

Lessons from Past Forced Resettlement for Climate Change Migration¹

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Abstract: *Much of the discussion around the potential impacts of climate change have centred around the issue of forced population displacement and the role for policy in resettling populations in anticipation of climate change impacts, especially inundation as a result of sea-level rises. In this context it is important to realise that the post-World War II period has seen massive planned resettlements of population from which a great deal of experience concerning what types of policies and programs are effective and what are not has been accumulated. It is necessary to distil some of the lessons from this experience to assist in the development of resettlement schemes associated with climate change related displacement. Resettlement experience has been derived not just from displacement associated with mega-projects but also from planned resettlements like Indonesia’s transmigration program, displacement from physical disasters such as the Asian Tsunami and in anticipation of physical disasters such as volcanic eruptions. The past experience has been entirely in resettlement within national boundaries and overwhelmingly on rural to rural resettlement. The lessons learned include the importance of full consultation with both origin and destination communities at all stages of the process, the necessity for the careful planning and allowing sufficient time and funding for all stages of the process. Finally, it is important to note that the last half century has seen massive redistributions of population in response to a range of economic, social, political and environmental changes over the last half century. Climate change related displacement must not be seen as something for which there is no precedent. Climate change related migration must be seen in the context of an existing migration system and policies relating to it need to take full cognisance of past experience.*

In the recent burgeoning of interest in the relationship between climate change and migration (IOM, 2009) there is a danger that such migration will be considered as being separate from other types of mobility. In fact climate change should be seen as a new and increasingly significant driver among a constellation of several dynamic forces impinging on mobility with which it interacts. Considering environment related migration separately from other mobility is dangerous not only because most climate change related movement is driven by multiple causes but also because there is a substantial body of knowledge of migration which is of relevance to better understanding the complex climate change-migration relationship (Hugo, 2010). Separating climate change related migration from existing knowledge of migration theory and practice would significantly delay progress in improving understanding and could lead to inappropriate, ineffective and inequitable policy intervention.

This contribution seeks to make a contribution in this space by focusing on the extent to which existing knowledge is of relevance to one of the most discussed and controversial dimensions of the climate change-migration relationship – forced displacement of individuals, families and communities from areas impacted by climate change and the resettlement of those people.

Most scientifically robust projections of climate change indicate that there will be significant changes in communities’ ability to earn a livelihood in hot spot areas which will experience the greatest

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impact. While much of the response will involve *in situ* adjustment, some mobility is likely to result (Hugo *et al.*, 2009). It needs to be recognised, however, that migration responses to climate change are of two types:

- Migration of some people out of areas influenced by climate change on a *temporary* or *permanent* basis can enhance the capacity of those left behind to adapt to climate change.
- In extreme cases where climate change makes it impossible for communities to remain in their home areas, *displacement migration and resettlement* elsewhere offers a last resort.

Some of the literature exaggerates the second type of migration response but it is only one among the array of *in situ* and migration responses to climate change and even then is usually the last resort when other adaptation mechanisms have been exhausted and community resilience broken down.

Over recent decades there have been many attempts in low income countries to resettle significant numbers of people within their national boundaries either in response to an event which renders living in an area impossible or to achieve a change in the spatial distribution of the national population for economic, social or political reasons. These include land resettlement programs, urban resettlement programs, settlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), resettlement associated with environmental disasters and displacement and resettlement associated with large scale engineering projects.

In distilling the lessons from the experience of displacement and resettlement it is important to note that there is no single magic recipe for initiating successful resettlement schemes since circumstances vary considerably from place to place. Nevertheless, it is clear that there are a number of issues which recur in the literature. It also needs to be said that while it is possible to identify ‘best practice’ in displacement and resettlement (World Bank, 1994), many of the lessons come from failure rather than success and few areas of public policy have a more sustained record of failure (Cernea, 1997).

Ultimately, the key indicator of success in displacement and resettlement must be that those displaced need to be established at the destination with minimally the same level of living they enjoyed at the origin but desirably an improved standard of living. As Cernea (1997, 1569) has pointed out:

‘Impoverishment of displaced people is the central risk in ... involuntary population resettlement. To counter this central risk, protecting and reconstructing displaced peoples’ livelihoods is the central requirement of equitable resettlement programs’.

What, then, are the lessons from over five decades of experience of displacement and resettlement which need to be heeded in coping with the anticipated forced displacements of people caused by the impact of climate change in low income countries?

1. *Provision of Sufficient and Properly Allocated Funding*

One of the chronic problems of resettlement programs has been a failure to provide the necessary level of funding for the displacement and resettlement processes and equally significant the misallocation of those funds through corruption and poor planning. Too often the funding allocation is based purely on the resources made available by government rather than a careful analysis of what the actual costs are that will be incurred by relocating from the origin and re-establishing livelihoods at the destination.

