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“Educate the Masses to Change Their Minds”

China’s Forced Relocation of Rural Tibetans



“Educate the Masses to Change Their Minds”

China’s Forced Relocation of Rural Tibetans

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Map



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Glossary

CHP	Comfortable Housing Project
PRC	People's Republic of China
TAP	Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture
TAR	Tibet Autonomous Region
UN	United Nations

Summary

Since 2016, the Chinese government has dramatically accelerated the relocation of rural villagers and herders in Tibet. The government says that these relocations—often to areas hundreds of kilometers away—are voluntary and that they will “improve people’s livelihood” and “protect the ecological environment.”

This report, drawing on over 1,000 official Chinese media articles between 2016 and 2023 as well as government publications and academic field studies, shows that China’s own media reports in many cases contradict the claims that all those relocated gave their consent.

The news articles instead indicate that participation in “whole-village relocation” programs in Tibet is in effect compulsory. The articles describe high levels of reluctance to relocate among many Tibetans from those villages. In one case, 200 households out of 262 in the village did not initially want to relocate to a new location which was nearly 1,000 kilometers away. In another village scheduled for relocation, all the residents except for a Chinese Communist Party activist initially disagreed with the plan to move the village. In all cases, the reports say these villagers eventually gave their consent to move. Human Rights Watch has not found any case where a village or any of its members scheduled for relocation has been able to avoid being moved.

The official press reports indicate the extreme forms of persuasion—that is, coercion—used by officials to pressure villagers and nomadic people or nomads to agree to whole-village relocation. These methods include repeated home visits; denigrating the intellectual capacity of the villagers to make decisions for themselves; implicit threats of punishment; banning of criticism; and threats of disciplinary action against local officials who fail to meet targets. In some cases, officials of increasing seniority visited families at their homes to gain their “consent,” visits that sometimes were repeated over several years. Some official press reports and videos obtained by Human Rights Watch show officials telling residents that essential services would be cut to their current homes if they did not move. Others showed authorities openly threatening villagers who voiced disagreements about the relocations, accusing them of “spreading rumors” and ordering officials to crack down on such actions “swiftly and resolutely”—implying administrative

and criminal penalties. This report includes three case studies that show in detail the timelines, objectives, arguments, and methods used to obtain the “consent” of residents of entire villages to relocate.

These coercive tactics can be traced to pressure placed on local officials by higher-level authorities who routinely characterize the relocation program as a non-negotiable, politically critical policy coming straight from the national capital, Beijing, or from Lhasa, the regional capital. This leaves local officials no flexibility in implementation at the local level and requires them to obtain 100 percent agreement from affected villagers to relocate.

In addition to whole-village relocations, there is also a second form of relocation in Tibet—that of individual households. This form of relocation typically involves officials selecting poorer households for relocation in areas presented as more suitable for income generation. While participants can decline to take part, Human Rights Watch found in many cases that officials provided families misleading information about the economic benefits of relocation to gain their consent. From previous projects, it should be evident to the officials that many rural people relocated would be unable to find sustainable work in their new environment.

Even surveys carried out by official scholars at relocation sites in Tibet—which tend not to criticize the government—variously concluded that many of those relocated “cannot find suitable jobs to support their families,” and “satisfaction with relocation is low.” A 2014 review of an earlier relocation program in eastern Tibet found that even after 10 years, 69 percent of relocatees were still facing financial difficulties and 49 percent wished that they could move back to their original homes on the grasslands. False expectations created by officials who knowingly provide rural Tibetans misleading or false information about the economic benefit of relocation likely contributes to the dissatisfaction.

In both whole-village and individual-household relocations, Chinese law requires those who have been relocated to demolish their former homes to deter them from returning. Our research found that officials in Tibet are often enforcing this requirement.

Official statistics suggest that between 2000 and 2025, the Chinese authorities will have relocated over 930,000 rural Tibetans (see Appendix I). Most of these relocations—over

709,000 people or 76 percent of these relocations—have taken place since 2016. Among these 709,000 people relocated, 140,000 are moved as part of the whole village relocation drives, 567,000 as part of individual household relocations

In this same period between 2000 and 2025, 3.36 million rural Tibetans have been affected by other government programs requiring them to rebuild their houses and to adopt a sedentary way of life if they are nomads, without necessarily being relocated.

Given that there are 4.55 million Tibetans living in rural areas in the People's Republic of China, these figures suggest that most rural Tibetans have been impacted by Chinese government relocation or rehousing policies in the past two decades. Many of them have had to move or rebuild their homes more than once.

While such mass relocations of residents have been occurring elsewhere in poor rural areas in China, these drives risk causing a devastating impact on Tibetan communities. Together with current Chinese government programs to assimilate Tibetan schooling, culture, and religion into those of the “Chinese nation,” these relocations of rural communities erode or cause major damage to Tibetan culture and ways of life, not least because most relocation programs in Tibet move former farmers and pastoralists to areas where they cannot practice their former livelihood and have no choice but to seek work as wage laborers in off-farm industries.

The relocation program in Tibet contravenes international human rights law standards. International law prohibits “forced evictions,” which have been defined as the removal of individuals, families, or communities against their will from their homes or land without access to appropriate forms of legal or other protection. Forced evictions include those that lack meaningful consultation or compensation, and which do not consider “all feasible alternatives” to relocation. Otherwise, lawful evictions must still be carried out in compliance with relevant international human rights law and “in accordance with general principles of reasonableness and proportionality.”

As detailed below, Chinese government policies that pressure or coerce Tibetans to relocate do not meet these standards. Authorities do not explore “all feasible alternatives” prior to relocation, ensure that those evicted receive “adequate compensation,” have a right to return where possible if dissatisfied, or other procedural protections.

Recommendations

To the Government of the People's Republic of China

The authorities involved in relocations in Tibet should:

- Impose a moratorium on relocations in Tibet until an independent, expert review of existing policies and practices is carried out to determine their compliance with Chinese laws and standards and international law concerning forced evictions.
- Ensure all relocations are carried out in compliance with international human rights standards, including exploring “all feasible alternatives” before eviction, paying adequate compensation, and providing legal remedies and legal aid to those affected. Mechanisms should be established to ensure that potential relocatees have full information about the rationale and plans for relocations.
- Cease coercing or otherwise improperly pressuring people to consent to government plans for relocation and appropriately penalize or prosecute any officials for doing so.
- End all quotas, deadlines, or targets requiring officials to persuade a fixed number of people to agree to relocate.
- Penalize any officials making unsubstantiated or unverified claims to prospective relocatees about the supposed benefits of relocation.
- Stop requiring those relocated to demolish their former homes.
- Offer support to academic institutions to conduct and publish regular and independent academic surveys of people's views both prior to relocation and afterwards, and take corrective action based on their views.
- Provide potential relocatees an opportunity at no expense to undertake site visits to a potential relocation site.
- Conduct regular, inclusive consultations with potential relocatees, including with regards to site selection preferences.
- Recognize and uphold the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association to ensure that Tibetans and others are able to engage in peaceful activities to raise concerns and criticisms, including of government relocation policies.
- Allow those adversely affected by relocation to return to their original land or to be resettled in an area nearby so they can continue their former livelihood.

