

# Foundation for Puerto Rico Helps Community Recover from the Bottom Up

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**Release Date:** Tháng 6 20, 2018

GUAYNABO, Puerto Rico – Carmen López spent eight months working to open a restaurant catering to health-conscious customers in the picturesque mountain Municipality of Orocovis. A week before launch, Hurricane María took aim at Puerto Rico and practically destroyed her dream.

Three months later, López opened Pueblo Sano (Healthy Town). She was able to serve only a few fruits and vegetables she could acquire locally.

Today, López and other small business owners in Orocovis are well into economic recovery with the assistance of the Foundation for Puerto Rico, a non-governmental organization that promotes community-based opportunities for social and economic development on the island.

The Foundation for Puerto Rico was founded in 2011 with the mission to transform Puerto Rico into a world-class travel destination.

Hurricane María, however, pushed the Foundation for Puerto Rico to quickly pivot to help small communities recover by establishing the “Bottom Up Destination Recovery Initiative.” Through this initiative, the foundation hopes to help 50 small communities in Puerto Rico recover from the storm and bolster sustainable local economies.



Orocovis, a municipality of 25,000 in central Puerto Rico, is the first of three pilot projects. The other pilots are in Punta Santiago, a neighborhood in the eastern coastal municipality of Humacao, and the municipalities of Aguadilla and Isabela in the northwest of the island.

“For Puerto Rico to recover, we need solid economic growth,” said Annie Mayol, the foundation’s president. “After Hurricane María, it was evident that we needed to create opportunities and help local communities whose economies were languishing.”

FEMA has provided technical assistance to the Foundation for Puerto Rico, and will continue to collaborate with the organization on community-based recovery projects.

Liana Aguilar, a FEMA voluntary agency liaison, said leveraging federal and philanthropic resources has proved beneficial to communities and is integral for long-term recovery.

“These types of aligned investments can deepen and spread the impact of innovation and sustainability across communities and regions,” Aguilar said.

In Orocovis, the Foundation for Puerto Rico spent \$565,000 on its first pilot project. It began by distributing \$77,000 in small grants to help 31 proprietors keep operations afloat following the hurricane. The business owners also were provided with 120 hours of entrepreneurial and technical training.



More than three dozen businesses were able to stay open during evening hours with the installation of 81 solar lamps. The foundation also facilitated the installation of five cisterns and distribution of more than 100 water filtration systems to residents and small businesses.

Orocovis, surrounded by steep mountainous terrain, lost all communications capability during Hurricane María. Installation of eight Wi-Fi satellite antennas along its famed Ruta de la Longaniza (Sausage Trail) helped restaurants and shops return to normal business operations.

Orocovis Mayor Jesús Colón said the foundation played a key role in helping the community recover. He also credited residents with embracing the team of foundation advisors who lived and worked in the community for several months.

“There was a need for small businesses to stay open, for our residents to have access to local products,” Colón said. “The foundation helped us immensely, but the community also took the lead in our own recovery.”

Carmen López’s restaurant is now fully open for business, and she is thankful to the Foundation for Puerto Rico for helping Orocovis become a stronger and self-reliant community.

“This has been a beautiful experience,” she said. “We have a new consciousness in Orocovis.”

For more information on Hurricane María recovery visit [FEMA.gov/disaster/4339](https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4339). To learn more about the Foundation’s initiatives visit [foundationforpuertorico.org](https://foundationforpuertorico.org).



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