps Council
- Mayor's Committee on Disabilities
- Neighborhood Commission
- Dept. of Social Services
- Cooperative Extension Services
- Redevelopment and Housing Authority

- ▶ Help make connections to key institutions that have a role to play in disaster preparedness
- ▶ Provide information on local emergency management challenges, past planning efforts
- ▶ Implement selected activities

### Community-Based Organizations

#### Hampton Neighborhood Development Partnership (HNDP)

- ▶ Assign and supervise an Emergency Preparedness Demonstration Team Coordinator
- ▶ Provide office space, a computer, telephone, copier, and other necessary tools for the EPT Coordinator
- ▶ Assist with formation and support of the Emergency Preparedness Demonstration Team
- ▶ Provide grant oversight

#### Emergency Preparedness Team Coordinator

- ▶ Recruit, coordinate, and support the Emergency Preparedness Demonstration Team
- ▶ Organize meeting logistics including materials and space
- ▶ Work closely with the "coach" to conduct task force work
- ▶ Maintain meeting minutes
- ▶ Act as liaison with MDC

### Hampton Community Service Providers and Neighborhood Leaders

- Hampton Community Service Providers and Neighborhood Leaders
- Neighborhood Leaders and Residents
- Lincoln Park
- Old Northampton
- Tyler-Seldendale
- Wythe-Phenix
- Service Providers
- Hampton University Police Department
- Riverdell Area Ministry Alliance
- American Red Cross of the VA. Peninsula
- Community Service Board
- Food Bank of the VA. Peninsula
- Peninsula Medical Reserve Corp. Coordinator
- Peninsula Agency on Aging
- Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP)
- Salvation Army
- Volunteer Center of the VA. Peninsula

- ▶ Provide information about current community preparedness barriers
- ▶ Generate suggested strategies to improve household and community emergency preparedness
- ▶ Prioritize strategies for grant implementation
- ▶ Implement selected activities
- ▶ Share the results of the Team's work with others in the community

### Outside Consultants

#### MDC

- ▶ Provide facilitation for the planning process
- ▶ Administer grant funds
- ▶ Liaison with Federal Emergency Management Agency Community Coach
- ▶ Aid in the creation of a representative EPT team
- ▶ Facilitate the planning process
- ▶ Identify technical assistance needs and have technical assistance providers to work with the team
- ▶ Assisting in prioritization of strategies and development of an action plan
- ▶ Help team develop a proposal to fund strategy implementation

#### UNC Center for Urban and Regional Studies

- ▶ Share best practices for disaster preparedness

During post-project interviews with participants, common themes emerged, particularly the importance of strong partnerships throughout the process. Service providers believed Hampton was an example of successful local and regional partnerships because of relationships built through regular contact. One participant said, "Meeting quarterly lets you hear about problems you didn't know, but you also develop that communication and trust with one another. You develop that openness with one another before an emergency happens." Another observed, "Occasional disagreements within partnerships were diffused by communication. We all want to help people and save lives. Connect on the mission. Then the politics fade back a little bit."

## Letting Community Culture Lead in South Mobile County, Ala.

When asked to expand the Emergency Preparedness Demonstration to areas affected by Hurricane Katrina, MDC talked to people across the region and selected South Mobile County, Ala., a fishing community on the Gulf Coast. About one-third of the residents are Southeast Asians working primarily in the seafood industry, often as business owners. Katrina severely damaged many of their boats, crab traps, nets, and small businesses. The area was very low-income even before the storm, and the Asian community was hit hard because so many individual assets were tied to businesses. A cultural, language, and religious divide in the community compounded the effects of the storm and resulted in fewer Asians receiving traditional disaster relief and other social services.

MDC partnered with The Community Foundation of South Alabama to forge relationships between the Asian community, emergency managers, and social service agencies. By meeting with a variety of people from county commissioners to Buddhist monks, MDC and the Community Foundation identified leaders from each Southeast Asian community living in the area—Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, and Thai. Over time, MDC and the Community Foundation were able to build trust between communities and the area's emergency managers.

MDC believes that motivated people in trusting relationships are the lifeblood of a community. Trust is best enhanced when people work together to determine what is worth doing and why. In South Mobile County, trust resulted from mutual respect, and listening and responding to cultural needs. By connecting these cultural and organizational networks, MDC helped create an infrastructure that allowed Asian communities and emergency managers to jointly leverage human talent and technical assistance to prepare for the next disaster.

With assistance from a community coach, MDC and the Community Foundation worked with the communities to differentiate what they already do for themselves during and after a disaster and what kind of services or assistance would be helpful. Each community created a plan with preparation strategies that would help them preserve their assets in the next disaster. With technical assistance provided by project partners, each community is working together on projects such as training community members in a phone system that sends emergency messages



**One truth found over and over, regardless of the project, is the reality that people care more about the results and feel ownership for solutions when they are deeply involved in doing the research.**

in different languages to their respective communities, developing calendars with emergency information in Lao, and constructing a storage facility for emergency supplies on land owned by the Cambodian-American Association.