- Grant access to Tibetan areas as requested by several United Nations special rapporteurs.
- Revise relevant Chinese laws to ensure that they comply with international standards concerning forced evictions in compliance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

To the UN Human Rights Council and Other UN Bodies

- The UN Human Rights Council should undertake an impartial and independent investigation into human rights violations committed by the Chinese government in Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and across China, as recommended by over 50 UN independent human rights experts.
- The UN high commissioner for human rights should exercise his independent monitoring and reporting mandate to collect information, speak out publicly on his findings, prepare reports on the human rights situation in Tibet, and keep the Human Rights Council regularly informed.
- UN special procedures should continue to document and publicly report on human rights violations in Tibet by the Chinese authorities within their respective mandates.

To Foreign Governments:

- Urge the Chinese government to respect the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association of Tibetans so that they are able to raise concerns with the government, including of relocation policies;
- Call on the Chinese government to grant access to Tibetan areas as requested by several United Nations special rapporteurs.

Methodology

Chinese authorities impose severe limitations on research into human rights conditions in Tibet. They do not permit access for independent researchers to Tibet except in extremely rare cases, and then only to study subjects that they do not consider sensitive or likely to produce findings critical of the government. Foreigners are not allowed in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) even as tourists without special permits and official guides.

Tibetans face severe risks of repercussions including potential arrest and prosecution if they are known to communicate with foreigners, whether in Tibet or abroad, about political issues or conditions in Tibet. Ethnic Han Chinese who are citizens of the People's Republic of China can also face significant risks, including criminal charges, if they speak with journalists or discuss or research politically sensitive topics, especially with a foreign-based human rights organization.

Chinese officials and diplomats rarely make themselves available to researchers from human rights organizations, and if they do, almost always provide standardized responses that deny any criticisms of the Chinese government. These restrictions on research have increased under the rule of Xi Jinping.

This report differs from the two previous reports by Human Rights Watch on relocation and rehousing in Tibet in 2007 and 2013.¹ Those had been based largely on information gained from interviews with Tibetans who had left Tibet after participating in relocation programs. Information of that kind is no longer available to researchers: first, because the Chinese authorities tightened security along TAR borders in 2008; second, because the authorities have drastically reduced access to passports for residents of the TAR since 2012.² As a

¹ Human Rights Watch, *"No One Has the Liberty to Refuse": Tibetan Herders Forcibly Relocated in Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and the Tibetan Autonomous Region*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2007), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/06/10/no-one-has-liberty-refuse/tibetan-herders-forcibly-relocated-gansu-qinghai-sichuan>; Human Rights Watch, *They Say We Should be Grateful: Mass Rehousing and Relocation Programs in Tibetan Areas of China*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2013), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/06/27/they-say-we-should-be-grateful/mass-rehousing-and-relocation-programs-tibetan>.

² Human Rights Watch, *One Passport, Two Systems: China's Restrictions on Foreign Travel by Tibetans and Others*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2015), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/07/13/one-passport-two-systems/chinas-restrictions-foreign-travel-tibetans-and-others>.

result, in the last 10 to 15 years, few Tibetans have been able to travel abroad to provide first-hand accounts of conditions inside Tibet.

However, because of the proliferation of digital news media within China, the volume of news published by official Chinese media has increased in recent years, particularly in terms of county-level and township-level news reports. These reports always follow strict propaganda guidelines and only contain information that is seen as praising or endorsing the policies of the Chinese Communist Party. Nevertheless, this increase in grassroots-level news reports makes it possible, at least in some cases, to follow in greater detail than before the aims and at times practices of local officials charged with carrying out relocation programs in Tibet.

As a result, this report is based primarily on publicly available governmental publications in Chinese and Tibetan, such as newspapers, online news channels, and websites run by government offices. We focused on about 1,000 articles from these sources that were published between January 2016 and the present. These included news about relocation drives, their implementation, numbers of relocatees, initial reluctance by residents to relocate, visits by officials to persuade residents to relocate, and other factors.

We also drew on academic studies that feature extensive research carried out by ethnic Chinese and Tibetan scholars in Tibet or related areas, and a smaller number of studies in English by scholars based outside China who carried out fieldwork in Tibet before the recent intensification of restrictions on access to the area.

These sources are supplemented by a handful of accounts provided by overseas Tibetans who have occasional contact with family members and who have a strong record of providing unvarnished and detailed, often verbatim, accounts of those contacts. Identifying details relating to those accounts have been withheld to protect the sources.

The term Tibet is used in this report to refer to areas within the PRC that were traditionally inhabited by Tibetans. It includes the eastern parts of the Tibetan plateau, which the Chinese government has, since the 1950s, organized into “Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures” (TAPs) within the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan. It also includes the western and central parts of the Tibetan plateau, known as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), a province-level administration established by China in 1965. In

this report, Tibet refers to both the TAPs and the TAR, unlike statements by the Chinese government that use the word Tibet to refer only to the TAR.

In this report, the terms “pastoralists,” “nomads,” and “herders” all refer to nomadic Tibetans who move around with their herds.

I. Background

Since the 1950s, the Chinese government has carried out the involuntary relocation of about 70 million people throughout China, mainly for urban construction.³ However, in 1982 the government began to develop a second mode of relocation. This involved using mass relocation as a strategy for poverty alleviation in areas where it considers ecological conditions unable to sustain farming or other forms of livelihood. The government piloted this “ecological migration” (Ch.: shengtai yimin, 生态移民) in an arid area of Gansu and Ningxia provinces known as the “Sanxi” in the 1980s and 1990s. In that case, authorities moved over three million villagers in 10 years to uncultivated land in the same county or province where conditions were better suited for irrigation and farming.⁴ Based on increases in rural income among the relocatees and other factors, the government declared the Sanxi program a success.

From 2001, the Chinese government expanded the use of such ecological migration as a means of poverty alleviation throughout the country, particularly in the poorer, western regions, including Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet. By the end of 2015, China had relocated more than 12 million people from poor households from ecologically unfavorable locations, making ecological migration one of the largest relocation programs in China, if not the world.⁵ In 2018, China released a White Paper that stated that “relocation for poverty alleviation has become the most effective way to get rid of poverty in areas where ‘the soil and water of a place cannot support the local people.’”⁶ A further 16 million

³ Guoqing Shi, Jian Zhou, and Qingnian Yu, “Resettlement in China,” in *Impacts of large dams: A global assessment*, ed. Cecilia Tortajada, Dogan Altinbilek, and Asit K. Biswas (Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2012), p. 219-20.

⁴ Peiling Li and Xiaoyi Wang, “Introduction: Poverty Reduction, Ecological Migration and Sustainable Development,” in *Ecological Migration, Development and Transformation*, ed. Peiling Li and Xiaoyi Wang (Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2016), p. 1-20; Xihong Shu, “The History and Present Condition of Ecological Migration in Ningxia,” in *Ecological Migration, Development and Transformation*, ed. Peiling Li and Xiaoyi Wang (Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg, 2016), p. 21-46.

⁵ Kevin Lo and Mark Wang, “How voluntary is poverty alleviation resettlement in China?” *Habitat International* 73 (2018): doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2018.01.002.

