

## REDUCING RELOCATION RISK

IN URBAN AREAS

## Re-imagining Resettlement for Risk Reduction in Urban India

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### Introduction

In India, people are relocated both after a disaster and in anticipation of one. The outcomes are often detrimental. Land is often acquired for 'resettlement and rehabilitation' to move people out of dangerous places, but there are no legal frameworks or safety net policies for those moved post-disaster. Specific policies are needed to support these people and ensure resettlement and relocation is good for cities at large. India has a weak national policy and legal institutional framework to deal with internally displaced populations. The current institutional mechanisms and authorities view the entire process

of resettlement and rehabilitation as a means of sponsored welfare and relief rather than as people's right to resettle. Compensation for disaster-affected people is always under ex-gratia (moral obligation) by the state or national government. There are limited market-based insurance instruments available for different types or combinations of hazards that often occur together. The penetration of these is further limited in access by the poor and vulnerable people who need it most, which means that they are reliant on the state or national government for support.

### Recommendations

#### Summary of Recommendations

- **Relocation should be a last resort for risk reduction.** Resettlement and relocation should only be done when sufficient assessments for all alternative options for risk reduction and development have been conducted and no other measure would be as effective or less socially and economically costly. Relocation and resettlement should always be accompanied by **safety nets for those being resettled.**
- **For some settlements, relocation must be avoided at all costs:** (1) If the settlement in an 'untenable' location is older than 10 years. (2) Once relocated, households must be protected against any future forced relocation. This could also create conditions for offering tenure security. (3) If there is no safe and viable location available within a minimum distance from the existing settlement (less than 2 km in rural and 5 km in urban areas) such that continuity of the life and services that they are accustomed to can be maintained.
- **Disaster management authorities need to work in close partnership with housing and development authorities** in order to conduct regular risk assessments pre-emptively, and have plans for resettlement for all exposed populations in a way that adds developmental gains and is not detrimental to the environment.

#### Gaps in Decision-Making Processes

##### A. Triggers and alternatives to relocation

1. Most often, the decision to take action post-disaster is based on the **urgency** of the situation, where many people have lost all forms of shelter. It is important to understand the long-term implications of resettlement, particularly when there is **not enough information to conduct any detailed environmental or socio-economic assessments.**
2. In some cases, the intervention is a political move and the moments of **disaster are being used as an opportunity to build housing stock** for the future in line with the overall growth vision of the city, and not necessarily for the benefit of those for whom the aid money may have been received. The result is that the housing provided is not useful for the allotted beneficiaries.
3. The urban context of such interventions is different from the rural. This is particularly due to the contested and limited land resource in the

former, and often, **alternate uses of the vacated land drive the decisions** for relocation. If the vacated land is put to an alternate use, other than environmental, the costs of relocation and upgradation for this new use seem unjustifiable vis-à-vis in situ upgradation.

