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Suggested Reference

Neef, A., & Singer, J. (2015). Development-induced displacement in Asia: conflicts, risks, and resilience. *Development in Practice*, 25(5), 601-611. doi: 10.1080/09614524.2015.1052374

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published in *Development in Practice* on 02 Jul 2015, available online:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/10.1080/09614524.2015.1052374>

<http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/issn/0961-4524/>

<https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/docs/uoa-docs/rights.htm>

Development-Induced Displacement in Asia: Conflicts, Risks and Resilience¹

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This introduction to the themed special feature on development-induced displacement in Asia discusses the scope and major drivers of development-induced displacement and resettlement (DIDR) in Asia and recent policy developments at the national and international level. It describes some of the existing conceptual frameworks in the field of DIDR and presents a new set of questions and concerns that are addressed by the five articles that make up this themed section.

Cette introduction du dossier spécial sur le déplacement provoqué par le développement en Asie traite de la portée et des principaux moteurs du déplacement et de la réinstallation provoqués par le développement (development-induced displacement and resettlement — DIDR) en Asie, et de la récente évolution des politiques aux niveaux national et international. Elle décrit certains des cadres conceptuels existants dans le secteur DIDR et présente une nouvelle série de questions et de préoccupations qui sont abordées par les cinq articles qui composent ce dossier spécial.

La presente introducción del suplemento especial centrado en el desplazamiento inducido por desarrollo en Asia aborda el alcance y los principales móviles que conducen al desplazamiento y al reasentamiento inducidos por desarrollo (DRID) en este continente, así como los recientes adelantos en políticas relativas a este fenómeno a nivel nacional e internacional. Asimismo, describe algunos de los marcos conceptuales existentes en el ámbito del DRID, presentando un nuevo conjunto de preguntas y dilemas que serán discutidos en los cinco artículos que integran este suplemento especial.

Keywords: Forced displacement – Conflict and reconstruction; Rights; Development policies – Aid; East Asia; South Asia

Introduction

Development-induced displacement and resettlement (DIDR) has remained one of the most contentious issues in development today (McDowell 1996; Vandergeest, Idahosa, and Bose

¹ Published as Neef, A. and Singer, J. (2015) Development-induced displacement in Asia: conflicts, risks and resilience. *Development in Practice* 25(5): 601-611.

2006; De Wet 2009; Bennett and McDowell 2012). The inequitable distribution of costs and benefits accruing from development is nowhere more evident than in the study of displacement as a result of construction of dams, railways, highways and other large infrastructure projects. While this is hardly a new phenomenon, the numbers of those affected have grown dramatically in the first two decades of this century and are expected to rise further in the years to come. Recent years have seen a steep increase in displacement and dispossession triggered by large-scale land acquisitions and leases – mainly for food, fiber and fuel – by a myriad of private and public actors, often referred to as ‘land grabbing’ or the ‘global land rush’ (e.g. Kugelmann and Levenstein 2013; Neef 2014). The experience of displacement encompasses more than physical loss: displaced residents lose power and agency over their lives, risking the simultaneous loss of economic, social and cultural resources (Oliver-Smith 2009) in order to enable the provision of electricity, improved transit, mass tourism, cheap food supplies and other benefits to industry, urban areas and the middle class.

Due to high population densities and rapid development processes, Asia is home to many of the most contentious displacement events and the world’s largest displaced population. DIDR has garnered extensive attention by civil society, media, development practitioners, donor countries and national policy makers due to related civil resistance – e.g. to the Sardar Sarovar Dam in India (Maitra 2009), national and transborder conflict over impacts of Mekong river basin dam constructions (e.g. Tilt, Braun, and He 2009; Galipeau, Ingman, and Tilt 2013; Zhang et al. 2013) and for the sheer scale of environmental and socioeconomic disruption posed by the Three Gorges Dam in China (e.g. Wilmsen et al. 2011; Wang et al. 2013).

