Risk Communication Interpretation of Resettlement: Case of Southern Transport Development Project in Sri Lanka

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Abstract— **Resettlement followed by construction projects damages livelihood of many affected households, which causes protests against them making overall projects behind schedule. Southern Transport Development Project (STDP) was the first highway construction project in Sri Lanka and it took unprecedented safeguard measures in order to mitigate negative impacts on affected people and to minimize the delay of construction. In the project, public officers in charge of resettlement communicated and built up relationship with affected people in the process of resettlement, and played a key role in applying various safeguard policy. Through interview with both of public officers and affected people, this research aims to understand dynamic process that public officers made constructive relationship with affected people in STDP as risk communication, seeing whether three important characteristics in risk communication realized in the project: heterogeneous effects of risk communication, two-way information exchange, and existence of two routes of persuasion. Through the interview survey, we confirmed the existence of heterogeneous effects of risk communication in STDP and suggested that ROs/RAs designed strategies of communication based on the stages of resettlement, which can be interpreted by central and peripheral routes of persuasion.**

Index Terms—**Land acquisition, Development-induced resettlement, Resettlement risks, Risk Communication.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Although infrastructure projects especially in developing countries are considered to be socially beneficial in general, large scale displacement and resettlement caused by their construction not only damage livelihood of many affected households, but also cause protests against them, which tend to make overall projects behind schedule.

Southern Transport Development Project (STDP) was the first highway construction project in Sri Lanka, which needed resettlement of thousands of people. At the beginning of this project, it focused on technical engineering issues, and encountered strong protests against resettlement by affected people, which became a turning point for the government to apply various safeguard programs. Especially, in STDP Resettlement officers (ROs) and resettlement assistants (RAs) had continuously communicated with affected people (APs) from the beginning stage of raising awareness of the project to the five-year follow-ups after resettlement. They helped APs to resettle and adopt to new environment. Experience in

STDP brought following projects much knowledge and lessons about how to proceed construction projects, one of which is on the ways how the executing agency communicate with affected people.

In our study, we try to understand dynamic process where ROs/RAs made constructive relationship with APs in STDP as risk communication, seeing whether three important characteristics that are important in risk communication realized in the project: heterogeneous effects of risk communication, two-way information exchange, and existence of two routes of persuasion. In the next section, these important features of risk communication and significance in the context of resettlement are discussed. The following sections describe our interview survey and results of our analysis. The final section concludes and discusses future work.

II. RESETTLEMENT AS RISK COMMUNICATION

Since resettlement entails livelihood risks for APs [1] and ROs and RAs played important roles in persuading people to accept these risks and in mitigating these risks in STDP, our study introduces theories of risk communication and persuasion, and discuss the possibility of applications to the context of resettlement.

First of all, we have to note the difference in impacts of risk communication among APs. A study by Slovic and others implies that "people judge a risk not only by what they think about it but also by how they feel about it." [2,3] This holds especially in our resettlement context, where people tend to have emotional attachment to their land which would be acquired. Furthermore, resettlement itself has heterogeneous effects: it causes more impact physically and mentally on vulnerable people like low-income households, the aged, the disabled, women and children. Thus, direction communication with APs should influence APs' risk perception are not uniform among APs. It is important to know how risk communication affected risk perception of APs in the context of resettlement in order to make their restoration of livelihood more effective.

Another important feature of risk communication is that it has two flows of information. One is from experts to non-experts, which is called "risk message", and the other is from non-experts to experts. One of various definitions of risk communication is "an interactive process of exchange of information and opinion among individuals, groups, institutions. It involves multiple message about the nature of risk and other messages, not strictly about risk, that express concerns, opinions, or reactions to risk messages or legal and institutional arrangements for risk management." [4]

As many researches have pointed out, the success of risk communication does not necessarily lead to better decisions and "we cannot say that it is the fault of risk communication even if risk communication results in legal deal by publics". Thus, "Among people responsible for designing messages about risk, there is a temptation to equate the success of their messages in producing the effect desired with the success of risk communication." [4]

In addition, it is usually difficult to "Two-way communication is clearly a prerequisite of successful information packages and it is often hard to implement requires flexibility and the willingness to adapt to public concerns on the side of the communication institution." [5]

ROs and RAs actually had responsibility on restoration of livelihood as well as resettlement. However, in resettlement process, to tell information about future risk was likely to induce APs to become against the project and resettlement. It implies that real communication with AP was one-sided rather than interactive.

