

# Planned relocation and durable solutions in post-Haiyan Tacloban

*Submission to the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement*

*Stockholm Environment Institute\**

*May 2020*

Internal displacement is a global issue: 33.4 million new displacements reported across 145 countries and territories in 2019 alone gives an idea of its widespread gravity.<sup>1</sup> In 1999, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement identified disasters as a main cause of internal displacement, alongside conflict, generalized violence and human rights violations. Since the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) began monitoring the number of people displaced by disasters in 2008, it has found that each year, disasters account for the majority of new displacements, averaging three times the number of people displaced by conflict and violence.<sup>2</sup> The problem is particularly acute in the Asia-Pacific region with its long history of major catastrophic disasters as well as frequent small or medium-sized events, with climate-related hazards increasing in frequency and intensity as a result of global climate change. In 2019, over 96% of the region's new displacements were triggered by disasters.<sup>3</sup>

Displacement does not just *happen*. It is built on a complex web of underlying social, environmental, economic and political factors that influence an individual's vulnerability and displacement risk. In order to address the root causes of displacement, it is critical to understand how these factors influence who is being displaced and why.

In a disaster, displacement describes involuntary movements away from one's home and can take a number of forms.<sup>4</sup> Evacuation is a life saving measure moving exposed populations out of harm's way before, during or after a disaster event.<sup>5</sup> Although evacuations are typically

---

\* Founded in 1989, the Stockholm Environment Institute is an international non-profit research and policy organization that tackles environment and development challenges. We have offices in five continents and work locally, regionally and globally. We are a trusted partner, widely recognized by decision-makers and the academic community as an independent and non-partisan institute. As a research-for-policy institute, we aim to make our knowledge and findings accessible to decision-makers and civil society, whether as our own open access material, in academic journals, or repackaged for effective decision support.

1 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2020). [Global Report on Internal Displacement](#).

2 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2019) [Disaster Displacement: A global review, 2008-2018](#).

3 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2020). [Global Report on Internal Displacement](#).

4 The Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda defines disaster displacement as "situations where people are forced or obliged to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of a disaster or in order to avoid the impact of an immediate and foreseeable natural hazard" ([Nansen Initiative](#) 2015, p. 16).

5 See United Nations General Assembly A/71/644 (V)18 page 18.

short-term, evacuated individuals might experience protracted displacement if they are unable to return to their homes and livelihoods. Displacement also occurs when households are destroyed or living conditions are no longer habitable. Planned relocation can be a solution to disaster displacement, resettling populations when they are unable to return to their previous residences, or a tool to get people out of harm’s way and reduce future displacement risk.<sup>6</sup> In these situations, individuals, households or even entire communities are assisted in moving to a new location and provided with the resources necessary to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. In utilizing planned relocation as a risk reduction strategy, it is vital that policymakers consider the extent to which relocations actually decrease risks or if there is potential that such measures simply create new ones.

The recommendations in this submission are informed by research conducted by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) investigating the impacts that disasters and climate change have on displacement, planned relocation and sustainable livelihoods. Specifically, it draws on the experience of planned relocation following the impacts of Typhoon Haiyan in Central Philippines to ensure that no one is left behind during the recovery process and that the process of planned relocation does not displace host communities.

This research highlights the importance of a human rights-based approach, the essential role of sustainable livelihoods to achieve durable solutions, and potential trade-offs in development and disaster risk reduction work. This submission highlights not only areas that the High-Level Panel should consider in its global inquiry but also practical recommendations for governments.

### Planned relocation: the policy landscape

At the international level, planned relocation has been addressed in a variety of policy discussions including climate change, humanitarian, disaster risk reduction and migration, as outlined in Table 1. At the regional level, however, guidance on planned relocation is limited. The ASEAN Disaster Recovery Reference Guide puts special focus on relocation and access to land in post disaster recovery, outlining challenges relating to land occupancy and land tenure in post disaster recovery.<sup>7</sup>

Table 1: References to planned relocation in international frameworks.

International Framework	Reference to planned relocation
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – Cancun Adaptation Framework (2010)	States were invited to enhance adaptation action with “[m]easures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement, migration and <b>planned relocation</b> , where appropriate, at the national, regional and international levels.” <sup>8</sup>

6 See Ferris, E., 2017. A toolbox: Planning relocations to protect people from disasters and environmental change. Institute for the Study of International Migration, UNHCR, The UN Migration Agency: Georgetown University, Washington DC.

