

Guidance for 'managed' relocation

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While the potential for climate change-related displacement has been recognised for over 20 years, the international community has been slow to develop climate change-specific instruments to guide the relocation process beyond those that relate to displacement generally.

Planned or managed relocation is increasingly being seen as a logical and legitimate climate change adaptation strategy. Although climate change-related migration can occur on a scale ranging from intercontinental to local, the majority of climate change-related movements have been, and are expected to be, within a country or even local in scale. This article looks at some of the existing guidelines, principles and statements of best practice for local and urban managed retreat as a deliberate climate change adaptation strategy for developing country cities.

Careful attention must be paid in the managed relocation process so as to not accentuate some vulnerabilities while reducing others. For example, climate change-related retreat might reduce physical vulnerability to hazard through reduced exposure, while simultaneously increasing social and

economic vulnerability through reductions in social capital and/or livelihood opportunities.

The literature on climate change-related relocation divides the concept into realignment and resettlement. Realignment is mostly practised in developed nations, and involves shifting communities away from climate change-threatened areas and restricting development in these risk areas. In less developed nations, the process is often referred to as relocation or resettlement, which is the facilitated movement of populations from an area of high environmental risk to another of lower risk. Resettlement is not a new concept, and has been used in the past for political purposes, conflict avoidance, development projects and disaster risk reduction. Although useful guidance about how best to carry out resettlement exists in these bodies of literature, it is still worth

developing climate change-specific guidance, particularly at the individual country level.

Five guidance documents

There are numerous documents which offer useful guidance for climate change-related resettlement despite not having been drafted specifically for that purpose. Due to the significant variation in vulnerability reduction approaches promoted by such documents we suggest that the climate change-specific documents below are the most appropriate source of guidance for climate change-related resettlement projects and programmes.

The Nansen Principles (2011) are designed to “guide actions to prevent or manage displacement, and protect displaced people in the face of climate change”.¹ The Principles are very general, and so provide somewhat limited on-the-ground guidance, yet are nonetheless useful starting points. For example, participation and partnership with potentially resettled communities is seen to be an important foundation of resettlement actions. Furthermore, close attention to economic vulnerability must be paid in resettlement actions, to ensure that livelihoods of resettled residents are maintained, or ideally enhanced, by the resettlement process. The Principles also promote the creation of country-specific climate change resettlement legislation, policies and institutions.

Populations at risk of disaster: a resettlement guide (2011) is focused on resettlement due to natural disasters.² However, it is framed within the context of a changing climate, which “is likely to exacerbate” natural hazard risks for some communities, and the understanding that these increased risks will translate into increased need for resettlement. As such, much of the guidance provided in this document is also guidance for climate change resettlement. The document promotes a comprehensive approach (i.e. physical, economic, social, ecological and political vulnerability reduction) to resettlement. Post-resettlement, the guide

suggests social and economic conditions of relocated persons must be re-established or enhanced, social networks rebuilt, and the vacated land modified physically or legally to ensure that new residents do not settle there and thus re-create conditions of risk.

Protection and Planned Relocations in the Context of Climate Change (2012) was commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and written under the auspices of the Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement.³ The paper uses lessons learned in development-forced displacement and resettlement as a point of departure for the creation of 22 “preliminary understandings for upholding the rights of communities who are or will be relocated as a result of climate change” which collectively promote comprehensive vulnerability reduction through resettlement. Examples of ideas promoted in this paper include: preserving existing social and cultural institutions, promoting livelihoods and economic prosperity in resettled communities, using participatory planning processes, developing monitoring mechanisms and grievance procedures, and ensuring that resettlement sites are environmentally healthy and robust in the face of climate change.

The Peninsula Principles on Climate Displacement Within States (2013) were developed through a consultative process organised by the NGO Displacement Solutions and involving lawyers, jurists, law professors and UNHCR, UN University and non-governmental organisation staff.⁴ The Peninsula Principles are arguably the clearest example to date of guidance which promotes comprehensive vulnerability reduction through climate change resettlement. They suggest that the resettlement process should preserve existing social and cultural institutions, ensure the resettlement site is not also at risk of climate change-related hazards, maintain or enhance housing and land tenure for resettled residents, provide compensation for lost assets, maintain or strengthen

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Informal settlements located alongside Pasig River, Manila, are extremely vulnerable to climate change-related flooding.

livelihoods, and strengthen capacities at multiple levels to deal with resettlement.

Planned Relocations, Disasters and Climate Change was a background paper for a March 2014 UNHCR-Brookings-Georgetown consultation designed to support the Nansen Initiative.⁵ Although the document's main focus is on cross-border resettlement, many of the document's suggestions are also relevant to local resettlement. Rather than offering specific guidelines for climate change resettlement, it refers to the large and well-established body of available guidance from the development-, disaster- and conflict-induced resettlement literature, and then references some of the emerging climate change resettlement guidance.

There remains, however, much work to be done to make climate change resettlement guidance available to national and city-level officials in developing countries. In particular, country-specific climate change resettlement instruments which incorporate a multi-dimensional vulnerability reduction perspective should be developed or adapted to reflect the vulnerability of each country's context, and perhaps even further contextualised for use in specific urban settings.

Conditions attached to climate change adaptation funding, from sources such as the Adaptation Fund and Green Climate Fund, will undoubtedly require well-structured climate change adaptation plans. Since resettlement is likely to play a part in these plans, efforts taken now to develop a range of guidance will help developing countries qualify for the funding needed to adapt to climate change over the coming decades.

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1. <http://tinyurl.com/NMFA-NansenPrinciples>
2. www.gfdrr.org/sites/gfdrr.org/files/publication/resettlement_guide_150.pdf
3. www.refworld.org/docid/5023774e2.html
4. <http://displacementsolutions.org/ds-initiatives/the-peninsula-principles>. See also Leckie and Simperingham article p34-5.
5. www.unhcr.org/53c4d6f99.pdf