Finally, models of persuasion are also considered to be strongly related with risk communication. Among them, the most influential one is the "Elaboration-likelihood model of persuasion", developed by Petty and Cacioppo in the late 1970s to 1980s [6]. Literature [5] emphasizes that "The major key point of this model is the distinction between central or peripheral route of persuasion and the authors emphasized the interrelatedness of two routes" and notes that "It could be applied to risk communication because it has been tested many times and the results have been consistent." [5] It also mentioned that in terms of elaboration-likelihood model, "Effective risk communication program must contain a sufficient amount of peripheral cues to initiate interest in the message, but also enough "rational" argumentation to satisfy the audience with central interest in the subject." [5]

Central interest has been said to have more impact on the relationship and bad performance cannot be compensated for better communication. [5] In our context of resettlement, compensation payment was the major concerns for most of APs. Thus, this suggest that compensation payment, which was important factor of evaluation of performance, should meet expectation of AP in order for public officers to get confidence.

Related with heterogeneous effects of risk communication, we also have to note that previous research has shown that "most people are not predisposed to exercise a central or peripheral interest in a subject. Rather it may depend on a message itself whether it can trigger central interest or not." [3] It could be different according to person whether they could have central interest, because responses of receivers in communication would be different even if they were told same things in same ways. It is important to think about what kind of people are likely to have central interest in the context of resettlement so that public officers can more easily communicate.

How (much) does the concept of risk communication can be applied to the context of resettlement? We tackle this question by focusing on above mentioned characteristics of risk communication; heterogeneous effects of risk communication, two-way information exchange, and existence of two routes of persuasion.

III. OUR STUDY

Our target case, Southern Transport Development Project (STDP) is the first controlled access expressway construction project in Sri Lanka, funded by Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC). A 126km-length highway was constructed and now is being operating from Kottawa, which is on the outskirt of the Colombo, to Matara in the Southern part of the island. The project Executing Agency (EA) was Road Development Authority (RDA) that was organized under the Ministry of Highways, Ports and Shipping (at present the Ministry of Highways and Investment Promotion).

For affected households, questionnaire surveys have been continuously conducted in order to analyze risk perception of APs and perceptions on the resettlement and the project, and their results indicate that the project can be evaluated as generally successful in terms of APs' satisfaction [7,8]. However, considering our aim here to study the feature of two-way communication in the context of risk communication, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 public officers of STDP and 32 affected households during the period from 27th June to 16th July, 2017. Each interview was done for 1.5 hours on average. We prepared basic questionnaire items as a guideline and flexibly added questions according to each person' answer.

Each Interview was basically done in Shinhara, which is the native language in Sri Lanka. We had two assistants, who majored in sociology, and had sufficient skill of English communication, and had participated in various field research by the time of our survey. Each interview proceeded like the way that one assistant wrote down the answer of respondents in English and the other verbally translated each answer in Shinhara into English.

However, we changed the way to conduct interview with public officers according to each person. Three respondents who has good command of English was interviewed in English. Nine respondents were interviewed mainly in Shinhara based on the questionnaires guideline without verbal translation, because it was in respondents' working time and we had to save time. In that case, we referred to English note written down by one assistant. For the other eight respondents, interviews were done with verbal translation of each answer.

We interviewed seventeen people who experienced RO and/or RA in STDP; five interviewees were resettlement officers and twelve interviewee were resettlement assistants. Also, we interviewed thirty-one households who had resettled in resettlement sites and one household who had self-relocation.

IV. RESULTS

A. Heterogeneous Effects of Risk Communication

Many APs mentioned that ROs and RAs talked about good aspect of projects, not bad aspects. Next quote suggests the possibility that such attitude of communication discourages APs to pay attention to the risk of more impoverishment.

"They always talked about good aspects of STDP.

When signing final document, RA said, "If any problems happen, please consult with us. We will continuously support you." After RO/RA went back, I got afraid of whether the word was true."

Meanwhile, another AP suggested the responsibility that announcement of ROs and RAs provoked risk perception and appropriate preparation for resettlement. One AP said, "My wife told me that she got instructions about how to manage compensation in official meeting." Also one RA told that ROs and RAs announced how to use compensation, divided compensation payment into various times, and paid compensation according to the level of restoration of livelihood while monitoring new houses after resettlement. In our survey, we could not ask APs how they felt when they were told how to use compensation because none of our respondent were the subjects of these instructions. However, we can at least imply that announcement had worked from the fact that AP communicated about how to use compensation with family.

