Challenges of Resettlement and Policy Deficiencies in Pakistan: A Case Study of South Punjab Flood Disaster Cities

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ABSTRACT

The study identifies major challenges in resettlement processes, investigates the role of community participation in any effective resettlement process, and examines gaps in policy and institutional frameworks affecting resettlement efforts in South Punjab flood disaster cities. This study will take a qualitative approach, with 20 in-depth interviews with affected households in the South Punjab flood disaster cities. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were planned to capture residents' experiences, challenges, and perspectives on the resettlement processes. The data was thematically analyzed to uncover recurring patterns and insights. This study reveals that resettlement processes face serious challenges due to inadequate infrastructure, lack of access to basic services, and insufficient financial support. The significance of community participation in maximizing resettlement effectiveness was additionally overlooked. Institutional and policy deficiencies in agency coordination and comprehensive planning have hampered successful resettlement efforts. These findings highlight the need for more inclusive and participatory resettlement strategies, as well as improved stakeholder coordination and strong policy frameworks, to address resettlement complexities in disaster-affected areas. The current study also adds to the limited body of literature on resettlement in disaster-prone areas of Pakistan. Contributing to this body of literature, it provides a set of best practices for understanding the complexities of the resettlement process, as well as the critical role of policy and community engagement.

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1.0 Introduction

Flooding occurs more frequently than any other disaster, and it disproportionately affects all over the world (Schultz, 2024). It has the highest mortality and economic impacts, displacing a large number of people and frequently necessitating resettlement, which is a complex process. Flooding has already exposed some potential vulnerabilities in South Punjab's infrastructural and socioeconomic fabrics (Siddique Akbar et al., 2024). Despite all of these interventions from governmental and non-governmental organizations, resettlement processes are still plagued by issues such as inadequate housing, limited access to basic amenities, and widespread socioeconomic instability. These issues highlight the urgent need for effective and valuable resettlement strategies aimed at improving the lives and rehabilitation of displaced communities (Noor et al., 2023).

The importance of community participation in the entire resettlement process cannot be overstated (Smyth & Vanclay, 2024). Truly, active participation of affected communities can be a way of improving the relevance and acceptance of resettlement plans; that they cut an edge by reflecting the actual needs of displaced populations. However, in many cases, poor forms of community engagement lead to their exclusion from the process, resulting in misinformed policies and plans (Opoku et al., 2024). This frequently results in very poor resettlement, exacerbating the difficulties of flood-affected households. Such dynamics are critical to developing more effective and sustainable resettlement strategies (Alshoubaki, 2024).

The study's key variables include resettlement challenges, community participation, and policy and institutional frameworks (Lu & Zhang, 2024). Resettlement challenges are the obstacles and/or difficulties that displaced households are likely to face during the relocation and rehabilitation process, which include, but are not limited to, the loss of adequate housing, access to basic services, and economic opportunities (Pechdin & Ahmad, 2023). Community participation can be measured by the level of involvement that affected households have in the planning and implementation of their resettlement programs; this has a significant impact on the degree of success. Policy and institutional frameworks are the laws, rules, and organizational structures that guide and facilitate resettlement processes, determining the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the efforts (Aung et al., 2021).

Despite the abundance of literature on disaster management and resettlement, there is a gap in relevant studies that materialize in the context of South Punjab, Pakistan (Aijaz, 2023). The majority of empirical research generalizes findings from various hubs; therefore, the findings cannot be applied to South Punjab due to its unique socioeconomic and cultural conditions (Abb et al., 2024). Among these theoretical aspects of resettlement, practical insights about implementation challenges are rarely discussed in the context of community participation. Filling this gap is critical because it will aid in the development of well-tailored resettlement strategies that address the actual needs and challenges of flood-affected populations in South Punjab (Sattar, 2023).

The primary research problem that this study will seek to address is the failure of current resettlement strategies to develop long-term resettlement plans for flooded areas in South Punjab.