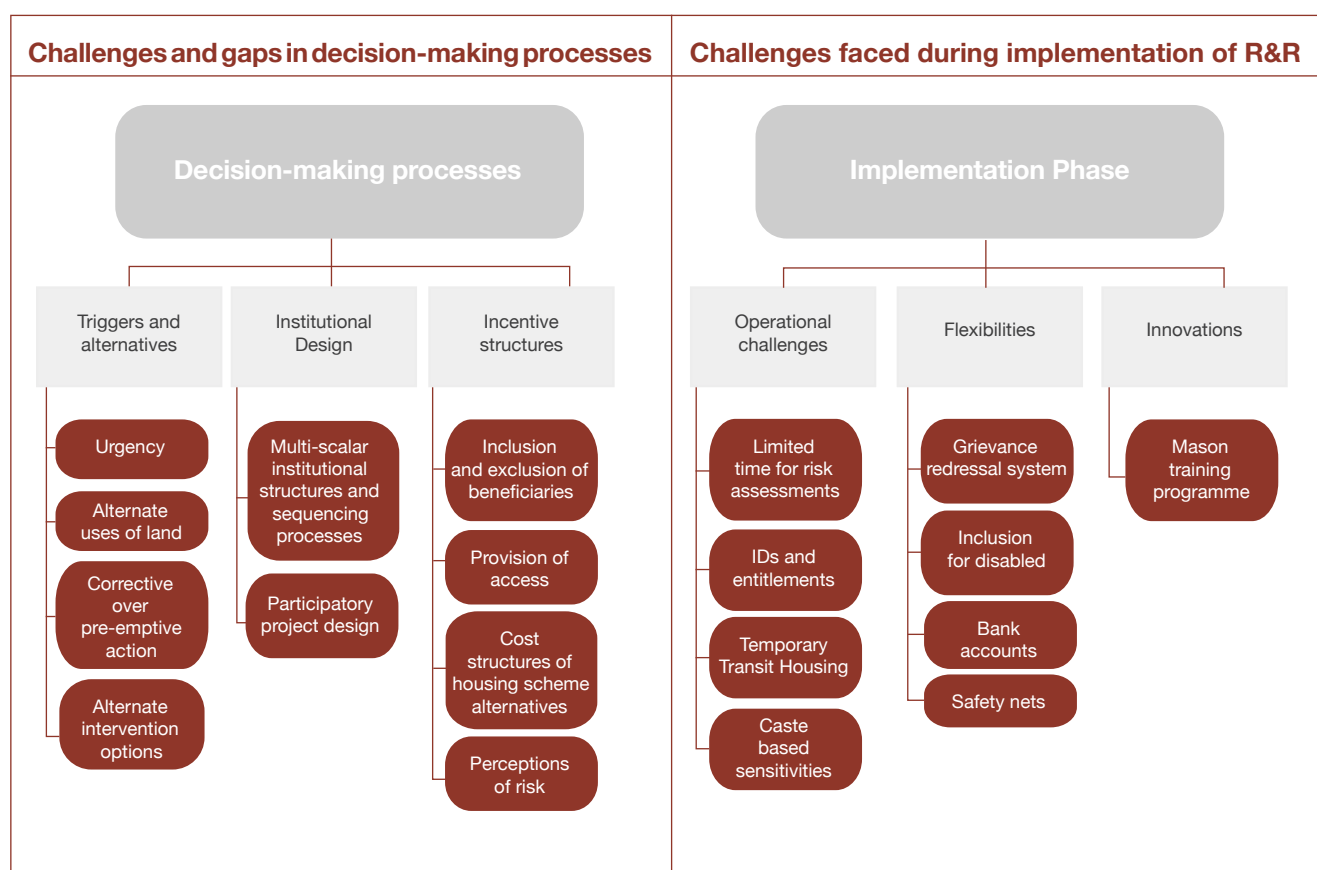
4. In most cases, **alternatives to relocation are not assessed fully**. Once resettled, it is assumed that the communities' needs are met even for the future – whereas people's experiences suggest that their regular costs seem to increase post-relocation, while their ability to deal with future shocks decreases. So there needs to be an understanding of **long-term implications on people's lives and livelihoods** at the time of relocation decisions.

### B. Institutional design

1. There is a **lack of multi-scalar institutional design** of these interventions, where community participation is enabled within the project design phases.
2. **Participation is being left for the last stages** of the project—if at all—instead of including people from the early design and planning stage. Participation and sense of ownership, once enabled, can have longer-term benefits for development. Urban settlements are also more heterogeneous than rural settlements, which can pose challenges for enabling participation.

### C. Incentive structures

1. Inclusion and exclusion of some households within larger settlements is known to tamper with the existing social and economic inequalities, and may not be equitable owing to the current **beneficiary selection criteria** and processes. Yet, universal housing allocation is neither a solution nor implementable.
2. Although there is a culture of using public transport in cities, relocating people by more than 5km is still leading to economic stresses faced by the communities, and thereby resistance to relocating. It is clear that **proximity of public transport is not the same as people being able to affordably access it**.
3. Where there are many housing schemes ongoing, different cost structures and provisions in each present themselves as disincentives to participate in one over the other. Even within one housing scheme, **one size doesn't fit all**, as the family needs and requirements vary, and often the site discrepancies also require different pricing structures within each scheme.
4. **People perceive risks differently from the state**, and each acts based on their knowledge and perception of these risks as well as their abilities to respond to them.



## Implementation Challenges

### A. Operational challenges

1. On the one hand, housing undertaken in a purely developmental context often ignores hazard risk reduction as part of the mandate. On the other hand, while post-disaster housing developments may address hazard exposure, they are often seen as creating other socio-economic risks. These two kinds of housing interventions are conducted by **multiple agencies with no cross-learning opportunities**.
2. **Beneficiary identification** based on select, objective criteria could be misleading. Reasons for the lack of identity cards could further lead to exclusion from entitlements, and beneficiary identification needs to be substantiated with alternative conditions of selection.
3. Provision of **temporary transit housing** needs to be made part of housing schemes, including those that involve in situ housing, for greater success of the intervention.
4. **Emergency shelters**, particularly in urban areas, are **not sufficiently equipped** for the needs during disaster evacuations.

