

ROBERT MUGGAH

Relocation FAILURES in Sri Lanka

A SHORT HISTORY OF
INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT
AND RESETTLEMENT



'Can one author concomitantly wield the analytical lenses of several disciplines? This insightful study brilliantly conquers this daunting methodological challenge. Muggah's major book is the sharpest theoretical, political, and sociological analysis of the conundrum of displacements and resettlement processes caused by development, conflicts, and natural disasters, that are integral not only to Sri Lanka's social fabric but epitomize the status of our today's world at large' Michael M. Cemea, George Washington University

'A welcome addition to the literature...Muggah brings insightful social science analysis to this subject, plus an incisive historical perspective.' Norman Uphoff, Cornell University

Each year, millions of people are internally displaced and resettled in the wake of wars and floods or to make way for large-scale development projects, and this number is increasing. Humanitarian and development specialists continue to struggle with designing and executing effective protection strategies and durable solutions.

Relocation Failures explains how internal displacement and efforts to engineer resettlement are conceived and practiced by policy makers and practitioners. The author argues that policies for internally displaced peoples are weak and diluted by narrow interpretations of state sovereignty and collective action dilemmas, and in the case of Sri Lanka, unintentionally intensified ethnic segregation and ultimately war.

This unique new book considers the origins and parameters of internal displacement and resettlement policy and practice and proposes an explanation for why it often fails. In highlighting the ways that development assistance can exacerbate smoldering conflicts, the volume provides an important caution to the aid community.

Dr. Robert Muggah is the Research Director of the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey. Previously, he was a Global Security and Cooperation Professional Fellow (SSRC) at the Refugee Studies Centre, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford. Muggah received a PhD at Oxford University and his MPhil in Development Studies at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Sussex.

Relocation Failures in Sri Lanka: A Short History of Internal Displacement and Resettlement by Robert Muggah is published by Zed Books, priced £19.99, ISBN. 9781848130463 For more information or to request a review copy please contact Ruvani de Silva on 020 7837 8466 or ruvani.de_silva@zedbooks.net.

Review Article

Relocation Failures in Sri Lanka: A Short History of Internal Displacement and Resettlement

By Robert Muggah

(London & New York: Zed Books, 2008)

Reviewed by Don Messerschmidt

Robert Muggah has written a tour de force on population displacement and resettlement associated with infrastructure development, conflict, and natural disasters. In the early chapters he reviews the literature and the international understanding of the notion of resettlement, then focuses on the Sri Lankan example in an extensive case study. The author's perspective is both sociological and historical.

The book has six chapters, bracketed by an Introduction and a Conclusions. The chapters are: (1) An Unified Approach to Displacement and Resettlement, (2) Protection and Durable Solutions: Regimes for Internally Displaced and Resettled Populations, (3) A Short History of Settlement and Resettlement in Sri Lanka, (4) Resettlement for Development: Systems L and B, (5) Resettlement During War: Trincomalee and Batticaloa, and (6) Resettlement After the War: Reflection on the North and East.

The author deals extensively with three systems, forms or causes of displacement and resettlement:

- DIDR or development-induced internal displacement and resettlement,
- CIDR or conflict-induced internal displacement and resettlement, and
- NIDR or natural disaster-induced internal displacement and resettlement.

Muggah defines the notion of 'resettlement' as "social and demographic engineering by another name", and he recognizes that the preponderance of literature on the subject of displacement and resettlement (D&R) is written from ethnographic, anthropological, sociological and psycho-social perspectives. He prefers a more interdisciplinary approach that is designed to more consciously include international relations theory, political geography, history and development studies. His goal is to discern the norms, institutions and agents that shape the process and outcomes of internal D&R.¹ Furthermore, he is especially keen on applying a "grounded theory" approach to field studies and analysis, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative instruments and triangulation analysis (defined and elaborated in the book). The methodological approach is essential for the reader to note in order to gain the fullest understanding and appreciation of this book. Just how the author has proceeded in the studies that inform this work and how his approach informs the analysis and enhances and strengthens the conclusions are important.

The primary objective of *Relocation Failures* is, the author writes, "to generate a comparative assessment of

international regimes designed to protect and promote durable solutions for internally displaced people, including their influence on shaping resettlement outcomes in a single country." The "single country" of his analysis is Sri Lanka, an excellent choice because Sri Lanka has experienced all three forms of internal displacement and resettlement (DIDR, CIDR and NIDR), often concurrently. Sri Lanka is by no means unique, however, and Muggah lists ten other countries in Africa, South America and Asia that have also experienced mass population relocation as a result of development, conflict and natural disasters (Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, Congo, Haiti, Colombia, Nepal, the Philippines, Solomon Islands and Indonesia). With the in-depth Sri Lankan case, Muggah provides his readers with an excellent base for comparative analysis.

