

KNOWLEDGE SHEET 8

Voluntary Relocation for West Africa's Coastal Communities

One-third of West Africa's population lives in coastal zones where they are vulnerable to the high risks of climate change impacts and natural hazards. Unplanned settlement patterns, over-exploitation of coastal resources and degradation of coastal and watershed ecosystems are among the factors adding to vulnerability. Climate change, sea-level rise, and damage from storm surges, waves and cyclones multiply the impacts. The difficult question for many communities then becomes whether the existing settlements are still viable given changing risk profiles. When the risk of flooding or other natural disasters becomes too difficult to mitigate, voluntary relocation can be considered as strategy to protect the lives and livelihoods of poor households.

Relocation is inherently an extremely disruptive experience upending the normal routines of life. It can shatter the social fabric of a community, not to mention the adverse impact it may have on livelihoods. However, if planned carefully together with the affected communities who then drive the decision-making, it can prove to be a part of inclusive, climate resilient development plans. Voluntary relocation

should essentially be a people-centered process and an integrated part of national resilience planning or disaster risk management strategy. Managed voluntary relocation therefore works best when the people see the benefits or requests this type of intervention when informed of the risks of staying in an extremely vulnerable place.



CHALLENGES

Relocation poses multiple risks and challenges for the affected people; ranging from the physical move to new housing, potentially having to adopt a new form of livelihood, rebuilding social networks, to name a few. For a government, challenges include finding suitable relocation sites, ensuring affected people are able to sustain or restore their livelihoods, and building trust with the affected and host communities in order to reduce social conflict. If the new sites are not properly designed or constructed with adequate infrastructure and access to services, this can lead to increased poverty, cultural alienation, and lost sense of belonging, as well as the risk of people returning to their original community. Governments need to consider costs and sources of funding, to ensure that the different components of a relocation program are all included in budget planning.

Regarding the affected communities, the main challenge lies in establishing trust and an open and honest way of engaging with them to discuss this option. Vulnerable communities cannot be expected to opt for such a drastic move unless they have appropriate information and feel they own the process. These communities often lack access to information of the magnitude and likelihood of risks, and have limited opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. Ensuring community engagement and leadership at each stage is a crucial success factor. Using a participatory approach to identify the at-risk areas, the likelihood of risks materializing and

who are the vulnerable groups can help build awareness and acceptance for this option. It is important to avoid a top-down process that only involves community participation at the last minute, which would risk opposition to any relocation plans or speculation on the value of land.

A major challenge in relocation plans is the issue of how to prevent people from returning to the old sites. After the decision to relocate has been made, it is important for the community to participate in preventing other people from re-occupying the coastal area. The best examples occur when the area is maintained as a communal or leisure space; social infrastructure and small commerce without permanent habitation could also be encouraged to enable the community to continue to enjoy the seaside but without the risk. If the new relocation area is distant, transport links (such as footpaths or roads) may need to be provided to ensure continued access to marine resources for fishing, tourism, and other coastal-based livelihoods.



Solutions

Whilst the challenges related to voluntary relocation are manifold, voluntary relocation may present a unique opportunity to improve the lives of vulnerable communities living in risk prone coastal areas. In the case of Sao Tome & Principe, the coastal population itself was asking to be relocated to safer areas after the community experienced unusually heavy and damaging storms in 2014-2015. The first step of the process was to determine the patterns of coastline change. Comparing topographic maps from the 1950s with high-resolution satellite imagery of the current situation made it possible to illustrate the changes in settlement expansion and exposure to risk and presenting the actual rate of coastline retreat. It was also possible to make projections of future hazard patterns and hence identify which areas would be most at risk.

