Resettlement of development-induced displacees: Emerging issues

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Introduction

"The forcing of communities and individuals out of their homes, often also their homelands, for the purpose of economic development" is termed as development-induced displacement by Pablo Bose (2003) and Bose et al. (2003). Development-induced displacees (DIDs) thus characteristically are different from the "voluntary" and "floating" migrants, as DIDs are forced from their homes or they move involuntarily. It is also important to distinguish DIDs from other types of involuntary migrants such as political refugees (who often face forced migration on short notice and assistance provided in such cases is reactive to refugee crisis) or environmental refugees and disaster-induced refugees (threats to lives and properties stemming from extreme environmental events rather than human actions). Large-scale physical infrastructure, which includes roads and highways, railways, dams and reservoirs, utility networks, urban and industrial development projects, often causes uprooting of massive sedentary populations for macro scale economic development. Such projects are aimed at improving living conditions of citizenry in general through national prosperity, although the displacements associated with them harm local people and communities and restrict their ability to continue with their normal livelihood. Unlike political and environmental refugees, migrants displaced by dam construction tend to stay in their country of origin and are commonly settled internally. The degree of uncertainty of development-induced displacees' future tends to be relatively high, particularly among the dam-induced displacees. These uprooted people do not have the option of ever returning to their place of origin, and cannot have a dream of regaining their original identity and cultural settings.

Worldwide scale of displacement and modeling

Since World War II, more than 20 million people have been displaced worldwide by strife, both cross border and international (BOSE, 2003; HAMPTON, 1998). However, the volume of dislocated people caused by economic development activities surpassed 100 million (McDOWELL, 1996). Notably, on average, 10 million people are uprooted by large-dam projects worldwide (CERNEA and McDOWELL, 2000).

Because DIDs are rooted in human actions for a so-called "greater cause," logistic, ethical, and social (such as instability, unrest, and civil disobedience) responsibilities concerning relocation lie with both individuals and institutions, primarily with governments. During the last 25 to 30 years, the field of resettlement studies has accumulated a systematic body of knowledge and theory that is both useful and provocative to planners and policy executives. The pioneering Scudder/Colson (1982) model is central to all these models and was based on several studies in Africa, particularly the Kariba Dam in Zambia.

It is suggested in this model that, in a free market setting, adaptation to forced settlement occurs in four demarcated stages:

- **Recruitment:** Involves the choice of people to be resettled, as many people may resist resettlement or may choose to migrate elsewhere on their own. In fact, only people with financial and logistical resources tend to voluntarily choose to relocate in the face of development-induced uprooting, and thus leave behind a population that would be forcibly resettled. The latter group thus represents a cohort with considerably diminished capital and human resources.
- **Transition:** With the actual removal of people and belongings, the transition stage commences and terminates with the successful adaptation to the new settings, as can be found in the reestablishment of economic systems and social and community networks. This stage commonly causes the most harm to people and the socio-cultural responses tend to be "conservative" as people are wary of risk taking. This in turn results in minimal cultural inventory restricted primarily to essentials and risk-averse stands on innovation, such as housing arrangements, new cropping techniques, and re-training for newer types of jobs.
- **Potential development:** People who are successful in reestablishing their system of livelihood gradually become involved

in experimentation, innovation, and risk-taking activities, and are open to alternative ideas and action plans.

- **Incorporation:** At this stage, the community at large will have attained normalized relations with government and other institutions (such as business and industry), and with the outside world in general.

Although the Scudder/Colson stage model of (institutional) response to involuntary resettlement is helpful to generalize the process, it is of little help to specify the complexities and problematic nature of development benefits and cost, particularly of the associated human and societal costs. Meeting people's basic needs and improving their living conditions through industrialization, enhanced trade, urbanization, and economic development in general is every nation's goal, which is founded upon the principle of a positive overall net benefit. It considers the penultimate national vision and goal. But such aggregate gain in most cases is achieved at the expense of immense local or regional human and societal costs that are not generally accounted for in the conventional cost-benefit analysis. Paradoxically, rather than bringing about positive change in the living conditions of people at the regional and local level, dam-induced displacements and the consequential effects have caused mass impoverishment for millions in many parts of the world. The avoidance or underestimation of a consideration of "externalities" has resulted in "hands off" by the governments or institutions in dealing with impoverishment of relocates and social instability, as well as environmental degradation (KANBUR, 2002; DOWNING, 2004).

