



Research Article

Reasons Behind the Refusal of Relocation Among Victims of the Cold Lava Flood Disaster of Mount Marapi: A Study in Nagari Bukik Batabuah, Canduang District, Agam Regency

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Abstract

This study explores the reasons why some victims of the cold lava flood disaster from Mount Marapi in Nagari Bukik Batabuah, Canduang District, Agam Regency, refuse relocation despite the government's provision of safer sites and supporting facilities as part of disaster mitigation efforts. Their refusal is influenced not only by physical considerations but also by deep-rooted socio-cultural and socio-economic factors. The study aims to describe the socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds of the affected victims and to analyze the reasoning and actions of those who reject relocation. Guided by Max Weber's theory of social action—particularly the instrumentally rational type—this research employs a qualitative descriptive approach. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, and data were gathered through observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal seven primary reasons for refusing relocation: (1) fear of losing ownership of land, assets, and property; (2) the potential loss of close social relationships and community solidarity; (3) emotional attachment to their hometown, homes, and ancestral graves; (4) apprehension about building new social relationships in an unfamiliar environment; (5) livelihood dependence on the current location; (6) concerns regarding children's education and access to healthcare in the relocation area; and (7) doubts about the adequacy of facilities and economic opportunities in the new settlement despite prior government outreach. These findings highlight the importance of incorporating social, cultural, and economic dimensions into relocation policies to ensure community acceptance and long-term sustainability.

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INTRODUCTION

According to Law No. 24 of 2007 (RKPD Agam, 2024), disaster is an event that threatens human life or is caused by natural, non-natural, or human factors that lead to casualties, destroys the environment, and incurs material losses. Sociologically, disaster is not just a natural event but also an emotional and social experience for the endangered community (Damsar, 2015). In West Sumatra, the potential for disaster is incredibly high, especially earthquakes, eruptions and floods. Between January and October 2023, the Regional Disaster Management Agency (BPBD) recorded 364 disaster events. Mount Marapi's eruption can lead to potential impacts on the community (health, damage to facilities) and secondary impacts (cold lava floods) (Agustino, 2024; Harlina, 2024).

Agam Regency is the region with the most disaster-prone potential in West Sumatra (Putri & Ikhwan, 2024). The Canduang sub-district is a sub-district that has the widest vulnerable zone. The cold lava floods in Nagari Bukik Batabuah have produced a considerable impact on 49 houses destroyed, 9 deaths and 5 injured. Thus, one step to respond to post-disaster is to relocate vulnerable communities at risk of future risk (Fadlan & Nurcholis, 2023).



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Relocation is a transformation of community settlements from disaster-prone areas to more permanent safe areas, equipped with facilities for housing, education, health, and economic empowerment (Iqbal & Vonika, 2019). However, in the cold lava floods disaster from Mount Marapi, even though there are facilities for relocation, some residents chose not to move. For example, according to data, 57 families accepted to relocate while 4 families directly impacted and about 100 indirectly impacted chose to stay. This means that relocation decisions are not merely effective decision making with a safety-inhibiting factor. Inhibiting factors are risk safety factors for survival; however, social, cultural, economic and psychological factors reinforce them (Hasan et al., 2022).

This research is based on Max Weber's theory of social action, especially on the type of instrumentally rational action (*zweckrational*). According to Weber, social action is a human action that has subjective meaning and is directed toward others (Johnson, 1986). Instrumentally rational action is directed toward a conscious calculation of goals and means of efficiency in achieving them. Thus, in this situation, victims denying relocation are acting after consideration or weighing pros and cons - of what they could lose from relocation (physical losses without compensation), disruption of social relations (sacralization of separation from other residents) or disruption of economic relations (lesser uncertainty than uncertainty of education and health services in other locations).

