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In Conversation with: William Siembieda (WS)
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Description: Transcript of a podcast of the discussion of the book From Strangers to Neighbors: Resettlement and Community Development in Post-Disaster Honduras between author Ryan Alaniz of sociology and Dr. William Siembieda of city and regional planning.

Brett Bodemer (Moderator): Welcome to Conversations with Cal Poly Authors. This episode was recorded Friday February 9th 2018 at the Robert E. Kennedy Library at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. This conversation features Ryan Alaniz and William Siembieda to discussing Ryan's book, From Strangers to Neighbors: Resettlement and Community Development in Post-Disaster Honduras published by the University of Texas Press. Ryan Alaniz is an assistant professor in sociology at Cal Poly. A Cal Poly graduate himself, he received an MA from the University of California at Santa Barbara in Latin American and Iberian studies and his PHD in sociology from the University of Minnesota. He collaborates with various institutions including the United Nations University Institute for Human and Environment Security and the Fulbright Program. His fields included post disaster recover, community development, and community social health. Dr. William Siembieda, Ryan's conversational partner, is a professor in Cal Poly's Department of City and Regional Planning. Bill is an internationally recognized expert in disaster mitigation and was a major contributor to the State of California's Multi-Hazard Mitigation plan. In 2015/16, Bill was awarded Cal Poly's Distinguished Scholarship Award for his important work in this field.

[Applause]

