Relocating Flood-prone Gulf Coast Communities: Obstacles and Possibilities

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SE CASC 2022 Regional Science Symposium

Climate change is just the latest problem to confront vulnerable communities. It can compound these other problems.

- Poverty
- Environmental Damage
- Gentrification
- Cultural Loss
- Lack of Self-Determination
- Lack of Jobs
- Lack of Housing
- Social Injustices

In the past, household-level relocation has been practiced. Younger people with transferable skillsets seem more likely to relocate, leaving behind older, more vulnerable people with more ties to home.

Successful Relocations
- Entirely voluntary
- Community takes lead from start to finish
- Community stays together, preserves identity
- Jobs/economic base at new site
- Equitable allocation and prioritization of housing at new site
- No need to relocate again in foreseeable future
- Old site and surrounding areas remain accessible to former residents

Policy Changes that Could Help
- Establish thresholds for when relocation vs. protect-in-place measures are warranted
- Apply the Uniform Relocation Act to ensure fairness in all government-assisted relocations
- Establish ombudsman within existing agency to lead environmental review, coordinate other agencies, guide communities through available programs, provide funding for community relocation coordinator, and oversee contractors working with communities to avoid wrongdoing
- Eliminate or dramatically revamp programmatic cost-benefit analysis to take into account benefits that are harder to quantify (e.g., community togetherness)
- Clarify which municipal/agency services will no longer be provided at old site after relocation offered
- Give former residents an “easement” to use/access old site

Currently Gulf States have no meaningful plans to assist communities with relocation.

Relocation Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practical</th>
<th>Assistance Programs and Policies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Ties to place and family</td>
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<td>• Lack of funding and affordable housing</td>
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<td>• Stress of starting over and integrating</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being undocumented or ineligible</td>
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<td>• Too complicated</td>
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<td>• Lack of trust in government</td>
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<td>• No inter-agency coordination</td>
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<td>• Post-disaster/reactive</td>
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<td>• National Flood Insurance Program is underfunded yet too expensive</td>
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With climate change there is greater need for organized, community-led relocation, that addresses the needs of the most vulnerable.

Isle de Jean Charles, LA—from the old site to a new site (2022)

This is perhaps the only planned community relocation along the Gulf Coast in recent times.