Thus, in conjunction with this problem, this research problem is focused on: "What are the reasons some victims impacted by the cold lava flood disaster of Mount Marapi in Nagari Bukik Batabuah refuse to relocate?" This question links to finding out why from a social, cultural and economic perspective as to their failure to relocate as well as a thought-action analysis of what occurs to keep them in a hazardous position. Therefore, these findings are expected to contribute to disaster management policies in a more contextual community-sensitive manner.

METHOD

This research is of a qualitative nature. Qualitative research in the realm of social sciences is a process of collecting and analyzing spoken or written words and human behavior as data without an initial requirement to count, measure, which subsequently results in the need to do so (Afrizal, 2014). The object of study is an individual unit of analysis (the victim of the cold lava flood who refuses to move, the Head of Nagari Bukik Batabuah, the KSB coordinator, a community leader, and the Head of the Housing Department of Lubuk Basung). The data collection techniques used are interviews, observations and documentation. The data analysis model is Miles and Huberman, which involves three stages of analysis - data coding, data display and concluding drawing (Bungin, 2007; Sugiyono, 2022).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There are two types of relocation. The first is collective relocation and the second is independent relocation. Collective relocation is government relocation. The government bears the costs of construction, the land to be relocate disprovided by the government, and housing units are built for the displaced community. Agency for Disaster Management Region (BPBD) is responsible for collective relocation housing development for disaster-affected communities. The regional agency for housing and settlement areas (PERKIM) is responsible for coordinating with BPBD because PERKIM is responsible for executing the collective relocation - namely, red zone identification of communities on a river with an inward (into the land) 100 meter radius red zone, identification of household units in the red zone, and subsequently, construction of housing for the relocated community. Yet, PERKIM will continue to coordinate with BPBD in development. Thus, independent relocation is government executed with costs of the nation but it occurs independently as it requires land to come from the sick community which must be certified with a geographical location in a disaster safe zone and constructed independently as the government has no authority to build such housing units; it must be certified with reusability elsewhere.

Victims' Thoughts and Actions For Cold Lava Flooding Refuse Relocation

The Bukik Batabuah community refuses relocation because the thoughts and actions critical for maintaining their community stability are compounded with socio-political, cultural, economic and other contextual complications. These complexities impact an individual decision of relocation policy assessment which ultimately encourages them to stay permanently in a disaster-prone area (Pramono et al., [2024](#); Saepudin, [2019](#)).

Social Factors

The population of Nagari Bukik Batabuah consists of two main groups: indigenous people and migrants. Indigenous people are the descendants of first-generation people from generations ago - born, raised, and socially/culturally naturalized in the region - whereas migrants are people who have traveled to this region for employment, education or better quality of living. Regardless, all groups sustained psychosocial and physical impacts from the natural disaster of cold lava flooding.

Furthermore, life before the disaster existed predominantly around work, school and then reunification with friends/family for socialization efforts (Fukuyama, [1995](#); Fukuyama, [2002](#)). Cultural traditions of the resident community play an important role in social cohesion; thus, even though there are inequalities where some have more than others, most people see Bukik Batabuah as their home because they have good relations with their neighbors and feel comfortable with living arrangements. It would do nothing to benefit them to go elsewhere and no one else would help.

They also have incredibly strong connections to the culture - burial plots of ancestors, traditional homes - that create permanent ties established within Bakik Batabuah. Therefore, a cohesive community means a collective resource that empowers them with resilience for the next disaster when the status quo is not socially disheveled after recovery.

Finally, there are adaptations and patterns of long-residing socialization; should they move to a new place, all of these relationships would no longer be rebuilt. They never want to lose social relations and fear those who are formerly extended family might now be lost elsewhere when now they're all together; thus, victims refuse relocation to stay in Nagari Bukik Batabuah.

Economic Factors

Agricultural and small business efforts heavily stabilize the economy. Agricultural products, small shops, tailoring efforts and other local dependent trades mean that socio-economically they are reliant on the socio-economic status that is present where they live. Therefore, it matters where they are located because socio-economically they will be supplemented by cheap resources.