RA: Great, well thank you all for coming on this Friday morning. I know the title isn't all that attractive. It's really long and seems very specific. But, I'm hoping to talk a little bit about how it would be relevant to all of us in this room, not only today but moving forward generally. So, I thought I'd talk a little bit about how the book came to be, elements of the book, as I mentioned, and then maybe a little bit about some of the takeaways. Like, what does the book actually say? So, you could walk away from this not having to read the book, now, after this after, after this morning. So, the book came about—after Cal Poly, when I graduated, I decided to spend the year doing volunteer work abroad. So, I did it at an orphanage in Honduras with 600 kids. That was right at late 2000, 2001, and 2002. And, at this orphanage, I spent a lot of time there. And an offshoot of the orphanage was actually a resettlement. So, Hurricane Mitch happened at the end of October 1998, I was there late 2000 and early 2001. And so, this offshoot we were able to visit as volunteers, this new resettlement called Nueva Esperanza, this resettlement was fascinating. It was 200 families that had to be relocated because Hurricane Mitch devastated the nation. Three million people of the six million, so half the population was heavily impacted somehow by the hurricane. Every bridge, if you can imagine this, every bridge
in the entire country was either damaged or destroyed by that hurricane. It was tremendous. And, the government of Honduras at the time had 0 lempira, 0 dollars to address disaster relief let alone recover and resettlement. So, here we have a very poor, second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, no money to rebuild, and an absolutely devastated countryside. So, I volunteered and I got a sense like wow this is really an interesting topic, like, how do you, how do you do resettlement? Forgot about it—back in 2006, I started a small nonprofit called the Football Project where we delivered soccer equipment to orphaned and underprivileged children after they do some kind of service project for their community. In one of these cases, we were—an application came for one of these resettlements outside of the capital city of Honduras, called Tegucigalpa, for this one community. And so, they picked me up and we had bags and bags of soccer balls and soccer jerseys, and, we're driving out to this new resettlement. And, along the way before, in this valley there were multiple resettlements. And, down the road, as we were going down the road, we were getting closer to this one that we were going to stop at, drop this equipment off at. And, as we were going down the road, the executive director of this nonprofit that was helping support this resettlement said, “you know, it's really too bad that this resettlement is doing so bad that the crime is actually spilling over and people are coming over and are effecting our community.” It was that ten second comment that really grabbed my attention stuck in the back of my brain. And, when I was really trying to develop dissertation ideas, back in 2008, I thought, ha, how interesting. Why would it be that if these resettlements had people from the same affected neighborhoods, in Tegucigalpa, that one would have so much crime and the other three miles down the road wouldn't. And so, that's what, I got some funding to look into this. And later, I found out that, in fact, she was absolutely right. In the one, in the first community that I was studying, they had 28 murders from 2002 to 2010. When I got the police reports, they weren't just murders, they were like really graphic terrible murders. And, the next community next door, three miles down the road had 0 murders. So, that was just one interesting question like why would one have so many murders and the other one doesn't? And, I started looking into it, looking at things like trust and participation and political efficacy. And, what I found was just massive differences between these two resettlements. And the question reappeared, why would this happen? Why would one, one have such bad outcomes and another have the same—if they have the same—or a different result if they had the same infrastructure and people came from the same neighborhoods? So, I was fortunate to get some funding from Fulbright, the Social Science Counsel, and then to write the book actually, the College of Liberal Arts. And, I wanted to give a shout out to a couple of people. First, to Jenny my partner who reread the manuscript twice and then Dr. Dematter [assumed spelling] who read the Manuscript once and gave me more than a thousand track changes, which, I did not appreciate at the time, but, now I appreciate. And, I want to mention that, when I first came up with this idea of disaster resettlement, I went through all of the faculty at University of Minnesota. Science, geography, urban planning, sociology, nobody did anything close to this. And so, I was happy to come back. My family lives in Nipomo, so I was coming back here for a visit over Christmas. And, I thought well maybe somebody at Cal Poly does something similar and they could help me, help guide me because my committee did not know what to do with me. And so, I'm looking around, looking around, and I see this picture of this kind of older guy smiling at the chalkboard in City and Regional Planning. And, I was like ah, Bill Siembieda, he does, he does work on urban planning, kind of
disaster resettlement. So, I reach out to him, super nice guy response. Yeah, come on over, come to my office, let's chat. Turns out, the guy sitting across the table of me wrote the urban plan for the valley of the resettlements that I was studying. He wrote the plan for them. And, he was onboard from the first moment, the first get go, helping me design the study and then giving me feedback along the way and even inviting me to conferences where I got to meet the top scholars in the world who do disaster recovery and resettlement. So, I'm really appreciative of Bill for that. But, the title as I mentioned, sounds really specific, but it's actually very relevant. So, one issue that many of you know about is that climate change is having a huge impact on the world. The IPCC Report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report, has noted that we're going to continue to see increasing numbers and increasing intensity of disasters on, in the United—in the world, excuse me. So, increasing numbers and increasing intensity. In addition, what we're seeing is that people are more and more vulnerable. Meaning that, in part, due to increasing poverty in certain areas as well as this large rural to urban migration, people are living in peri-urban areas, or what we call slums, stacked together in very unsafe conditions. So, if a disaster were to strike, it's going to have a huge impact on these communities. So, climate change, we're going to see more and more people affected by disasters and then going to have to be relocated out of these unsafe conditions. In addition, the United Nations High Commission on Refugees has found that we are at the highest number of refugees on the planet in the history of the world. So, 1 out of every 113 people on the planet is a refugee. So, these refugees are going to need to find a safe place to land. And, there's really no wall high enough that we can build that's not going to impact us from the migration and immigration of people wanting to come to a place like the United States. So, as I mentioned, Honduras is absolutely devastated by this Hurricane Mitch in 1998. And so, I'm interested in that question, why did these two resettlements end up with such different trajectories? So, here's the kind of three takeaways. The first is how do you build, how do you help resettlements of people who don't know each other who are all brought together into this new location, how do you help them move from a bunch of strangers living together into neighbors, into having a sense of community? It's a really complicated question. And, the first takeaway is well, obviously, it's very difficult, but, you have to recognize that these folks are very vulnerable. So again, second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, government is not supporting them at all. These people were impoverished, had very little education, a lot of them had very few resources. And then, they were dropped down into this, middle of this resettlement with beautiful infrastructure, nice roads, beautiful houses, water. But, how do they, just because they're dropped into this location doesn't necessarily mean that they can build a community, build, work together for some kind of common vision. And so, that's one of the, my great critiques. If you look at the definition for a successful resettlement by FEMA or by the U.N., they say we have successfully moved this number of families into this number of houses, and that's it. But, that doesn't mean that a house is not necessarily a home and a resettlement is not necessarily a community. That's the social aspect or the social structure that's part of that. And so, that's what I bring to the table is, one example that Bill knows about, there was one of the resettlements that I studied was built by a non—a large international nongovernmental organization. And, their focus is only on building homes. They're only building houses, excuse me. So, they built 285 homes for the most vulnerable population that they could find from this Hurricane Mitch which was single mothers with children. These single
mothers with children, they moved them all in into this beautiful infrastructure and took a bunch of pictures with the kids in front of the houses and then moved on and said, we're done, you got your house, good luck. We're going to go build more houses. And, that sounds fine, right. They were able to write back to all their donors like, look at our spreadsheet, we built all these homes and we got these pictures of these kids all happy. Within six months, a gang came in, took over the whole resettlement and each woman had to pay an impuesto de guerra, a war tax, to stay in her own home. So, in this case, resettlement, this organization, superficially, looked like they did a really great thing. But, these women's lives were a lot more miserable living in these beautiful houses than living in the temporary shelters where they came from. So, that's a first, is that, we have to think about the population. And, it's not just infrastructure. These people who are vulnerable need support and guidance. And, this is actually contradictory to what I expected. So, what I expected is, as sociologists, we're really interested in empowerment, democracy, agency, giving people the right to say and determine their own live. But, what I found is that people, when they're thrown into these conditions, often don't have enough resources, time, money, education, skills, leadership to be able to negotiate the relationships and build the social structure, the norms, the values, the commitment to actually develop the resettlement into a community on their own. What I found is that people, without support, they often just don't have enough time or energy to be able to put into all that effort to build trust, to be engaged politically, to do extra work on behalf of the community when they're just trying to take care of their kids. So, vulnerable populations need support and guidance. The second is we need to look not just on infrastructure, but, what I term a new metric called social health. So, social health has five components. They're all similar, they're all something that we're interested in. The first is trust. We want to be in a place where people trust each other. The second is civic participation. We want to be in a place where people work together to make the place better. The third is a common vision. So, do people, together collectively, do they have some kind of common vision for this community or is it fragmented and competing visions? How does that have an impact? The fourth is collective efficacy. Are people willing to look out for one another and help each other? And, the fifth is crime. Is there a lot of crime in that community? So, what I argue in the book is well, is that, when organizations or governments do resettlement, they do need to build houses, absolutely, right. Maslow's Hierarchy of Need, like, you need a place to live and you need water, got it. But, let's move past that and think about the social condition and the social consequences within this, these resettlements. So that people, when they move in, aren't good for the first six months, but are good for ten years or indefinitely because they've had that opportunity to build trust and social health. And finally, number three, so vulnerable populations need support, let's think about social health. The third big lesson is what I call, I've drawn a theory of path dependency. And very basically, path dependency is this idea if you have a perfectly round hill and a perfectly round ball on top of that hill, if you push it, it can go in any million of a different directions. But, once that snowball starts going down that hill, it starts to build up momentum, it starts to gain speed. And, it's very difficult, as it gains speed, to knock it off of that path. I argue the same thing is—can be thought—or resettlement culture can be thought in the same way. So, if we're all—if each one of us had our family and we all had to be relocated somewhere, and there is a place, we'll say close to the ocean, Montana, they were all, they gave us a spot out there and we all brought our families and we brought our extended families. So, say there's 100 or 200
families there. We have to negotiate power. Who's going to make decisions? Do we look to the scholars in the room? Hopefully not. Do we, is it democratic, does each person have a voice? It becomes really difficult, we, also there's gender dynamics, there's economic dynamics that people bring into it. So, there's all these things that need to be negotiated. What an organization can do is, they can help shape and guide that process to make sure that everybody does have a voice and also shape the culture so that when you push that ball down the hill, you can start to make sure. And, a good example was trash, right. Trash is a big problem in Central America. Everybody litters, not everybody, it's very common that people litter. So, if an organization can have everybody sign up and believe that we don't litter in this community and the first 200 families say we don't litter in this community, they all sanction each other to make sure, they call each other out when they see each other littering. Then, as new families come into this resettlement, as they build more homes, a new family, even though they're used to littering back in their old neighborhood, they come into this new neighborhood and they're like oh you guys don't litter here. Okay, I guess that's just a rule and I'm going to not litter either because nobody else litters. And, it starts to create a particular type of culture that people buy into. It just becomes normal and normalized. And so, I argue that resettlements are very particular. It's this opportune moment. It's like a blank slate where you bring a bunch of people together and it doesn't have to be like it was back in their, back in their old neighborhood. It can be different. So, if they can make that blank slate. If they can say here are some really nice—here are some rules that we have around behavior, here's how we interact with each other, here's how we take care of each other, then that ball, that snowball will start down a particular path that will provide dividends long into the future. What I saw in other resettlements is, very quickly, people saw that nobody followed these new rules. And so, they threw up their hands and say well nobody votes anyway. Why would I vote? They're just corrupt just like they were in my past neighborhood. So, they throw up their hands or they want us not to litter but, everybody else is littering. So, I'm going to litter too. They just, that moment, that opportunity is lost. And so, those, I think, are the three big lessons. Vulnerable populations need support, social health is a valuable metric to think about, and initial culture shapes the future. If you can get a really strong healthy set of norms and values embedded within the minds and hearts of the survivors, then, I think that that will be really beneficial in the long run. So, thank you for listening in and I'll turn it over to Bill.

