Event 2 “Refugees Unwilling to Return: Cases of the Indian Ocean Tsunami, Great East Japan Earthquake, Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy”

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**Speech Summary**

**Mikiyasu Nakayama**

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees are often mixed up but they are very different. IDPs are increasing over the years and currently there are more IDPs than refugees. Whereas refugees are unwilling to return to their original home, IDPs are hesitant to return home even when they can. After the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, many people of Fukushima are wary of returning home because of radioactive material related health risks. This prompted an international collaborative research project on why some refugees are not willing to come back home and how they could be motivated to return home. Going even further, what sort of measures are required to mitigate tensions and conflicts between refugees and the original residents of host communities? By researching several case studies in both Asian and US, we aim to answer these questions.

We shall discuss the findings of three different case studies: The Great East Japan Earthquake, the Indian Ocean Tsunami, and Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy. Years after the 2011 Japanese earthquake, the 7,400 residents of Naraha Town were finally permitted back home in September of 2015, however, only 5% returned. Can a ghost town really exist in that state and remain an independent town? Going back to the past seems unrealistic. The refugees of Naraha wondered how many weeks and then months they must stay in temporary housing. However, life in temporary housing became enjoyable because residents were able to become close friends with their neighbors. Before the earthquake, they were more independent because of the spread out nature of Naraha. But now that they live in a smaller area, they can enjoy a new sense of community. For elderly victims in Soma-City, there are newly developed apartment houses that provide community rooms, cultural events, and more. Some are arguing that temporary housing should be maintained.

**Carl Bruch**
On March 11, 2011, there was a magnitude 9.0 earthquake centered off the east coast of Japan. Hirono Town is just south of the epicenter. Before the earthquake there were 5,500 residents and now there is half of that. Waves as high as 40m crashed against the coast and went as far as 10 km inland, damaging about a million buildings and displacing 300,000 people. It was the costliest disaster in world history. In March of 2015, 228,000 people were still displaced. Some moved on to Tokyo or other cities, and some stayed in their temporary housing. Some stayed a couple nights in hotel room, then a gym, and other places before moving into temporary housing. Many residents from Hirono Town traveled to Onigoe post earthquake where the priority for temporary housing generally went to the elderly and families with young children, while trying to keep communities together. The IDPs living in temporary housing actually very much liked it; it was tidy, surprisingly spacious with modest kitchens and several rooms, and had efficient communities. The only complaint some had was that the walls were very thin. People settled in and even began planting gardens and vegetables.

What are the incentives for people to stay in temporary housing, and what are the disincentives dissuading them from moving back? The study was conducted using structured interviews. Questions addressed: basic demographics, the process of leaving Hirono Town, experience in temporary housing, and plans for life after temporary housing. These interviews were conducted just when it was declared that the temporary camp was going to be closing soon. 32 people were interviewed, mostly in Onigoe Temporary Housing but people in some other temporary camps were also included in the study - all were from Hirono Town. The vast majority were over 50 years old, and only two residents were single. About 2/3s of IDPs owned houses in Hirono Town, of which about half were habitable. They were asked how long they lived in Hirono before the earthquake and it ranged from less than 1 year to more than 80 years. About 70% planned on eventually returning to Hirono Town. However, most were reluctant to leave early (i.e., before they have to). Most reported that they were happy living in temporary housing. Comparing life in Hirono Town and in temporary housing, about 70-80% reported that temporary housing had better shopping, medical care, and dental care. IDPs also expressed preference, albeit less strong, for Onigoe in regard to education and recreation.

There were four primary reasons expressed for why the IDPs had not returned. The first was the strong sense of community. There are many community activities and interactions in the temporary housing, and many expressed concern that they would be more alone if they were to return. New people to Hirono Town had an easier time making friends in a different setting. Second, it was more convenient. There was better shopping, medical care, and dental care. Expeditions to go shopping were provided—in contrast to Hirono Town, where it was harder to get around. Thirdly, they expressed a sense of injustice. IDPs from other towns appeared to be getting better treatment (for example, with respect to covering the costs to move back and to rebuild). Government assistance was no longer available to the people of Hirono Town. They believed they should get fair compensation and take advantage of what they can, as long as they can. And lastly, the limited compensation. After
5 years of being displaced, it is possible to claim compensation. This raises questions of fairness: People from other villages are getting compensated, so why aren’t those from Hirono Town? All these factors seem to provide incentives for IDPs to remain in temporary housing.