Scale and Drivers of Development-Induced Displacement in Asia

Being the two most populous countries in Asia and globally, China and India together account for a particularly large share of displaced people. In the second half of the 20th century over 45 million people were displaced by development projects in China, based on calculations by the country’s National Research Center for Resettlement (Fuggle et al. 2000, quoted in Stanley 2004). The Three Gorges Dam – the world’s largest hydroelectric dam completed in 2012 – displaced at least 1.3 million people (Wilmsen, Webber, and Duan 2011). The South–North Water Transfer Project, a megaproject that aims at channeling billions of cubic meters of freshwater annually from the Yangtze river in southern China to the water-thirsty northern region, may cause the resettlement of hundreds of thousands Chinese citizens, depending on the final routing of the project (Ringler et al. 2012). Beyond its national borders, China has also become a major player in large-scale infrastructure projects in other Asian countries and the implementation of its plans to establish an Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) – and a New Development Bank with its BRICS partners Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa – will further strengthen its influence in the region. Among the Chinese governments medium-term plans are a new ‘Silk Road’ enhancing its connectivity with Central Asia, a railway network linking its southwestern Yunnan province with Mainland Southeast Asia and several ports in Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Pakistan and Indonesia. China is also among the top five Asian investor countries – in terms of land acquired or leased in foreign territories – that have been driving the recent regional (and global) land rush (Table 1).

Table 1. Top Five Target Countries of ‘Transnational Land Acquisitions and Leases’ in Asia and Top Five Asian Investor Countries

Target Countries in Asia	hectares	Asian Investor Countries	Hectares
1. Indonesia	3,957,502	1. Malaysia	3,590,776
2. Cambodia	797,572	2. Singapore	2,994,650
3. Lao PDR	528,335	3. China (incl. Hong Kong)	2,834,683
4. Vietnam	351,809	4. India	1,708,441
5. Malaysia	294,649	5. South Korea	1,074,467

Source: Data from Land Matrix Partnership, retrieved 16 April 2015

Note: These figures do not include large-scale domestic land acquisitions and leases.

In India, it is estimated that almost 60 million people were displaced between 1948 and 2008 (Mathur 2008, cited by Meher 2009). Displacement processes have further intensified in recent years, mainly in relation to multipurpose mega-dams, large-scale mining projects and special economic zones (e.g. Maitra 2009; Somayaji and Talwar 2011; Chowdhury 2013; Mariotti, this issue). There is a broad consensus among scholars that the poorest and most marginalized communities in India, particularly indigenous and tribal people (*Adivasi*), ethnic and religious minorities and natural resource dependent communities, are most adversely affected by dispossession and physical and economic displacement (Meher 2009; Somayaji and Talwar 2011). Mathur (2013) estimates that 40-50 percent of the displaced are *Adivasi*, although indigenous communities account for only 8 percent of the population. In the mineral-rich eastern states Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkand and West Bengal, Maoist insurgents (the so-called *Naxalites*) have capitalized on displacement processes by recruiting disenfranchised indigenous people, creating heightened national security concerns (e.g. Carl 2006; Kennedy 2015). The vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to provide electricity to the 300 million Indians that have not been connected to the grid – mainly through coal-fired power plants and hydroelectric dams – is likely to further exacerbate the tensions. Hence, the issue of development-induced displacement in India is situated at a critical intersection of cultural identity, human rights, development aspirations, social conflict and national security concerns.

Indonesia and Cambodia are the two countries in Asia that have been primarily targeted by the recent global rush for land and other natural resources, triggered by the global financial and food crises of 2007/2008 and the trend among large international investors to look for safe investments against the backdrop of increasingly volatile financial markets. According to records by the Land Matrix Partnership, nearly 4 million hectares of land have been acquired in Indonesia by foreign investors in recent years (cf. Table 1), primarily for oil palm plantations and – to a lesser extent – fast-growing tree plantations for paper and pulp production. Outer island plantation development and expansion has triggered hundreds of land disputes each year – often accompanied by violence or causing dispossession - between smallholders or indigenous residents and plantation companies (Obidzinski et al. 2012). Malaysia and

Singapore feature prominently in the diverse portfolio of investor countries. Foreign investors are also targeting Indonesia's vast mineral resources (cf. Price, this issue). In post-conflict Cambodia, dispossession and displacement related to large-scale land acquisitions and public mega-projects have affected more than 770,000 people (almost 6 per cent of the country's population), according to recent estimates of a local human rights organization (ADHOC 2014). Many investors seek to exploit the country's abundant natural resources, e.g. by establishing rubber, sugar and teak plantations on land previously occupied by customary rights-holders (Neef, Touch, and Chiengthong 2013; Oldenburg and Neef 2014). Large-scale tourism development projects, such as the US\$3.6 billion tourism complex in Cambodia's Koh Kong province built by the Chinese Tianjin Union Development Group, have also triggered the forced displacement of hundreds of families (Neef and Touch, in press). International donors have supported a number of highway and railway projects that have been associated with massive relocations (Connell, this issue).