WS: I appreciate that. If you read this book, there's a lot of different pieces that you're going to learn because the book is, in part, field research. This is what I see, this is what I found. It's, in part, analysis, well this is what I mean. And, it's in part, I hope this is going to help, I hope this is going to happen. So, there is this kind of, you know, positive-ness in the book that, if this happens, and this can happen, can that happen. So, let me tell you, there's some differences in this book than other books on resettlement. Resettlement is a big deal, not in the United States, but certainly for the World Bank. You ask the World Bank people what's the biggest issues they have in disasters, it's, they're, all of them are going to say resettlement. It's resettlement that becomes the most problematic. This resettlement process is a little bit different. It's not like taking people out of one country and shove, taking them to another country and putting them in a resettlement camp for five years and figuring out what to do with them, right. It's not like the Syrian or the Yemenis situation. What it is, is that, you're taking
people out of one place and offering them something that they didn't have before, a new house in a new settlement area. And, each of the NGO's who work in this valley, basically are cherry picking these people. They only want these people for their places because they want to believe that they're going to help them by this. So, there is a sort of a notion of hope in this whole thing. Ryan, you say that creating community is a process and an outcome. Can you expand on this? You can explain the process and I think you talk about the process. But, the outcome, there's a lot of outcomes, right. And so, if you explain why you say it's both things.