7 See ASEAN, 2016. [ASEAN Disaster Recovery Reference Guide](#).

8 UNFCCC, Decision 1/CP.21 (n 130), para 49.

Inter-Agency Standing Committee – Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons (2010)

This publication highlights the need for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are able resume normal life by finding some sort of durable solution.<sup>9</sup> **Permanent relocation is considered a last resort** when another area can offer comparable living conditions. This Framework highlights the importance of independent monitoring of conditions in relocation areas to keep IDPs from returning to unsafe locations.

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction – Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015)

As part of Priority 2, Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk, the Framework highlights the need to **“formulate public policies, where applicable, aimed at addressing the issues of prevention or relocation**, where possible, of human settlements in disaster risk-prone zones, subject to national law and legal systems” (para. 27 k).<sup>10</sup> Priority 3, Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience, then outlines the importance of mainstreaming disaster risk assessments as a strategy to identify areas that are safe for human settlement (para. 30 g).<sup>11</sup>

Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (2018)

Objective 5: Enhance availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration highlights the need to “[c]ooperate to identify, develop and **strengthen solutions for migrants** compelled to leave their countries of origin owing to slow-onset natural disasters, the adverse effects of climate change, and environmental degradation, such as desertification, land degradation, drought and sea level rise, **including by devising planned relocation** and visa options, in cases where adaptation in or return to their country of origin is not possible” (para. 21 g).<sup>12</sup>

Examples of national level policy include:

- Fiji’s planned relocation guidelines to ensure that the nation is able to adapt to sea level rise and coastal erosion.<sup>13</sup>
- Vanuatu’s national policy on climate change and disaster-induced displacement, highlighting that the effects of climate change may prompt some communities to consider planned relocation, while recognizing the potential negative impact on the security, health and well-being of individuals.<sup>14</sup>
- Following Typhoon Haiyan, the Philippines Shelter Cluster offered guidance on national and international relocation standards and best practice.<sup>15</sup> The note highlights that relocation is not just providing shelter in a new location but must consider how the move will impact livelihoods and community life.

9 “A durable solution is achieved when internally displaced persons no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement.” For more information, see the [IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons](#) (2010).

10 Res 69/283, ‘Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030’ (23 June 2015) UN Doc A/RES/69/283, annex II.

11 Ibid.

12 Res 73/195, ‘Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration’ (19 December 2018) UN DOC A/RES/73/195.

13 Government of Fiji, 2018. ‘[Planned Relocation Guidelines – A framework to undertake climate change related relocation](#)’.

14 Government of Vanuatu, 2019. [National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement](#).

15 See Shelter Cluster Philippines, 2014. [HLP Guidance Note on Relocation for Shelter Partners](#).

## Background: Post-Typhoon Haiyan Tacloban

In 2013, Typhoon Haiyan, known locally in the Philippines as Yolanda, displaced four million people. Humanitarian organisations, UN bodies and local authorities had to consider how to relocate the survivors away from the danger zone. Tacloban City, the regional centre of Eastern Visayas, was particularly devastated, with 90% of the city destroyed. According to the Philippines Shelter Cluster, Typhoon Haiyan destroyed approximately 580,000 houses and damaged a further 550,000.<sup>16</sup> The government was faced with the task of “building back better” and as a result, designated the devastated coastal areas as “no build zones”, preventing the construction of residential dwellings within 40 meters of the coast in order to reduce future exposure. As a result, the government was tasked with relocating several densely populated informal fishing communities in the coastal areas to other sites in the North of the city.

The relocations in Tacloban highlight a number of concerns. Given the highly developed nature of Tacloban, land is limited, and the government was forced to relocate the community 19 kilometres from their former settlements. Many households that had been living along the coast had relied on livelihoods linked to the location, often fishing or working in the city. To compensate, affected individuals were given livelihood trainings, tools and capitals. However, these were not enough to sustain these households and build lasting livelihoods. Although there was considerable livelihood support, with some households being supplied capital, materials and/or specific training, for many, this was insufficient to build durable solutions. In addition, access to assets were sometimes conditioned on people’s social and political capital, as those connected to the village Board of Directors were often more likely to benefit from opportunities and housing benefits. Additionally, the loss of material assets were frequently irreversible however, those with transferrable skills were better able to adapt and diversify their livelihood. For those that wished to continue their previous livelihood, the distance between the new relocation sites and their previous dwellings required substantial transport costs.

