Factors affecting the successful integration of host and displaced communities in involuntary resettlements

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SUMMARY

Involuntary displacements are growing in numbers worldwide due to natural disasters, conflicts and development related activities. While often the local authorities assume the responsibility of resettling such displaced communities, many such resettlements have been reported as failures. Among other reasons, integration issues between host and communities have been identified as a contributory factor for such failures. In a bid to unveil the reasons for failures in such integrations, a comprehensive literature review has been conducted. Current literature highlights main reasons affecting the acceptance/rejection of a new involuntary displaced community categorised into social, economic, cultural, and other dimensions.

Keywords: involuntary resettlements, host communities, displaced communities, host-displaced community integration.

INTRODUCTION

The number of involuntary displacements are increasing rapidly and drawing the attention of the world (Cao, Hwang et al. 2012). Major reasons for such displacements are conflicts, consequence of change in the land usage (e.g. development), and natural disasters (Betts 2009). People who do not have the ability and / or wealth to move away from these situations are referred to as trapped population (Foresight 2011). It is often the responsibility of the relevant authorities to relocate this trapped population to minimise the harm caused by the disruptive events, however, such relocations often fail to ensure long term recovery. This failure has often been attributed to social, economic and cultural parameters which need further attention.

More often than not, the consequences of involuntary relocations will have an impact on two different communities; the community which is being relocated (displaced community) and the community receiving the newly relocated community (host community). Despite the argument about community’s willingness to host the displaced community, literature broadly highlight cultural, regional, and ethnic differences between host and displaced communities as contributory factors for the failures of resettlements. As such this paper reports the findings of an extensive literature review to unveil the factors affecting the integration between host and displaced communities.

CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS

Principle 22 of the guiding principles of internal displacements (United Nations 2004) states that the internally displaced persons should not be discriminated, as a result of their displacement, against the enjoyment of their rights. However, resettlements after a displacement often create segregation between displaced and host communities and lead to difference in treatments. This labelling process is initially created to reify targets for aids. However, the labels stay over time and usually ends up in various tensions and affect the relationships between the groups (Duncan 2005).

Initially, after a resettlement, the resettled community calls attention to the special needs and vulnerabilities. However, in long term, the local (host) community sees this as a social injustice and complains against the privileges receive by the resettled community, which are denied or unavailable to the host community. This condition imposes a social and financial burden on the society.

Brun (2000) explains that, the same place can be valued and used differently by different people. As a result, the new community attempts to give new meaning to the old place which give rise to various problems within the communities over the use of space. Large-scale resettlement schemes are crowded in nature (Keraminiyage and Piyatadasanan 2013). Therefore, they are generally provided with all the facilities within their boundaries. These changes make an adverse effect on the livelihood of the host community. As a consequence, the host community blames the new community for their economic losses.

Reduction in availability of resources following resettlement has been reported in many case studies. As a consequence, the competition for resources could weaken social networks and reduce cooperation between the displaced and host communities. Further, Cao, Hwang et al. (2012) based on a study in China by demonstrated that food insecurity, owing to the inadequate food supply, increased the displaced community’s proneness to poor nourishment and related...
diseases. This condition influences the host community to reject the new settlements.

Recognising the new community officially as part of the economic cycle is a way to eliminate informal economy. Else, the new community will work illegally, thus competing against the local labour force (Basok 1990). This will replace the local labour force and create downward wage pressures. Chambers (1986) states that, whether new community depress or stimulate the economy depends on the institutional policies. However, creation of employment according to the population increase is often neglected in the resettlement plans. This issue creates a hesitation among local community to accept the new community.

Resettled communities, particularly after a conflict-induced displacement, often perceived as a security threat even if they do not engage in any endangering activities because of ideological differences (Basok 1990). Cultural, regional, and ethnic differences between host and displaced communities also could act as triggers for discrimination and racism (International Committee of the Red Cross 2011).

Resettlements place the host community in a position where it has to share public facilities such as roads, common buildings, schools, water bodies, forest lands, grazing lands, food supply, healthcare centres, and means of livelihood such as fishery infrastructure (Gunawardena and Wickramasinghe 2009). Brun (2010) evidenced that, competing for services such as health has put government health services under pressure in Sri Lanka after a prolonged conflict-induced displacement.

Discriminations owing to language and culture have been highlighted in many refugee studies. Lee (1966)'s theory of migration points out similar culture and language as a pulling factor for migration. On the other hand, difference in language and culture act as a barrier for social integration. International Committee of the Red Cross (2011) observed clashes and confrontations between the hosts and internally displaced persons in Colombia due to issues such as being black, being loud, from coast, or from large families.

Considerations about the compatibility between host and displaced community is often overlooked by the relevant authorities owing to time limitations, drawbacks in the policies, and financial unpreparedness (Magis 2010). Oliver-Smith (1991) suggests that, success of a resettlement will be enhanced if the resettlement is approached as socio-cultural as well as material problem in which the host and affected communities participate in planning and implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

Proper integration between host and displaced communities plays a major role in making involuntary resettlements a success. The identified factors affecting the acceptance/rejection of a new community can be categorised in to social, economic, cultural, and other factors. However, these factors are highly depended on several background factors such as the wealth of the host community, nature of government policies, livelihood of the host community, and alike.

REFERENCES