RA: So, that's a really good question. All of us are often, and I think a good, another good example, here on campus, is the dorms. The dorms, a bunch of strangers show up together, are stuck in a building and they have to figure out how to live together, more or less. Now, they have a lot of guidance, of course. There's a lot of rules and regulations about it. But, they end up working together and negotiating relationships. And, that is the process of creating community. If they weren't engaging with each other, if they weren't willing to work together or to create some kind of vision or sense of this is what we want, our place of where we sleep, where we eat, where we spend time, this is not, if we're unwilling to work together, then, it would fall apart and there'd be a lot of conflict. So, I think the process of building community is always being negotiated in faculty meetings. Is it a cohesive through, on sports teams? So, I think it's a really interesting question of how are we constantly in the process of negotiating and creating community. But, it's also an outcome because, once we've built community, there are real significant benefits to having a community. We have a support network that we can draw upon. There's people that who, if there's something, that we can feel safe around certain groups of people. Communities, when you have a group of people supporting one another, they're more resilient to things like whether it's climate change or even a child's death. So, having, building community, I think we're always working on it. But, the more we build community, I think that's part of the hope that I have, I think that's something. Actually personally, I think we've lost a lot in the United States that a lot of other places like Honduras have, is they have a greater sense of being able to depend and being vulnerable and asking for help from one another, but, in addition, being more open and being more willing to give and help one another. So, in the United States, and this is a little bit plangent, but, going, in the United States, I think there's a lot of this pull yourself up by the bootstraps, individualism, I don't need anybody else. Everybody on the block has a lawnmower instead of one person buying a lawnmower and sharing a lawnmower, right. We don't ask for help very much because it's part of our culture to be self, not need, independent, we don't need each other. When, in fact, the more we can think about and be willing to be vulnerable and ask for help of one another, it creates a really beautiful sense of reciprocity. There's a really neat book on two communities in the highlands of Columbia, or on a mountain in Columbia, these two communities, they live on either side of this mountain. Depending on the weather system, one side gets a lot of rain or the other side gets a lot of rain. Those that get a lot of rain have more produce. So, every year, these two communities meet in the middle and share because they know that one community's going to be doing a lot better than the other community. And so, that sense of reciprocity and being willing to be vulnerable and say hey I need help and being willing to give help, I think, is real benefit of a deep sense of relationship and community.
WS: Thank you. In the two major, this book includes studies of a number of NGO settlements in the same valley. The valley is actually called the [inaudible] Valley even though it's not mentioned in the book, it's the [inaudible] Valley. But, the, and this is a valley where I took 16 Cal Poly students in 2000 to write the plan, the first sustainable land use plan for the [inaudible] Valley which all these settlements are based on, where they're located. But, the two major settlements discussed in the book have two physical different forms of public space that are created. And, that has to do with the market, where the market is, right, and where the church is or not or isn't, and the public area. And, that turns out, you discussed to be different than you thought it was going to be. One place had a very formal design public space and market area, the other was more informal. And, how did that come about? Why did the most, the bigger market space not work and the smaller market space seem to work better?

RA: So, in one resettlement, the nonprofit, it used to be an old coffee plantation. And so, they utilized all the buildings that processed coffee as a formal market. The problem was, was it was outside of the community. It was up to 400 yards away from any given household. Well maybe 40 to 400 yards away from any given household, uphill, in the sun. And, Honduras is in the tropics, it's very hot. So, people would have to walk, nobody had cars really, have to walk up to this market and then walk all their groceries back. Whereas, the other resettlement had the market right in the middle of town. So, everybody was approximately 40 to 100 yards away. And it became, it was shaded. And so, people would come and gather there, they would interact there. And, that would create relationship. People would get to bump into each other and get to know each other a little bit. I want to add a third one, which, I don't think is in the book. The other resettlement that I studied, it was 200 houses 10 rows of 20 houses just like this just very straightforward, very efficient. And, they had two churches, a Catholic church on one side and a Protestant church on the other. And, this 200 families, it was one of the first resettlements built. So, I thought, well after 12 years, the first resettlement that was built, they should have the closest relationship, they should have the most trust because they've been together to longest an there's only 200 families compared to some of the communities that I studied, these settlements that I studied was 1,200 families. Turns out, that hadn't been, wasn't the case at all. So, I kept asking the question, I did a survey of the entire community. And, I was asking the question, do you trust your neighbor? And, it was a yes or no question and he said yes and no. I said well, okay, can you expand? He said well I trust my neighbor on either side of the street, but, those people down there, that's probably 50 yards away, I don't know those people. I'm like you've lived in this place for 10 years and there's only probably 800 people in the community and you don't know those people. Like what? That doesn't make any sense. And, I step back and I look at the map, and again, it's the two churches and the rows of houses. There's no meeting space for them. There's no soccer field, there's no market place. They were just isolated. And so, the, I brought that up to the nongovernmental organization who was running it. And, he said wow I'm surprised they don't trust each other more. He said what do you recommend? I said build a market place or build a soccer field. The soccer field, what it would do is bring the kids together to start interacting. And then, if they put on tournaments, the parents would come and watch the kids play. And, everybody, then people, vendors would come and start selling stuff at the soccer field. And, it would be a place
where people could gather for an activity that would force them to bump into each other and, in that process, get to know each other and hopefully build relationships.

