

Safe and secure housing for vulnerable communities

Relocating and resettling communities displaced due to development projects and conflict had been a challenge the world over. While new housing maybe provided there are dangers of impoverishment and social and cultural issues appearing, risking the success of the action and vulnerability of the people.

The government and other development partners had initiated a number of policy initiatives and programmes to address the needs of Development Forced Displaced (DFD) and Conflict Induced Displaced (CID) communities in the South, North and East of Sri Lanka during the last decades. The results have been mixed.

Most independent studies conducted had focused on a particular issue or single form of displacement or geography, or relied on one type of data collection i.e. quantitative or qualitative approaches.

This research carried out in equal halves at two sites relied on 1800 household interviews, 40 in-depth interviews and two community profiles in five 're-housing' sites in Colombo (Sinhapura, Sahaspura, Wadulusevana, Lunawa and Halgahakumbura) and two 'return' sites in Jaffna and Nallur Divisions in Jaffna.

The research found major differences in the needs of the people at the two locations in relation to relocation and resettlement, including opportunities and challenges.

Key findings

Development Forced Displaced:

- The design of uniform state housing does not require much improvement and there is general satisfaction about the facilities – but depending on earlier location, house size, quality, tenure etc.
- As this is mostly relocation, there should be consideration on cultural and environmental changes which effect community cohesion, lost networks, impacts on livelihoods, and children's education/upbringing
- The process of evolving re-housing calls for more consultations, transparency and absence of involuntary movements, including control of crime and substance abuse at the new locations

Conflict Induced Displaced:

- Allocation of equitable housing support should be considered as there were sole, owner and donor driven approaches on arbitrary selection
- While lost networks, communities, properties and livelihoods were somewhat regained there are increasing challenges in social and cultural changes including the rise of alcoholism, drugs use and crime
- The local resilience and ability to adapt should be taken into account, including the role played by the diaspora in recovery - to engage and build on them

Policy relevance and implications

The two types of displacement resulted in differences in losses, magnitude of violence, times of displacement, support received, levels of recovery, and control over life events. For those in Colombo there were improvements in material quality of living but not so on social quality – it declined. For those in Jaffna, material quality was recovered and social aspects were mixed. Nevertheless they felt a strong sense of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ than those in Colombo.

Vulnerability and insecurity were evident and both communities experienced it in different ways. These are crucial factors that need to be taken into account, as they implicate the people’s wellbeing and happiness and genuine willingness to stay - rather than leave for life and homes elsewhere. To this end housing policy and programmes models should be broad based, people friendly and needs driven if they are to be truly sustainable.



Sinhapura phase II housing complex, Colombo

Brief description of project

The project is part of the global Safe and Inclusive Cities (SAIC) research program that documents the links between urban violence, poverty and inequality, jointly funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Department for International Development (DFID). Sri Lanka is one of fifteen research teams in 40 cities across sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The 3 year research was implemented by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), in Colombo over the period 2013 to 2016.

<http://ices.lk/research/current-research/a-cross-country-study-on-urban-inequality-and-poverty/>

<https://www.idrc.ca/en/project/involuntary-resettlement-cross-country-study-urban-inequality-and-poverty-0>

<https://www.idrc.ca/en/article/conflict-displacement-and-post-war-recovery-case-passaiyoor-east-sri-lanka>



Houses close to main road, Passaiyoor, Jaffna



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International Development Research Centre
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