Despite significant investments and concerns about sustainability, resettlement processes rarely produce long-term and satisfactory solutions for relocated households. This shortfall is attributed to a lack of community participation and significant gaps in policy and institutional frameworks. With these deficiencies, an attempt is made to identify and thoroughly analyze the reasons why resettlement in the context is not being carried out effectively. As a result, the study's significance lies in its ability to inform policy and practice interventions for disaster resettlement in South Punjab or similar regions. This research assisted in identifying the major challenges and gaps in current resettlement processes, allowing for the development of a more effective and sustainable strategy. The current study's findings are likely to benefit policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders interested in effective program design and implementation that is responsive to the needs of affected populations, resulting in increased resilience and recovery for disaster-prone communities.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Social Capital Theory emphasizes the importance of social networks, trust, and reciprocity norms in a community; thus, it provides insight into how resettlement occurs after a disaster (Sakamoto, 2024). The theory described how social capital can help in disaster recovery. It further discourages residents from banding together and supporting one another. Strong social capital can greatly improve resettlement planning and implementation (Markowska-Przybyła & Grześkowiak, 2022). It holds that a community's high social capital increases its capacity for resource mobilization, need advocacy, and adaptation to new living conditions, ensuring that resettlement is successful and sustainable (Bernados Jr & Ocampo, 2024) . Empirical studies have found that social capital plays an important role in disaster recovery. For example, Aldrich's investigation of the Great East Japan Earthquake found that stronger social networks were associated with faster and more complete recovery; social capital in the area aided affected residents in significant resource mobilization and mutual support (Ramón-Hidalgo et al., 2020). Johnson, Lizarralde, and Davidson's investigation into post-disaster housing reconstruction in India and Sri Lanka, for example, emphasizes the importance of community involvement and local knowledge in any resettlement process's success (Lizarralde et al., 2024). In fact, their research reveals that top-down initiatives frequently fail in the absence of effective community participation and strong social capital.

The study by Nakagawa and Shaw on linking social capital in Japan and India supported this, stating that such communities recover more quickly (Shahid et al., 2022). Citing another example of linking social capital in Bangladesh, Islam and Walkerden found that linking social capital contributes to disaster resilience by providing better information and access to resources for households (Aldrich, 2020). Murphy's work also incorporates social capital into emergency management strategies, highlighting community networks that can serve as a stronghold for resilience (Jones et al., 2024). These studies further indicate that social capital is important in resettlement programs, as it ensures effectiveness in mobilizing resources and providing support, hence improving processes and outcomes (Roberts et al., 2021).

2.2 Empirical Studies

Empirical studies have examined challenges and best practices in disaster-affected resettlement contexts, identifying effective strategies as well as common pitfalls (Su & Le Dé, 2020), for example, conducted a thorough review of disaster-related housing reconstruction in India and Sri Lanka (Di Ludovico et al., 2020). Their main findings emphasized the importance of community involvement and flexible policies that can be tailored to changing circumstances. The results showed that top-down approaches easily ignore the concerns and priorities of displaced households, resulting in poor resettlement outcomes (Kondo & Lizarralde, 2021). The authors' plea for participatory planning processes highlights the importance of involving communities in decision-making and mobilizing their knowledge and resources to improve the effectiveness of resettlement programs (Shamloo et al., 2023).

Similarly, in his 2012 study of the responses to the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, Aldrich established the importance of social capital in disaster recovery. In summary, the affected population's high level of social capital, as evidenced by robust social networks and high trust, resulted in better mobilization for disaster recovery. What made the residents resilient was their ability to pool resources, support one another, and advocate for their needs. According to Aldrich's findings, developing social networks and community cohesion may be critical in resettlement processes, and the stronger the social capital, the easier it will be for affected communities to recover and adapt.

Mustafa and Wrathall (2011) examined the social and institutional dimensions of flood vulnerability and resilience (Ghasemzadeh et al., 2021). Indeed, policy and institutional gaps, particularly poor agency coordination and very weak mechanisms for implementing disaster management plans at the local level, hampered resettlement and recovery efforts (Alves et al., 2022). Stronger policy frameworks and institutional capacities are viewed as necessary to support resettlement efforts. Here is a glimpse of the systemic failures that characterize disaster relief initiatives, arguing for better governance and coordination(Cuaton et al., 2024) .