WS: That's good, there is a physical determinism component in all these things that go on to say where you place things and how people interact and how you access them counts in this whole idea of community building. You talk about two fundamental theories in the book. One is called technical assistance the other's called self-help. And this is really basic, basic development theory. Can you explain why you chose these two and the differences between technical assistance and self-help and are they both needed or are other things needed?

RA: So, the self-help, so traditionally, when you look at community development, so community development, there's a couple different perspectives. The two biggest perspectives is the community development by the community for the community. So, you hand over power, you encourage the community, and you provide the resources that they need and let them determine how to help themselves. Pretty straightforward. The opposite end is the technical assistance, saying well the community may not necessarily know what's best for them. So, we're going to give them technical assistance to help them develop in a particular way because we think that they need to grow their economy but they think they need to get better transportation, we're going to help them grow their economy. So, the World Bank has historically been very technical assistance focused and the International Monetary Fund only gives loans to countries and the, and states for projects that they deem worthy. So, it's very much top down whereas the self-help is very much bottom up. What I argue in the book is that we need a little bit of both. The community, because they're so vulnerable, has to, it is, it's important to empower them because, an organization is not going to be with this community forever. But, it's really important, because they're so vulnerable, to give them a lot of technical assistance to build them up, to support them, to give them the things that they need initially. And so, I have a graph in the book where I show the technical assistance very high at the very beginning and the self-help very low. And, over time, maybe about eight, ten years, they switch. So, the technical assistance goes down dramatically and the self-help, they're constantly passing responsibility over to the community so that they'll be able to continue without the support or the need of outsiders.

WS: So, this is a big distinction because of the technical assistance can be everything from a small engineering project of how to build the retaining wall, right, all the way up to how do you start a new factory and do this. And, you give them assistance and you let the people figure out what to do once they get it versus self-help is someone coming to you and saying I want to build a brick factory and then you say okay you need so much money and so many machines to build a brick factory. And that, and then you provide the resource with them. The interesting thing about these two things of technical assistance and self-help is that last night, actually, on Channel 9 or Channel 11 on the TV, they played the community meeting in Santa Barbara County for the Montecito mudslide, two hours playing on TV from 6 to 8, right. And, I was watching the community talk to the county people and stuff. And, this is the, this is what was going on. It was some community assistance, some self-help, you know what do we do and how do we do it. And, technical assistance says is it going to rain next week and is it going to rain
more than an inch and a half or two inches? So, there was this mix going on. And, I could just see this book being played out in Montecito, right. And, they really need this, but they do. But, the fact is that they were the two major things that they were looking for. You know, should I really, they were asking should I leave my house? Because, is the mountain going to come down on us again and all the boulders going to come and you going to catch the boulders and stop the mud? And, everything like that. And the poor, I mean, the people in the County of Santa Barbara who were in the meeting, they ran a good meeting. They had the sheriff there, the county executive, the emergency management person, engineer, and everything else. They ran it really well. And, they were very honest, right, what they knew and what they didn't. And, of course, no one can tell you how much it's going to rain next week, you know, one inch, two inch, exactly, because they depend on the weather service, right, another technical support issue. So, this idea of technical support is always there. And, you can be a fairly wealthy community like Montecito. And, the reason that Montecito is actually vulnerable is Montecito, and everyone who's gone to LA has passed Montecito and said oh lovely house up there and might even have gone up and seen the Zen Temple and, you know, meditated there for 15 minutes. Montecito's an unincorporated area of Santa Barbara County. It's not a city. And so, it's dependent on the county of Santa Barbara for everything. For sheriff services, for technical services, everything else. So, it really is, in some sense, needy, right, in this particular point. And, they have to create their own vision going forward to do this. So, some of the things you say, I was watching last night saying see, yeah, they need Alaniz there and, to tell them what to do. And so this, for everyone here, if you work in any development or recovery situation, you're always going to be asked to do these two things, technical assistance and self-help. And, the fact is that the technical assistance part, you know, is based on, I think, a little bit more rational, rational thing. How do you build a retaining wall? What you have to do in the self-help is how do you, how do you move people along in an aspirational kind of way, at the same time you need to build the retaining wall so the mountain doesn't fall down on you? Right? So, there is, there is a, you know, sometimes one goes before the other and you need both. One of the things, in this particular book, is that, during this period, there's a discussion of the water systems. And, it turns out that, water systems and infrastructure systems are a key in this valley. And that, one of the settlements has water, electric all the time, sewage, but only water three days week and the other one has water all the time. And, that's the difference in the infrastructure investments. But, the one that has water only three days a week and electric is seen as a more safe and better, you know, community because it is this, it goes beyond the infrastructure investment here, it goes on, basically, personal safety. You talk about path, you talked about path dependence. And, why did you choose this framework for your story? And then, can you tell us a little bit more about why path dependence becomes important for you? I mean, for a sociologist to write in this way is refreshing, right, to do that. And then, afterwards, after you explain about why you chose path dependence and why it's important to you, how, if you applied path dependence to Puerto Rico right now, how do you see the progress and outcomes in Puerto Rico in 5, 10, 15 years?