These projections were shared and discussed with the communities to ensure common understanding of the risks and to canvass the options for relocation as a way of preventing damage and losses in the future. At the same time as vulnerable households were mapped, the communities were involved in the identification of poorest households. The results of both of these exercises were validated jointly with the community so that there was general agreement on who is vulnerable and should therefore get priority in terms of relocation to safer areas. Next, the Government had to secure an area for the new construction of housing in a safe location in order to house poor families from vulnerable areas. This expansion area as it is called, also aims in the future to attract new people with the social infrastructure and services to be provided



there. To achieve this goal, plans for the expansion zones will include structures for schools and health centers, space for small commerce, sports fields, as well as green areas. In addition, some social housing for the poor or vulnerable citizens (including the elderly and disabled) could be included in the areas.

The decision to relocate into expansion area is voluntary and no compensation is given. However, for the poorest, assistance is given in a way that focuses on the community's self-identified needs and priorities regarding livelihoods or social infrastructure. Even though those moving to the expansion areas are not compensated in monetary terms, the farmers and private landowners who were using the expansion area lots must be compensated for their lost assets (such as crops and fruit trees). To this end, A Resettlement Action Plan was prepared to establish a formal framework for affected people to secure fair and timely compensation for the losses. It is important to clarify the acquisition process of the expansion sites with the private owners/land users and negotiate fair compensation; preferably land-for-land compensation for the farmers. This was done by giving them a preferential lot in the expansion area. In the case of agricultural crops, it is necessary to record the number and type of trees to calculate fair market-price compensation based on official rates.

Engaging regularly with affected communities to raise awareness about climate risks on the coastal areas can help

identify their needs and to have a shared understanding of the risks and options to manage them.

Once a community has voluntarily made the decision to relocate, it is important to involve the communities in the various aspects of preparing the actual relocation. This includes the selection of new relocation sites, provision of socioeconomic infrastructure, ensuring access to basic services, enabling people to continue with their livelihoods or offering alternatives etc. Including communities as the owners of the process will help empower them, and help them forward in their lives with fewer risks from weather and climate hazards.

Proper livelihood planning also guards against return to at-risk areas by ensuring people have what they need. In cases where people move into areas inhabited by others already, it is important to make sure the host population is included in the conversation about the relocation plans. The host population will also require benefits from the relocation program, such as improved services. This is essential to defuse any potential conflict between groups. Ensuring families stay together is important for the social fabric of a community, especially under stressful conditions such as relocating permanently away from a familiar area. Keeping valuable socio-cultural links can be challenging, and requires effort from both the planning authorities and communities.

REFERENCES

- Koskinen-Lewis, P., A. de Carvalho, C. M. Dias, C. Fernandes, O. Diogo, L. Taulealo, F. Evalu and N. Simi, 2016 "Managing Population Retreat from At-Risk Areas" SISRI Knowledge Note No. 3. Small Island States Resilience Initiative. The World Bank and Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR). Washington DC.
- Brookings Institution, Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, UN High Commissioner for Refugees. 2015. *Guidance on Protecting People from Disaster and Environmental Change through Planned Relocation*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Campbell, J. 2010. *Climate-Induced Community Relocation in the Pacific: The Meaning and Importance of Land*. In: McAdam, J. (ed.) *Climate Change and Displacement*. United Kingdom: Hart Publishing Ltd.
- Chun, J. 2015. *Planned Relocations in the Mekong Delta: A Successful Model for Climate Change Adaptation, A Cautionary Tale, or Both?* Brookings-LSE. Project on Internal Displacement. Washington DC: Brookings Institution.
- Correa, E. (ed.). 2011. *Preventive Resettlement of Populations at Risk of Disasters, Examples from Latin America*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Petz, D. 2015. *Planned Relocations in the Context of Natural Disasters and Climate Change: A Review of Literature*. Brookings-LSE. Project on Internal Displacement. Washington DC: Brookings Institution.

The West Africa Coastal Areas Management Program (WACA) is a convening platform that aims to assist West African countries to sustainably manage their coastal areas and enhance socio-economic resilience to the effects of climate change. The program also seeks to facilitate access to technical expertise and financial resources for participating countries.



West Africa Coastal Areas
Management Program

www.worldbank.org/waca