⁶ National Development and Reform Commission, “China’s Policy for Relocation and Poverty Alleviation (国家发展改革委发布《中国的易地扶贫搬迁政策》白皮书),” March 30, 2018, https://www.ndrc.gov.cn/fzggw/jgsj/dqs/sjdt/201803/t20180330_1050716.html. On the political uses of the expression “the soil and water of a place cannot support the local people,” see Yonten Nyima, “‘When the Land Cannot Support the People Any More’: The Utility of an Official Formulation in Resettlement in Tibet,” *Inner Asia* 25 (2023), doi.org/10.1163/22105018-02501007.

people were relocated during the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016–2020) as part of Party Secretary Xi Jinping’s signature drive to eradicate poverty in China.⁷

The Chinese government’s use of relocation as a poverty-alleviation tool coincided with a new approach in the international community from around 2000 that called for a decrease in the use of involuntary relocation.⁸ The World Bank declared in 2004 that, as an overall objective, “involuntary resettlement should be avoided where feasible, or minimized, exploring all viable alternative project designs.”⁹ The Chinese government considers its poverty-alleviation mode of relocation in line with this global approach, and has emphasized the importance of voluntariness in its relocations.¹⁰

Chinese government documents often claim that there is a mass, popular wish to relocate because of unsustainable ecological conditions in a particular location. Government documents therefore often state, as a given, that local residents want to relocate and are only waiting for the government to arrange this. The 2018 White Paper on Poverty-Alleviation Relocation, for example, says that in all cases, “the poor have a strong desire to relocate, but are unable to relocate due to their own abilities and income levels.” As a result, it concludes that in these programs “the Chinese government complies with the people’s desire for a better life.”¹¹

The poverty-alleviation strategy of the TAR government is based on the same principles of the Sanxi model of poverty alleviation: it contends that poverty among Tibetans is an inevitable result of environmental conditions, and that therefore relocation is the solution. “The hardest nut to crack,” the TAR governor said when he described the relocation target for the region, “is relocating people living in impoverished regions with an inhospitable

⁷ Hongzhang Xu, Xinyuan Xu, and Jamie Pittock, “Understanding social issues in a new approach: The role of social media in displacement and resettlement,” *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 7 (2023) 100463, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2023.100463>, p. 1.

⁸ Lo and Wang, “How voluntary is poverty alleviation resettlement in China?” p. 34.

⁹ World Bank, *Involuntary Resettlement Sourcebook: Planning and Implementation in Development Projects*, (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, 2004), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/206671468782373680/Involuntary-resettlement-sourcebook-planning-and-implementation-in-development-projects>, p. 5, 371.

¹⁰ See the National Development and Reform Commission, “National Plan for Poverty-Alleviation Relocation During the 13th Five-year-plan Period,” September 2016, <https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-10/31/5126509/files/86e8eb65acf44596bf21b2747aec6b48.pdf>, p.6. See also Lo and Wang “How voluntary is poverty alleviation resettlement in China?” p. 35.

¹¹ National Development and Reform Commission, “China’s Policy for Relocation and Poverty Alleviation.”

natural environment and difficult production and living conditions. As these regions can't sustain local livelihoods, the only solution is to relocate their residents so that they have new development opportunities and thereby tackle poverty at its root.”¹²

In the case of Tibetans, however, evidence that these areas cannot support human life has generally not been detailed in public documents apart from broad references to the high altitude of locations, their distance from urban centers, and factors such as “deep mountains and valleys.” In fact, many of the Tibetan households relocated as part of the “Extremely High Altitude Relocation” program are not registered as poor and are relatively prosperous.¹³

In practice, however, poverty-related relocation in Tibet differs diametrically from the original Sanxi model, in that the Sanxi farmers were moved to a new location but were able to continue their existing form of livelihood there. In many of the relocation programs in Tibet, those relocated are moved to locations where they cannot continue their former livelihoods or lifestyle. Often, for example, herders are moved to farming areas and farmers are moved to urban or peri-urban areas where they will be entering the labor market without the Chinese language skills or the vocational experience to do so.¹⁴

¹² “A Balanced Effort: Anti-poverty efforts in Tibet explained,” *Beijing Review*, March 21, 2017, www.bjreview.com/Nation/201703/t20170321_800091743.html. (The TAR’s 13th Five-Year Plan for Poverty Alleviation says: “On the premise of industrial support, three years will be used to implement ex-situ poverty alleviation and relocation for the 263,129 poor people who have ‘one side of the water and soil cannot support the other.’” http://www.xizang.gov.cn/zwgk/xxfb/ghjh_431/201902/t20190223_61971.html.)

¹³ Registered poor households had already been relocated on an individual basis, usually locally, from villages where, later, whole-village relocation was imposed. This report on Amdo county, for example, shows that poverty alleviation had been completed there by February 2019, 10 months before whole-village relocation began. Those remaining in the villages by the time whole-village relocation started would therefore not have been poor households. “[Looking back at 70 years and looking forward to Xinaqu] - Re-entering the fifth stop on the Tibetan Road - Amdo County's relocation poverty alleviation work has been basically completed (【回眸 70 年 展望新那曲】--重走进藏路第五站——安多县易地搬迁扶贫工作基本完成---有家有事业),” September 29, 2019, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/aKpDfsmEq-VpPPwiTgd7Kw> archived at <https://archive.ph/VGygi> on April 15, 2024.

¹⁴ For example, satellite photos show that the Sinpori resettlement site in Lhokha, to which the 30,000 herders have been moved from grassland areas of Nagchu, has very limited cultivable space. The settlement site of Xiangheyuan in Toelung Dechen county in Lhasa, which houses 6,000 former herders, appears to have no available land for farming, let alone herding (see *Misleading Information in Individual-household Relocation Programs*).



Official ceremony in August 2023, celebrating the mass relocations of 6,000 herders to Xiangheyuan, a multistory development where there is no available land for herders to continue herding. Source: Wumatang Township government, Dangxiong County, Nagqu, TAR (当雄县乌玛塘乡人民政府)

Relocation and Sedentarization of Nomads in the TAPs since 2004

Human Rights Watch has previously published two reports on the Chinese government's practices of poverty-alleviation relocation and ecological migration in Tibet.

"No One Has the Liberty to Refuse," published in 2007, documented the government's policy of requiring Tibetan pastoralists to leave their land, flocks, and sources of income to settle near or in towns.⁴⁵ This policy was part of the ecological migration drive that followed the Sanxi experience, and which the government said was necessary in the Tibetan case to protect pastureland from overgrazing. This policy involved not just relocation but also "sedentarization"—requiring that nomads live in one place, ending their nomadic lifestyle and livelihood. The policy, implemented in the TAPs, involved a total of 1.13 million herders between 2004 and 2010 in two programs: the "Ecological Migration in the Three-

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch, "No One Has the Liberty to Refuse."

River-Source Region” program in Qinghai, and the “Pastoralist Sedentarization” program (see Appendix I).

Human Rights Watch’s 2007 report found that the relocation policies had been implemented without consultation, were effectively compulsory or forced, and in many cases increased the difficulties Tibetans face in sustaining their livelihood. The report concluded that relocations often resulted “in greater impoverishment, ... dislocation and marginalization.”