Alongside Lao PDR, its neighbor to the north, Cambodia is also aspiring to become one of the 'batteries of Southeast Asia' by planning a cascade of hydroelectric power stations along the lower Mekong basin (Graecen and Palettu 2007). The two countries are planning to build up to 11 highly controversial mainstream dams by 2030 in order to harness the 30,000 MW hydropower potential of the river basin, according to the Mekong River Commission (MRC 2015). While energy-hungry Thailand – which was the first country in Mainland Southeast Asia to build massive multipurpose dams from the 1960s onwards – is supporting these plans and has major financial stakes in several of them (Middleton, Garcia, and Foran 2009), Vietnam strongly opposes its neighbors' hydropower aspirations, as the country is anticipating major impacts on the Mekong delta's flood regime and fish supplies. Aside from large-scale displacements of already vulnerable populations in Cambodia and Lao PDR, there are well-founded fears that dam developments will trigger a massive decline of fish supplies, affecting millions of people along the Mekong and around the Tonle Sap Lake (Kirby et al. 2012). According to one comprehensive assessment, the animal protein that is at risk of being lost every year if all planned dams were built is equivalent to 110 per cent of the combined 2010 total livestock production of Cambodia and Lao PDR (ICEM 2010). On its part, Vietnam has invested heavily in hydropower development in its northwestern highland provinces Son La and Hoa Binh and in the central region of the country, relocating hundreds of thousands of mostly ethnic minority people in the process (Hall, Hirsch, and Li 2011; Bui, Schreinemachers, and Berger 2013; Singer and Hoang 2015).

If the Asian Development Bank's vision of a "Seamless Asia" (ADB & ADBI 2009) is fully realized, future displacements in the region are likely to dwarf past experience; the ADB has estimated annual infrastructure investment needs across Asia to be in the order of \$750 billion per year between 2010 and 2020. "Building roads, railways, bridges, power stations, and pipelines across the region should be a priority for the region's policymakers. In these uncertain times, Asia must not pause or turn back, but rather forge ahead with the challenging and immensely rewarding task of integrating this large and diverse region for the benefit of all its citizens." (ADB & ADBI 2009: 11).

Recent Policy Developments Relevant to Development-Induced Displacement

Since the first guidelines for development-caused involuntary resettlement were adopted by the World Bank in 1980, a growing number of international lenders and national governments – most notably in China, Vietnam and India – have enacted resettlement guidelines and legislation requiring compensation and post-resettlement support that is more commensurate with replacement (e.g. Price 2008). While early approaches prioritized financial compensation for restoring original standards of living, more recent policies have acknowledged the social, health and livelihood costs of displacement by seeking to prevent or minimize displacement when possible and adopting a “resettlement with development” approach. Involuntary resettlement safeguards developed by the Asian Development Bank and updated in 2012 (ADB 2012) and the recommendations of the 2000 report of the World Commission on Dams (WCD 2000), an international consultative body of dam and displacement experts, became models for subsequent national legislation that institutionalized compensation and livelihood support for the displaced. Private sector banks and other investors in infrastructure construction projects have developed their own set of guidelines for managing the social and environmental risks of infrastructure projects, the Equator Principles. During the last decade several universal declarations, such as the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (UNHCR 2004), have underlined the rights of project-affected populations to participate in the relocation decision-making process and to provide free, prior and informed consent (FPIC).

Yet, despite the proliferation of international, national and private-sector guidelines, standards and safeguards, it has become increasingly clear in recent years that compensation alone is not sufficient to address the considerable risks and adverse impacts of displacement. Even in nations with progressive pro-poor legislation, most development-induced displacement continues to result in impoverishment (Oliver-Smith 2009). Accordingly, recent DIDR research has emphasized the complexity of displacement and its ethical dimensions. There is overwhelming evidence that displacement exacts a greater toll from particularly vulnerable social groups: women (e.g. Bisht 2009, ADB 2012), indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities (e.g. Colchester 2000; Bui, Schreinemachers, and Berger 2013; Mariotti, this issue), the urban poor (e.g. Choi, this issue), children (e.g. Cernea 2000), and land-poor farmers dependent on access to common-pool resources (e.g. Chowdhury 2013; Quetulio-Navarra et al. 2014; Mariotti, this issue).

