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Resettlement and the co-governance of risk in Montserrat

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Abstract

This paper demonstrates how disasters can create spaces for existing risk governance systems to be questioned and modified. The volcanic crisis in Montserrat from 1995-97 led to a reconsideration of responsibilities and risk management practices by both Montserratian and UK authorities. It initiated a process of resettlement and transformation in land-use and development planning that has substantially reduced levels of volcanic risk on the island. However, these benefits have to be weighed against loss of livelihoods for a significant proportion of the population and considerable social upheaval.

Critical to the success of this new development model is the need for vertical coherence and dialogue between different stakeholders. Montserrat and UK risk governance systems are more integrated now, but unless communities are engaged in risk management decisions, Montserrat's low- risk development model could come unstuck. Small islands with large risks can learn a lot from the Montserrat experience.

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