## Knowledge—The Pathway to Empowerment

Too often after disasters, energy is invested in pointing fingers that could be more productively focused on working together, learning from the past, and assessing current and future needs. To prevent chronic problems from recurring, communities need to be willing to gather concerned people together and talk openly. But that talk has to be grounded in reality.

In the case of the EPD, that meant conversations about the real factors affecting disaster awareness and preparedness—and then addressing them. MDC believes when a community has access to information and technical assistance, it can make wise decisions about its future. To that end, MDC and its partners designed activities and created tools seeking to empower people to come up with ideas for raising levels of preparedness and putting ideas into action. Activities included:

- Developing household survey, participant interview, and evaluation protocols, as well as training for community partners involved with data collection;
- Scanning the fields of public health, planning, disaster management, and others for promising practices in increasing awareness and preparedness in disadvantaged communities;
- Compiling and interpreting technical data on levels of risk and vulnerability faced by disadvantaged communities;
- Brainstorming and evaluating potential strategies and implementation plans.

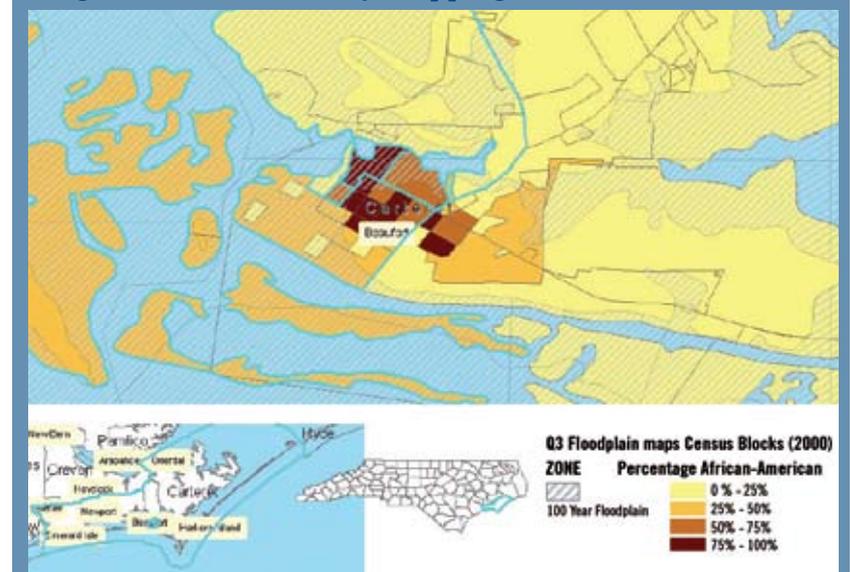
To facilitate collaboration as well as the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data, MDC and its partners developed a set of helpful tools, including:

- A Social Vulnerability Assessment focusing on the characteristics of the disadvantaged populations and the disasters they face;
- A Plan Assessment focusing on the extent to which existing disaster plans account for disadvantaged groups, and
- A promising practices index highlighting examples from the field.

The Social Vulnerability Assessment (SVA) tool has been particularly useful as a means of enabling participants to meaningfully discuss community-specific information on land use, hazard areas, evacuation routes, and demographic profiles of their own at-risk population groups. In addition, maps showing hazards and the proximity of homes to hazards provide powerful images that encapsulate challenges in ways that words cannot.

During the Hertford County EPD meetings, participants were split into three groups to comment on vulnerability maps and to point out discrepancies in the location of critical facilities, housing, and employment or environmental threats. In Hampshire County, W.V., participants supplemented the information gathered from official sources by pointing

## Using Social Vulnerability Mapping



This is an example of a vulnerability map of the town of Beaufort, in Carteret County, N.C..

- ▶ **Base Map**
- ▶ **Layer Depicting Hazards**
- ▶ **Layer Depicting Vulnerable Locations**
- ▶ **Layer Depicting Critical Facilities**
- ▶ **Layer Depicting Hazardous Locations**
- ▶ **Layer Depicting Businesses, Employers**
- ▶ **Layer Depicting Vulnerable Populations**



out areas not highlighted on maps where flooding often occurred. In another instance they challenged the official map's indication of the presence of a large Hispanic population in a part of the county prone to flooding. Community members knew this population had moved away when their main source of employment, an apple orchard, had shut down.

Comments like “that facility is actually across the street from where it is shown,” and “that building no longer exists,” reflect the importance of local knowledge. In addition, concretely depicting the overlap of hazards and the built environment helped participants in Hertford, Hampshire, and other sites form a rationale for more intense community engagement and capacity building, and to see the potential benefit of better coordination between formal and informal actors.

