Thirty years of development-induced displacement in China
François Dubé

To accelerate the process of poverty reduction in its poorer regions, China decided in 2001 to implement a national programme of displacement of populations living in areas considered environmentally fragile. But these programmes were hardly a novelty for China, and the record of previous such attempts has been far from positive.

In 1984, the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in northern China – a sparsely settled, mostly desert region – launched extensive displacement programmes intended to restore a deteriorating ecosystem and eradicate absolute poverty, with the support of the central government and the World Bank. Parts of this mountainous province are the most vulnerable in China in terms of their ecological and environmental capacity to support people and livelihoods. Over the last thirty years, it is estimated that the authorities in Ningxia have displaced about 700,000 peasants living in the extreme south of the region, an area particularly affected by droughts and water scarcity.

Although ostensibly designed to increase the well-being of those displaced, these large-scale displacement policies have instead given rise to serious problems for the people forced to move. In most cases, these projects include a component of ‘local economic development’, whereby industrial plants with high emissions and high energy consumption were established in areas previously untouched by industrialisation, often with consequences that proved more damaging for the environment than the original situation. It may be that such projects, however, raise the political profile of sponsors and advance individual careers, regardless of environmental impact. The question arises as to why the government policy failed to achieve its desired effects.

Prioritising modernisation
Our field research, conducted over the course of 2014 with displaced communities in Ningxia, revealed how displacement policies can harm families. This is the case of the Ma family from the Guyuan district of Ningxia, for example, whose access to education, health care and housing clearly worsened after their displacement to Yinchuan. We believe that one of the problems lies in the fact that the population displacement policies are so deeply steeped in the government’s modernising doctrine as to prevent any alternative being considered in the fight against poverty and environmental degradation.

There is a consensus among Chinese policymakers at all levels of government that development and modernisation (usually expressed reductively using a single indicator, namely Gross Domestic Product – GDP) are inherently beneficial processes and to challenge this reflects an anti-productive attitude, or even a lack of patriotism. For Chinese policymakers, the relocation of entire communities from ecologically fragile zones to industrial areas is an inherent part of the modernisation process, and a manifestation of social progress. The institutions responsible for the design and implementation of these displacement projects cannot afford to seek the opinions of those being displaced, despite long-existing international guidelines on this subject. If the people to be displaced were to prove refractory or even hostile, it would call into question the developmentalist premise of the Chinese leadership.

Challenges remain
Recent field surveys show that many of those who were displaced still face difficulties adjusting to their displacement: smaller living spaces, substantially increased living expenses, different planting methods and techniques to assimilate, and social
Refugee Status Determination (RSD) in Albania

Xymena Dyduch

A study of Refugee Status Determination decisions in Albania – a relatively new European country of destination – reveals some shortcomings, despite the country’s efforts to develop its procedures in line with international standards.

In October 2012, the European Commission recommended that Albania be granted European Union (EU) candidate status, subject to the completion of key measures in certain areas, including in asylum. One of the government’s objectives was to align Albania’s Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures with the EU Directives concerning RSD.


We studied RSD decisions rendered in Albania between 2006 and 2011 in order to evaluate how far Albania’s practice at that stage conformed to the EU legal framework. We analysed 11 RSD decisions: three refusals and eight decisions granting refugee status. Six of the 11 claimants were Chinese, three Kosovar, one Serbian and one Iranian. The analysis of the decisions