

The Environment, Natural Hazards and Displaced People

Introduction

This research looks at the dynamic relationship between displaced people with the environment and natural hazards, specifically within humanitarian contexts. Displaced individuals and communities, such as refugees, are often marginalised within their host societies [1]. Marginalised populations have been presumed to be highly vulnerable to natural hazards, such as landslides and cyclones [2]. Yet the literature on refugees and displaced populations' vulnerability and resilience to natural hazards is currently sparse.

Within Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) literature, there is strong advocacy for the inclusion of the local community in disaster planning and response as well as a stronger focus on community resilience [3]. This is also reflected in one of the Priorities of Action from The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 [4] is:

"To ensure the use of traditional, indigenous and local knowledge and practices, as appropriate, to complement scientific knowledge in disaster risk assessment and the development and implementation of policies, strategies, plans and programmes." (p. 14)

To date, relatively few DRR strategies are inclusive of displaced people or within a humanitarian setting [5].

Key Themes

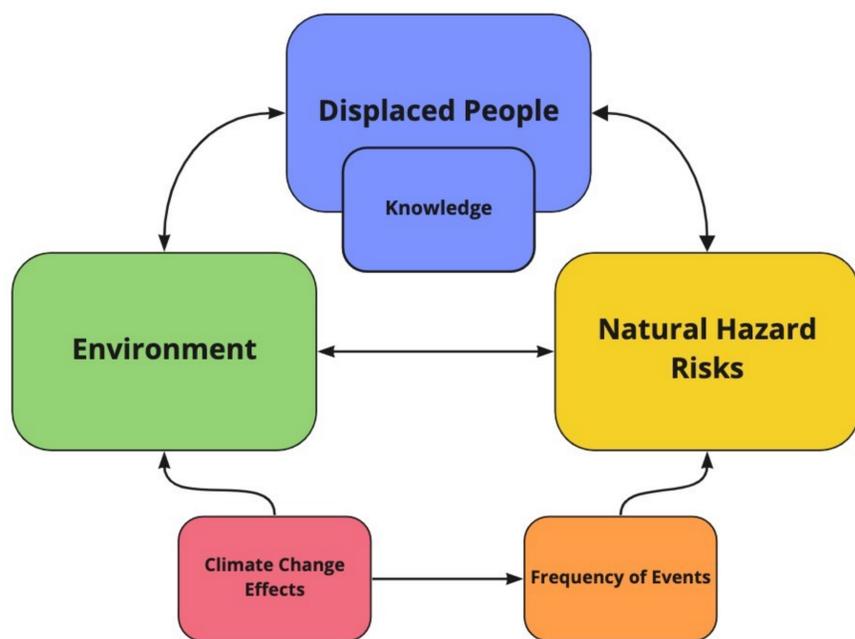


Figure 1. Diagram of Key Concepts (Author, 2022).

Research Rationale

Studies which focus on displaced people and populations' resilience to disasters are largely missing.

Literature from disaster studies in urban and rural contexts, as well as climate change, evidence that:

- perception and experience affect individual interpretation and action of risk information and behaviour on mitigating hazard risk [6; 7; 8].
- DRR strategies and training do reduce the loss and damage from disasters [4].

It remains unknown if these findings are similar for displaced individuals.

Moreover, hazard profiling and mapping do offer an initial layer of risk understanding. Other elements need to be further considered and integrated, such as knowledge and shelter, for more effective DRR strategies [3].

This research is needed as the UNHCR estimated in 2020 that there are approximately 82.4 million forcibly displaced people [9]. This number is anticipated to continue rising in parallel with an increase in the number of disasters and the complexity of crises.



Figure 2. "Bangladesh: a year of bringing relief to Rohingya refugees" by EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Research Aim and Questions

The overarching aim of this research is to gain an insight into how 'knowledge' is acquired, situated and applied in the interface between displaced people and the environment and natural hazards.

Based on the gaps in this literature review, I have identified three recurring questions which I would like to investigate:

1. In what ways do displaced individuals rely on their stories, education, and experiences from their previous places of living to understand the new environment and risks? Or do they rely on the assistance of the host communities and humanitarian agencies?
2. Does the frequency of exposure to certain natural hazards increase knowledge, and lead to improved disaster preparedness, response, and recovery?
3. How can displaced peoples' knowledge of the environment and natural hazards be further and appropriately integrated into disaster risk reductions strategies?

Research Methods

The proposed methodology for this research is to use a blended approach with qualitative and quantitative methods. The goal is to collect:

- empirically rich data, such as from interviews and focus groups, and
- numerical data, through the likes of surveys, to be able to spatially visualise some results.

This multi-method approach should allow for a detailed and holistic understanding [10], as well as the findings to be applicable for advancing academic discussions and humanitarian policy.

In terms of a case study, the researcher would like to collaborate with a humanitarian agency to ideally conduct research in South East Asia.

Potential Research Impact

It is anticipated that the findings from this research will contribute to the academic, practitioners and policy domains in the DRR and humanitarian sectors. The findings and wider conclusions should:

- increase the decolonized accounts from displaced peoples' experiences;
- enrich the understanding of how knowledge is acquired and applied in the context of DRR;
- deepen the understanding of 'local' community engagement with displaced individuals and populations;
- add to the body of literature on 'bottom-up' hazard research and knowledge; and,
- provide evidence-based materials which address DRR initiatives, such as some of the action priority points from the Sendai Framework.

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