

Risk-related resettlement and relocation in urban areas

Key findings

1. Resettlement and relocation can reduce people's exposure to hazards, but in most cases, it leaves people worse off overall in social and economic terms than they were before.
2. Planning needs to prevent the location of new settlements in hazard-prone areas, to avoid future need for resettlement.
3. Resettlement should always be considered a last resort after all options for on-site mitigation or upgrading have been exhausted. Decision-making authorities may, and often do, understand risks differently from the communities living in environments that they know and understand, and alternative actions to resettlement may be possible.
4. Policies and procedures must ensure people's rights are protected; legal frameworks may need to be strengthened; and international covenants on resettlement must be honoured.

This *CDKN Essentials* summarises recommendations on the appropriateness of, and best practices for, urban resettlement and relocation as a response to disaster risk.

Out of harm's way?

In cities worldwide, inequalities are high. Low-income populations suffer disproportionately the impacts of climatic and other hazard events, as well as being exposed to everyday health and human security risks. Within these populations, women, the elderly, disabled people and those belonging to particular ethnic or social groups may be especially vulnerable.

As one way of addressing disaster risk, national and local governments, often supported by international funding agencies, engage in resettlement and relocation. This can be preventative, or occur after a disaster. While this reduces people's exposure to hazards, it can lead to other problems, which can leave people more vulnerable or worse off than they were before. We need to understand better the challenges and associated outcomes of such interventions on people and cities.

To reduce disaster risk, the systemic drivers of environmental degradation and inadequate location of human settlements, which contribute to multi-dimensional poverty and inequality, need urgent attention. Resettlement needs to be understood as part of long-term sustainable development, not just as a means for disaster risk reduction.

Definitions¹

Resettlement: major integrated, comprehensive movement of people, which normally involves significant distance between the original and new locations. It involves not only new housing and services, but also new social and economic relations, and new challenges such as access to work and social cohesion.

Relocation: non-systematic movement of people from hazard-prone locations to nearby areas. It involves less upheaval in terms of access to work and social networks.

Eviction or displacement: expulsion of people from possession of their land or house, usually by a process of law. Households are moved forcibly without an alternative location being planned for the move.



Low-income people are most vulnerable to the impacts of climatic and other hazard events.

Recommendations

- **Avoid any need for future resettlement.** Land-use planning, leading to safer locations for the population, is of paramount importance to eliminate or reduce the need for resettlement and relocation in the future. Urbanization, poverty conditions, degradation of local and regional natural environments and climate change increase the number of people living in high-hazard prone areas. Therefore, the priority is to make safe land available for low-income populations, minimise new development on hazard-prone land, and integrate current and future risk into development, land use and urban planning.
- **Protect against forced evictions.** Hazard exposure and welfare protection is often used as a pretext to move people out and destroy their property, such as policies applied to some 'untenable' slums in India and 'unmitigable' risks in several Latin American countries. Selection based on these conditions may be subjective and based on archaic data, offering a limited view of the risk and risk reduction options available. Laws are often rigid, and place too much power in the hands of the few. Legal frameworks need to be strengthened, while national safety-net policies and procedures need to be enforced and monitored to protect people's rights, and to ensure due and just processes are followed.
- **Understand all options for risk reduction.** Communities, government and other stakeholders need to be fully informed about the issues – including the values of different people, current and future hazards, and potential uses for the land to be vacated. Relocation and resettlement should be considered a last resort. Discussion is needed on the alternatives to resettlement and relocation, including potential options for risk reduction and on-site upgrading/rebuilding. People have always lived in hazard-prone locations, and may be willing to accept certain risks based on the opportunities offered by the location and the value they place on it. Decision-making authorities may understand risk differently, often equating it with exposure to extreme events. The gap in understanding between communities and authorities is a potential cause of contention, and a platform for dialogue

and informed debate is needed to overcome these differences.

- **Enable consensus-building processes with all stakeholders.** For both preventive and post-disaster resettlement and relocation, decisions must be built in consultation with – and consensus between – those living in exposed areas or those affected by the disaster. The affected community and local authorities are lead stakeholders, and they can identify others who should be brought into this deliberative process. Information sharing, education and communication between stakeholders are needed to ensure decisions are made with complete ownership of the issues and knowledge of potential outcomes. Transparency of information and intentions is of paramount importance in this process.
- **Honour international covenants on resettlement.** If a multi-stakeholder consultation identifies resettlement or relocation as being the most appropriate solution for all or part of the community, then protection of rights, maintenance and diversification of livelihood opportunities, sustainable development, and adherence to principles of international covenants on resettlement must prevail.
- **Share good practices.** Sharing across local and state governments, between national governments and with civil society through exchanges, workshops and technical assistance will improve the practices and outcomes of risk-induced resettlement. Platforms for national and international discussions between policy-makers and practitioners can heighten awareness of the issues.

The first draft of this document was written after a two-day multi-stakeholder meeting held at FLACSO, Quito, 14–15 October 2016. For more information and resources please visit the CDKN webpage.

Endnotes

- 1 Ferris, E. (2014) *Planned relocations, disasters and climate change: consolidating good practices and preparing for the future*. Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (www.unhcr.org/53c4d6f99.pdf).

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