

Benefit-sharing in Urban Displacement and Resettlement

The Role of Participant Activism

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How can people displaced by development projects benefit from them? Developers, researchers, and activists have long known that people forcibly displaced by development projects usually face losses and impoverishment. Thus, international development banks have developed standards to mitigate negative effects and improve outcomes (e.g. Asian Development Bank 2009; World Bank 2017). With good planning and resources to improve livelihoods, displacement and resettlement can become opportunities for development. Recently, there has been emphasis on “benefit-sharing,” the ways in which the displaced and resettled can participate in long-term project gains.

Monetary benefit-sharing has been the focus of much work. Alongside investors, shareholders, and governments, the displaced and resettled receive some of the income earned (Price et al. 2020). A limited number of projects generate regular income, mainly hydroelectric infrastructure and some mines. In contrast, urban projects rarely produce long-term income. Generally oriented around infrastructure (especially transport) and the regularization of “informal” neighborhoods,¹ they sometimes provide gains (through the sale of new building lots or toll charges), but often they do not. However, these projects might offer possibilities for non-monetary benefit sharing, such as improved infrastructure, long-term business and job opportunities, training, and social services. To realize these benefits, good resettlement planning and implementation need to focus on livelihood improvement and reconstruction, not just housing, which has been the focus of much urban resettlement. My interest is the processes by which people might more readily get these non-monetary benefits. One strategy, discussed here, is participant activism, already common and broadly oriented around getting better benefits.

Planners and implementors often regard participant activism as a nuisance. They believe that it is too often oriented around stopping projects. Participant activists also want to improve

¹ It is likely that climate change projects will displace many people, especially the less affluent, over the coming years (Bronen et al. 2018). However, this paper concerns infrastructure construction and regularization.

benefits for themselves and their neighborhoods. I conceptualize participant activism and protest as a form of participation, often considered essential to development. In contrast to participation defined by planners and implementers, participant activism is motivated primarily by the interests of the affected.

This paper discusses briefly four aspects of urban participant activism: 1) it occurs almost everywhere; 2) it has varying degrees of success; 3) it uses multiple tools and networks; and 4) it is complicated. In conclusion, the paper suggests strategies to increase non-monetary benefit sharing for the urban displaced and resettled.

1) Participant Activism against Urban Resettlement Occurs Almost Everywhere

There is no way to generate a random sample of urban resettlement projects. This paper uses cases from my fieldwork and published and unpublished material (Khan, n.d., Koné 2009, Levey and Levey 2000, Lilius 2020, Modi 2011, Müllaur-Seichter 2020, Schechla 2013). The cases, which cover major issues, come from varied time periods. They include transportation projects as well as projects to regularize and resettle neighborhoods that do not conform to legal standards.

In the United States, in the 1960s, Washingtonians fought a new expressway through the Black neighborhoods of the city. In Barranco, in Lima, Peru, activism arose against the *Metropolitano*, a new bus rapid transit (BRT) service, begun in 2006. The socially heterogeneous residents of Barranco created the movement, *Salvemos Barranco* (Save Barranco) to avoid disruption caused to their neighborhood by the *Metropolitano*.

In 2016, in Finland, activists in a Helsinki suburb created the Myyrmäki Movement, to revitalize it and to prevent large-scale dislocation from potential gentrification.

In Dakar, Senegal's capital, bulldozer-led evictions were often carried out in the 1960s and 70s, but protests led the government to stop. In 1995, the Malian government summarily evicted the residents of Senou, a spontaneous neighborhood, when it decided to enlarge the airport zone. In Muthurwa in central Nairobi, Kenya's capital, people were threatened with eviction in 2010, when the landowner, a railroad pension fund, decided to develop the area.

In Mumbai, India, shopkeepers displaced by the Mumbai Urban Transport Project (MUTP), brought a grievance to the World Bank Inspection Panel in 2004, for better compensation. The apartments offered to all the displaced did not allow them to re-establish their

businesses. In Korail, a large irregular neighborhood near more affluent areas of Dhaka, Bangladesh, it was easy to find work in nearby businesses or households. Residents faced continued threats of eviction because of the area's favored location.

2) Varying Degrees of Success

One goal of activism, stopping entire projects, has rarely been achieved. Activists did stop the Washington, DC expressway, and a subsequent court case diverted the funds to Washington's subway system. When residents of Korail went to court, they gained an order against eviction unless new housing was provided to the displaced. Sometimes, actions prevent subsequent displacement. Protests against bulldozing evictions led to legal barriers to it in many countries, including India, Senegal, Mali, and Burkina Faso, four countries where I worked (UN Habitat 2007, p. 15).

Activism for better compensation and benefits has been more successful. The MUTP shopkeepers got new resettlement sites and the option for cash compensation (Modi 2011). In 2000, Senou residents received a new neighborhood, with roads, schools, and markets. By 2009, many had built houses and public services were under construction.

Activism can also lead to unanticipated advantages. To some, Salvemos Barranco seemed to have failed. The World Bank Inspection Panel ruled that there was lack of adequate consultation and ordered implementers to address traffic problems, but the project continued. However, the social movement became a political party, reflecting the organization and power of Barranco and its neighbor, Surco. The party negotiated with the World Bank about future interventions and proposed sanitation and environmental projects to Lima's Participatory Budget.