### B. Lack of flexibilities

1. There is still a lack of **sensitivity to caste and disability** at the time of beneficiary identification. Mixing of castes occurs at the time of relocation, and this is leading to high risks for particularly vulnerable groups. Community mobilisers must have **sufficient autonomy** for working closely with the target settlements to be able to identify and address these as they come up on a case-by-case basis.
2. A **multi-stage grievance redress system** that is accessible to one and all needs to be in place in urban areas, to correct for any excluded households that have been disadvantaged because of their lack of political powers.
3. Transferring money to **existing beneficiary bank accounts** may not be possible as they have lower transfer limits.

### C. Innovations

1. Innovative interventions such as the **mason-training programme** could reduce the challenges of skills scarcity during large-scale interventions, but their **impacts on long-term economic diversification and other social outcomes for women are still unknown**.

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## Policies and Programme Design

Research shows that relocation almost always disturbs the balance of the existing neighbourhood, yet there are situations where relocation is the only means to reduce exposure. While it is not recommended to have a blanket policy of relocation for reducing risk, as this could be used as a pretext for evictions and development, it is still advisable to have some safety recommendations in terms of what these relocation interventions must consider, and what are the 'No-Go' conditions for relocation.

### A. For in situ reconstruction and upgrading

1. This should be the status-quo decision, unless it is documented in detail that despite structural interventions, relocation is the only means of reducing risk exposure, as well as providing improved overall development outcomes for the people.

### B. For relocation

1. Relocation is recommended only as long as in situ upgradation or early-warning-based risk reduction options are not viable.
2. The distance between old and new sites must be minimal (less than 2 km in rural and 5 km in urban areas) such that continuity of life and services that

people are accustomed to can be maintained, even if provision of new services is not planned.

3. Rather than the size of the settlement, it is seen that the levels of homogeneity must direct the design of the R&R.

### C. For all interventions aimed at risk reduction

1. It is recommended to conduct detailed assessments for the most vulnerable settlements prior to actual extreme events, and investing in early warning systems (particularly for climatic and hydro-meteorological hazards) to avoid disruptions.
2. Making people aware on a regular basis and keeping them involved in the various decision-making processes, not just during implementation, is pertinent.
3. Suitable models and simulations of climate change must be devised to inform design and policy actions for long-term risk reduction. For instance, moving people so that they continue to stay on the coast could be re-evaluated with future scenarios of sea-level rise, etc. along with the implications of costs and benefits in various time frames.
4. It is often advocated to have the beneficiaries

contribute financially for some ‘skin in the game’, thereby encouraging participation and involvement. However, it is also seen that these financial requirements often become additional burdens, and can exclude those who cannot afford such investments. In such cases, participation can also be enabled by involving people in other ways, such as construction, thereby ensuring quality and ownership.

5. The project design should include appropriate methods to rehabilitate or restore livelihoods and economic patterns. If the same livelihoods cannot be restored, alternative livelihood options need to be identified, based on their existing skills.

#### D. Characteristics of settlements where relocation must be avoided at all costs

1. If the age of the original settlement living in ‘untenable’ locations is older than 10 years, relocation is not recommended as a means for risk reduction. Tenability assessments can be no older than 5 years, since adaptation strategies come into play after that and people learn to cope with their risks.
2. Once relocated, households must be protected against any future forced relocations. This could also enable tenure security.

#### Definitions used in this issue brief

**Untenable slums:** According to Rajiv Awaas Yojna’s Guidelines for Slum Free City Plan of Action 2013-22, an untenable slum is defined as slum pockets in the following locations: 1. Major storm water drains; 2. Other drains; 3. Railway lines; 4. Major transport alignment areas; 5. Banks of rivers or water bodies; 6. Beds of rivers or water bodies; 7. Others (Hazardous or Objectionable) including high-tension lines.

**Pre-emptive vs. post-disaster risk management:** Disaster risk management is seen by some (UNISDR, 2011) as comprising three distinct yet complementary types—corrective or post-disaster, whereby existing risk is the centre of attention and reduction the goal; pre-emptive, where the avoidance or prevention (within bounded limits) of future risk is the goal; and compensatory, where residual risk is dealt with through different social and economic mechanisms.

## References and further reading

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The research project “Reducing Relocation Risks in Urban Areas” examines the various social and economic implications of climate-risk related resettlement and relocation policies in cities across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Policy briefs are available for each region, and there is a cross-regional policy brief. The project was carried out by The Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS), The Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU) at University College London, Makerere University, Uganda, and the Latin American Social Science Faculty (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales) (FLACSO), and funded by the Climate and Development Knowledge Network. More information and project publications can be found at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/reducing-relocation-risk-urban-areas>