While some might work in the formal sector - government jobs or more established entrepreneurial endeavors - it's clear that most income-generating prospects rely on relatively informal endeavors. For example, those who were impacted either directly or indirectly refuse to relocate because their jobs link them back to Nagari Bukik Batabuah. They feel that should they relocate now - even if it's minimal employment - then customers will leave them and they will never know what might happen in a new situation. They know that those who live in Bakik Batabuah have established schools, jobs, businesses and they do not want to start all over again in the relocation area.

Relocation means costs for transportation related to time on the job will increase in addition to travel time. If they were workers that worked doing agriculture here, relocation means loss of all agricultural efforts as agricultural lands would be vacant with no return on investment.

Cultural Factors

Residents of Nagari Bukik Batabuah have a culturally important connection to ancestral rice fields and gardens. Those who feel they might lose ancestral land or those who feel that they would move and their ancestors' properties would be taken from them due to government unclear intentions - even though the government has stated that it would not take their land - has even greater ownership potential should they so decide.

While the government states that it is the property of the residents of Nagari Bukik Batabuah and it won't take possession, no real explanation exists. Therefore, there is fear of uncertainty.

Thus, anticipations of loss related to cultural identity occur from those who have lived in an area too long for comfort because once they leave, they'll never get back; this is their birthplace, their place of cultural ancestry and subsequently-linked sentimental value for identity.

Those who fear losing long practiced culture - for example, gotong royong or mutual assistance - do not believe that it might not exist in the relocation area. Those who have ancestral burial plots fear that they or their children will never visit nor take care of their ancestors' graves; they fear that their children might never even know who was there to begin with if they leave.

Thus, they want to stay to preserve their ancestral property significance linked to culture; agricultural lands and traditional homes are not merely economic assets, but an identity-linked component as purely cultural significance.

Other Factors

Ultimately, potential complications emerge due to non-relocation decisions based on other factors like educational opportunities for children because many parents didn't know what schools their children would receive in the relocation area - as likely a decreased accessibility (Amma et al., [2022](#)).

Health concerns also emerged as many felt that facilities would be different where people who are unknown to what's available - or not - might have different regional health facilities that differ from unknown needs. Thus, all of these uncertainties indicate to them that it would be worth it to stay in Nagari Bukik Batabuah to avoid any alternatives - even if it meant being subjectively prone to disasters (Harlina, [2024](#)).

CONCLUSION

Victim refusal to relocate is not entirely due to relocation policies failing to secure safety, it's an intersection of social, economic, cultural and contextual opportunities with this population that represents their greatest value/loss from not relocating. For example, socially, there are long term relations, support systems and emotional familiarity established here; economically, these people are primarily agricultural/small business workers whose livelihoods are place-specific and to relocate is an insult to income stabilization; culturally, there are land attachments (homes, lives, family graveyards) which become barriers to relocation due to identity, ancestry and senses of belonging; finally, contextually, there is uncertainty with children's education and health services in the new location. Therefore, all of these factors contribute to why they do not want to relocate - everything that is working for them is essentially there and everything that could work for them in a different area, albeit less effectively, represents loss over time, regardless.

According to Weber's theory of social action - incentive rational social action - the response to relocation is a calculated social action. This is to say, they took the time to assess what would be the best option for social benefit and rationally, and they believed staying was more beneficial. Therefore, the fact that they didn't want to move does not make them appear irrational, but instead, it's a rational response.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that relocation policies should not be adjusted to allow more safety as a guarantee. Disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies need to take into account sociocultural and economic and psychosocial impacts as without this consideration, they feel inauthentic and not sustainable to communities. Relocation needs guarantees as security for land rights negotiations and assurances, livelihood stocking assurances, cultural sensitivity in the approach and transparency in communication for this potentially vulnerable policy that DRR could otherwise champion for the masses.

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