RA: Geez, not easy Bill. So, the first.

WS: That's why you asked me to do this, right? He called me up and gave me a talk.
RA: So, I think, so disasters, I think, generally perturbations, we can really think of them as an opportunity to effect change, significant change, not just an infrastructure like rebuilding the electrical, the failing electrical grid in Puerto Rico, but also cultural as well. So, it's a moment, again, where people are shaken up and have to look, as one of our colleagues says, it kind of tears away the cloak over society. And so, I think it becomes an opportunity to change not only what we see but our belief systems and our norms and our values. And I think path dependency helps us explain this because only a moment, it's only a moment, when this happens, very soon people are ready to retrench and go back into what they knew beforehand. They're, people want to relax into, even if it's an unhealthy cultural environment, it's what they know, generally. So, they're more willing to kind of fall back into that than move forward and try and live a different way of life. So, I think path dependency helps us see this moment of opportunity for cultural change. So, for Puerto Rico, I think Puerto Rico, and I don't know the case very well, so, I'm only speculating. But, I think I would ask the question what was some of the big cultural problems, say, political corruption, that was happening in Puerto Rico and how can they utilize this moment to develop new value and new norms and new strategies that people buy into that then can start to shift and change and become integrated in a way that this is that corruption wouldn't happen in the future? Or, for example, people coming together to support each other. If this is a moment when neighbors are really helping neighbors, when beforehand they didn't, how can they keep that going, this idea of reciprocity and working together for the common good? How can they keep that cultural value moving forward, if it wasn't there in the first place? So, I think it's really an opportunity, again, we can look at the university. When you first arrive at the university, when you first move to a new place, how can you, what are the norms and values there, but, how can you shape and change those norms and values because you have this kind of break in what's normal?

WS: You write that as successful resettlements require a clear strategy, a lot of folks on recovery talk about that. How do you develop such a strategy under the stress to help people who are victims of a natural disaster? In the case studies that you've presented here, you really talk about the fact that neither of the NGO's that you studied really wanted to be a community developer. They were dragged into this by other forces. So, it struck me that it would be difficult to develop a strategy when the technical assistance giver or the self-help giver doesn't want to be there. But, they can't do anything because the people are there and you can't use them. So, how do you really develop a successful, you know strategy, what does that involve?

RA: Yeah, I think it involves, it's a very messy process. But, I think when I say clear strategy, I think it would be an organization going in. So, I was invited to go after the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 by a nonprofit out of Florida. And, I went there with them for 10 days to look at a rebuilding or recreating a new settlement out of Port-au-Prince, which is, as you know, devastated. And, they wanted to build a new resettlement of 500 houses for 500 families and a factory, a clothing making factory to make sure that they had the economic kind of motor to support this resettlement. And, I said that's awesome. Like, this is sounding really good. And, I give them props for asking a sociologist, they were all architects, engineers, and business people, for thinking that there's maybe relationships and power that are part of this situation.
And, what I told them is that strategy doesn't have to necessarily be this really definitive like this is what we're doing, but rather, the strategy has to be, I think, more of that understanding that there is going to be technical assistance but also understanding that the organization's not going to be there for a long time, that the strategy can't be just about houses, that they have to think about the long term social relationships in the resettlement. And that, the organization, I argue in the book, organizations who do resettlement should plan on sticking around for about ten years to support the social development of these resettlements. We build houses, that's fundamentally problematic because all of the inequality and power relationships that were there before could, potentially, and more likely will be more problematic in the future because it's such a vulnerable population it's such a vulnerable moment for people. So, if there were somebody, and this happened throughout the resettlements, some people had more money coming into the resettlement. And so, they would find out ways to buy more of the land of that resettlement which already created inequality. They found ways, for example, to utilize, to negotiate the political process so that only their family members could use the sports field. So, if it's not done well and a strategy is not embedded to think about the social consequences of the resettlement, I think that it's really going to fall apart. Everything, so I studied seven resettlements in total. And, I interviewed all of the nonprofits that worked with them. And, EVERY single resettlement, or organization that I talked to, each one of them, I asked them so what theory or what kind of idea did you use about this community development and resettlement? Each one said we have no idea. We have no clue what we're doing. We're doing the best that we can. And, in some cases, they said we don't even want to be here but there's nobody else. So we have to, we just have to keep going because there's nobody else to help these people. And so, I think that that's part of the strategy too is, if you're going to ask for donations to build a resettlement, ask for donations, not just to have that nice spreadsheet of infrastructure, but to say, okay, behind that we have all of these social development projects. We're going to do a community empowerment. We're going to have social events to get people together. We're going to support the soccer team. We're going to do all of these things and we're going to make sure that the political process is transparent. Because, otherwise, especially in these countries. And, it's difficult if you haven't lived there. But, a lot of these countries have some cultural bad habits, I guess, of taking advantage of the political process for their own familial gain or not, you know, just really focusing on their family first and not necessarily on the benefit of the community. So, if you can protect the community from that by having rules and support from an organization, I think that the long term consequences aren't just going to be beneficial for that community specifically, I think that'll have ripple effects for the rest of that area and potentially for the rest of the country.