Finding space for the resettlements proved to be problematic. Given the limited availability of land near the relocated area, the government chose a site on the other side of the city and put the relocation site directly on or adjacent to three farming communities who were then displaced. In some cases, residents were evicted because their houses were directly in the resettlement zones while others were able to keep their homes but lost their farmland, causing major livelihood disruptions and sometimes leading to displacement.

## Key Concerns for the High-Level Panel

Planned relocation is typically a measure of last resort and does not affect a majority of IDPs. However, given that planned relocation may become an increasingly common solution to reduce community exposure to environmental hazards or as a part of a post-disaster recovery plan, as seen in Tacloban, the High-Level Panel should consider how governments can ensure

---

<sup>16</sup> Shelter Cluster Philippines, 2014. [Infographic 100 after Haiyan](#).

that those affected are protected and not at risk of secondary displacement. As such, the Panel is invited to consider the following:

- **Explore how planned relocation can utilize a human rights-based approach.** The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement guarantee the protection of displaced persons in all phases of displacement. Displacement violates human rights and puts individuals in situations in which they need humanitarian protection. Carrying out a human rights-based approach involves first identifying what rights might be violated and which duty-bearers should be held responsible. In the case of Tacloban, planned relocation uprooted communities and led to difficulties accessing social services, jobs and livelihoods.
- **Examine how livelihoods contribute to household resilience.** The research in Tacloban found that a clear understanding of livelihood assistance and other support needs is essential for ensuring that relocated households are able to sustain themselves in order to reduce aid dependency and negative coping strategies. In Tacloban, only some relocated individuals received livelihood support following their relocation and even then, only some interventions led to viable livelihood activities. Some of the resources provided, both food and capital, were either directly used by the household or went towards accumulated debts. Other interventions were not appropriate, such as providing seeds to households that did not have access to land or training and supplies to open a bakery without access to an oven. Ultimately, in order for those resettled to North Tacloban to achieve a durable solution, they will require access to sustainable employment or livelihoods and access to support services.
- **Planned relocation is often a last resort but also can provide an opportunity for at risk communities to truly “build back better” by generally reducing disaster risk.** More guidance needs to be provided to governments as they pursue relocation options outlining key considerations for when relocation is appropriate and how to be equitable and sustainable in its implementation. These guidelines should not only be short-term but consider the long-term trajectory of displacement. As seen in Tacloban now, not all of the proposed resettlement sites have been completed and a number of victims are still waiting for their housing units. For some already living in relocation sites, access to water and electricity is still a problem. Without clear guidance and monitoring, such interventions run the risk of violating the human rights not only of those relocating, but also host populations. In some cases, planned relocation can lead to the displacement of host communities, when communities inhabiting the relocation site are displaced to make room for the new settlement. Rather than reduce overall vulnerability, such action has the potential to increase the vulnerability of one community while meeting its goal of reducing the exposure of another. Redistributing the population can create other stresses on access to land, resources, livelihoods and services and prioritize the needs of the target group over other groups.
- **Transforming post-disaster development and ensuring that no communities are left behind requires a deep understanding of social vulnerabilities in order to not exacerbate them.** To ensure that displaced populations find durable solutions, development pre- and post-disaster must contribute to equitable, resilient and

sustainable societies.<sup>17</sup> A transformational approach requires holistic, long-term planning that will incorporate more inclusive decision making, seeks to understand the impacts of development decisions and challenges existing structures and power relations. To do this, policy makers must strive for equitable outcomes that ensure that poor and/or marginalized groups are able to benefit from development and disaster risk reduction projects and that potential trade-offs are not made at their expense.

## Practical recommendations for policymakers

This submission does not attempt to advocate for or against planned relocation as a part of disaster recovery or solution to disaster displacement, but rather seeks to highlight important concerns that governments must consider when pursuing durable solutions. Being displaced is a traumatic experience and involves a lot of uncertainties. It is up to governments and humanitarian and development actors to ensure that individuals are protected in all phases of their displacement and that durable solutions maintain life, livelihood and dignity.

