

**Relocation Policy in Greater Jakarta and Empowerment of Urban Poor:
A Gender Politics Perspective
(A Policy Brief)**

Chusnul Mar'iyah, Ph.D

Many residents of Greater Jakarta today face the major issue of access to adequate living space. Economic status determines who controls and has access to land and housing, with the wealthier able to command possession. In fact, most of the living space in Greater Jakarta remains controlled by the affluent few.

For the urban poor and the lower-middle class in Greater Jakarta, living space is a significant issue that impacts upon their livelihoods and well-being. For these citizens – whether they have lived in locations for generations or have more recently migrated - competition for land is exacerbated by various factors. Government regeneration and upgrading policies (development of modern business centers, road widening, construction of toll roads, bridges, etc.) are generally preceded by land seizures, whilst rising costs for basic needs (water, electricity, food/produce) and administrative costs (all sorts of taxes, costs for basic services etc) make urban living unaffordable for those on low incomes.

Many of the urban poor citizens of Greater Jakarta have established their homes in precarious locations such as on riverbanks, next to train tracks, under over-passes, by the lake, around traditional markets, and in empty lots (either abandoned or neglected by the owners). For those living in *kampung*s, poor living conditions may be aggravated by issues such as health problems, poor sanitation, and malnutrition and other socio-economic problems including access to education and employment, and environmental risks and crime.,

Whilst Greater Jakarta has progressed economically, there have been few state attempts to ensure equity and justice for its citizens. Economic growth has been enjoyed by the wealthy, who control resources with little positive impact on the less well off, leading to increased levels of socio-economic inequality in Greater Jakarta.

In recent years, the government of Greater Jakarta has introduced and implemented a relocation policy for the residents living

in inner-city kampungs to new resettlement enclaves (*rusunawa*). Those resettled are moved to high-rise apartments or 'superblocks' specially constructed by the government as part of redevelopment and regeneration schemes. Resettlement sites are generally located at some distance from the original habitation site, often on the outskirts of the city and are entirely different from residents' previous abodes in almost all aspects.

For the government, the issue arises of determining the most appropriate process and strategy for relocation. They should address any new problems arising among the urban poor undergoing relocation and identify those most at risk in this context. At the same time, those affected need to develop strategies for empowerment in order to mitigate against the worst effects of relocation (see also Elias et al 2018).

This article seeks to address in brief these issues based upon a study conducted in 2017, resulting from a research collaboration between CEPP FISIP UI with Warwick University, UK. This research was funded by the British Council's Newton Fund (grant number 217195589). It draws upon research undertaken in Rumah Susun Muara Baru, North Jakarta in September 2017 as well as interviews with stakeholders at two separate events. The fieldwork focused largely on investigating the socio-economic activities of female-headed households.

The Relocation process and strategy

Relocation of poor urban residents to high-rise apartments by the government of Greater Jakarta may be considered a positive measure in order to attempt to improve living conditions, particularly given the pressure of land availability. In the context of highly populated metropolitan areas such as Jakarta. Indeed, the construction of superblocks for residents has, in many respects, become an unavoidable, policy choice.

However, such policy initiatives by the government have not necessarily been comprehensively researched and effectively planned. The government has focused primarily on the operational aspects of relocation - that is the practical aspects of relocation such as timetabling rather than the economic, social and cultural impacts of resettlement.

One of the relocated citizens living in the superblock that we interviewed recounts this as follows:

"As a resident of superblock in Cakung, East Jakarta, the government's policy is not adequate to solve the problem. They don't have the strategy and social engineering to integrate the entire occupants since the government merely focuses only on

the relocation itself. The citizens were not properly informed about the ethics of living in such a place and other relevant information usually included in socialization. Things becoming more complicated because the occupants still own low-rise houses. They seem to be unprepared to live vertically. In worst cases, some local thugs reap benefits from the relocation".

There are certainly injustices at work here. In developing multi-occupant, high-rise housing as a solution, little consideration has been given to the varied life-styles and needs of the residents.

The study's findings demonstrate that, to date, the local government does not have a strong, comprehensive and integrated strategy for conducting relocation of residents from kampungs to superblocks. The government considers that it has fulfilled its civic obligations by relocating residents to a living place it considers adequate. Little consideration is given to the consequences of resettlement for those relocated which may lead to social, economic, educational, health, cultural implications. For the government relocation has become a merely 'functional' administrative activity.