Nicholas S. Bryner

This case study focused on the return of IDPs after hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, and functioned as a point of comparison with the Great East Japan Earthquake. What factors explain why some IDPs have return and some have not? What policy instruments were used and which ones were the most effective? It has now been 10 years since Katrina hit the Gulf of Mexico in August 2005. About 18,000 people were killed; 2 million people displaced; and 100 billion dollars in damage. It is the costliest natural disaster in US history. The population of New Orleans dropped by more than half and has since rebounded by 2013, but is still down 100,000 people from before the hurricane. The distribution of which communities returned varied across the city. For example, people that are white, have a higher income, and own homes are more likely to come back than minorities and low-income residents.

What leads to long-term displacement or permanent relocation? Our literature review suggested that housing issues are the most important factor. Residents are less likely to go back if their house is completely destroyed (as compared to those whose homes were only partially damaged). The FEMA trailers and temporary housing was originally for a period of 18 months and was then extended to 45 months. Then there was the 2009 controversy, where people were left without options by the government, coupled with safety complaints. The second main factor affecting return is the issue of public services shortages. The state of the hospitals and schools was abysmal and can become a public health emergency the longer that populations are separated from their usual doctors. Vulnerable people with health issues were left with huge problems if they returned. Some families stayed in Houston, for example, because their kids would have a reliable school there. Thirdly, there was the obvious financial constraints of moving. And lastly, some people may exhibit a general preference for alternative locations. Some people developed deep ties to their new community. The possible reasons for returning: home ownership, emotional connection to home, higher income household, and loss of temporary housing. The possible reasons for relocating: the extent of housing damage, employment opportunities elsewhere, previous area perceived vulnerable, a preference for the new city, and forced to relocate.

Hurricane Sandy hit in 2012 along the New York and New Jersey coastline. There were 147 direct deaths, and extensive damage costing about 62 billion dollars. Reasons to return include: a sense of community, jobs, and financial investments. Reason to not return include: the cost of rebuilding to new standards and flood insurance underpayments. What were the policy responses? Our study focused on describing the objectives of policy responses, the range of the policy instruments/tools, and policy limitations. Policies can be categorized as either compensation-oriented (“backward-looking”) or resilience-building (“forward-looking”) policies meant to promote return or relocation. Some policy
instruments included: tax exemptions/incentives for rebuilding homes infrastructure (do not efficiently reach lower income classes); practices with regards to mortgage lenders’ receipt of insurance claims; buyouts to promote relocation (expensive); and changes to building codes to promote resilience in return. One policy instrument used was making changes to the National Flood Insurance program, which discouraged people from returning to flood prone areas. This was adopted after Sandy hit, creating a political backlash and many changes were later repealed or delayed. Policy makers had to ask difficult questions. How many and what kind of people did they want back in the city? Policies have many consequences. Do the policy responses meet the needs of the city and people? There are limitations on policies that are financial, political, and constitutional. These must be carefully considered.

Heather Croshaw
“2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami: Experiences from the Maldives”

The Maldives is the lowest lying country in the world at about 2.4 meters above the ocean. Its economy is comprised of tourism, fisheries, and agriculture. In December of 2004, a 9.3 earthquake created a huge tsunami that had a relatively short wave height but killed 108 people. Everyone was impacted in some way and the country’s GDP went down by 62%. It is considered to be the worst natural disaster in history. Around 22,000-29,000 people were considered displaced. This was especially disastrous as the Maldives doesn’t normally experience natural disasters and the government was inexperienced in emergency planning. Only the people living in the capital city of Male had advanced warning and some islands had no warning at all.