2. *Planning of the Displacement-Resettlement Process*

One of the assets which many of the low income countries face with the inevitability of eventually needing to resettle some communities due to the impact of climate change is time. While in some countries the displacement impacts of climate change are more imminent than others, in most cases the slow onset effects mean that communities, nation states and the international community have a significant period of time to plan for displacement and resettlement where it is considered to be eventually necessary. This is not to say that there is no urgency. Although the desired end point may be decades away, there is an urgency to begin planning the process. One of the clear findings from the resettlement literature is that time is required to put in place all of the institutions, structures and

mechanisms to facilitate equitable and sustainable resettlement. Cernea (1995) identifies a key barrier to the success of past resettlement projects has been weak governance with the institutions charged with the responsibility of resettlement lacking a political mandate and having poor institutional capacity.

3. *Empowerment of the Displaced People and Communities*

A clear finding of the literature on resettlement has been that too often the process has been a 'top down' one in which the involvement of those being displaced has been limited. Displaced communities often perceive themselves as powerless and this erodes the resilience and social capital of resettled communities. Engagement of the communities to be effected from the earliest stages of planning and fully involving them in each stage of the process in a way which gives them ownership of both the displacement and resettlement processes is one of the signal lessons which can be derived from the literature.

4. *Full Engagement With Destination Communities*

In most cases of resettlement there are communities already established at the destination and it is rare that areas are available where no local communities are to be impacted by the influx of displaced persons. A common problem with land settlement and infrastructure resettlement programs is to neglect involving those pre-existing local communities in resettlement areas. Both in terms of taking into account their interests as well as drawing on their experience and local knowledge. At the outset it is necessary for these communities to be fully engaged and consulted with in every relevant stage of planning relocation and resettlement in the same way as for those being displaced. Not to do so will risk disaffection and resentment in that group who can mobilise effective opposition to resettlement. A basic principle is that the origin community, like the displacees, should not experience a decline in their livelihood as a result of resettlement. Their rights need to be fully recognised and they should be properly compensated for any loss of property.

5. *Making Use of Existing Social Networks*

One of the consistent findings in migration research is the importance of the social networks established by migrants with their home communities in encouraging and facilitating further migration (Massey *et al.*, 1993). However, social networks also have an important role in facilitating adjustment at the destination. Accordingly, where it is possible, resettlement of communities to locations where they have substantial social capital in the form of earlier generations of migrants should be encouraged. This is especially the case where resettlement involves rural to urban displacement- which will loom large in climate change induced migration. Migrant communities often are instrumental in cushioning the newcomers' adjustment to the destination. This involves help in effectively entering the labour and housing markets but also in providing crucial social and cultural support and assistance.

6. *Ensuring the Reconstruction of the Livelihoods of Displaced Persons*

The bottom line of any resettlement program must be that the level of livelihood of those displaced is, at least, re-established at the destination but preferably improved. However, the circumstances at the destination may be quite different to those at the origin so that the livelihood at the destination may necessarily be significant different to that at the origin. There often will be a need for training of the resettlers to equip them with the knowledge and skills required to earn a living at the destination, especially in situations where the economies at the destination are quite different to the origin. In the initial stages of establishment it is necessary to provide support through funding or access to work such as in any work needed to establish the settlement – housing, infrastructure, land clearing and preparation etc. This support must be available for a sufficient time period to allow resettlers to re-establish themselves at the destination. There is some experience of this support being withdrawn prematurely so that settlers lapse into poverty before they get a chance to establish themselves.

7. *Recognising Differences in the Displaced Population*

In resettlement there is no 'one size fits all' solution when it comes to facilitating the process. Cernea (1997) shows that some population subgroups are hurt more by displacement than others and the level and type of support and assistance they require also varies. In several programs women are given less compensation than men and older people and children are neglected. One of the important issues in climate change related displacement is that the poor are likely to be disproportionately affected since they have less resources available to make adaptations before resettlement becomes necessary. Vulnerable groups at the origin risk becoming even more vulnerable at the destination. Special attention to vulnerable groups is especially necessary where entire communities are being resettled and there is no selectivity in who moves. Such groups will have the least resources, information and contacts at the destination to assist in the process of readjustment.

8. *Re-establishing Social and Cultural Capital at the Destination*

In the concentration on establishing the physical capital, natural capital and human capital lost by communities due to displacement there is often a neglect of their loss of social capital. As Cernea (1997) points out, strategies are required to assist displaced people to restore their capital in all its forms. There is then a need to assist the new settlers to build up their social and cultural capital at the destination as part of the adjustment process. This will be facilitated where communities can re-establish themselves at the destination as a cohesive group but there will need to be sensitivity and innovatory policy required if social capital is to be transplanted. In international migration some experience has been gained with multiculturalism policies which have focused upon new arrivals maintaining their language, culture and social networks while still embracing the main tenets of the host society. There would seem to be some transferability of these lessons to the internal migration resettlement context.

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