

Gender, floods and mobility: A post-disaster view

The case of REINA in Quezon Province, Philippines

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Background

Research context: Risk-prone low elevation coastal zones on the eastern side of Quezon Province, Philippines (municipalities of Real, Infanta, General Nakar or REINA), which experienced a big flood and landslides in 2004 due to swift runoffs from increasingly denuded mountainous areas

- Widened river system due to runoffs and heavy siltation, while agricultural lands are severely eroded by more frequent river flooding and heavier precipitation
- Over time, livelihoods have been changing from rice, fishing and coconut farming to a mix of irregular vegetable and fruit farming, heightened charcoal production, non farm occupations

(This study is part of a larger three-year research project on 'Re-thinking Gender in Development in Asia' awarded by the Norwegian Research Council in 2011 – still work in progress!)



NOV., 2004 FLASHFLOOD DAMAGES IN INFANTA, QUEZON



Concepts

Political ecology considers:

- wider social and economic forces and trends that combine with variable weather events/stressors that affect people's lives and livelihoods;
- inequalities in the share of risks to disasters and access to resources for resilience-building

A paradigm of **mobilities**

- as it links with gender, class, ethnicity to try to interpret how people make sense of their recovery from disaster;
- serves as a **marker** of people's unequal capacities to recover from disaster and build their resilience

Objective and questions

The study aims to examine how people adapt and build their resilience against more frequent flood episodes.

- How do people make sense of floods?
- How do they adapt to flood risks through their mobility? How are institutions assisting in adaptation and resilience-building?
- How does mobility shape people's resilience? Or how does mobility relate to people's gender and social vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities?

Methodology

Sequential mixed methods approach was employed, following two phases of data collection

- Phase 1: Building propositions through qualitative data collection (key informants, focus groups, in depth interviews, desk review)
- Phase 2: Testing the pervasiveness of propositions from qualitative data through quantitative data collection (household survey)

→ → Currently transitioning to Phase 2 after producing an informed survey instrument from the initial findings of the qualitative phase

Preliminary Findings

1. **Mobilities mark the boundary between a prosperous past and a present period of resource decline and difficult new arrangements for women & men**
 - *'Our wealth will never come back to us. Our lives were better in the past.'*
 - *'In the past, we could still afford to send our children to college.' 'Today, our children – only high-school graduates – leave our villages to find work elsewhere.'*
 - *'Today, even women and mothers have to travel to work and earn something.'*
 - *Men go off to construction sites, which is often irregular. Whereas more women today work as domestic workers in Manila or Laguna and their jobs are more stable'*



2. Resettlement areas are sites of resettled, but insecure resettlers

- *'If we were given work here (resettlement site), we will not go to work elsewhere.'*
- *'From our resettlement area, we walk to our former lands by the river to fish or collect driftwood for charcoal.'*
- *'We stay on the lands the river has left us to plant watermelons and vegetables. We rush home when it begins to rain'*
- *'We have more expenses now because we have to travel more frequently, from home to our fields by the river.'*
- *'Those who lost their land have to move and find work near and far.'*



3. To be mobile is not desirable, but they have to do it

- *'Migrants ('dayo') come to our village to cut trees for charcoal production. They are destroyers.'*
- *'Landless people have no choice but to search the forests and burn and produce charcoal. Those who still have land do not have to seek work elsewhere'*
- *'Farming keeps mothers from leaving their homes. They can keep households "whole", unlike the women who have to leave home.'*



4. Even nature is mobile!

- *'The river stole our land.'*
- *'The river is coming up to our doorstep'*
- *'Our homes, our backyards – we – are being chased by the landslides.'*
- *'Every night during the rainy season, I fear that the river has become my bedmate.'*

This compels them to be constantly conscious of the need to 'make a move', but which necessitates asking the difficult question of 'where to go?'



5. Mobility defines women and men's responses to flood disasters

- *'It is the women and children who evacuate, while the men stay behind to protect their home and belongings.'*
- *'When there is no man in the family, we just have to abandon our home and evacuate when a flood comes.'*
- *'When the floods came, I stayed behind to protect and watch over my husband's motorbike. He would be furious if I let anything happen to it.'*



6. Institutional adaptive responses and planned disaster recovery in resettlement sites are, on the other hand, mobility-blind:

- Bio-intensive gardening
- Women zero-plastic campaigns
- Wood carving and sewing
- Hazards mapping for disaster preparedness

Reinforce the aspiration for **fixity** and **immobility** by re-traditionalizing gender roles that emphasize in-place livelihoods and assign tasks for disaster preparedness. No program addresses people's actual mobilities.



To conclude

Mobility marks multiple stratifications/different vulnerabilities:

- Generally, those who move are seen to be more disadvantaged, while those who remain sedentary are feminized into traditional roles and are usually the well-off in the villages
- Narratives of mobility lay bare more fundamental socio-economic vulnerabilities that mediate and adversely affect people's adaptive capacities, post-disaster:
 - weak resource endowments (e.g., landlessness due to erosion)
 - lack of social protection (for the very poor)
 - low level skills/education

Implications on adaptation and resilience-building

Mobility poses a challenge to planning in a number of ways:

- Raises awareness about mobility as able to uncover people's vulnerabilities
- Puts into question assumptions about planners' assumptions on what makes people disaster-vulnerable in the first place ('is vulnerability only based on their geographical locations – or more?')
- Puts into question assumptions about the nature of people's responses to disaster and resilience building strategies as being largely 'in place' and immobile
- Raises awareness about mobility being a 'blind spot' in resilience-building programming, drawing attention to other non-material 'blind spots' that may constrain resilience and adaptive capacities (e.g., identity, affect/emotions, belief systems)

Thank you.

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