In response, the Chinese government stated that Human Rights Watch had made “unfounded accusations against Chinese economic policies.”¹⁶ It added that “there is no problem of coercion or relocation” in Tibet,¹⁷ and that the population “welcomed” the relocation programs, which had led to considerable rise in living standards.¹⁸

Human Rights Watch’s second report on relocation in Tibet, “They Say We Should Be Grateful,” published in 2013, examined additional evidence about the settlement and sedentarization of Tibetan herders in a number of the TAPs in Qinghai province.¹⁹ It again found that the relocation had been “forcible,” since in effect it had not allowed herders any options other than to agree to relocate. It also found that many of the concerns raised in the 2007 report about the future of the new sedentarized communities of the former herders had been borne out: some of the new settlements appeared unsustainable, and many of the new residents faced deteriorating living conditions and greater uncertainty

¹⁶ “Party Newspaper Rejects US NGO’s Accusations: Building Homes for Tibetan People Does Not Violate Human Rights (党报再驳美 NGO 指责: 为西藏牧民建房不侵犯人权),” *People’s Daily* (人民日报), January 27, 2012, <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/2012/01-27/3623866.shtml>.

¹⁷ “因此我们这里不存在强迫的问题, 不存在搬迁的问题.” See “The State Council Information Office held a press conference on the economic and social development of the Tibet Autonomous Region (国新办就西藏自治区经济社会发展情况举行新闻发布会),” Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Federal Republic of Germany, June 25, 2007, http://de.china-embassy.gov.cn/chn/zt/zgxz/xzdxhfhz/200706/t20070625_3121455.htm.

¹⁸ “Report distorts facts on Tibet housing project,” *China Daily*, January 28, 2012, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2012-01/28/content_14497756.htm. The proportion of those relocated rather than rehoused on the same site during the first phase of the Comfortable Housing Project was given as 20 percent in a 2007 statement: “Last year, 56,000 households and 290,000 farmers and herdsmen moved to new homes... 80 percent of the farmhouse renovation and housing projects in pastoral areas are on the original site and location. [The location of] about 20 percent may be slightly changed, but they are not relocated far away, but in the original village or place (大概有 20%可能稍微有点变动, 但不是远距离搬迁, 就是原来的村子、原来的地方).” See “The State Council Information Office held a press conference on the economic and social development of the Tibet Autonomous Region (国新办就西藏自治区经济社会发展情况举行新闻发布会),” Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Federal Republic of Germany.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch, “*They Say We Should Be Grateful*.”

about the future. “Irreversible dislocation and marginalization are already observable,” the report concluded, with herders “in effect being forced to trade poor but stable livelihood patterns for the uncertainties of a cash economy in which they are often the weakest actors.” The Chinese authorities did not respond specifically to these findings.

Relocation in the TAR between 2000 and 2013

While the sedentarization programs were being carried out in the TAPs, the Chinese government began implementing three major programs in the TAR that involved either relocation or compulsory rehousing of a total of 2.45 million people.

Of the three programs, one, the “Rangeland Construction and Pastoralist Sedentarization” program, targeted herders (see Appendix I).²⁰ It did not force the herders to move from their pasturelands or to give up their livelihoods. Instead, it required the herders to construct “concentrated housing”—basically, villages instead of dispersed housing—and to contribute 30 percent of the cost of their new houses.²¹

The second, the “Natural Forest Relocation” program, relocated 15,183 Tibetan villagers from an area known as Sa-ngen.²² Three of the villagers told Human Rights Watch that they had not received compensation promised to them by officials in return for relocating, and that “people were facing problems with their livelihood” in the relocation sites.²³

The third of these programs was the “Comfortable Housing Project” (CHP), which was a mixture of compulsory rehousing, some optional rehousing, and relocation. The CHP involved a total of 2.03 million villagers and required many of them to rebuild their houses on sites alongside major roads.

²⁰ “40,900 Tibetan Nomads Settled During the Settlement Project of the Five-Year Plan (十五期间西藏游牧民定居工程使4.09万人实现定居),” *Xinhua*, May 4, 2006, https://www.gov.cn/govweb/jrzg/2006-05/04/content_273598.htm.

²¹ See Yonten Nyima and Emily T. Yeh, “Houses for People and Houses for Goats: Reducing Pastoralist Mobility in Tibet,” *Inner Asia* 25 (2023), doi.org/10.1163/22105018-02502021.

²² See “Tibet implements natural forest protection project to build “ecological barrier in the upper reaches of the Yangtze River” (西藏实施天然林保护工程 建“长江上游生态屏障”)” *Xinhua*, October 7, 2010, https://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2010-10/07/content_1716635.htm.

²³ Human Rights Watch interviews with a 24-year-old woman from Gonjo, Kathmandu, December 30, 2004, and a 28-year-old man from Gonjo, Kathmandu, January 7, 2005. Names withheld.

Human Rights Watch's June 2013 report included a study of the CHP.²⁴ It noted that, while some Tibetans benefited from and welcomed its policies, large numbers did not take part in the programs voluntarily.

An article in the official Chinese media, in response to a summary by Human Rights Watch of these findings, said that the organization had “misinterpret[ed] the Chinese government's supportive policies in the Tibet Autonomous Region” and “deliberately overlooked that the Chinese government's program has improved public services.”²⁵

Relocation of Tibetans since 2016

Since 2016, when China's 13th Five-Year Plan began, there have been five main relocation programs carried out by the Chinese authorities in Tibetan areas (see Appendix I).

Four of these programs took place in the TAR. In many cases, they required people to move hundreds of kilometers from their homes, whereas the earlier relocation programs usually involved relatively short distances:

- The “Targeted Poverty Alleviation” drive moved 254,395 people from poor rural households to locations with better income-generating opportunities.
- The “Sa-ngen Cross-municipality Whole-village Relocation” program,²⁶ which began in October 2017, has been relocating 11,605 Tibetans from an area in Chamdo municipality.²⁷ At least 7,764 people have already been relocated as part of this program.²⁸

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, “*They Say We Should be Grateful*.”

²⁵ Yang Minghong, “Look at Tibet growth without tainted glasses,” *China Daily*, February 6, 2015, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2015-02/06/content_19505682_2.htm.

²⁶ The title of the program includes the phrase “whole-district relocation,” but we have translated this as “whole-village” to make the meaning clearer.

²⁷ The Sa-ngen Relocation program involves the relocation of seven townships, with 49 villages. See Lanying Qin, “An Analysis of Promoting the Sustainable Development of Relocation for Poverty Alleviation in Tibet—Based on the Relocation of Changdu “Sanyan” Area in Tibet (推进西藏易地扶贫搬迁可持续发展探析——基于西藏昌都市“三岩”片区易地搬迁的分析),” *China Tibet Development Forum*, July 28, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/dYojdERN3BwxvCNGYUgShg> archived at <https://archive.ph/ASwJL> on April 15, 2024. One report says that 45 villages are being moved from Sa-ngen, but this is assumed to be an error. “Summary of Poverty Alleviation and Relocation in the “Sanyan” Area: Changing the Land and Soil to Enrich the People, (‘三岩’片区易地扶贫搬迁综述：换一方水土 富了一方人),” September 14, 2018, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/25q71P8f9j_Nm5_MjupbJg archived at <https://archive.ph/smYXu> on April 15, 2024.

