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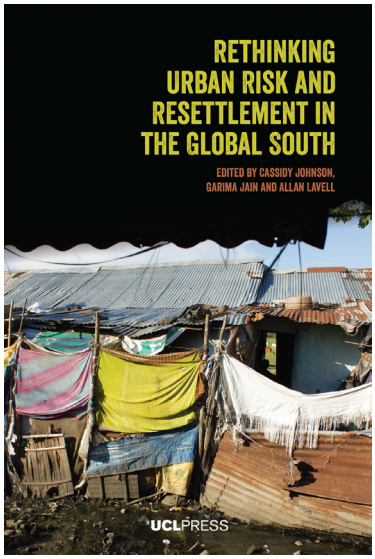
Rethinking urban risk and resettlement in the Global South



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Facing disproportionately many mankind-induced risks and natural hazards, low-income populations in the Global South are also exposed to another threat, namely resettlement and relocation processes, although they are meant to reduce the risk of disaster. On many occasions, national and local governments as well as international funding agencies regard these as good measures. The problem is: "While this may reduce people's exposure to hazard, it can lead to numerous other problems, which can leave people more vulnerable or worse off than they were before [given the fact that it is a difficult task to] "reconstitute their livelihoods and their infrastructural, economic, social, cultural and psychological foundations" (p. 1).

Rethinking urban risk and resettlement in the Global South stems from the intercontinental project 'Reducing relocation risk in urban areas'. The three editors were also involved in this project as (co-)principal investigators and specialists in the Global South regions and in the scientific fields relevant to the topics of the book, namely urban risk and resilience, disaster prevention, urbanism, and disaster risk reduction.

The contributors of the chapters also have extensive knowledge of the topic, as the work of most of them is related to Latin American, African, and Asian countries, within an academic context, and as members of the United Nations agencies. All these details are essential in order to understand that, given the credentials of the contributors, the research presented in this book is credible and welcome, as the contributors seem to know the reality of the topics discussed.

The scope of this volume is to understand the challenges and associated outcomes of such interventions on people and cities, and to examine ways to avoid the need for resettlement because it is proven that many such processes incite "social conflict, competing demands and dissatisfaction with (or suspicion of) government and its ability to provide solutions" (p. 2).

The book's fifteen chapters are organised into five parts, in addition to the Introduction and a concluding chapter. The Introduction gives a welcome overview of the subject, its terminological controversies, the description of the project and its findings, which are the basis of this book, as well as a description of the structure of the book.

Part 1 (Chapters 1-3) focuses on a critical framing of the related concepts, with resettlement as a last-resort approach for disaster risk management, and as an unfortunate outcome of development failures. The case studies in this chapter are drawn from resettlement projects in Manizales, Colombia, and from both rural and urban contexts in India.

Part 2 (Chapters 4-6) scrutinises the subjective concept of 'risk', a crucial element in whether resettlement is an appropriate course of action. The authors consider national policies, including those related to

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'non-mitigable risk' in Peru and 'non-tenable slums' in India, and those related to Uganda as a case study.

Part 3 (Chapters 7-8) studies the resistance to resettlement, by exploring the reasons why urban residents resist resettlement, and by examining in depth the resistance to the New City of Belén resettlement project in Iquitos, Peru.

Part 4 (Chapters 9-12) examines the problem relating to land – how land is held and transacted through evictions and dispossession. The content is based on the studies of Kampala, Uganda, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, the Visayas region of the Philippines, as well as on David Harvey's model of "accumulation through dispossession".

Part 5 (Chapters 13-15) explores the issues of resettlement or relocation to or from ecologically sensitive areas of the city, through case studies from Ría Celestún Biosphere Reserve in Yucatán, Mexico, Chennai, India, and Kampala, Uganda.

The suggestions from the concluding chapter and the findings of the book and the project (see the Appendix) are primarily aimed at helping practitioners develop better processes for implementation and decision-making for disaster risk reduction and resettlement. The book is also a useful read for academics and students in social sciences, economics, urban sciences, and management.

The book contains maps, photos from the case studies (such as the impressive Figure 15.4 *People going on with their lives amid flooding in Natete, Nafuka zone*, p. 299, and others), and conceptual figures (such as Figure 3.2 *Elements of decision-making processes*, p. 56). They all contribute to illustrating the text, along with the references at the end of each chapter which are useful to deepen the research.

The merit of the book lies in an international comparison between countries from the Global South, which reveals that, in the absence of research on the affected population, a legal framework and strong institutions, or applied discretionarily, potentially good measures (or that at least try to reduce the risks) can become sources of inequalities and injustice.