WS: In the fundamental practical point of view, if you were asked to go and run an organization, how would you develop a strategy? What would that entail?

RA: The strategy would be one, I think getting as many stakeholders as possible into a room and talking, knowing that it's going to be a messy, messy project, but, thinking about that every single organization I talk to, they had no strategy at all. So, if you can at least have some kind of strategy saying yeah we're going to build infrastructure and we're going to make sure that people trust each other and there's going to be low crime. I think that's better than what a lot
of these organizations did. The one that did the best was the one that had the clearest goal that they had worked with the stakeholders from the very beginning to design this long term process and vision to create and make sure that everybody was onboard and bought into it and worked together to create that vision.

WS: Well, I think that that’s good, I mean most, around the world, unless you’re, you know, the UN, you know, high commissioner for refugees, no one goes into do a, to help a community and expects to spend ten years doing it, even five years. Most, even national governments don't do that. The Japanese had the great eastern earthquake and tsunami in 2010 are still in some of these cities seven years later and they've spent a trillion yen and they don't want to be there right. It’s hard for you to get someone to do this. In the U.S., our structure in the U.S. is very short term. The Federal Government is never involved in something for the long term because we leave it to the states. So, the state is responsible for doing this and then down to the cities. So, we don’t even have the mechanism to do that. You create a new kind of term here, first time I've seen this term called SAGE, which is called Sustain, Accompany, Guide, and Empower. It sounds something you do at the pep rally, okay, all right. Okay, this sounds a bit like a religious philosophy. So, how did you come to decide on the sage components and the relevancy for resettlements? I mean, you could have put together anything. SAGE sounds good but.

RA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, I wanted it to sound good.

WS: Okay.

RA: So, wisdom.

WS: Yeah.

RA: So, it's the acronym, Sustain, Accompany, Guide, and Empower. I was trying to—that really fits with that self-help versus technical assistance that we were talking about. SAGE is the mechanism, or is a way of combining those two together. So, you have to sustain, meaning you have to sustain that community giving them and supporting them with resources for a long time. You have to accompany them, meaning that, you have to continue giving them that technical assistance over time and walk with them instead of just handing a building over and leaving. You have to guide the process of cultural change. And then, you have to empower, meaning, you have to hand over responsibility to the local people. So, I was trying to really combine the two together so that, potentially an organization wouldn't have to fight with themselves about well do we do technical assistance or self-help? Here's kind of a nice acronym to think about the way to do community development in resettlements.

WS: And, is the SAGE applied to the level of the organization that helps or is it the level of the household?

RA: It's the organization working with resettlement leadership.
WS: Okay.

RA: And, hopefully, if there's some kind of democratic leadership, then, households will have some ways to, to respond to these issues. For example, if they feel like it's too heavy handed, they can push back against it. Or, if they feel like they're not getting enough support then they can share that with the supporting organization.

WS: You say that, as an outcome, the success of creating community can be measured by how people treat each other, okay. That's great. Is it the social dimension that's the difference between the constructing a resettlement and fostering communities? Is it the social dimension that's the key thing, if they treat each other well, people will be happier?

RA: I, fundamentally think so. And, Gandhi once noted, you know, if you, maybe it was Gandhi, Mandela, if you really want to know.

WS: Maybe it was Jeff Armstrong.

RA: Jeff Armstrong, maybe not. If you want to know how well an organization runs, ask the secretary, ask the janitor, ask the person at the bottom. And, I think, fundamentally, that's it. At the end of the day, if you want to know how healthy a place is, ask the least, quote unquote, important person and they will tell you how good it is to be in this organization, community, etcetera, department. And so, I think, fundamentally, that's what we should be attempting to do is ask the least important person. Ask the children how are things going for you? Are you, can you play, are you, do you have friends here? Ask the single mothers, do you feel like you have enough support? Are you able to live a life that you want to? And in that way they, that will be a good sign, a good measure of how healthy that community is. And, the one example that I gave, right, those women wouldn't even leave their houses. They were afraid to leave their houses. Or, the other community that I studied, they were so afraid of being robbed that they would never leave their house unattended. One family member always had to stay in the house for fear that somebody would immediately jump in, take everything they owned, even though it was locked and they had, you know, gates over the, gates and everything, take everything they own. So, what kind of, what kind of community or resettlement is that where you can't even leave your house? So, that's what I think we need to think about is the way we do resettlement now is making people's lives marginal and, in some cases, a lot worse. We can do it a lot better. Now, governments, organizations are going to push back. They don't want to spend the money to do this. But, I think, in the long term benefit, would it be better to have a healthy resettlement that turns into a community that can protect and take care of itself, or, is it less expensive to do it that way or is it less expensive to let it fall apart and let a gang come in and have even a stronger hold, a stronghold, essentially, to then do their work and have to have, in one case, the Brazilian Special Forces come in to kick out that gang? As happened in that resettlement that I told you about with the women. It took years, you may know about this, years before the government finally brought in this task force to kick out that gang. And,
how expensive was it instead of spending that money helping those women develop their own sense of community?

