

Recently Launched Special Issue

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Improving Policy and Practice on Return Migration after Natural Disasters

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Introduction

From Hurricane Katrina's devastation of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, to the Great East Japan

Earthquake of 2011 and the ensuing tsunami and nuclear reactor meltdown, governments in the United States and Japan have had to engage in massive restoration and cleanup efforts to address significant loss of life, tremendous economic damage, and displacement of entire communities. It was also the case in such countries as Indonesia and Sri Lanka with the Great Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004 and the Great Sumatra Island Earthquake in 2009.

Disasters often provoke immediate responses and aid. For displaced populations, however, the disruptive effects may continue for years as they struggle to return to affected areas. In Japan, decision-makers and scholars have noted that many evacuees are not returning to their homes following the Great East Japan Earthquake, and that those who have returned face tremendous challenges. In the United States, return of evacuees to New Orleans and surrounding areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina has been uneven (and often inequitable). In Indonesia and Sri Lanka, the Great Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004 and the Great Sumatra Island Earthquake in 2009 created a great number of refugees and some of them have not come back home due to various reasons.

Increasingly, questions are being raised whether damaged areas should be rebuilt in the same way, whether they should be rebuilt differently, or whether people from vulnerable areas should not return to their previous areas of residence. Even when policymakers decide to encourage return, persons displaced by a disaster may decide not to return. Conversely, even if policymakers decide to discourage return, displaced persons may fervently seek to return.

Various social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors influence how evacuees

consider whether, when, and how to return. Those with strong cultural ties, a sense of place, or social capital are more likely to move back after a disaster. Other factors include job opportunities, home ownership and other wealth, insurance, the quality of education and other social services, engagement in political processes, likelihood of a repeated disaster and displacement. Policies at national and local levels may influence decisions by providing compensation for evacuees or other incentives, while formation of new ties in resettled areas, economic considerations, or fear and safety concerns may discourage return. Other decisions must be made when safety, environmental, or health concerns make return impossible. Given the social, economic, and environmental risk that often accompanies post-disaster return, depending on the situation and context, countries and municipalities may wish to be prepared with policy plans and options for whether and how to incentivize return. These strategies should account for longer-term adaptation needs as well as social attitudes.

This proposed special issue features policy priorities, public perceptions, and policy options for addressing post-disaster return migration in the United States, Japan and a couple of Asian countries. It includes a series of case studies in these countries, which are based on a sustained dialogue among scholars and policymakers about whether and how to incentivize the return of displaced persons, taking into account social, economic, and environmental concerns.

The research team, composed of researchers from Indonesia, Japan, Sri Lanka and the United States, is presently undertaking a collaborative and interdisciplinary research process to improve understanding about how to respond to the needs of those displaced by natural disasters and to develop policy approaches for addressing post-disaster return. This research process includes case studies on experiences and policies related to return that were employed following recent disasters, and on attitudes and other factors that influence how people displaced by these natural disasters respond to the return policies.

The research focuses on three key issues:

- Objectives for return migration (whether to return, in what configuration, etc.)
- Priorities and perceptions that influence evacuees' decision-making regarding return
- Policies and practices that are used to pursue return objectives

The special issue will be published online in February, 2016. Please stay tuned *Journal of Asian Development*:

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The papers in the special issue will be indexed in RePEc after the publication at <https://ideas.repec.org/s/mth/jad888.html>