Ahmad and Afzal's research focuses on resettlement issues in flood-affected communities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan (Khan et al., 2024). Their findings revealed several critical issues, including insufficient funding, a lack of basic services, and socioeconomic instability (Shah et al., 2024). According to the authors, community participation is one of the most important factors influencing resettlement success, and more participatory approaches must be implemented (Hyder et al., 2024). This takes into account the needs and perspectives of the relocated population. These findings suggest that only by incorporating community feedback and taking a holistic approach can the challenges be effectively addressed and appropriate assistance provided .

Malik, Raza, and Ali (2020) examined how resettlement affected livelihoods among displaced households in South Punjab (Ahmad & Afzal, 2024). They discovered ineffective resettlement strategies, which increased poverty and vulnerability. As a result, more coherent and sustainable resettlement programs would be required, not to meet short-term needs, but to promote long-term socioeconomic growth(Attri, 2023) . The findings clearly demonstrate a pressing need to develop resettlement strategies that address immediate needs while also supporting long-term

recovery and stability (Pok, 2024) .

Some empirical studies have shown that community participation, social capital, and strong policy frameworks lead to positive resettlement outcomes (Ma et al., 2024). They go on to say that successful resettlement requires strong social networks, adaptive policies, and comprehensive support systems (Plimley, 2024). Drawing on these findings, this study will advocate for a more effective and sustainable resettlement strategy for flood-affected communities in South Punjab that is responsive to their immediate and long-term needs (Bernados Jr & Ocampo, 2024)).

3.0 Methodology

The design is primarily exploratory, with the goal of gaining in-depth insights from flood survivors into resettlement experiences. This study employs a qualitative approach because it allows for rich, detailed, and context-specific data that can be used to develop relevant resettlement strategies. Indeed, the study aimed to unravel the complexities of resettlement by analyzing personal accounts from those affected and investigating emerging resettlement themes.

researchers chose a qualitative research approach for this study because, while it deals with complex social phenomena and processes of interpreting people's subjective experiences, it allows for an in-depth examination of personal experiences and perspectives, resulting in rich and detailed data that would otherwise be overlooked when quantitative methods were used. The qualitative approach is ideal for this research because it allows for a thorough examination of the challenges and complexities of resettlement in South Punjab flood disaster cities. This study is to concentrate on households affected by the recent floods in South Punjab. This comprises the population that has been displaced and resettled as a result of the disaster, and they possess different perspectives on the challenges and effectiveness of the resettlement process. For this, 20 households from various flood-affected areas of South Punjab were chosen using a purposive sampling technique. The sample is chosen to ensure that demographic groups and experiences are represented in a way that takes into account the different socioeconomic status, gender, and household size involved. This will provide information about resettlement experiences for various segments of the affected population. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with members of the selected households. In this regard, the interviews would be useful in gathering information about resettlement experiences, challenges encountered, interactions with resettlement authorities, and perceptions of the resettlement process's effectiveness. The semi-structured format would allow for flexibility in exploring specific topics while maintaining consistency across interviews.

An interview protocol guided the data collection process, which included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses to participants' resettlement experiences. Several aspects of the resettlement process were discussed, such as logistical challenges, social support, and policy effectiveness. Furthermore, the protocol included a number of probes that allowed for a more in-depth look into insights and clarifications during the interview. Data from interviews were analyzed thematically. The thematic analysis was used to code data and identify emergent patterns, themes, and insights into the participants' resettlement experiences. These stages include data familiarization, initial code generation, theme search, theme review, and theme definition and naming. Thus, thematic analysis is a systematic approach to interpreting qualitative data that

identifies key issues and trends relevant to the study's objectives.