WS: That's a great answer. And, the time makes a big difference when you look at these kinds of books and the reporting of the fields stuff because time changes all kinds of things. When I started work in Honduras doing the [inaudible] plan and then another plan for the Mayan settlement in the north, it was fairly safe. You could get around the country pretty easy, you can go and, USAID had a big office in Tegucigalpa, the center. It turned out that, in 2001, the USAID office was the second largest unit of USAID in the world, in the world. Only Egypt, only the Egyptian one was bigger in terms of staff and stuff. So, it was a big deal, right. They were putting lots of infrastructure in it. By 2008, the USAID had closed the office in Honduras and every, all the entire 150 left the country. But, during that 8 year period, it had gotten so dangerous that even USAID quit the country, you know, and left, you know, which says that these settlements, which are basically fragile units, from Strangers to Neighbors, in these kind of new resettlements, you're taking a lot of strangers and you're putting them together and trying to create community and change them to neighbors, that's a very nice title. But, in order to do that, having safety is important. I mean, basically, the feeling of security has an overriding set of things. I like the one in the forest area a lot, from its physical design point of view, because they put in so much money and infrastructure, which was unusual in these projects where you could actually get water and they put that water line ten kilometers away and they got it out of the mountains and pumps and everything else. So, I was very happy when I was there to see all the infrastructure and the house designs and three different kinds of designs and stuff like that. But, had no sense of how the dynamics of life was going to be. And, you write about the dynamics of life, right. And, the fact is, no matter what you build and how you build it, it’s the dynamics of life that have to be regenerated. Now, this is all done, and I'm going to tell the audience. All of what he writes about here, all the resettlements and the [inaudible] Valley and the seven one, there’s actually more than that by different NGO's round the world, mostly faith based ones, this is all done without the help of the national government or even the local government. This is all money coming from raw building housing projects there. And when I was working, I remember one day in, I was in [inaudible] and I met these very nice people from Toronto, they had just arrived and they were representing some church in Toronto. And, they actually came with a bag full of money. They had this bag full of money, right. And, they were going to help, they were going to build some housing. So, they, I found them, said well we need to get a site, some land, buy a piece of land because we're going to build some housing and help people, right. And, they brought the resources down to do that. But, this is an external set of resources. So, as opposed to what we see here in the U.S. or in other countries, this, these are all done by third parties organizations, NGO's which create, again, a full sense of, you know, longevity. How long you going to be there? Because, there is no stability going on. And so, it’s an important kind of idea of, because, every one of the NGO's are going to operate differently. And it's the story of Haiti right. You have 10,000 NGO's, you know, and people don’t like that but they need them. So, you learn something from the fact that when the NGO's are asked to do this job which they think is right, you're going to get different outcomes. The outcomes aren't going to be the same because none of them are there, you
know, for this long term, which, I think, is the big point that you're making. I mean you, if you want to be a community developer, you've got to stay in the community for a long time.

RA: Or, if you're going to do resettlement, you should partner with a community development organization. One thing to note that Bill said, and sorry I didn't bring this up earlier. The reason I keep bringing up crime and violence, Honduras had, it was, and it's still pretty close, the most violent country in the world, has the highest homicide rate in the world outside of warring countries. So, the United States, when I wrote the book, the United States has a murder rate of 5 per 100,000 people. Mexico has a murder rate of about 11 to 100,000 people. Honduras had 89. And, it wasn't just, again, it's like setting buses of people on fire kind of murder. So that's, so security is a critical issue which is why it's such a focus of the book. It's something that's hard for us to understand. You can't be outside at night, you can't even go to the grocery, you can't walk to the grocery store because you're potentially going to get kidnapped or robbed or something. So, that is one of the big struggles that people, that these resettlements have. Not only are they just trying to build their lives together, they're trying to prevent or trying to protect their families from this massive violence that surrounds them. So, one thing that one of these settlements did, [inaudible], what they did was they were being targeted from theft. And so, a car would pull up, stop in front of a house in the middle of the night, and rob, hold up the people in the household and rob them, stuff the stuff in the car and then take off again. So, the community came together and said, we are going to watch for anybody who doesn't look like somebody from the community. And, every night, we're going to send people out with whistles that, and keep an eye on the entire community and blow the whistle. And, if anybody hears a whistle, everybody comes out with their machetes or pitchforks or whatever it is and stop that from happening. And, in that way, the community was able to self-regulate because the police wouldn't do anything. And so, I think, by them trusting each other and trusting that the person, the neighbor that was supposed to walk the street that night did so, it actually made them safer because they couldn't trust the government to do it for them. Could it make them more unsafe because they're just kind of relaxed into it? I guess that's a potential. But I, the threat is so real that I don't think they'll get mold into just relaxing into it. Thank you for the question though.

WS: Thank you.

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