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Building Community Resilience in the Re-settlement of Displaced Communities

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Abstract

In natural disaster and man-made conflict scenarios, livelihoods, assets, community networks and relationships get destroyed and in many areas, lives and communities are devastated. Re-settling these communities and providing them the essential support to adapt to the new or changed environments has been a major challenge for governments. Taking into consideration case studies from two South Asian countries, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, this paper explores the displacement and re-location cycle experienced and the impact disaster, conflict and reconciliation has on families, community and stakeholder relationships and networks as they re-build their lives in the re-settlement process. The case studies were selected from available literature to focus on different kinds of natural disasters and civil conflicts. The paper focuses on characteristics of resilient communities and how these characteristics have aided the recovery and re-settlement. It also identifies attributes that are inherent in communities that have undergone disaster and displacement and explores how these attributes have helped communities in re-building their lives. From the literature and the case study results and information, it is seen that topics of safety, security, and livelihoods summarises the core needs that are important for transitional settlement and shelter. Having ownership of assets, a shelter or dwelling unit or land is also important in the re-settlement process. These requirements vary according to the ethnicity, religion and culture and the challenges for the relief agencies are to provide alternative solutions that match these requirements in the short and long term.

Keywords: Community Resilience, Re-settlement, Displaced Communities, Building Resilience, Natural Disasters, Civil Conflicts

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1. Introduction

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [10], between 2008 and 2013, almost 47 million people were displaced by disasters and natural hazards in South Asia. The enormity of displacement caused by disasters is determined by communities' vulnerability to shocks or stresses and the capacity they have to withstand the disaster. In these situations social, economic and political realities have a major influence on the capability to cope and have varying effects on individuals and communities. In disaster situations, homes and livelihoods are destroyed, social support networks disintegrated, heightened risks such as family separation, child protection challenges and gender-based violence are introduced. These risks increase the more often people are displaced and longer the displacement. Similarly, the more resilient the community, the less the risk and impact of displacement experienced. Oxford Dictionary broadly defines resilience as "the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness" (2017). In the context of Communities, 'resilience is a measure of the sustained ability of a community to utilise available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations' [28]. Social resilience is different to 'individual resilience' as it takes into account the economic, institutional and social dimensions of a community. It extends the ecological perspective of resilience to recognise the ability of people to organise themselves [21]. Resilient communities are better able to preserve their basic social structures and functions and to restore them when displacement does occur, so reducing the associated risks.

Recent perspectives on resilience can be summarised into three major views [8]- Resilience as stability (Buffer capacity), Resilience as recovery (Bouncing back), Resilience as transformation: (Creativity). A common aspect in all perspectives is the ability to withstand and respond positively to stress or change. Taking into consideration case studies from two South Asian countries, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, this paper explores the displacement and re-location cycle experienced and the impact disaster, conflict and reconciliation has on families, community and stakeholder relationships and networks as they re-build their lives in the re-settlement process. The case studies were randomly selected from available literature to focus on different kinds of natural disasters and civil conflicts. The paper focuses on characteristics of resilient communities and how these characteristics have aided the recovery and re-settlement. It also identifies attributes that are inherent in communities that have undergone disaster and displacement and explores how these attributes have helped communities in re-building their lives.

An objective of the study is to examine the findings from different case studies in relation to settlement planning, the institutional context, provision and maintenance of shelter and infrastructure, relationships developed in community formation, support provided for communities in the re-location process and equity issues that have risen as communities settle in the new developments. Another objective is to explore the erosion of livelihoods, especially livelihoods that are relating to place and geographical location, family and traditional support systems and how the families are coping and creating new relationships with the re-homing and re-settlement process. The study recognises that the housing and infrastructure provision in the settlements are basic and minimal and focuses on the key factors that are essential for communities to reconcile and begin the recovery process. It will also attempt to identify key attributes that are inherent in resilient communities that make this process attainable. The findings inform all stakeholders, national and international, and make an important contribution to understanding the specific situations and needs of families, communities, and how policy makers and humanitarians can more effectively address these. Case studies are limited as the re-settlement processes are at varying stages and the unavailability of some data due to political sensitivities and the difficulty in gathering personal data from a vulnerable community groups that have gone through a traumatic period in their lives. A broad-ranging literature review provided the foundation for this paper and an understanding of the wider context and debate in relation to community resilience and social capital place the study in the current policy and strategy framework. Methodology is based on both secondary and primary data sources captured from different case studies carried out in the region and synthesising the information and findings to draw out lessons that can be learnt. These provide an insight and guide future initiatives to improve community resilience.

2. Community Resilience

Research on resilience is complex due its involvement across multiple disciplines and developed through different stages from ecological resilience (1960-70s), to an approach applied to human systems under social-