Professor Michael Cernea, a former World Bank advisor, observed and conceptualized the risk of impoverishment through development- induced displacement by offering a narrative model, in which he identified several critical dimensions of the model (CERNEA, 1990):

- **Landlessness:** families with customary rights (common rights), rather than with family title, are commonly uprooted; compensation in cash does not ensure replacement of lost land;
- **Joblessness:** farmers and private small enterprises may not be reestablished at all, causing massive unemployment;
- **Homelessness:** for many families, without resettlement programs by the authorities, the loss of shelter is never replaced;
- **Marginalization:** small land or resource-holders or low income families are further marginalized in terms of resource, income, etc.
- **Food security:** undernourishment due to chronic food insecurity is common among displacees;
- **Morbidity:** adverse health effects associated with uprooting are well documented;
- **Social disarticulation:** results from break down of kin systems and social networks, as well as from the break-up of authority systems and loss of leadership (also see DOWNING, 2004). Quantification of this aspect is difficult.

As a consequence of these emerging scenarios and the scholarly work of Cernea and other contemporary scholars, significant changes occurred in the development and planning approaches to large-scale infrastructure including dams. This has been observed more prominently among the donor agencies and subsequently among national governments than any other involved bodies. One of the best examples is that, conventionally, planning for resettlement of uprooted people did not exist because displacees were viewed and designated as obstacles to dam or infrastructure construction rather than recognizing them as victims as well as potential contributors to economic growth and prosperity. Such policy and planning vacuums caused relegation of the issues of forced displacement to the position of "necessary evil" for which ad-hoc treatment was tolerable by the authorities, on the one hand. On the other hand, insufficient resource allocation, underplanning for resettlement and rehabilitation, and poor execution of ad-hoc programs were common consequential effects.

Lessons from resettlement schemes in various parts of the world

There are no specific criteria available to assess success and failure of resettlement schemes. Resettlement is a multidimensional opportunity for the reconstruction of systems of livelihood and human settlements. These dimensions represent a development in the standard of living of those affected, as well as in the regional economy of which they are a part. The major goal of resettlement schemes therefore is to ensure that settlers are afforded opportunities to become established and socioeconomically self-sustaining in the shortest possible period. Such schemes also must take into account important developmental aspects, such as social and physical infrastructure, schools and health services, access to jobs, and housing allocations, especially to meet expanding needs of these components. In sum, to be successful, resettlement schemes should lead to a transfer of responsibility from settlement authorities to the settlers themselves.

Coburn et al. (1984), by analyzing the resettlement of displacees caused by earthquakes in Bingol province of Turkey, have identified three factors that largely determine the fate of a scheme:

- the physical environment of the new settlement,
- the relationship with the old village, and
- the capability of the community to develop itself.

Other studies from Latin America and the Middle East have substantiated these citations by identifying that

- site,
- layout,
- housing and, more importantly,
- displacees' inputs through direct involvement in decision making,

are the most important criteria. Global literature surveys suggest that, while all these criteria would reveal some degree of commitment to permanence in both a dwelling and a community, it is important to recognize that all are ultimately dependent upon a certain level of economic uplifting of the displacees in terms of employment, income, and assets. Opportunity and proximity to employment sources and social support and services have been identified as most important elements in making a resettlement project successful. Partridge (1989) in this context inferred that a crucial variable for assessing successful adaptation in the transition period is the reestablishment of the livelihood in terms of economic and social systems of production and consumption.

One of the most frequently cited causes of resettlement failure is the poor selection of site for resettlement, influenced chiefly by the fact that the welfare of the affected people and their preferences receive least priority. Rather, other factors such as selection of land that can be easily acquired, and/or public/state owned land is designated for convenience. Accessibility and topography favoring rapid construction for authorities seeking maximum efficiency in the use of resources and "speedy solutions" are also registered as reasons for poor site (in terms of ecological, social settings) choices.

Layout or design of the settlement has also been seen as a cause of abandonment of the sites by the resettlers. Monotonous, uniform designs and construction that represent an unfamiliar cultural value (urban, metropolitan) to the rural populations generate cultural conflicts, stress, and rejection. Such layouts often lack the required variety and individually preferred features. In such resettlement designs, the culturally constructed ritual spaces that are required by people in their surrounding environment do not exist in general. The failure of the layout to facilitate interaction with kin and old neighboring groups has also led to the abandonment of resettlement sites

in many parts of the world.

