Planned Relocation in the Context of Climate Change: Experience from the Field

Alice Thomas, Refugees International
The Politics of Planned Relocation

Toolbox is “particularly relevant to situation where there is time to plan and on planned relocation as a proactive measure to respond to risks created by disasters and environmental change.” Toolbox, p. 4

Challenges to engaging in proactive relocation:

• Limited amount of climate risk information available to local governments & local communities;
• Limited funding or alternative land available for planned relocation, even where need is recognized;
• Those most vulnerable to climate change effects and displacement, and therefore in need of planned relocation, are often the poorest and most disenfranchised; and
• Often people don’t want to move.
2013 Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines

Photo credit: Refugees International
2013 Typhoon Haiyan –

- Local governments well aware of hazard risks *before* disaster
- 4 million people displaced
- Primarily coastal communities who lacked secure land rights
- Govt institutes relocation plan for 200,000 households (1 million people)

Relocation plans adopted by government ran into obstacles including:

- Lack of suitable, available land for relocation
- Lack of sufficient funding
- Lack of legal & institutional framework for relocation

Result:

- Protracted displacement of vulnerable HH in camps, bunkhouses
- Only small % of households relocated
- Relocated HH experience loss of livelihoods, access to social services, social networks
- Most people went right back and more vulnerable than before; risk of recurrent displacement
2015 Flooding and Landslides in Myanmar
2015 Floods & Landslides –
- Affected 9 million people primarily in Rakhine and Chin States
- Areas affected extremely poor & vulnerable
- Humanitarian response to disaster insufficient
- Inability of houses to recover (e.g., increased poverty; indebtedness)

Relocations:
- Collapse of river banks and landslides resulted in permanent displacement
- Govt, with support of intl agencies, relocates communities
- Ran into same challenges: lack of land, funding, legal frameworks

Result:
- Protracted displacement of vulnerable HHs awaiting relocation
- Mixed results in terms of sustainability
- Likely migration over long term
Outcomes:
- People moved to remote locations
- New sites often more dangerous
- Lacked access to livelihoods/services
- Poorer than before
- No consultation/participation of communities
Takeaways:
- Post-disaster relocation largely unsuccessful
- Prolonged displacement
- Secondary displacement
- Protection issues unaddressed (e.g., evictions)
- People left more vulnerable than before
Lessons Moving Forward

National Governments:
- Insufficient focus on preventing/mitigating conditions likely to bring about displacement and threaten human rights.
- Need to develop and implement human rights-based disaster management laws that focus on identifying & addressing climate displacement risk (e.g., hazard and vulnerability mapping; early warning; evacuations).
- Implement legal & institutional frameworks for planned relocation.

International Humanitarian Agencies:
- Need to understand/clarify their role in planned relocation.

International Development Agencies:
- More focus on disaster recovery.
- Integrate climate displacement risk into laws and development planning including DRM, land use planning, building codes, agriculture, climate change adaptation.
Thank you!