

Resettlement Principles

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1. The resettlement effect is defined as the **“loss of physical and non-physical assets, including homes, communities, productive land, income-earning assets and sources, subsistence, resources, cultural sites, social structures, networks and ties, cultural identity and mutual health mechanisms** (Downing and Garcia-Downing 2009).
2. **The negative consequences of involuntary displacements extend far beyond the loss of land.** Understanding what happens when people are involuntarily displaced begins with culture as a set of constructs and rules for constructing the world, interpreting it, and adapting to it (Downing and Garcia-Downing 2009).
3. Removing people from their known environments separates them from the material and cultural resource base upon which they have depended for life as individuals and as communities. **A sense of place plays an important role in individual and collective identity formation, in the way time and history are encoded and contextualized, and in interpersonal, community and intercultural relations** (Oliver-Smith 2005). Removal from one’s place, one of the most basic physical dimensions of life, can be a form of removal from life, from that complex in which space, kin relations, local communities, cosmology and tradition are encoded and linked. Involuntary resettlement may break a community’s social geometry; that is, the bonds that in ordinary culture are continually recreated by socially constructed time, space and personages (Downing and Downing 2009), thus drastically destabilizing affected communities by threatening or rendering culture meaningless. Social life may become chaotic, uncertain, and unpredictable.
4. The **separation or fragmentation of community** that frequently accompanies uprooting may cause stress and suffering (Scudder 2009). Lives are disrupted, social relationships may be broken, social and economic assets lost, leaders diminished, people falling ill and dying prematurely, and the capacity of a community’s resilience to withstand the normal range of environmental and social forces of their society diminished.
5. The **design, materials and construction of resettlement projects are often more expressive of goals of economic efficiency and elite perceptions of the poor and minorities than the needs of the displaced.** In the long run such misguided projects actually cost more because the settlements and houses are abandoned or destroyed and the social disarticulation they foster undermines the productivity and self-sufficiency of the group. The built environment in which we live is both expressive of and shapes our social relations. Material reconstruction can both support and express social reconstitution. Material reconstruction can be a confirmation of social reconstitution. It can also undermine the process severely and very frequently has (Oliver-Smith 1991; 2005).

6. **Productive activities are disrupted.** Resources, such as land or jobs, are either irrelevant or gone. A significant cost of resettlement may be the loss of livelihood possibilities or employment in the resettlement process or if such opportunities are not available at the new site. Involuntary resettlement frequently diminishes the economic organizational capacity of a group. The loss of livelihood is frequently responsible for the abandonment of resettlement communities (Cernea 1997).
7. **Cultural transmission and socialization activities become difficult to sustain** given that what is being taught and learned is disarticulated from the present situation. Social arrangements that allow sharing of common goods become insignificant because the common resource is disappearing or gone. Involuntary displacement directly threatens a people's agreements on the social geometry – their temporal, spatial and social arrangements (Downing and Garcia-Downing 2009).
8. **Negative impacts on the health condition of resettled population are a consistent outcome of resettlement projects,** especially vulnerable groups including children, women and the elderly (Kedia 2009). The elderly in particular are vulnerable in resettlement and frequently suffer high rates of mortality in the aftermath of resettlement, a phenomenon that is often referred to as “dying of a broken heart.”
9. **Resettled populations frequently suffer a loss in social and political power.** Removed from their local context, they are at a disadvantage in seeking resources in a new or different system of political organization and power relationships. Moreover, if relocated into existing communities, they are at a further disadvantage in their relations with host populations who may resent their arrival as well as the competition for resources (Cernea 1997; Scudder 2005).
10. **Authentic participation is consistent with the emphasis on the recognition and restoration of the rights of affected people.** Resettlement projects that impose heavy costs are often characterized by policies that depend very little on consultation with the affected population. The previously mentioned problems derive from a lack of consultation with, and participation by the affected people. This lack is generally due to a disparagement of local knowledge and culture on the part of policy makers and planners. Affected people are generally not considered by elites to have the social and cultural tools necessary for executive or even advisory forms of decision making, planning, and execution that pertain to resettlement projects (Oliver-Smith 1991).

Conclusion

The task that uprooted peoples and those who would support and assist them face is to reconstruct self, family and community, both in the form of material structures and processes and in their social and cultural expressions. The most pressing need at this juncture is achieve a greater balance between addressing the material needs of displaced communities and acting in a way that supports, rather than undermines their struggle to reconstitute the social bases of their communities. The wreckage from uprooted communities around the world is as much due to

poor policy as it is to the many forms of uprooting and violence to which they have been subjected (Oliver-Smith 2005).

Resettlement projects must be developed that enable people to materially sustain themselves while they begin the process of social reconstruction. Resettlement projects must be designed to further, rather than impede, the process of community reconstitution. However, if the level of impoverishment experienced by most resettled peoples is any indicator, even adequate systems of material reproduction are beyond either the will or the capabilities of most contemporary policy makers and planners.

References

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