Poor housing design and construction also cause failure to resettlement schemes. Urban housing schemes are seen as being too small for large rural extended families. The loss of privacy is another frequent complaint. Traditional houses have evolved over time as functional to the needs of the household units, whereas the urban resettlement housing designs are not commonly suitable for domestic-subsistence activities (e.g. seasonal variations and necessary needs are not recognized).

Values and opinions of the affected people have traditionally been ignored in site selection, preparing the layouts, and designing the houses. Such lack of consultation and participation of the DIDs has given rise to poor understanding of the social and culturally derived needs and values, and more importantly, has missed the opportunity to reap the benefits of the DIDs intimate knowledge and long experience with the immediate environment. In Turkey (AYSAN and OLIVER, 1987), Brazil (WORLD BANK, 1987), and Peru (OLIVER-SMITH, 1977 and 1986), non-displacees and non-locals were hired to construct resettlement infrastructure, depriving the DIDs from gaining a sense of ownership and relevant new skills.

The significance of economic transition of DIDs cannot be underestimated. In the context of the Three Gorges Dam in the People's Republic of China, it has been estimated that over 1.2 million people will be uprooted. With the rising of the water level of the Yangtze up to 175 meters, 484,700 urban residents will be displaced (57 percent) and could be absorbed in comparable occupations. However, the challenge for planners is to facilitate reconstruction of the livelihood of rural DIDs (361,500 in 1,353 villages along the reservoir shores). The land-for-land policy has been used both in India (Narmada Valley project) and China earlier. Li Heming et al. (2000) reported that the majority (66 percent of respondents) of the relocatees regarded their farmland (in the steep, relatively infertile slopes) after relocation as "worse" or "much worse" and 12 percent reported it as "the same as" and 21 percent said they were "better off."

The strategy of settling rural migrants in urban areas through the help from finding relatives and friends and arranging for these migrants to enter the non-agricultural sector in general have been successful for the elderly populations in China. However, although government tried to settle younger rural migrants in urban economic sectors, their employment did not last very long (WU, 2004). A Canadian example can be cited here as an interesting lesson. In the mid 1990s in the Canadian eastern coastal regions, due to a moratorium on Cod fisheries, thousands of fishermen lost their livelihoods. The Canadian government initiated vigorous retraining programs to transform these massive human resources to suit for emerging urban, service sectors jobs that over time have been proven to be successful.

Glittenburg (1982; cited in Oliver-Smith, 1991) investigated reconstruction in four urban settlements, following the 1976 Guatemalan earthquake. The earthquake displaced thousands of families by destroying their houses and all of their personal possessions. The families could not stay close to their original settlements due to the instability of the terrain. In the face of such uncertainty, these working class families, with the help of students, organized a land invasion. Experiencing such a *fait accomplis*, the National Housing Bank (BANVI) agreed to buy the land and the local church agreed to build 1,500 houses, a health station, a primary school, a market, a church, and a park. The obligation of the participants was to take part in all decision making of the project, commit 3 weeks labor to house construction, and pay a mortgage of $8-10 per month. Today, it is one of the highly organized communities in Guatemala. The high level of organization, the dynamic nature of internal leaders, and external assistance that encouraged taking ownership were the key factors in ensuring the success of the project.

Policy and planning frameworks for mitigating displacement impacts

Michael Cernea (2000) and Theodore Downing (2004) have suggested that, although every negative counter-development effect of large dam construction cannot be prevented, many of the great risks can be minimized. Appropriate policy adjustments, planning mechanisms and tools and execution of effective programs are necessary to attain such goals. For involuntary resettlement schemes, four interrelated frameworks are said to be required:

– Policy framework
– Planning framework
– Organization framework
– Legal framework[1]

of which the first three are relevant to the Chinese context.

Policy framework

- The responsibility for relocating the groups affected by public projects lies ultimately with the government; the people who directly benefit from the project that causes displacement should share in solution-finding;
- Avoidance of forced displacement should be a policy-priority, and when unavoidable, its effects should be minimized through alternative solutions;
- The centrality of policy objective should be to assist resettlers to improve their former living standards and production levels or at least restore them;
- The policy approach should be changes from relief and assistance programs to full-fledged development programs;
- Land-for-land as well as cash compensation against losses are inadequate to reconstruct the livelihood of resettlers, therefore compensation mechanisms should be complemented by a "generalized safety net" measure (KANBUR, 2002);
- Overall, the equity concerns must be addressed in policy framework.

