

**Synthesis of Expert Contributions and Discussions during the PERN Cyberseminar on  
“Preparing for Population Displacement and Resettlement Associated with Climate  
Change and Large Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Projects” (November 2011)**

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**I. Resettlement as social protection: how do we get to positive outcomes?**

On the first day of the seminar, Graeme Hugo set the tone by introducing a core set of guidelines in the implementation of climate-driven displacement and resettlement programs. These guidelines reflect the central assumption that resettlement is a policy tool for social protection of the most vulnerable to changing environmental conditions. It is implicit to these guidelines that communities needing policy intervention tend to be (but are not always) poorest and most marginalized segments of the population, and the displacement-resettlement process entails risks of further entrenchment into conditions of impoverishment (Cernea 1997). Resettlement policy ought to be aimed at breaking the destructive cycle of impoverishment and marginalization, and instead at “restor[ing] the hope that some children could lead a better life than their parents” in the words of François Gemenne. These guidelines merit restatement in full. Resettlement programs should include 1) the provision of sufficient and properly allocated funding; 2) planning through the stages of the displacement and resettlement (Meshach Ojile, along with others, observed that the greatest obstacle to positive outcomes is *poor governance*, which is implicit in the Hugo’s guidelines, but deserves explicit recognition); 3) empowerment of displaced communities; 4) full engagement with destination communities; 5) plans to use existing social networks; 6) a plan for livelihood reconstruction; 7) a recognition in the differences in the displaced population; and 8) the re-establishment of social and cultural capital at the destination.

Perhaps a few more guidelines might well be added:

9) As Thayer Scudder, along with others, suggested a fundamental rule of thumb that “resettlement should be avoided to the extent possible and where necessary involve the minimum number of people” because of the risks to households, livelihood systems and communities. 10) Burton Singer’s contribution suggests an additional guideline around the special concerns of physical and mental health. Psychological impacts were even observed in the “resettled” spouses of Yale professors, so we can imagine horrific stress of those forcibly displaced.

All the same, how do we move toward better outcomes? François Gemenne suggested that “resettlements don’t have to be brutal processes imposed upon people, but can be incremental transformations decided by the people themselves” over the long-term --in the space of two or three generations. A number of commenters argued that policy ought to facilitate or subsidize more traditional forms of migration in the face of environmental decline to international or urban destinations, depending on national circumstances and capacity to absorb migrant populations. Viewed thus, alternative program designs might include incentives for migration to new ecological cities, and international transition-to-citizenship programs. We also might envision virtual programs without the insistence on geographically fixed settlement, taking lessons from the all-voluntary Homeless People’s Federation (HPF) of the Philippines. As such, virtual or post-geographic resettlement programs could be designed to include social protections (e.g. social insurance and health benefits), livelihood transition mechanisms,

transfer payments, and could incentivize social cohesion with remittance matching programs. Hometown associations (HTAs), now a common tool for development and empowerment in Latin America (Orozco 2002), provide an established model for organizing migrants virtually, and could serve as a platform for the guidelines established here.

## **II. Resettlement amidst population dynamics:**

A number of commenters pointed out the role of population dynamics in the displacement-resettlement process. Black et al. (2011) explore the dynamic through which the poorest and most vulnerable settle into a poverty trap: those with sufficient resources and opportunities move away as environmental conditions degrade, leaving behind an increasingly poor and vulnerable segment of the population. Michael Cernea explained that both “early movers” and “late movers” would face impoverishment risks, but perhaps to different extents and through different mechanisms. David Wrathall pointed out that resettlement becomes a policy attempt to freeze the machinery of population dynamics, and by its nature, exacerbates self-selection problems. Many displaced persons will have the opportunity to ask themselves “should I accept a resettlement benefit, or can I manage on my own?” This calculation may divide a displaced community, with resettlements becoming concentrations of people who decide they need assistance.

## **III. Legal Frameworks**

In the discussion questions were raised about the potential platforms for legal protection, legitimisation and formalisation of affected communities and advocacy on their behalf, and which types of platforms could support social protection mechanisms. A difference of opinion emerged over the argument for the aegis of existing international legal frameworks (i.e. migrants and resettled persons as “climate refugees”). Marc Levy pointed out that legal protection under many legal frameworks requires crisp attribution to climate change, which is problematic in all but the most obvious circumstances, and so we might expect an expansion of rights and obligations to affected people through time. We would do well to anticipate the frameworks of protection that might emerge. Nevertheless, the diversity of potential climate-driven migration types challenges a common platform. Where international migration is involved, the hometown association model was suggested as a platform for legitimisation, formalisation and advocacy on behalf of affected communities, which could also support social protections in post-geographic communities.