Post-relocation problems

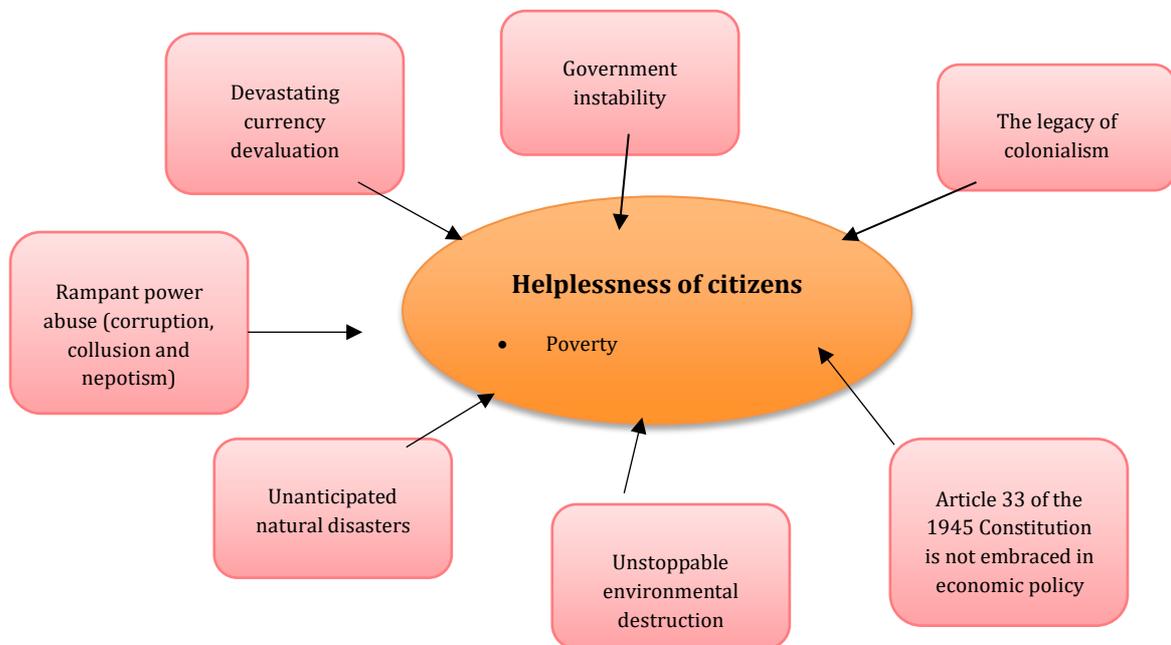
The failure to execute integrated and comprehensive relocation policies and programs has complex consequences on the lives of those relocated. Whilst on the one hand, there may be obvious material advantages in a new residence (e.g. concrete dwelling, health benefits, well-managed residences), on the other hand, there may be unforeseen disadvantages that impact socially, economically and culturally to undermine the expected benefits of relocation. One such impact may be to inhibit social, economic and cultural mobility.

Evidence reveals that the relocated urban poor, resettled in superblocks have not really benefitted from any significant social mobility. They remain as poor as they were previously in the kampungs, just as their predecessors were – and are often considerably worse off. Moreover, those affected often continue to undertake similar forms of employment as there is a failure to address the underlying issues that restrict upward mobility.

Moreover, issues of inequality may be exacerbated by relocation. For example, those in higher storey residences may not have equal access to improve their livelihoods via small micro enterprises (usually they run small shops or kiosks providing daily needs) due to the location of small, informal business enterprises on more accessible lower-storeys. For those relocated on higher floors this may result in loss of vital income

generation, which can lead to financial problems such as the inability to pay for rent (Jakarta Post 2018).

In short, simply relocating the urban poor to new housing fails to address the underlying issues that disempowers and marginalizes those affected. Long-standing, multi-dimensional causal factors that have persisted over the past four decades, have had inhibitive effects, including: the colonial legacy, government instability, currency devaluation, the abuse of political power (corruption, collusion, and nepotism), unanticipated natural disasters, unstoppable environmental destruction, as well as the absence of seriousness in implementing the constitutional mandate for economic development (article 33 of the Constitution). These dimensions are outlined in the following schematic:



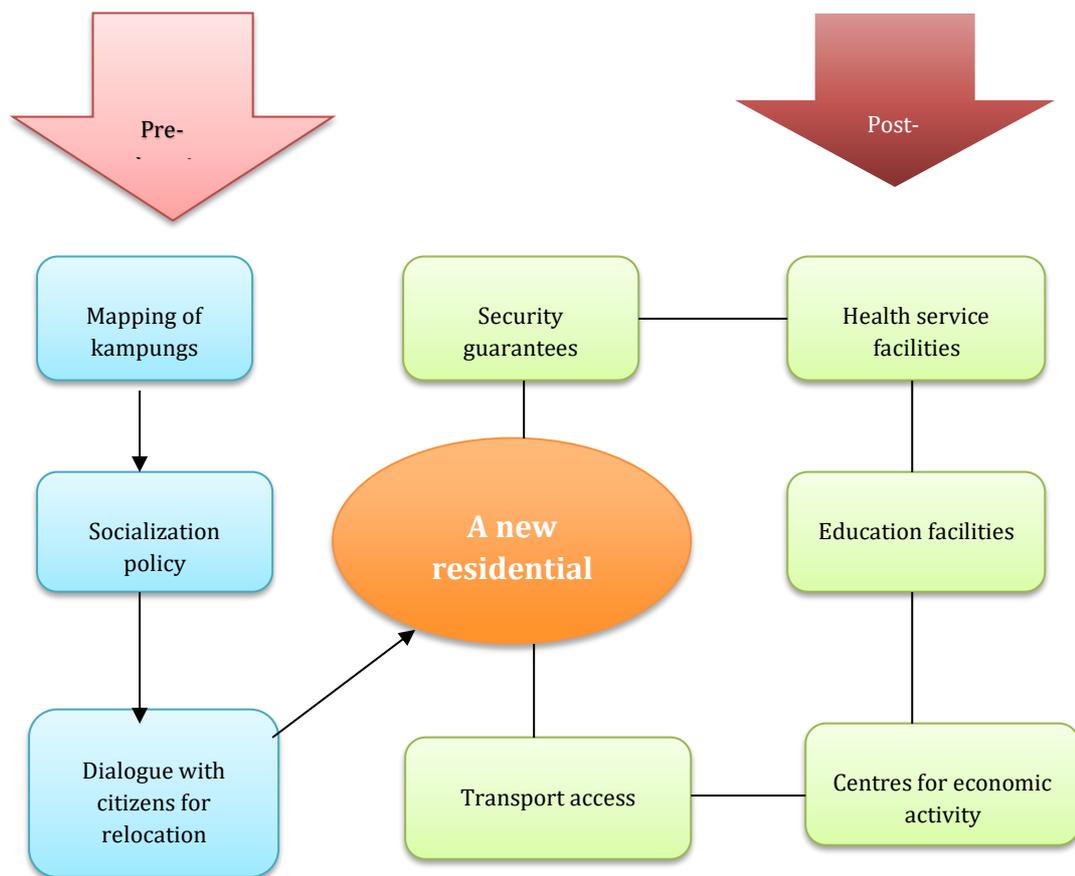
Moreover, seen through a gender perspective, it is evident that women are disproportionately negatively affected. The dual nature of women's domestic roles and responsibilities as well as the burden of income-generating activities often undertaken in the home, increases their vulnerability to the unforeseen consequences of relocation.

Empowering the Relocated

Only by addressing the underlying cycle of poverty, marginalization and powerlessness, of the relocated citizens, particularly women, can conditions be improved. The policy model that has been planned and implemented so far needs to be reassessed and replaced with a more comprehensive and integrated policy.

My contribution to the research for this project is to make the recommendation that relocation policy needs to be significantly reconsidered. At the level of pre-relocation, local government needs to conduct thorough and objective mappings of the kampungs in Jakarta, involving experts in the field alongside local residents. Communication of the policy needs to be conducted effectively so that the residents targeted for resettlement comprehend the nature of relocation and understand the lifestyle changes of superblock habitation. A participatory planning approach that involves residents in decision-making would facilitate a bottom-up collaboration with government and help to mitigate against the worst effects of relocation.

A more inclusive approach to relocation policy would also help to strengthen capabilities post-relocation, to ensure security guarantees, education and health services, transportation access, and most importantly economic centers for the citizens to maintain livelihoods.



Overall, relocation is not just about moving people from one place (kampungs) to another (superblock/high-rise apartments), but also an opportunity to enhance lives and empower citizens. Social responsibility, justice and equality dimensions are vital, as is a gender perspective.

References:

Elias, J., Mari'yah, C., Rethel, L., Thompson, C., Tilley, L., and Suwarso R. (2018) *Women and Post-Eviction Resettlement: An Empowerment Toolkit*. Coventry: University of Warwick. Available at https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/researchcentres/ipe/jakarta/publications/womens_empowerment_toolkit.pdf

Jakarta Post (2018) 'Rusunawa Tenants Owe RP 35.9 Billion in Overdue Rent. 13 March.