The author is particularly keen on testing the association between nascent international regimes for the three forms of D&R (as independent variables) on state behaviors and resettlement outcomes (dependent variables). This, he points out, requires extensive investigation into the policies and practices (real and perceived) of state and non-state institutions, and of international organizations, and into the experiences of relocated populations before and after resettlement. Along the way, Muggah has framed various theoretical notions based on intensive fieldwork, then "tested" them by sending drafts to key senior analysts affiliated with multilateral institutions closely involved in international D&R.

The body of the work is made up of the Sri Lankan case study, from all three major perspectives. To achieve the solidly and richly detailed case study, Muggah used various participatory methods. But with a view to the ethical dilemma, he has carefully stripped the data of identifying characteristics so as not to reveal individual or locale-specific information that could be abused by government or military agents.

A major discussion early in the book is on this very subject-Ethics. Indeed, his attention to ethics gives the book high merit as a sound and reasonable review of the subject of displacement and resettlement internationally, and of the Sri Lankan situation in particular. Muggah notes in the discussion on ethics that D&R studies are sometimes called the 'anthropology of suffering', focusing as they do on violence, dislocation. Here he refers to a number of sociological and anthropological writings on the subject. Such studies inevitably reveal ethical tensions; hence they require of researchers and resettlement agents, alike, a high degree of ethical and moral standards, following a dictum first posited in the Hippocratic oath and more recently espoused

by developers and researchers in situations of conflict and trouble: Do No Intentional Harm. Muggah then lays out ways to prepare for such field studies and how to frame data analysis. These are extremely important considerations. They underpin and strengthen the entire book.

Chapter 1, on the unified approach, reviews the extensive literature on displacement and resettlement, a literature characterized as rife with conceptual tensions. Muggah covers considerable ground in this discussion—including definitions and labels applied to displacement and the parameters of resettlement (“a diffuse and misunderstood concept”) in all three forms, DIDR, CIDR and NIDR. He concludes the chapter by pointing out that “The internal displacement and resettlement agenda was shaped by separate clusters of epistemic communities and sustained interaction between scholars, policymakers and practitioners.” Consequently, many foundational concepts and labels used to describe the DIDR, CIDR and NIDR phenomena have been informed by the bureaucrats of both international and national agencies and organizations.

In Chapter 2, Muggah defines and discusses a number of D&R ‘regimes’, with their various strengths and weaknesses. This chapter is divided into the following sections: ‘Regimes and forced migration’, ‘An international refugee regime’, ‘A regime for CIDR’ and ‘A regime for NIDR’. An important point of discussion here is how state and national level actors (policy-makers, D&R agents, etc.) are influenced by international voices from multilateral agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Chapters 3 through 6 comprise the major Case Studies in the book. It begins in chapter 3 with a historical overview of settlement and resettlement in Sri Lanka. Then, in chapters 4, 5 and 6 Muggah reveals Sri Lanka’s experience with displacement and resettlement under the three scenarios. These four chapters provide the reader with a rich trove of data and analysis, and a splendid review of one nation’s approach to forced resettlement in varied contexts.

The overall result is a richly comparative analysis of different categories of internal D&R that reveals common causes, conceptualizations and consequences. This book is, therefore, a major step towards the conceptualization of a unified perspective on both policy and theory-building. It is with these ideas that the Conclusions begin. In comparing internal displacement and resettlement, the author proceeds to discuss advances towards a unitary approach, reflections on multi-causality, bureaucratic logic, and impoverishment effects of forced migration, leading ultimately to the potential for regime convergence.

Resettlement Failures in Sri Lanka is a must-read primer, rich in detail and sharp analysis, for students of displacement and resettlement, as well as for policy-makers at the national and international levels, and for field agents and operatives responsible for carrying out or overseeing forced migration and resettlement resulting from large infrastructure development, conflict, or natural disasters. It is an ideal book on which to base a D&R seminar, against which students can compare other case examples (from other countries) for analytical purposes.

The book is rigorously researched and thoroughly documented, with extensive notes and references. It is highly recommended for all who deal with issues of displacement and resettlement in development, and/or under circumstances of conflict or natural disaster. The book is 322 pages long, with tables, figures, maps, list of acronyms, extensive notes and bibliography, an index, an appendix, and acknowledgements. The ISBN numbers are 978-1-84813-045-6 (Hb), and 978-1-84813-046-3 (Pb).

Notes

¹ Note that the acronym “D&R” is the reviewer’s invention. The author doesn’t use it, although he does list 148 other acronyms, which gives the reader an indication of how acronymic this field of development study tends to be.