²⁸ The Sa-ngen program is part of the TAR “Targeted Poverty Alleviation” program, but, unusually—for reasons that are unclear, and which may relate to planned hydropower construction in the area—it requires entire villages to move, not individual households.

- The “Construction of Well-off Villages in the Border Areas of the TAR” program officially ran from 2017 to 2020, but in fact continued until at least 2021. It placed Tibetans and members of other local ethnic groups in newly constructed or reconstructed villages situated along Tibet’s borders to defend China against “infiltration” from “anti-China forces” in its Himalayan neighbors.²⁹ Official media reports have said that a total of 241,835 people were “involved” in the program.³⁰ However, they have not said precisely how many of these participants were relocated.³¹
- The “Extremely High Altitude Ecological Relocation in the TAR” program began in 2017 and will relocate 130,302 people by 2025,³² of whom 38,126 have already been moved.

The fifth relocation drive targeting Tibetans since 2016 was carried out in the TAPs, relocating 313,192 people. They were likely farmers rather than nomads, as part of “Targeted Poverty Alleviation” programs in those areas.³³

²⁹ See “China’s Tibet builds over 620 prosperous border villages,” *People’s Daily Online*, July 5, 2022, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2022/0705/c90000-10119067.html>; and International Campaign for Tibet, “New ‘defense’ villages and infrastructure being built on Tibet’s border,” December 23, 2019, <https://savetibet.org/new-defense-villages-and-infrastructure-being-built-on-tibets-border>.

³⁰ “As early as July 2017, the People’s Government of the Autonomous Region issued the Construction Plan for Well-off Villages in the Border Areas of the TAR (2017-2020), deciding to implement the construction of well-off villages in 628 border first-and second-line administrative villages across the region (of which 427 are border first-line villages, 201 second-line villages and Chayu 察隅 farms) involving 62,000 households and 242,000 people. The main construction contents include housing improvement, infrastructure, public service facilities, industrial construction, and ecological and habitat construction.” “The construction of moderately prosperous villages in border areas is truly beautiful - the first batch of planned total investment this year is 13.525 billion yuan to implement 395 villages (【边境新貌】边境地区小康村建设得真美丽——今年首批计划总投资 135.25 亿元实施 395 个村),” May 13, 2019, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/lqEmCQblLuEUuGEQgZTGcW> archived at <https://archive.ph/BCtZV> on April 15, 2024.

³¹ The meaning of “involved” is unclear, but the numbers of people actually reported in official media as having been relocated to border villages so far appears to be smaller, so it is likely that a large proportion of these “involved” people were already living in border villages that have been redesignated as “new moderately well-off border villages.”

³² “Extremely High Altitude Ecological Relocation involves 31,721 households in 3 cities (prefectures), 20 counties, 97 townships (towns), and 450 villages (residences) in Shigatse City, Nagqu City, and Ali Prefecture, with a total of 130,302 people.” See “Tibet Vigorously Implements Grassland Ecological Protection and Restoration Projects, to Promote the Construction of a National Grassland Park This Year (西藏大力实施草原生态保护修复工程 今年推进国家草原自然公园建设),” *Tibet Daily*, July 7, 2021, http://m.tibet.cn/cn/index/ecology/202107/t20210707_7028162.html archived at <https://archive.ph/K6z8J> on August 2, 2023.

³³ The Poverty Alleviation program in Qinghai moved over 200,000 people “from uninhabitable areas to newly constructed resettlement sites” between 2016 and 2020. “Reflecting on China’s poverty alleviation journey through the lens of Qinghai province,” *China’s Poverty Reduction Online*, September 8, 2020, http://p.china.org.cn/2020-09/08/content_76681135.htm.

53,568 people were relocated as part of the Poverty Alleviation program in Sichuan province. “Vigorously Advancing in the New Era of Governing Sichuan and Revitalizing Sichuan, Further Leaping Forward | Focus on Rural Revitalization ①: Creating

Taking these five programs together, official statistics indicate that at least 709,494 people have been relocated or are due to be relocated in Tibet since 2016.

The government maintains that the relocation of these Tibetans is essential to reduce poverty, in particular by moving people from what it describes as high-altitude, cold, remote, or infertile areas to locations with more convenient transport access, services, and communications.³⁴ At other times, the authorities contend that the Tibetans must be relocated in order to “return nature to wildlife,” to avoid grassland degradation through overgrazing, or, in a smaller number of cases, to move people from localities with health risks.³⁵ The government says that these relocation programs will all lead to greater economic wealth and higher living standards for rural dwellers.

Whole-village vs individual-household relocation programs

To examine the extent to which relocation is voluntary in Tibet, it is necessary to distinguish between the two main methods officials used to implement their relocation programs: whole-village relocations and individual-household relocations. As explained above, the whole-village method of relocation (Ch.: zhengcun banqian, 整村搬迁) involves moving the entire population of a village to a new location. Since 2017 in the TAR, whole-village relocations involved moving more than 500 villages with over 140,000 residents. Given that the entire village or community at that site needs to be moved, and that the government still requires officials to ensure that the relocation process is, in theory, “voluntary,” officials need to show to their superiors that each household in a village

a New Picture of a Beautiful and Livable Countryside Through Both Internal and External Renovation (踔厉奋发新时代 治蜀兴川再跨越 | 乡村振兴蹲点记①：内外兼修 绘就美丽宜居乡村新画卷),” June 9, 2022, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/DFdJu2U7aFwdeW4K_JxCjw archived at <https://archive.ph/dQlRb> on April 15, 2024; “Poverty alleviation and relocation work in Aba Prefecture during the 13th Five Year Plan period (“十三五”期间阿坝州易地扶贫搬迁工作),” January 12, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/ZFJaTSVWhsf7-KF6gnRWUw> archived at <https://archive.ph/xNoRZ> on April 15, 2024.

34,575 were relocated in Gannan Prefecture, Gansu Province. “Relocation to Address People's Worries and Build a Dream of Moderate Prosperity in Tibetan Villages (易地搬迁解民忧 藏乡筑就小康梦),” January 9, 2021, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/LyMDW43-x_5eKEgzPORc2A archived at <https://archive.ph/fJE8K> on April 15, 2024.

13,879 were relocated in Dechen Prefecture, Yunnan province. “Poverty Alleviation Dynamics: A Historic Leap Forward in Diqing and the Comprehensive Construction of a Moderately Prosperous Society (【脱贫动态】历史性跨越 迪庆全面建成小康社会),” July 8, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/oSw-XCmUnqfWddAEArb9Q> archived at <https://archive.ph/5SJHq> on April 15, 2024.

³⁴ Tibet Autonomous Region Development and Reform Commission, “Tibet Autonomous Region's “13th Five-Year Plan” Period Poverty Alleviation Plan (西藏自治区“十三五”时期脱贫攻坚规划),” November 11, 2018, https://www.xizang.gov.cn/zwgk/xxfb/ghjh_431/201902/t20190223_61971.html.

³⁵ Defined as places “with severe endemic diseases or frequent geological hazards.”

consented to the relocation of that village. The result is that, as shown below, officials have to place increasing pressure on villagers until they give consent.

The second mode of relocation involves just moving individual households (Ch.: danhu banqian, 单户搬迁). Between 2016 and 2020, 567,000 people in Tibet were moved under such programs. The primary rationale for these relocations is not the environmental unsustainability of a location—although officials talk up environmental factors—but reduction of poverty.

