

Population relocation in the context of disasters and environmental change: Insights from a comparative approach

Susanne Melde

Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC), IOM



Overview

1. The international policy framework
2. Planned relocations: what we know and the adaptation gap

Case study 1: Manam Islanders, Papua New Guinea

Case study 2: Mekong delta, Viet Nam

Case study 3: Nuevo Boca de Cachón, Dominican Republic

Conclusion

1. Planned relocation in the international policy framework

International level

- Planned relocation mentioned in a COP decision in 2010 but **not mentioned** in 2012 decision on loss and damage nor **in the COP21 Paris Agreement**
- Planned relocation **considered in the 2015 Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction** with a clear humanitarian focus

Regional level

- Planned relocation considered a **priority for adaptation to climate change in the Pacific**
- The **European Commission considers relocation as a last resort** when responding to the challenges of environmental and climate change

→ **Yet a lot more common than assumed**

2. Defining planned relocation and adaptation

➤ **Planned relocation** is understood as

“permanent (or long-term) movement of a community (or a significant part of it) from one location to another, in which important characteristics of the original community, including its societal structures, legal and political systems, cultural characteristics and worldviews are retained: the community stays together at the destination in a social form that is similar to the community of origin” (Campbell 2010: 58-59)

➤ **Adaptation** is understood as

“**moderat[ing] harm or exploit[ing] beneficial opportunities**” (IPCC 2012: 72)

2. Planned relocations: what we know and the adaptation gap

- Insights for planned relocation from scholarship on:
 1. More recently **existing practices**
 2. **Development-induced displacement**
 3. **Disaster risk reduction**
 4. **Evacuations**
 5. **Historical examples**
- **Main gap:** how relocation experiences have **impacted on adaptation** to environmental hazards of the affected population

Case study 1: Manam Islanders, Papua New Guinea

First relocation of Manam Islanders

- 2004-2005: after the volcano of Manam island erupted, about 11,000 inhabitants were evacuated to nearby coast
- **Evacuation → Planned relocation**

Possibility of a second relocation

- Planning started in 2006, but funds disappeared
- Absence of reliable data on the population
- Issues with site for 2nd relocation (Andarum): livelihood based on cocoa; leaders of Manam Islanders not involved in the dialogue with local landowners
- Multiple site approach including Manam island: re-provide basic services on the island; exposure to further volcanic activity (Connell and Lutkehaus, 2016)



© IOM 2015 (Photo: Susanne Melde)

Case study 1: Manam Islanders, Papua New Guinea (cont'd)

Positive implications:

- People protected from the risk of new eruptions
- Better access to local markets and social networks (Connell and Lutkehaus, 2016)

Negative implications:

- Health care deteriorating and alarming
- Population pressure and impact of El Niño contributing to food insecurity
- Exposure to new hazards: Occasional flooding, droughts and landslides
- Obstacles to human development due to a lack of awareness compared to the local population and increasing inequalities (Connell and Lutkehaus, 2016)

Case study 2: Mekong River Delta, Viet Nam

- Selective relocation – river bank erosion, frequent storms, landslides (Entzinger and Scholten, 2016)

Key to success:

1. Sustainable livelihood options, such as vocational training
2. Distance allowing continuation of income generating activities and continued reliance on social support network



© IOM 2015 (photo: Susanne Melde)

- Yet only 'shifting vulnerabilities' (Chun, 2014) in case of short distance moves (Entzinger and Scholten, 2015; 2016)
- due to lack of income diversification, especially for women
 - hazards unlikely to be reduced in the future
- **push factors for migrating to urban areas** likely to increase (Entzinger and Scholten, 2016)

Case study 3: Nuevo Boca de Cachón, Dominican Republic

- Due to the rising level of the lake, since 2011, the President promised to relocate the village to higher ground
- The relocation took place in 2014 by Armed Forces
- Most of the houses in the old village were destroyed and only few families remained



© IOM 2014 (photo: Susanne Melde)

Case study 3: Nuevo Boca de Cachón, Dominican Republic

Positive implications:

- Harm to flooding from lake Enriquillo successfully reduced
- New village site accounts for better housing
- Increased access to water, food and social services, but less than other migrant and non-migrant households

Negative implications:

- People still use their old property for grazing their livestock as the new plots are too small (but this is a viable option)
- Access to the local market slightly more difficult due to increased distance
- Slight increase in discrimination for accessing work, health care or education



© IOM 2014 (photo: Susanne Melde)

Conclusion

Existing body of literature provides a sufficient basis for **analysing the feasibility and sustainability of planned relocation examples**, which need to **better inform policy**



Three main factors explain the success or lack thereof of past relocations:

- 1 - The **type of relocation and consequently available timeframe**
 - preventive relocations increase urgency
- 2 - The **political will** to plan, finance and conduct the movement
- 3 – **Sustainable livelihoods:** Land tenure traditions, distance, diversification enabling or impeding **long-term and sustainable solutions to adaptation**

Policy implications

1. **Sharing good practices** for locally driven and rights-based approaches
2. **Prevention:** Increasing disaster risk reduction and resilience to decrease displacement and relocation risks
3. Developing and managing **early warning systems**
4. Integrating **gender** concerns



Contact:

Susanne Melde
Research and Policy Officer

smelde@iom.int

GMDAC

gmdac@iom.int

MECLEP

<https://environmentalmigration.iom.int/>

This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.