The deplorable record of DIDR projects in Asia and beyond has been well-documented by researchers and has triggered a number of policy reforms at the national and international level, yet today many of these hard-won safeguards risk attenuation. India’s recent resettlement legislation is a case in point. Until 2013, land acquisition and takeovers of land by the state for ‘public purpose’ invoked the principle of ‘eminent domain’ and was governed by a legal instrument from colonial times, the Land Acquisition Act of 1894 (Maitra 2009; Price 2009). It was replaced by *The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act 2013 (LARR 2013)*, which came into effect on 1 January 2014. The act – which introduced a number of safeguard mechanisms for farmers at risk of displacement and more generous compensation and resettlement packages for the displaced –

was hailed by many human rights advocates as a major step towards more humane, participatory and transparent processes of land acquisitions and displacements for projects in the ‘public interest’, whereas economists have argued that LARR 2013 privileges a small minority of land owners and constrains public and private investment and economic growth. Yet, recent ‘amendments’ to the act under the watch of the Modi administration appear to have watered down some of the central clauses of the act. The amendments include “a fast track process for defence and defence production, rural infrastructure including electrification, housing for poor including affordable housing, industrial corridors and infrastructure projects” (Government of India 2014). As we write this article, further changes to the LARR 2013 in the form of a new Land Bill are being discussed in policy and civil society circles in India.

At the international level, the revision of the World Bank’s Environmental and Social Framework (World Bank 2014) has drawn harsh criticism from civil society organizations (CSOs), which accuse the largest development bank of weakening land rights protection for poor and vulnerable communities. In a joint statement of more than 100 CSOs in 2014, the World Bank was criticized for (1) providing an ‘opt-out’ clause on safeguards for indigenous people, (2) diluting involuntary resettlement policy, (3) excluding land administration projects from resettlement safeguards and (4) providing insufficient protections of farmers, pastoralists and indigenous people against land grabbing (Inclusive Development International 2014). Indeed, the draft safeguards seem to be at odds with the spirit of the “Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Forest and Fisheries”. These guidelines – which had been developed under the leadership of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and were officially endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in 2012 – have been considered as a major milestone in the effort to contain the global land rush, as they emphasize the need for respecting customary land rights and invoke human rights principles of protecting vulnerable and marginalized groups against dispossession and displacement (e.g. Brüntrup et al. 2014). Some observers believe that the World Bank’s attempt to exonerate itself from its obligations to people at risk of displacement and resettlement and to give its borrowers more discretionary power in dealing with the displaced is a reflection of its aim to enhance funding of private and public mega-projects and a response to growing competition from newly emerging lenders, such as China and India, and private investors not tied to safeguard regimes (Pred 2014; Connell, this issue).

Established Frameworks and Emerging Concerns

As Dawson and Farber (2012: 126) maintain, “[d]evelopment-induced displacement can pose more conceptual challenges than displacement caused by armed conflict.” This is in part due to the fact that questions of responsibility and applicability of particular legal frameworks tend to be more complex. Early DIDR research in the 1980s and 1990s – predominantly conducted by anthropologists and sociologists – focused on resettlement outcomes in the wake of large-scale dam construction in Africa, Latin America and Asia. The principal conceptual frameworks that are still most influential today were first advanced during that period, including sociologist Michael Cernea’s *Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction* framework,

which posits eight risks of resettlement: the loss of land, the loss of jobs; homelessness; marginalization; increased morbidity and mortality; food insecurity; loss of access to common property resources and the weakening of social and community ties (Cernea 1997). Other models sought to conceptualize the resettlement process along a temporal continuum, as with Scudder and Colson's *Four-Stages Model* of (a) recruitment of affected residents, (b) transition, (c) community formation and economic development, and (d) incorporation (Scudder and Colson 1982). More recently, Downing and Garcia-Downing (2009) have described a transition from the previous "routine culture" to a "dissonant culture" of psycho-social dislocation shortly after resettlement, and the eventual establishment of a new routine culture.

Scudder (2009: 27 f) mentions four characteristics that are particularly relevant for conceptualizing DIDR processes: (1) the accelerated rate of social change, (2) the predominantly involuntary nature of resettlement, (3) resettlement as by-product of a different development initiative, and (4) the complexity associated with DIDR processes and outcomes. The articles in our themed section break new empirical and conceptual ground with regard to all four DIDR characteristics. The major research questions addressed from different disciplinary lenses are:

- How do non-economic factors such as participation, advocacy, volition, and power relations affect resettlement outcomes?
- What are the differential impacts of development-forced displacement on various social groups, including those left behind?
- How do private-sector projects address displaced citizens' livelihood needs and include resettlers in negotiations about relocation plans?
- Do uniform national resettlement policies and compensation schemes suit both urban and rural contexts?
- In which ways are organizations working with affected populations in resettlement processes and how are these processes framed and resettlers' aspirations simplified in development discourses?