4.0 Findings and Results

This paper contributed some insightful literature to the resettlement process for flood-affected households in South Punjab, addressing a variety of issues and investigating the role of community participation in improving the effectiveness of such processes. These findings are based on 20 in-depth interviews with households that have suffered from recent floods, providing insight into the specific challenges experienced and the likely benefits of active engagement in community processes.

4.1 Key Challenges in Resettlement Processes

One major issue that was identified was resettlement infrastructure. There were numerous complaints about the poor quality of housing provided in the new area. Many people stated that their homes were poorly built, with some pointing out issues such as a lack of insulation and poor building materials used. One respondent claimed, "The houses they gave us were not durable and didn't have proper sanitation facilities," while another stated, "We already see cracks in the walls and leaks in the roof." The lack of basic facilities, such as adequate water supply and functional sanitation facilities, contributed to a decrease in life quality in resettled areas.

It makes it extremely difficult to maintain an average standard of living for a household. The other critical issue was resettlement funding. The majority of respondents said it was delayed and provided very little compensation or financial support. Many of those interviewed claimed that the money they received was insufficient to compensate them for rebuilding their homes or resuming economic activity. One of the respondents explained that the money received was insufficient to rebuild our homes and lives. We are still trying to catch up on costs. Another commented on how slow financial aid was, saying, "We had to wait for months before getting any help, and by then, it was too late to make effective use of the funds." This financial shortfall exacerbated the challenges that the displaced households were already facing, preventing them from fully recovering and rebuilding their lives.

Furthermore, bureaucratic inefficiency and poor coordination among resettlement agencies posed a significant problem. Respondents described cases in which different resettlement agencies sent inconsistent messages and duplicated responsibilities throughout the process. One of the interviewees recalled, "Different agencies gave us different information, and it was difficult to know who we could contact for help." Another stated, "We had to deal with several levels of bureaucracy, which exacerbated our frustration and time delay in receiving real assistance." These administrative issues further complicated the resettlement process and created a sense of helplessness among all parties involved.

4.2 Role of Community Participation in Effective Resettlement

As a result, community involvement in planning and decision-making was frequently proposed as a means of improving resettlement. People's experiences attending community meetings and participating in resettlement decision-making were far more positive. They believe

that allowing people to participate in the planning and implementation of resettlement policies best meets their needs and preferences. One of the respondents stated: "Participation in the community meetings was important in raising our concerns and seeking better support of our needs," an additional participant said. "They considered our input and there was some improvement in resettlement arrangement," a further participant stated.

The involvement of local community leaders and organizations was also deemed very beneficial by respondents in facilitating a smoother resettlement. Among the many contributions that respondents valued, one of the most important was the role of local leaders as a liaison between residents and authorities, smoothing the bureaucratic process and ensuring that the community's needs were clearly presented. One respondent stated: "Our local leader played a very big role in advocating for us and assisting us with the paperwork," whereas another stated: "Community organizations were very supportive and served as a bridge between us and the resettlement agencies."

It also found that participation wasn't always effective. In some cases, participants reported that the participation process was restrictive, with few opportunities to influence resettlement decisions. "We were only briefly consulted and had no say in the final decisions about our new homes," one interviewee explained. A different person commented, "It wasn't that transparent, and many of us felt somehow shut out from meaningful participation." The low level of engagement led to dissatisfaction and a sense of exclusion among a number of respondents, which should be interpreted as a call for more inclusive and transparent resettlement processes. The results suggest that community participation has the potential to immediately and concretely improve resettlement processes, though the quality and extent of involvement will determine how this is accomplished. If the community is actively involved in all stages of planning and decision-making, resettlement processes can become more responsive and satisfying to both immediate and long-term needs.

4.3 Gaps in Policy Frameworks

The tendency to highlight was the failure to design exclusive and adaptive policy frameworks. Most respondents felt that current policies did not address the victims' specific needs. "Policies in place seem generic, failing to account for the unique challenges faced by those of us who lost everything in floods," as one participant put it. One respondent adds, "It has no clear guidelines on how to support people with different needs, such as those who are elderly or disabled."

