WHY THEY STAY: PUERTO RICAN BUSINESSES IN THE FLOOD ZONE

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Abstract

In 2017 Hurricane Maria, a category five hurricane, hit Puerto Rico. The destruction caused by Maria is still felt around the island to this day. Many people continue to live in areas that are at high risk of future disasters. Resources that offer to move residents to more safe areas exist, but many people choose to stay in the danger zone. This project focuses specifically on businesses that chose to continue operating within the 100-year flood zone as established by FEMA. Through 125 in-person surveys, 75 in Loíza and 75 in Comerío, Puerto Rico, we sought to understand why they stay. Our findings showed that residents of these communities were heavily influenced by the interdependencies they had with residents and other local businesses. Simply moving to another area would disrupt these interdependent relationships and could be harmful to their livelihoods or communities. For many businesses, the risk of staying in a high-risk disaster area is lower than the risk of starting over in a new place. More research can be done to understand how organizations offering assistance can make their resources more accessible to residents in Loíza and Comerío, as well as tailor assistance to better suit the wants and needs of those who are seeking aid.