The first article in this themed section, authored by **Brooke Wilmsen** and **Mark Wang**, explores whether volition in resettlement has any significant impact on successful outcomes in China by juxtaposing the case of the Three Gorges dam project with a supposedly voluntary poverty alleviation migration scheme. The authors find that the line between forced and voluntary movement is blurred in the case of an authoritarian state like China. While involuntary displacement processes may entail a greater degree of choice and agency for the resettlers than commonly thought, voluntary resettlements may be characterized by more subtle forms of coercion, such as the gradual withdrawal of services from those who decided to remain in the area. Their findings further suggest that it was not the supposedly voluntary nature of resettlement in the case of poverty alleviation resettlement that contributed to its relative success, but rather its people-centered practices and long-term commitment to establishing sustainable communities.

In the second article **Chiara Mariotti** applies a political economy approach to determine how

structural factors in compensation and rehabilitation result in adverse incorporation in local development for dam-displaced residents in Andhra Pradesh, India. She identifies four major types of adverse incorporation: spatial, socio-cultural, political and economic. She argues that the process of adverse incorporation is a result of three major shortcomings in the Resettlement & Rehabilitation package offered to the displaced populations: the inadequate handling of land compensation for tribal people (“scheduled tribes”), the exclusive focus on cash compensation for non-tribal people and the failure to create non-farm employment opportunities for the resettled communities. In conclusion, she calls for (1) a broadening of land-for-land compensation schemes, (2) the replacement of all material losses (e.g. including lost access to communal forest resources) in the case of cash compensation and (3) connecting resettlement policies with broader political goals of poverty alleviation through benefit-sharing and employment creation schemes.

The third article, written by **Narae Choi**, examines the impacts of resettlement on those left behind at a railway reconstruction project in Manila and their efforts to regain economic resilience. The author challenges the common assumption that resettlement processes affect only the resettled communities by exploring a range of adverse livelihood impacts on those groups that were not physically displaced, but suffered from the demolition of productive physical capital and the reconfiguration of their socio-economic livelihood networks. While a number of non-displaced people were only minimally affected and for a few the changes in their locality opened new windows of opportunity, many experienced a deterioration of their socio-economic situation. The author’s findings beg the question whether such diverse and complex impacts of development-induced displacement can be adequately addressed by existing policy frameworks, strengthening the call for a critical rethinking of developmental change more generally.

In her article on a railway construction project in Cambodia, **Jessie Connell** describes an active community of NGOs assuming an advocacy role in promoting the grievances and conditions of displaced urban and rural residents and holding international donors and national agencies accountable. She finds that aspirations of the displaced vary widely, with some residents eager to resettle to a safer site offering improved infrastructure and higher security of land tenure. These findings challenge standardized and inflexible resettlement standards, such as the ‘minimizing displacement’ principle upheld by international development banks which in some instances may have inadvertently negative consequences. The author further argues that accountability advocacy can lead to ‘islands of governance’ that stand in stark contrast to the limited support systems that are in place for the thousands of displaced people in other parts of the country.

In the final article of this themed section, **Susanna Price** discusses the differential outcomes of rights- and risk-based approaches to land transfers and resettlement, drawing on a case study of a private sector mine development project in Indonesia’s Papua Barat province. Her findings suggest that while both approaches contributed to the drafting of a resettlement plan that was broadly accepted by civil society, it was the rights-based approach that opened up negotiation space for the displaced populations and helped addressing asymmetric power relations. The

author calls for comprehensive strategies – most notably (1) transparent and fair negotiations, (2) extensive consultations and impact assessments, (3) the offer of a ‘no-displacement’ option, (4) grievance redress mechanisms, and (5) extensive entitlement packages for resettlers – to ensure that land transfers and resettlements are truly voluntary and provide a basis for sound social and economic development of affected communities.

All five papers are indicative of an emerging trend in DIDR scholarship to employ more nuanced and multi-faceted approaches that expand the focus beyond specific case studies of displaced communities and individual livelihood outcomes. We hope that this themed section – which includes both well-known DIDR scholars and some of the field’s most promising young researchers – will invigorate DIDR research at a time when rapid growth in displaced populations lends new urgency to the need of advancing the empirical understanding of the complexity of DIDR processes and contributing to build more comprehensive conceptual frameworks that can inform policy making and lead to more inclusive development strategies.

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