The rigidity and inflexibility of resettlement policies were identified as barriers to successful resettlement. The majority of respondents believed that the policies were indifferent to situations and other unforeseen anchorage. One of the interviewees stated that "policies are too rigid and do not allow for readjustments based on real-time needs or problems that arise during the resettlement process." This frequently leads to delays and inefficiencies in meeting short-term needs, as well as a lack of flexibility to respond to changes on the ground.

4.4 Institutional Gaps

Other major issues raised included institutional gaps. Most interviewees stated that there was a lack of coordination among resettlement agencies. They claimed that there was no clear communication or collaboration between the government, NGOs, and local authorities. Different agencies frequently appear to be working in silos, and no one takes overall responsibility for coordinating efforts to ensure that all aspects of resettlement are addressed," one respondent explained. A different individual responded, "There's a lot of duplication of effort here, which results in confusion and inefficiency."

Finally, some attempted to assess the capacity and preparedness of resettlement institutions. Respondents believed that most institutions were ill-equipped and lacked the expertise required to efficiently handle large-scale resettlements. In this regard, an interviewee responded: "The agencies in charge seem overwhelmed and lacking in resources, materials, and trained personnel to manage such resettlement processes properly." A different person commented, "Lack of strategic planning and foresight is contributing to all this disorganization and delay that we are going through."

4.5 Impact on Resettlement Efforts

Such gaps in policy and institutional frameworks have a direct impact on the effectiveness of resettlement initiatives. In other words, the lack of comprehensive and flexible policies, combined with inefficient institutions, resulted in less-than-ideal outcomes for displaced households. The respondents almost unanimously stated that the much-touted policy intent failed in practice to provide adequate support, resulting in a lengthy recovery period. As one respondent commented "The gap between what is promised in the policies and what is actually delivered on the ground is significant, and it leaves us in a difficult position

5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The study identified some critical challenges and insights into the resettlement processes for flood-affected households in South Punjab, providing a thorough understanding of how these challenges relate to the existing body of research. Johnson, Lizarralde, and Davidson raised similar concerns about post-disaster housing reconstruction in India and Sri Lanka, including poor resettlement infrastructure, poor construction quality, and a lack of amenities. Their research identified the issues of strong, well-equipped housing, which are consistent with the concerns of the respondents in this study. Similarly, the financial shortfalls reported in this study are nearly identical to Aldrich's observations: adequate financial resources are critical in any effective disaster recovery process. Delays and insufficient financial support exacerbate recovery challenges, echoing previous research on disaster resettlement.

Inefficiencies in bureaucracy and a lack of coordination among resettlement agencies, as observed in this study, echo the issues raised by Mustafa and Wrathall (2011) in terms of flood vulnerability and resilience in Pakistan. Coordination and communication among various implementing agencies have been found to be ineffective, making the process complex and, at

times, protracted, which may frustrate displaced households. Ahmad and Afzal's study discovered that institutional inefficiency is another factor that impedes resettlement success.

On community participation, the study's findings support previous research by Aldrich (2012), who demonstrated that communities with higher social capital experienced more effective recovery. In light of this, respondents' positive experiences with community involvement in decision-making highlight the importance of participatory approaches in resettlement processes. In some cases, the limited and superficial nature of participation reflects the concerns raised by Malik et al. (2020) regarding the poor implementation of participatory processes in resettlement.

The current study thus contributes to the literature on resettlement challenges and community participation in flood-affected areas. It identifies critical improvements in infrastructure, financial support, and agency coordination to address identified challenges. This study strongly advocates for meaningful community participation in decision-making processes in order to improve resettlement outcomes. These findings have significant policy and practice implications, indicating that effective, long-term resettlement will necessitate more comprehensive, flexible policies, improved institutional coordination, and increased community engagement. Suggestions are made to work toward more flexible policies, increased financial support in the form of timely aid, and the provision of meaningful opportunities for community participation in resettlement program planning and execution.

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