## Communities Moving Forward

As MDC reaches the conclusion of the demonstration project, several positive outcomes are being realized. Our experience leads us to conclude that efforts to reduce the vulnerability of disadvantaged communities and increase levels of disaster preparedness preserves assets, enriches lives, and strengthens the fabric of community. Relationships between local emergency management, community-based organizations, and citizens become closer, and local emergency plans improve. Resources both inside and outside the community are more fully understood and appreciated. Tactically, the use of methods appropriate for disadvantaged populations in disaster planning and preparedness increases. Promising activities reported by demonstration sites include:

**“This work is important because the ones who suffer the most are the least able to get out of the way of or prepare for disasters. They live in vulnerable places and do not have savings or access to credit sufficient to move elsewhere. They are also often not equipped to advocate for changes in the system. Speaking truth to power and navigating bureaucracy takes skill and expertise. The Emergency Demonstration Project is helping disadvantaged people uncover their inherent capacities and unleash their natural inclinations to protect themselves.”**

— John Cooper, EPD Project Director

- In Hampshire County, W.V., two new organizations with no prior experience in disaster planning became actively engaged. One of these organizations, the Committee of Aging, also became a primary partner in the county's newly established Preparedness Education and Assistance Project (PREAP), which is oriented toward identifying and engaging community organizations that work with target groups.
- In Dorchester County, Md., the Office of Emergency Management and a representative of the Hispanic community successfully collaborated on Spanish-language CERT training—possibly the first in the state of Maryland.
- In Hampton, Va., the planning process created a unique opportunity to introduce the new Director of Emergency Management to people in area neighborhoods and get to know communities more intimately. The Hampton EPD produced a disaster awareness calendar that has been so successful that a corporate sponsor committed to funding the next one.
- In Hertford County, N.C., the topic of disasters was a vehicle for strengthening old relationships and building new relationships between residents and the local Office of Emergency Management. The Hertford EPD process resulted in new alliances between individuals, agencies, and organizations in the search for preparedness resources and the formation of a new Hertford Citizen Corps Council.

- In South Mobile County, Ala., county emergency management and local community-based organizations have a greater familiarity with the barriers that the community faces when disasters strike. Systems are in place allowing Asian leaders to notify each community about preparation and available resources in their own language. During the next disaster, FEMA will set up recovery centers in trusted Asian institutions.



## Accessing Tools for Your Own Community

Throughout the course of the Emergency Preparedness Demonstration, MDC and its partners produced replicable processes and tools that can be utilized by communities large and small, including:

- A compilation of practices from around the country on plans, programs, and processes (e.g., sheltering, evacuation) to reduce vulnerability among disadvantaged populations;
- An assessment tool for communities to investigate how well local disaster plans address the needs, goals, aspirations, and capabilities of disadvantaged people who are especially vulnerable to disasters;
- A social vulnerability assessment to engage and guide a community in determining the physical and social vulnerability to disasters faced by the disadvantaged in their community;
- Case studies of EPD sites focusing on community characteristics, community engagement techniques, stakeholders involved, coaching strategies, and outcomes; and
- A variety of worksheets to drill down larger tasks like community team building and inventorying resources into manageable steps.

## About MDC

MDC was established in 1967 by the North Carolina Fund, with the support of the state's civic and business leadership and the Ford Foundation, to help the state make the transition from a segregated, agricultural work force to an integrated, industrial one. The North Carolina Fund was established in 1963 by then-Governor Terry Sanford as a five-year program to address the root causes of poverty in the state through the creation of 11 community action agencies and other community initiatives.

***One long-term staffer was recently asked to explain what the initials MDC stood for. After considerable thought and an accounting of his 25 years with the organization, he decided "hard work, hanging in there, beating the odds," was most appropriate.***

Over time, MDC extended beyond North Carolina and its mission broadened. Today, its mission is to use the levers of education, work, and asset building to create a pathway to help organizations and communities close the gaps that separate people from opportunity. MDC has helped organizations be successful by involving the people being served by their programs in community program decisions. That model of community engagement and inclusion and giving voice to the voiceless is as evident in MDC's work today as it was during the 1960s, when teams of African-American and white college students worked closely together to show that communities could be stronger if their members reached across lines of race and class to devise solutions for their own problems.

When the North Carolina Fund made final grants in 1969, MDC became one of three spinoff organizations and continued its mission in workforce development, education, rural development, institutional and community engagement, youth programs, and advancing equity and opportunity. MDC has a 42-year track record of successfully managing research and demonstration initiatives in the fields of workforce and economic development, leadership development, education, community philanthropy, and assets building.

MDC is a private, nonprofit organization located in Chapel Hill, NC and is supported by grants and contracts from foundations, federal, state, and local governments, and the private sector.

LEFT: South Mobile County Emergency Preparedness Demonstration team members celebrate the project's success. Back row, from left: Vann Suon, President Cambodian-American Community; John Cooper, MDC; Michael Dillaber, Community Foundation of South Alabama (CFSA); Thomas Davis, CFSA; Front row, from left: Christina Rausch, MDC; Botum Nhiem, Pam Broadhead, Mobile County Emergency Management Agency; and Vuthy Chan. PHOTO BY: Stephanie Ryan, CFSA

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