In contrast, what seem like successes are not always realized. In 2013, a judge ruled that Muthurwa tenants could not be evicted, until there were standards for eviction that conformed to Kenyan law (Lenaola 2013). Evidently, further negotiations between the tenants and the landowner were not fruitful. Court cases continued, and in 2016, another appeal for delay was denied. Newspapers suggested that eviction was imminent in 2020.

3) Use of Multiple Tools and Social Networks

Activists against displacement use many tools, including social networks and existing

institutions. In their activism to block the Washington DC expressway, affected Blacks and non-affected Whites worked together, demonstrating, running petition drives, collaborating with planners, and going to court.

Residents of Korail, threatened with eviction from the lakeshore in their neighborhood, barricaded roads and made human chains. They threatened to extend protest to a major road between the airport and the city. Simultaneously, some assisted people whose buildings were being demolished to remove their belongings. Others contacted influential people. Korail leaders relied on supporters in the neighborhood and had links to more powerful individuals and NGOs outside.

People displaced from Senou in Bamako, Mali called on *the Association Malienne des Droits de l'Homme* (Malian Association for Human Rights) and the *Espace d'Interpellation Démocratique* (Space for Democratic Claims) for assistance. They also recounted experiences on local radio and television.

Activist organizations varied. The Myrrmäki Movement, with no committees or boards, mostly communicated via Facebook. Nevertheless, it got grants and funded street artists who made the community's identity visible. In contrast, the spontaneous social movement in Barranco eventually became a political party that allowed it to play a formal role.

Activists brought complaints to formal venues when appropriate. Cases were brought to local courts in Washington, DC, Korail, and Muthurwa. Those affected by MUTP and the Lima Metropolitano, both of which had some World Bank funding, brought cases to its Inspection Panel.

4) Participant Activism is Complicated

Affected people are not homogeneous, even if they are portrayed as such by planners. They have multiple interests that influence their actions. Moreover, results are often incremental and may take a long time.

In hierarchal and segmented urban societies, people have differential access to resources, diverse housing, and carry out varied economic activities. In Mumbai, the affected were so varied that the shopkeepers acted separately. In contrast, the Barranco organizers made efforts to involve people from all socio-economic levels (intellectuals and artists, drug dealers, poor working class) and to ally with a poorer neighborhood, Surco.

Another challenge is the often long wait for results. Activists may get discouraged due to defeats or slow implementation. Although the first court cases about Washington expressway were brought in 1960, the first major decision occurred in 1968. Only in 1976 was it agreed that money be spent on the subway, and it was many years before the subway made it to Black neighborhoods. Muthurwa court cases continued for almost 10 years.

Finally, progress toward the goals of the affected is not always secure. Mass evictions still occurred, even after adoption of anti-bulldozing policies and court orders. In India, evictions have taken place with greater frequency since the 2000s (Weinstein 2020), for reasons ranging from climate change to preparation for the 2010 Commonwealth Games in Delhi. In Korail, residents along the lake were being evicted in 2012, 4 years after the 2008 court order. The government said it was for environmental reasons: to manage the city's water resources.

Increasing Benefits to the Displaced during Planning

The displaced are often given derogatory labels, such as squatters or rootless, and considered less than legitimate residents. Their contributions to the urban economy through work and social action are often not recognized. During planning, it is important to recognize the displaced as urban citizens who merit a role in delineating the impacts of displacement and planning their resettlement. Several strategies are particularly important.

Planners should remember that resettlement is fundamentally about livelihoods, not just housing. Too many projects have falsely assumed that displaced urban residents can continue their existing employment. Models for planning might include Chinese programs that have made ground-breaking efforts to create jobs for the urban resettled (Shi 2019).

Displaced people have varying skills, access to resources, and social networks. Preparatory studies can analyze information on this diversity so that sub-projects can be designed for different groups. Preparatory studies can also help understand the socio-economic relationships that underpin displaced neighborhoods. This includes networks both among residents and across neighborhoods and classes. How these will be affected by displacement? Can these relationships be used to provide benefits to the resettled?

If benefits can be planned from the beginning, the displaced will have less need to protest inadequate programs. The involvement of the affected in planning and early implementation may slow activities, but it can to later acceptance that will speed later implementation and the ability

of resettled people to reconstruct their lives.

After Resettlement

Even the best planned resettlement will face challenges, including unanticipated results. Some consequences may not be evident until after project completion. In addition, the forcibly resettled always incur some trauma, no matter how well prepared the resettlement or how good the benefits. As people spend time in their new homes, they better understand their opportunities and disadvantages. Thus, activism rarely ends when the project is over. People often continue to try to improve lives and livelihoods. Steps can be taken to allow people to continue their roles as economic, social, and political actors in their new neighborhoods.

First, resettled people should be assured the rights due all citizens, including voting, access to government benefits, social services, entitlements (e.g. food vouchers), and access to local participatory forums (e.g. Participatory Budget processes in Latin America). The resettled should be able to participate in development programs open to all citizens.

Resettled people should be able to continue old forms and create new forms of local organization that allow them to pursue their interests. They should also have opportunities to make new alliances with individuals and institutions.

If participant activism is welcomed instead of being circumvented, the displaced and resettled may get a greater share of benefits. Projects may be planned better and people may be able to create better livelihoods.

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