

Towards greater transparency and accountability in decision-making for planned relocation

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Governments need to be more transparent in terms of reporting on their relocation planning and implementation in order to ensure responsible decision-making and effective monitoring.

Decisions around adaptation governance occur within a complex network of international and domestic actors and influences. National government officials are the primary conduits, usually with responsibility for choosing, funding and implementing adaptation policy, including relocation programmes. Yet, at the national level, there is a lack of transparency around how governments decide to use, support or delay relocation, and what factors or stakeholders help define the outcomes of these decisions. Low levels of accountability can lead to poor decision making and negative outcomes. There are also few incentives to ensure that affected communities have input in choosing which adaptive response is most appropriate.

Governments receive technical guidance on best practices for adaptation from UN bodies like the Adaptation Committee and from UN agencies such as UNHCR and IOM, and financial support for implementation from development banks such as the World Bank and Green Climate Fund. However, the existing multilateral adaptation frameworks that shape these interactions lack explicit goals. Adaptation planning is treated differently from mitigation, particularly around reporting requirements. For example, all UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Member States are expected to submit adaptation plans, but these submissions are not required or monitored in the same way as Nationally Determined Contributions – which focus mainly on mitigation. The absence of clear targets such as a Global Goal on Adaptation or detailed reporting requirements means that the accountability and transparency of adaptation planning

can suffer, the impact of collaboration across multiple levels of governance is unclear, and groups affected by relocation or other adaptation policies have no protection or representation in long-term planning.

Reporting failures: the accountability problem

To enhance accountability it is imperative – at a minimum – to improve baseline reporting of adaptation planning. A global dataset of climate-related relocations from the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD)¹ includes over 400 identified cases from across 74 countries. Cross-referencing this data with national adaptation planning documents submitted to the UNFCCC reveals notable accountability gaps when it comes to reporting relocation plans. Of the 197 countries party to the UNFCCC, 102 countries have submitted reports on adaptation planning either through National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) for Least Developed Countries, National Adaptation Plans for developing countries, or Adaptation Communications for all countries. Fifty out of 102 countries mention relocation, resettlement or retreat in their plans; 28 of these 50 have existing relocation programmes documented in the PDD data. Yet 37 of the remaining 46 countries from the PDD data have submitted no adaptation reporting, while nine have relocations occurring but have not acknowledged them in their adaptation plans.²

These reporting gaps highlight the further support needed for adaptation planning, as well as the differences in expectations of accountability between adaptation and mitigation. The lack of quantifiable adaptation metrics and clear

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measures of success may contribute to this misalignment.

The need for transparency

Understanding which factors shape decision-making for interventions like planned relocation can be critical where context, risk drivers and timing can mean the difference between success or failure. When the rationale behind the decision is opaque, this can raise questions around the incentives, appropriateness and acceptability of the policy. Without greater clarity on which stakeholders are involved in decision-making and how, it is difficult to ascertain the degree of involvement of affected communities in decisions and planning (an important factor for success). Unpacking the legal and financial options available to decision-makers equally provides important context to how these policies materialise.

Gathering data on where and how these policies are being used is essential to understanding how relocation is collectively and practically being applied as adaptation. Among the places where relocation has been used in response or anticipation of climate risks, some communities have led local initiatives to relocate from vulnerable areas, but have lacked political and financial support from regional or national government. Elsewhere, some national governments have established top-down policy frameworks for relocation and then initiated programmes (sometimes ad hoc) under this structure.

The Fijian government has initiated a novel top-down approach which could potentially improve transparency in decision processes around relocation. Fiji's Planned Relocation Framework – supported by a Climate Relocation and Displaced Peoples

Trust partly funded by the Norwegian government – is the first of its kind to establish a set of mandates to follow for better protection and attention to the well-being of populations experiencing relocation.³ Governments facing risks of comparable magnitude may move to establish similar frameworks as part of their adaptation planning. While this is a valuable first step in transparency, such open-ended guidelines and funding still require accountability regarding the actual relocation decisions, the level of community input, and how the availability (or lack) of funds may affect which policy response is chosen.

As governments move through the stages of commitment, to policy choice, and then to actual implementation, transparency and accountability through reporting are vital to ensuring responsible decision-making around which policies are chosen and why, particularly when stronger measures like planned relocation are deemed necessary. Failing to address these structural issues will impede effective collaboration on adaptation planning and can lead to poor decision-making and negative outcomes from relocation.

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1. See Bower E and Weerasinghe S (2021) *Leaving Place, Resorting Home: Enhancing the Evidence Base on Planned Relocation Cases in the Context of Hazards, Disasters, and Climate Change*. Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) and Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law. bit.ly/PDD-Leaving-Place-2021
2. 'Developing' and 'developed' countries have previously had different pathways for adaptation reporting. These numbers are regularly updated as new documentation is submitted.
3. See article by Liam Moore in this issue.