Planning framework

- Action plan for resettlement schemes must be an integral part of the project development process. Planning should begin by examining the options for reducing displacements as well as risks of impoverishment.
- The planning for displacement and resettlement should attempt to consult the affected population as much as possible, to involve its leaders and organizations, and to inform them of the overall project plans and their justification. This would minimize the gaps between authorities and DIDs.
- Resettlement planning processes should examine the acceptance rate for various options to minimize risks and facilitate organization and funding.
- A development-oriented plan for resettlement should attempt to improve the prior housing standards and the physical infrastructure and services at the new relocation sites, rather than allowing only for the same standards. Literature on resettlement has revealed that self-built houses are preferred by resettlers over authority or government built housing. Aysan (1987) studied resettlement schemes in Western Turkey, and noted that some degree of flexibility in dwelling structure and function was a key to their success. Residents were given single storey houses of 42 sq.m built on a grid layout by the state. Popular demand for variations from the state mandated design was not incorporated. However, the lot size was large enough to permit settlers to play an active role in altering and extending their houses. This was regarded as a sign of commitment and permanence.

- Displacees who move in groups, as part of a pre-existing community, neighborhood, kinship group, adapt better than individual family units in new locations. Whenever possible, in order to minimize social disarticulation, the settlers' social and cultural norms should be protected and supported.
- The resettlement plan should also account for "second generation" adverse environmental effects at the relocation sites (e.g. deforestation, social erosion, drainage congestion, and general overload of the ecological carrying capacity of the relocation areas).

Organizational framework

- Population relocation has often turned into implementation disasters in dam and other infrastructure projects, in part because the same agency which was responsible for building the dam was also given the charge of resettlement. Such agencies are specialized in the engineering and civil works and do not possess the professional skills to deal with agricultural and urban relocation. The agencies tend to relegate relocation affairs to the status of a low priority task.
- The Mexico Hydroelectric Project is a good example where major organizational modification was needed to improve resettlement planning (GLITTENBURG, 1982; OLIVER- SMITH, 1991). This was a World Bank assisted project, and two dams of the project displaced more than 5,000 people. The lowest level unit with the National Power Company handled previous resettlement schemes, which many of them so mismanaged they eventually caused outright cancellation of the resettlement schemes or delays of long duration. Such lack of organizational supports was seen in unclear objectives, inadequate planning, insufficient staffing and financial resources, and poor scheduling. The Company's reorganization efforts have eventually addressed these problems by creating a special social development division, with applied action research specialists in the team.
- Monitoring and on-going evaluation of the dislocation and resettlement processes should be a priority element in designing organizational framework. The specific but subtle risks that prevail with the affected families (malnutrition, increased morbidity and mortality, asset depletion, social disarticulation) need special staff who are trained to understand and capture them. It is particularly important to ensure that the monitoring and evaluation teams are not under the direct authority of those responsible for compensation or resettlement operation.

Concluding commentary

The era of large dam construction in the developed world is over. Such a change in the discourse of large scale public utilities development and construction of large dams is chiefly attributed to increased public awareness of the adverse environmental and equity effects on the most vulnerable population, and the resultant stringent environmental impact assessment requirement for receiving construction of license.

However, globalization of the world economy has generated new economic momentum in many developing countries of Asia and Latin America, providing new impetus to expedite economic growth process through large scale development projects. Most of these newly industrializing nations have a large population with high population density, many of whom are adversely affected by development-induced displacements. In the forthcoming years, dealing with DIDs will therefore remain a major development policy challenge for the newly developed nations.

The courageous steps that the People's Republic of China have taken in recent years in terms of a simultaneously focus on human safety through flood mitigation and generation of power for rapid manufacturing and service growth are commendable. Construction of the Three Gorges Dam is the realization of a century-old dream. However, two major constraints may undermine the benefits of such accomplishment:

- a failure in reconstruction of the livelihood of more than 1.3 million displaced people from the lower levels of the Yangtze valley; and,
- long-term environmental impacts from the changes in water level and river regimes, for example mercury accumulation.

Establishing a participatory decision-making process in the resettlement process, and providing alternative choices to the displacees certainly will improve the performance of resettlement schemes. As well, incorporation of a resettlement scheme as constituent parts of future power development and water resource management projects will address and mitigate the concerns that usually arise from uncertainty in planning and implementation.

Note

1. The fourth framework is the legal framework. Existing literature in this area is primarily based on private and common property rights and protection of individual rights under a democratically elected government. China being a centrally planned economy and unique in terms of its legal systems, a separate discussion on legal framework for the Chinese case is required.

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