When considering planned relocation as a durable solution for disaster displacement or as a disaster risk reduction strategy to reduce exposure, governments and implementing agencies should consider the following:

- Governments have to deal with a number of potential trade-offs in all phases of disaster management including with relation to aggregation, risk, equity, time, and participation.<sup>18</sup> **Consideration and integration of potential trade-offs in post-disaster decision making is crucial in decreasing competition amongst development goals and potentially eliminating the trade-offs themselves.** Trade-offs could include disaster risk reduction efforts that prevent or restrict future development. In Tacloban, some resettlement sites were not constructed with a deep understanding of longer-term access to sustainable livelihoods, environment, or access to social services. Understanding trade-offs can also provide a deeper understanding of how risks are created and lead to more equitable, resilient, and sustainable outcomes and contribute to better informed decision making.
- Reducing exposure does not automatically increase the resilience of a population. Rather, it must be coupled with **increasing the resilience of relocated populations and requires increased access to services, sustainable livelihoods and support.**
- Recognize the importance of a **cross-sectoral approach to achieving durable solutions.**

---

<sup>17</sup> For more information on transforming development and disaster risk see SEI's International Centre of Excellence on Transforming Development and Disaster Risk (ICOE-TDDR) at [wetransform.dev](http://wetransform.dev).

<sup>18</sup> For a more in-depth understanding of post-disaster trade-offs see: Tuhkanen, H., Boyland, M., Han, G., Patel, A., Johnson, K., Rosemarin, A., Lim Mangada, L. (2018). A typology framework for trade-offs in development and disaster risk reduction: a case study of Typhoon Haiyan recovery in Tacloban, Philippines. *Sustainability*, 10(6). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10061924>

Collaboration is needed among government ministries, including those relating to housing, disaster management, economic development, etc. Additionally, assistance will be required from humanitarian and development actors.

- When finding a relocation site, **risk assessments should not only consider physical risks like flooding or landslides, but also social risks**, accounting for both the relocated population and the host community who are dependent on the land for their lives and livelihoods. Special attention must also be made to ensure that host communities are not displaced as a result of planned relocation projects.
- The roles and responsibilities of local actors vary depending on the local context. **Responding to disaster displacement and considering relocation options must understand and adapt to the local context and include all affected populations in decisions.** An all-of-society approach, including local and national authorities, utilities, civil society organisations, and businesses, will ensure local buy-in and promote the sustainability of response efforts and achieving durable solutions.
- The extent to which planned relocations displace or cause severe livelihood disruptions for host populations is largely unknown. The research explored in this submission only considered a small number of resettlement sites in Tacloban and found that in each of them, there was some form of displacement experienced by some residents (e.g. with people's home and/or farmlands being destroyed to make room for construction). Despite this paucity of information, initial research suggests that this problem is more widespread. **More research is necessary to consider the extent to this problem in Tacloban and if other host communities face the same.**

#### For further information please see:

Boyland, M., Johnson, K., Salamanca, A., Thomalla, F., & Tuhkanen, H. (2019). *A framework for transforming the relationship between development and disaster risk*. IRDR. Retrieved from <http://www.irdrinternational.org/download/13914/>

Boyland, M. Johnson, K. (2018). Can progress in Asia keep pace with increasing disaster risks? Reflections from AMCDRR 2018. <https://www.sei.org/featured/progress-in-asia-on-increasing-disaster-risks/>

Johnson, K. (2020) Disaster and climate-induced migration and displacement fact sheet. <https://www.sei.org/publications/disaster-and-climate-induced-migration-and-displacement/>

Johnson, K., Mortensen, S. (2019). Recovering from Typhoon Haiyan: planned resettlement displaces farming communities. <https://www.sei.org/featured/recovering-from-typhoon-haiyan-planned-resettlement-displaces-farming-communities/>

Kemsey, J. (2019). Careless development models in wake of Yolanda. <https://www.sei.org/about-sei/press-room/careless-devt-models-in-yolandas-wake/>

Thomalla, F., Boyland, M., Johnson, K., Ensor, J., Tuhkanen, H., Gerger Swartling, Å., . . . Wahl, D. (2018). Transforming Development and Disaster Risk. *Sustainability*, 10(5), 1-12. doi:10.3390/su10051458

Tuhkanen, H., Boyland, M., Han, G., Patel, A., Johnson, K., Rosemarin, A., Lim Mangada, L. (2018). A typology framework for trade-offs in development and disaster risk reduction: a case study of Typhoon Haiyan recovery in Tacloban, Philippines. *Sustainability*, 10(6). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10061924>