

Resisting Disasters: Four Coastal Communities against All Odds.

Lillian Ramírez-Durand (UPRM Sea Grant)

and

Carlos Carrero-Morales (UPR Interdisciplinary Center for Coastal Studies)

The municipality of Mayaguez is the biggest city in the West coast of Puerto Rico. With a population of 89,080 (US Census, 2010), the major economic activities are close to the coastal areas. Several communities such as Guanajibo, San Jose, Mani y el Seco; were historically established in the wetlands in the coastal areas of the municipality. Population estimates on these communities are about 16, 234 residents in the area. Little is known about how resilient are these communities, and which are the alternatives and/or options they have in the case of a natural disaster. Three coastal communities from the Southwestern city of Mayagüez, located in pockets of the remnant of one of the largest mangrove forests and coastal marshlands in Puerto Rico, volunteered to participate in this project. Community members identified a matrix of processes as the key components of climate change. Participants stated that the actual evacuation routes are not the best, due to their proximity to the sea and riverbanks. Discussions from the focus groups identified and located, for each community, the best routes and scenarios for evacuation in a map. Education programs and outreach from local and state agencies were also identified as a priority to develop together future plans on relocation and evacuation routes, based on their different needs and the socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of their respective.