The government had to make industries on the fly in order to deal with the impending crisis. It quickly created the National Disaster Monitoring Center and the Internally Displaced Persons Unit. The tsunami impacted 198 islands in total and all but 9 islands were partially or completely flooded. The smaller islands were destroyed, and the structural damage throughout was vast. Because these are islands, food and water relief was particularly difficult. It took 3 to 4 years to identify about 15,000 registered IDPs because the islands are so spread out. The IDPs were distributed across 18 atolls. The International Federation of Red Cross established a Red Crescent office and built IDP housing that were initially tents and then dorms. Moving IDPs from temporary housing to permanent housing took about 10 years. About 2,000 housing units were needed. Furthermore, international donor money eventually dried up and added to the delay. The dorms hosted several families in the same space, which created tensions. Each unit slept up to 16 people, creating concerns for the overall safety for residents. Furthermore, tension between the IDPs and the host communities over identity and resources sprang up on different islands. Some islands and communities are not designed to accommodate livelihoods like fishing that many IDPs relied on as their main source of income before the tsunami.

A case study was conducted focusing on Kandohuldhoo Island where IDPs lived on four different islands. The community was built from scratch and created on a previously uninhabited island. The project was part of the “Safer Islands” program even before the
tsunami hit. One highly debated question was whether or not the original intended island for the program could have been rebuilt. The project was largely viewed as a success. The incentives for IDPs to return include: facilities are improved, better houses, community consultation, allowances, voluntary relocation, island identities. The disincentives include: free services, new livelihoods, water/sanitation issues, new communities, different property rights (females want to be on the title when it was traditionally male), construction delays, and political delays.

In conclusion, what worked? Voluntary relocation programs, government reforms, transparency, consultations, and adaptability of government. What didn't? The Initial temporary housing, lack of information, host and IDP conflicts, limited benefits for hosts, women were often excluded or needs were not addressed, IDPs outnumbering host population, and the timeline for return. Overall this was a positive response to the natural disaster from an international perspective. In the future, the Maldives will focus on managing IDPs, disaster risk reduction, climate change, and institutionalizing IDP programs.

Panel Discussion

Carl Bruch: Regarding the nature of blue-collar workers that we interviewed, we mostly talked to service-oriented people (such as truck drivers or machine repair people), rather than fishermen and farmers. The broader question is what the economy of Hirono is going to be based on now, because it already lost fishing to other towns before the earthquake. Some questions are considered obtrusive in Japanese culture, but IDPs were very open to discussing very sensitive topics.

Heather Croshaw: Some islands were completely overrun by the tsunami preventing people from going back to their old jobs. Some of the new islands weren’t as well equipped for fishing jobs that IDPs had before the tsunami, forcing them to find new jobs.

Nicholas S. Bryner: Regarding the dispute over tax dollars being spent on building in potentially unsafe areas, we didn't look into that directly. It is hard to draw geographic danger zones without it seeming arbitrary to at least someone. However, those affected by a disaster have a very strong incentive to push for expenditures that will help them recover. It is impossible to please everyone.

Carl Bruch: There are disasters everywhere, so it is hard for politicians in one area to argue against funding for disaster recovery when their state or region may be affected by the next major disaster.

Major Questions and Answers

1. Why don’t IDPs return home when it is safe?
   Some are happier in the new community and have more opportunities to create bonds with neighbors; some find recreation, education, health, and transportation much easier or better in the new community; some have a sense of injustice and want to take advantage of the government assistance; some cannot afford to move back; and some had preferable property rights.
2. Why do IDPs return home?
Some had a deep connection to their identity, home, and the community within; some had improved facilities and communities; some had better housing; some had jobs or financial investments in their home community; and some were provided allowances.

3. What are some ways governments can encourage IDPs to move back?
Some policies include: tax exemptions and incentives for rebuilding homes and infrastructure; changes in insurance and mortgage lenders; buyouts to promote relocation; and changes to building codes to promote return.