This mode of relocation begins with officials selecting a number of households that are officially recognized as poor and proposing that they relocate. In some cases, officials circulate a list with details of one or more potential relocation sites and invite any registered poor households who want to relocate to apply.³⁶ Available evidence so far does not indicate that households that have been invited to join an individual-household relocation program are placed under pressure at that stage. This is partly because the policy design allows flexibility for officials—if one household does not want to relocate, the officials can encourage another household to apply. Relocation, especially if it is within the same area, can be an attractive option for poorer households. We found only two official media reports describing households in such programs choosing not to move,³⁷ but accounts we have received through overseas Tibetans suggest that this does happen.

However, official reports also describe relocation quotas that officials need to fulfill, which are published at the regional level. The TAR Poverty Alleviation Plan for the 13th Five-Year Plan period, for example, instructed officials in 2016 to “strive to complete the poverty-alleviation relocation of 64,000 households with 263,129 registered poor people by the

³⁶ Human Rights Watch received a list of potential relocation sites in January 2023 which showed eight sites in the TAR, with the name of each site, its altitude, distance from the county seat, and amount of subsidy that relocatees would receive (document withheld to protect sources). The source did not accept the invitation to apply for relocation and did not report any repercussions for this.

³⁷ Two official reports mention cases where one or more villagers decided not to move and were able to remain in their homes. “Gurgling reassuring water moisturizes the shepherd’s heart (汨汨放心水 润泽牧人心),” *Tibet Daily*, December 25, 2020, http://epaper.chinatibetnews.com/xzrb/202012/25/content_61786.html; and “Gandan Chuguo town held a meeting to promote evacuation and demolition of the original houses for poverty alleviation (甘旦曲果镇召开扶贫易地搬迁原房屋腾退、拆迁工作推进会),” August 25, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/zeTYqKUokktKhgXgmMlZwg> archived at <https://archive.ph/QvL8h> on April 15, 2024.

end of 2018.”³⁸ Each relocation program publishes the final number of people it will relocate at the start of each program, and, so far, always succeeds in achieving them.³⁹ If a local relocation drive is not getting enough participants through the selection or the open invitation process to meet its quota, officials invariably begin targeting and pressuring individual households for relocation.⁴⁰

Context: Tightened Political Control in Tibet

Mass relocations in Tibet should be set in the region’s political and historical context. In China, officials have extensive powers, and a Tibetan who refuses a request or instruction by an official could face greater risks than for other Chinese citizens. This is particularly the case when an official frames an issue as “political.” Tibetans are in any case disempowered by China’s overwhelming administration in Tibet, which presents itself as engaged in perpetual “war” against the perceived “splittist” or separatist threat posed by Tibetans. As a result, Tibetans are placed under especially intense pressure to demonstrate compliance with China’s foundational requirements of absolute, unquestioning loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party and the national government. Tibetans in particular, along with Uyghurs in Xinjiang, are increasingly viewed by the government as politically suspect and as a security threat.

This view dominates the TAR government’s policy on poverty alleviation and relocation. Although the Dalai Lama, Tibet’s religious and political leader, and his administration left Tibet six decades ago and have no known role in economic or developmental issues in Tibet, the TAR plan for poverty alleviation and relocation blames poverty and other issues

³⁸ Tibet Autonomous Region Development and Reform Commission, “Tibet Autonomous Region’s “13th Five-Year Plan” Period Poverty Alleviation Plan,” ch. 3.

³⁹ Quotas for the relocation of poverty-stricken households are based on criteria specified in “TAR Poverty Alleviation Plan for the 13th Five-Year Plan Period,” TAR Development and Reform Commission, November 23, 2018, https://www.xizang.gov.cn/zwgk/xxfb/ghjh_431/201902/t20190223_61971.html.

For the mainland context, see Sarah Rogers, Jie Li, Kevin Lo, Hua Guo, and Cong Li, “China’s rapidly evolving practice of poverty resettlement: Moving Millions to Eliminate Poverty,” *Development Policy Review* 38 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12435>, p. 541-554.

⁴⁰ Personal communication with former field researcher Jarmila Ptáčková, June 13, 2023. Human Rights Watch has documented how quotas for arrests in China’s “anti-corruption” campaign and in the Strike Hard Campaign in Xinjiang have led to arbitrary arrests, torture, and imprisonment. See Human Rights Watch, “*Eradicating Ideological Viruses: China’s Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang’s Muslims*,” (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2018), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/10/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs>; and Human Rights Watch, “*Special Measures: Detention and Torture in the Chinese Communist Party’s Shuanggui System*,” (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2016), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/12/06/special-measures/detention-and-torture-chinese-communist-partys-shuanggui-system>.

in Tibet in part on the Dalai Lama and his supporters in exile. “Poverty alleviation and development [in Tibet],” according to the plan, “are always facing the interference and destruction of the Dalai clique, and the task of building a solid foundation for opposing secession and social stability is arduous.”⁴¹ The government statement indicates the high level of suspicion and antagonism among officials toward ordinary Tibetans, many of whom are followers of Tibetan Buddhism and revere the Dalai Lama.

One form that this official suspicion takes is enhanced surveillance, which is more prevalent and invasive in Tibet than most other parts of China. For example, since 2011 authorities in Tibet have stationed teams of cadres in every village in the TAR—the first time a Chinese government has had a permanent presence of officials at the village level. Permanent cadre teams have also been installed since 2011 in every monastery in the TAR and many of the TAPs. Authorities implemented the Targeted Poverty Alleviation and concurrent relocation campaigns at the same time as they expanded mass data collection and other administrative and technological means of control in Tibet, such as the “Grid Management” and the “Double-linked Households” systems. Policies for rural transformation such as Poverty Alleviation are so far always top-down initiatives, apparently without significant local consultation, and were previously administered by government officials at township level, but now increasingly appear to be run by newly introduced agents of state authority at the grassroots level, such as the village-based work teams, Aid Tibet cadres, “enrichment entrepreneurs,” and village cooperative leaders.⁴²

At the same time, officials have intensified policing at village level in Tibetan areas. “Fengqiao-style” police stations, which emphasize the participation of local residents in grassroots policing, have been set up in many villages and include an emphasis on using police for data collection and house-by-house service provision in rural areas. These efforts have included the “Three Greats” drive, which required police to “resolve disputes

⁴¹ Tibet Autonomous Region Development and Reform Commission, “Tibet Autonomous Region’s “13th Five-Year Plan” Period Poverty Alleviation Plan,” Foreword, section 2.2.

⁴² See, for example, Luosang Dajie et al., “Research on the Sustainable Development of Poverty Alleviation and Relocation in Tibet — Based on the investigation and analysis of Lhasa (西藏易地扶贫搬迁可持续发展探究 ——基于拉萨的调研分析),” *Economics Teaching and Research Department of the TAR Party School* (2020), <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/eluWhmynHEfiPmVung8r8g> archived at <https://archive.ph/gmZHQ> on April 16, 2024; Li Chengye, ““Party Building Empowerment and Integration of Villages and Communities’ Drive Common Prosperity (‘党建赋能·村社合一’带动共同富裕),” *Tibet Daily*, April 21, 2022, <http://xz.people.com.cn/n2/2022/0421/c138901-35233409.html>.

and collect opinions and suggestions put forward by the masses.”⁴³ In practice, this meant identifying and suppressing dissenting views, which would certainly include any opposition to relocation or complaints among relocated communities.