Much climate-driven migration is anticipated to be internal and thus dependent on individual states’ legal frameworks. David Satterthwaite pointed out that much of climate-driven displacement and resettlement will occur in cities or to cities, and so legal frameworks must deal with integrating informal settlements, expanding public services, and providing “trunk” mitigative protections like drainage, coastal flood protection or flood plain management. Todd Schenk’s contribution provided a comparison of authoritarian (China) and *laissez faire* (United States) resettlement interventions. While China’s technocratic model facilitates prospective resettlement, it allows the potential for abuse and little recourse on the part of resettled persons. On the other hand, for a variety of reasons, prospective resettlement became very difficult in the *laissez faire* context. Robin Bronen’s (2011) case study of the relocation of Newtok, an indigenous Alaskan community, underscored the latter point. In Elizabeth Ferris’s words, “If the US government can’t relocate a community of 300 people --who want to move, have identified a site and have jumped through numerous bureaucratic hurdles-- it raises very disturbing questions about future responses to potentially much greater needs in countries [whose] governments [possess] far smaller resources,” and roughly equivalence in terms of their *laissez faire* approach.

#### **IV. Political ecology of mitigation and adaptation:**

Climate change presents the frightening prospect of the need to resettle communities in the name of adaptation – whether that resettlement is in anticipation of projected impacts, or in reaction to existing impacts. This became a subtle strain in the discussions that deserves amplifying here. In order to move away from a carbon-based economy and mitigate worsening climate change impacts, we will have to build hydropower dams, and the persons in those flooded valleys will have to be resettled. Beyond dams, as Alex de Sherbinin reports, land grabs in conjunction with biofuel projects in Africa, Latin America and Indonesia are growing in frequency. In the end, how do we assure that costs and benefits of climate change are not borne inequitably, and “engage first hand in the effort to ensure that the process is fair, equitable and beneficial to project affected people,” as David Halmo argued. Yan Tan’s illuminating piece on China’s experience resettling people from degraded ecological systems and in dammed river valleys is a good first start. Even in a tightly controlled context, Tan reported that the wealthiest obtain advantages over the least wealthy in the displacement-resettlement process. We must ask the same questions at broader scales: who will benefit from political decisions that prioritize hydropower, biofuels and resettlement? For example, do certain factory owners exert influence in resettlement decisions and gain an advantage from a displaced-resettled workforce?

#### **V. Typologies of mobility: displacement and resettlement**

From the outset, commenters from all corners of the globe --from India, China, and countries of Africa, South Asia and the Americas-- pointed out a difficulty distinguishing between economic and climate-driven migration. As Vide Adedayo pointed out, “in Nigeria for instance, we experience more of temporary, and seasonal migration as a result of drought, flood and sea rise, while large-scale migration due to climate change is rarely identified.” The common denominator is that environmental pressure typically builds slowly, allowing time to adapt livelihoods. Michael Cernea framed the difference between economic migration and displacement in forceful and thought-provoking terms, which deserve repetition in full:

“There is, unfortunately, a deep qualitative difference between economic migration undertaken by the actors' decision and initiative ... and forced displacement or inflicted uprooting, imposed by physical violence or legal violence by outside agents, like the state or a land-grabbing-for-its-profit-corporation (or even a military force). The issue is not ... to ‘broaden our understanding of resettlement by (our) looking’ differently at ... these processes. The issue is *ontological*: how these processes *intrinsically are in themselves*. And further, also, how they are perceived and ‘looked at’ by their actors, who live them in their flesh and blood and suffer them. It is the reality of their existence and not the reality of our interpretations. ... These conceptualizations are ... hugely important when conclusions for *different policy actions must be* derived for ... qualitatively different events, which demand substantively different strategies. This *is the difference* between policies for assisting and facilitating economic migration, and the *totally* different policies for restricting forced displacement to the minimum, or eliminating it fully whenever possible.”

Susana Adamo argued, along with Michael Cernea, that within the realm of human mobility types, resettlement is not “at the far end of a continuum from voluntary to forced, but is *sui generis*,” intrinsically different. First displacement occurs, and then secondarily the decision to resettle must be made, which entails another set of processes. How then do we typologize resettlement? Architesh Panda suggested a formal categorization of resettlement types in the vein of Renaud et al. (2007). Oliver-Smith (2006) proposes a useful typological framework

consisting of continua that capture the multi-dimensional nature of mobility and settlement, and avoids arbitrary and artificial distinctions. Elizabeth Marino pointed out that, in fact, often resettled persons are “lured” (or incentivized) into participation, which challenges the notion of a forced-voluntary continuum (Schweitzer et al. *forthcoming*). Instead, Elizabeth suggested an outcomes-based typology on the basis of well-being or program success, or similarly, the extent to which displaced persons achieve some measure of “stability” over the long-term.

### **Citations**

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