Article Title

Governing community relocation after major disasters: An analysis of three different approaches and its outcomes in Asia

Citation

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Abstract

Over the past decade, post-disaster recovery efforts have increasingly aimed to relocate communities, with the idea that well-designed plans and implementation will lead to increased resilience. While the rationale has been that relocating away from hazards will reduce the risk of future devastation, in practice relocation has long been the least favored policy option. Communities targeted for relocation are often disadvantaged to begin with, and relocation disturbs their social networks and economic well-being, pushing them further into destitution. In light of this, it is important to understand good relocation governance, particularly ways in which local governments carry out relocation with local actors, and especially considering increasing rates of post-disaster relocation efforts.

This paper focuses on three recovery cases – earthquake and tsunamis in Tohoku (Japan), storm surge in Leyte (the Philippines), and volcanic eruption in Yogyakarta (Indonesia) – to examine different governmental approaches to community relocation. Specifically, it explores how program design and governance structure impacts implementation and success of community relocation, and how that effects community engagement and the ultimate outcomes of relocation in a long-term.

Cross-comparison analysis of governance suggests six findings. First, housing programs that existed pre-disaster are the most likely mechanisms to be used for community relocation post-disaster, as it is difficult to quickly reconfigure relocation programs. Second, governance structure and stability greatly influence the relocation process, which in turn affects social networks and sentiments of those relocating. Third, the way in which incentives are allocated affect the responsibility of recipients toward relocation actions. Fourth, governments' monitoring of community relocation could influence projects' speed, but not the quality of resettlement outcomes. Fifth, the way governments and communities approach relocation are largely a result of their local culture, thus, considering and adapting the local philosophy increases community buy-in. Lastly, actively involving communities in relocation governance is important for their

continued investment in the new sites. In sum, a revised model of governance supporting holistic "life rebuilding", rather than solely "rehousing", in the societal system is critical, and stresses the importance of governance structured to center communities within the decision-making process.

Summary

National governments and development agencies consider community relocation to be a solution to increasing threats from natural hazards [26]. At the local level, governments are increasingly adopting large-scale relocation in response to devastation, hoping to avoid future devastation. However, policy makers and planners at all levels are not yet aware of the long-term impact of differing governance on relocating communities. To shed light on the causal relationship between governance and outcomes, this paper analyzed three cases of large-scale relocation in Asia.

There are two policy takeaways from this analysis of relocation governance. First, the continued failure of community relocation – e.g., disrupted social networks, increased negative sentiments, and dissatisfaction with living conditions in the relocation site – is due to the intended purpose of relocation, i.e., where it aims to "rehouse" rather than "rebuild life" in a societal system. While large-scale relocations are taking place in devastated communities after disasters, housing programs that existed prior to disasters are often used without much adjustment to the scale of devastation. Shifting the mindset of governments as well as revising programmatic design is therefore essential for improved community relocation.

Second, governance is confirmed as a key factor affecting community relocation outcomes. The cases highlight that a governance structure that allows for increasing community responsibility resulted in a greater and continued sense of improvement regarding post-relocation living conditions. Providing a central role to the relocating communities themselves is essential, as they know their preferences better than any government. For instance, monitoring relocation only contributes to the quality of resettlement outcomes if the system is structured to support the community's decision. By involving them in the planning, decision-making, and management process, this can shift the mindset from demotivation – they have just lost both their house(s) and land – to motivation to work toward resettlement that suites their physical, financial, and socio-cultural needs. Additionally, allocating incentives and a portion of funding directly to communities can help increase participation. It is also worth noting that while there is no perfect design for governing relocation, the impact culture plays in outcomes warrants a close examination of local nuances when developing an approach to incentivize communities.