In Lhodrak County, for example, where Tibetans have been required to relocate to newly built villages on the “front line” of the international border, “the police, together with the secretary of the village branch and the director of the village committee, went to the villages and carried out a dragnet-style investigation to find out the various disputes, household registration issues, and expropriation in each village,” according to an official media report in January 2022. The report added, “They conducted visits and investigations on issues such as demolition and relocation.”⁴⁴

Throughout the period under review, attendance at regular “education” sessions by local officials teaching the importance of compliance with the law and the “unity of nationalities” has been compulsory for all Tibetans, including ordinary villagers. Those considered insufficiently compliant are liable to be targeted for surveillance or selected for more intensive reeducation.⁴⁵ The current public education campaign known as the “Three Consciousnesses” stresses that one’s duties to the state as a citizen surpass all other commitments.⁴⁶ Those questioning or resisting government policies such as mass relocation are liable to be treated as political dissidents. In numerous speeches and statements, the TAR party secretary, the top leader in the region, has emphasized that any failure to follow Party policies is not allowed and is tantamount to supporting “the Dalai Clique,” which can lead to major criminal charges in Tibet.⁴⁷

⁴³ “New evidence of mass DNA collection in Tibet,” Human Rights Watch news release, September 5, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/09/05/china-new-evidence-mass-dna-collection-tibet>.

⁴⁴ “Public Security Bureau went deep into the front line of the border to carry out the special work of “big visit, big investigation, and big resolution” (【微视频】洛扎县|公安局深入边境一线开展“大走访、大调研、大化解”专项工作),” Uncharted Luoza WeChat, January 29, 2022, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/hZ-4M2oOjGZLOU4lATNyYw> archived at <https://archive.ph/t34Eu> on April 16, 2024.

⁴⁵ See, for example, “Qushui County Public Security Bureau “Maple Bridge-style village police room” to create a record of work (打造平安“枫”景线—曲水县公安局“枫桥式村居警务室”创建工作纪实),” *Tibet Daily*, July 14, 2020, http://epaper.chinatibetnews.com/xzrb/202007/14/content_37769.html.

⁴⁶ See, for example, “Fully understand the importance of in-depth publicity and education of the “Three Consciousnesses” (【观点】梁宁：充分认识深入开展“三个意识”宣传教育的重要意义),” September 5, 2022, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/yRM1_DXCduH-XmvjbKmpsA archived at <https://archive.ph/HK9A8> on April 16, 2024.

⁴⁷ “Wu Yingjie and Qi Zhala conducted a field visit to the Sinpori extremely high altitude ecological resettlement site (吴英杰齐扎拉在森布日极高海拔地区生态搬迁安置点调研),” *Tibet Daily*, January 3, 2020, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0103/c117005-31533809.html>.

Applicable International and Domestic Laws and Regulations

International human rights law recognizes the right to be protected from forced evictions. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which is considered reflective of customary international law, states that “[e]veryone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others,” and that “[n]o one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.”⁴⁸ The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which China is a party, protects the rights to livelihood and to housing, which guarantees security of tenure. The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the international expert body that interprets the Covenant, stated in a general comment that “all persons should possess a degree of security of tenure which guarantees legal protection against forced eviction, harassment and other threats.”⁴⁹

The Committee has said that prior to carrying out any evictions, particularly those involving large groups, governments should explore “all feasible alternatives” in consultation with the affected persons. Those being evicted should be provided legal remedies or procedures, and have a right to adequate compensation for any property, both personal and real, which is affected.⁵⁰

The Committee stated that where evictions are justifiable, they must be carried out “in strict compliance with the relevant provisions of international human rights law and in accordance with general principles of reasonableness and proportionality.”⁵¹ Procedural protections that should be applied include: an opportunity for genuine consultation with those affected; adequate and reasonable notice for all affected persons prior to the scheduled date of eviction; information on the proposed evictions, and, where applicable, on the alternative purpose for which the land or housing is to be used, to be made available in reasonable time to all those affected; and other protections.⁵²

⁴⁸ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. res. 217A (III), U.N. Doc A/810 at 71 (1948), art. 17.

⁴⁹ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 4, The Right to Adequate Housing (Art. 11(1) of the Covenant), E/1992/23 (1991), para. 8(a).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 17.

⁵¹ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 7, The right to adequate housing (Art.11.1): forced evictions, E/1998/22 (1997), para. 14.

⁵² *Ibid.*, para. 15.

There are also additional and similar standards regarding development-based forced evictions, including the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, endorsed by the UN General Assembly, and the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement, adopted in 1997.⁵³

Under Chinese law, rural land is not privately owned. Instead, it is the property of the “collective.”⁵⁴ Turning collective land into state land, as well as the transfer of use rights from agricultural to industrial, business, or tourism, is lucrative and has long been one of the main sources of revenue for local governments.⁵⁵ Abuses of power, illegal land seizures, and corruption are recognized as prevalent problems countrywide.⁵⁶

The Chinese Constitution and the Property Law both state that “citizens’ lawful private property” is “inviolable.” However, they also allow for the expropriation of private property in the “public interest,” a term that Chinese law does not define. The Land Administration Law says that the state may requisition land owned by collectives according to law for public interest purposes, such as “urban infrastructure projects or public welfare undertakings; major energy, communications, water conservancy and other infrastructure projects supported by the State; and other purposes as provided for by laws or

⁵³ The World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, A/CONF.157/23, July 12, 1993, para. 10; UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement, Annex 1 of the report of the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing as a Component of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living, A/HRC/4/18 (2007). The Basic Principles state in para. 21:

Evictions require full justification given their adverse impact on a wide range of internationally recognized human rights. Any eviction must be (a) authorized by law; (b) carried out in accordance with international human rights law; (c) undertaken solely for the purpose of promoting the general welfare; (d) reasonable and proportional; (e) regulated so as to ensure full and fair compensation and rehabilitation; and (f) carried out in accordance with the present guidelines.

Other standards in the context of ecological relocations include: UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Guidance on Protecting People from Disasters and Environmental Change through Planned Relocation, October 7, 2015, <https://www.refworld.org/policy/opguidance/unhcr/2015/en/117656>; and Elena Correa, Fernando Ramirez, and Haris Sanahuja, *Populations at risk of disaster: a resettlement guide (English)*, (Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, 2011), <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/612501468045040748/Populations-at-risk-of-disaster-a-resettlement-guide>.

⁵⁴ The Law of Land Administration of the People's Republic of China (adopted on June 25, 1986) (amended on December 29, 1988, and August 29, 1998), art. 10.