Finding 1: The ways how risk communication affected how they felt about resettlement and risk perception are different among APs.

B. Two-Way Information Exchange

Respondents' statements suggested that ROs and RAs gradually improved relationship with APs and they had typical styles of communication with APs according to the stages in the process of building up relationship.

At the first stage, resettlement officers and assistants had to make APs get ready for listening to them, because otherwise APs refused to talk with any officers. One interviewee said:

"At the beginning, RA must listen to affected person, then RAs can explain and give information. I asked about family matters and got closer with affected persons. Then, they were ready to listen to RAs. Gradually they believed in RAs. However often they blamed us, but we let them do it, because we had worked with them again and again."

In addition, another interviewee pointed out the importance of attitudes of talking as well as listening. The following quote empathized the importance of peripheral route, not central route, which is about how friendly and confidentially to communicate with APs.

"We could build confidence through talking. Important thing is not what we were talking about. Important thing is how we talk with APs. ―Need to talk familiarly and friendly. Always try to give correct information directly. People like direct words. It couldn't satisfy APs that we said something using words not trustful."

However, next quotes show that at the following stage of explanation, where risk messages were conveyed, one-sided communication had more proportion than two-way communication. APs said:

"ROs/RAs explained a lot. But sometimes we couldn't understand what they were saying."
"They were talkative. They explained about the project and also they tried to convince that we would have to move from here."

Finding 2: Communication between ROs/RAs and APs was one-sided rather than interactive when it comes to the stage of explanation.

C. Existence of Two Routes of Persuasion

Many APs said "We first got confidence in RAs after getting compensation and decided to resettle. What RAs said had been just verbal promise before that." One AP told "A RA was very corrupted, because I got less compensation compared to others." Before getting compensation, he did not get confident in RA but at the same time he had not thought that RAs was corrupted as well. In addition, one RA said "I can't say that I get the confidence from all the APs because some APs didn't get the compensation as they expect, so they didn't rely on us anymore."

One RO said that he categorized APs by business and could understand what kinds of people have complaints. For example, APs who have a daughter can be, because such AP will need money in her future marriage. APs also evaluated the same RO differently: One said that one RA was very talkative, but another said the same RA was just listening to them. These implies that public officers modified which route they use in communication according to each person.

Above mentioned one-sidedness of their communication is strongly related with existence of two routes of persuasion. For example, one resettlement officer said:

"In this project, we should be more talkative. Otherwise we won't be able to do our task well. After I went to the APs' houses I let them to speak. In the middle of the conversation they gave me a chance to talk and I clearly explained them about the compensation package. After my explanation they were willing to hand over the land."

Because ROs were expected to visit households when RAs could not deal with the APs, we can see that above mentioned AP in RO's statement was strongly against resettlement. The RO could manage even such AP who were strongly against STDP, trying to make APs resettle as quickly as possible. To do so, they emphasized their awareness of the project and its compensation scheme, which satisfied central interest of APs.

Finding 3: Compensation payment was critical factor for ROs/RAs to get confidence from APs, and ROs/RAs modified their styles of communication according to the central interests of APs.

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

We stated some findings about communication with public

officers (ROs/RAs) and APs in the context of resettlement in STDP, highlighting some important features of risk communication. Our Interview results suggested that communication with APs had several stages and ROs/RAs designed strategies of communication based on the stages of resettlement. At the first stage, it could be understood that peripheral route being was important for APs to pay attention to them. However, communication between ROs/RAs and APs was one-sided rather than interactive when it comes to the stage of explanation. Compensation payment was critical factor for ROs/RAs to get confidence from APs, but since the ways how risk communication affected how they felt about resettlement and risk perception are different among APs, ROs/RAs modified their styles of communication according to the central interests of APs.

Studies have usually focused on the impact of risk communication on APs, but since risk communication was two-way communication, and through communication each stakeholder had feedback from other's attitude and changed the behavior in our context too, we need to see the behavioral changes of public officers too. In the beginning of STDP, ROs and RAs didn't have knowledge and experience about risk communication and they have learned practical knowledge through STDP by themselves. What competency ROs and RAs gained and the impacts of their learning are interesting topics to study in the future by analyzing our data more.

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