⁵⁵ Loren Brandt, Jikun Huang, Guo Li, and Scott Rozelle, “Land rights in rural China: Facts, fictions and issues,” *The China Journal* 103 (January 2002). See also: You-Tien Hsing, *The Great Urban Transformation: Politics of Land and Property in China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵⁶ “China's Wen says farmers' rights flouted by land grabs,” *Reuters*, February 5, 2011 (accessed January 16, 2024), <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/05/us-china-land-wen-idUSTRE81406C20120205>.

administrative regulations.”⁵⁷ The Grassland Law, which governs the management of grasslands that make up much of the Tibetan plateau, empowers the government to limit herds in order to “protect, develop and make rational use of grasslands.”⁵⁸

On paper, Chinese law requires that people facing forced evictions are consulted and compensated.⁵⁹ In practice, the laws do not permit them to challenge the decisions to relocate them. In the rest of China, those facing forced evictions have few rights—even if they take the matter to court, at most they can challenge the amount of compensation offered, not the decision itself, and doing so carry risks of detention and imprisonment.⁶⁰ In Tibet, political repression makes it impossible for Tibetans to challenge any part of the relocation decisions without serious repercussions.

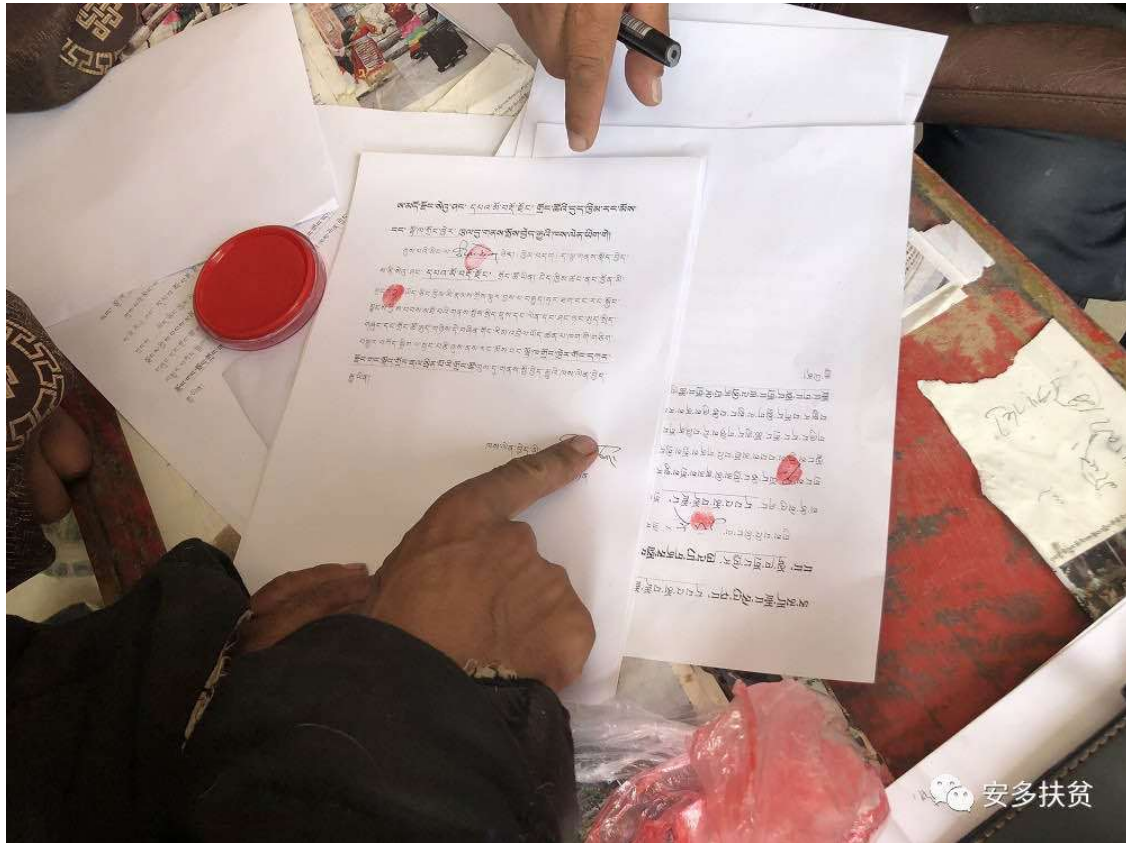
⁵⁷ Land Administration Law (1998/1999), <http://www.lawinfochina.com/law/display.asp?id=3673> (accessed January 16, 2024), art. 54.

⁵⁸ Grassland Law, promulgated June 18, 1985, revised December 28, 2003, arts. 18, 45, and 48.

⁵⁹ Constitution of the People's Republic of China, amended March 14, 2004, by the 10th National People's Congress at its Second Session, art. 13; PRC Property Rights Law (2007), art. 42; Land Administration Law (1998/1999), art. 39.

⁶⁰ Hongzhang Xu, Xinyuan Xu, and Jamie Pittock, “Understanding social issues in a new approach: The role of social media in displacement and resettlement.”

II. Coercion in Whole-Village Relocation



A Tibetan villager puts a fingerprint on an official document, agreeing to be relocated to Sinpori, a mass resettlement site 60 kilometers southwest of Lhasa. Source: Poverty Alleviation Office, Anduo County, Nagqu, TAR (安多县扶贫办)

Initial Reluctance to Relocation

On paper, local officials propose whole-village relocation drives to the members of a village, usually at the township level, and the relocation of the village is approved by consensus of the village residents.⁶¹ Officials therefore must get agreement to move from every household in a targeted village. As a result, almost all official media reports about relocation drives focus on the successful efforts by officials to get every household in the

⁶¹ See the National Development and Reform Commission, "National Plan for Poverty-Alleviation Relocation During the 13th Five-year-plan Period," September 2016, <https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-10/31/5126509/files/86e8eb65acf44596bf21b274aec6b48.pdf>, p.6. See also Lo and Wang "How voluntary is poverty alleviation resettlement in China?" p. 35.

village to agree to move. To highlight the achievements of these officials, some local media reports note that villagers were often initially reluctant to move to a new location when officials first proposed the relocation scheme. The reports then praise the diligence and hard work of the officials that led to the “correction” of such opinions.

These reports refer to villagers’ initial reluctance by using phrases such as “the doubts that arise in the minds of the masses and difficulties that they encounter,”⁶² “the difficulties raised by the people” before agreeing to relocate,⁶³ “difficulties or doubts about relocation,”⁶⁴ or “negative thoughts.”⁶⁵ Other reports refer to “the masses who can’t figure it out for a while,”⁶⁶ the “relocation-problem households and the wait-and-see households,”⁶⁷ and the problem of those who are “still worried,” “confused,”⁶⁸ “unwilling to move,”⁶⁹ or

⁶² “心中产生的疑虑，遇到的困难。” See “Kusang, deputy secretary of the Latod township Party committee and head of the township, went deep into villages (residences) to carry out work on thought education among masses about extremely high altitude ecological relocation (尼玛县来多乡党委副书记、乡长姑桑深入村（居）开展极高海拔生态搬迁群众思想工作),” July 10, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Fun64MbSsdmFRMi3ZUdoag> archived at <https://archive.ph/6bzI4> on April 16, 2024.

⁶³ “Qiere township has steadily promoted the promotion of extremely high altitude ecological relocation policies (切热乡扎实推进极高海拔生态搬迁政策宣传工作),” October 13, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/huuECKlAt3wj2M8sdH21hQ> archived at <https://archive.ph/vXnV3> on April 16, 2024.

⁶⁴ “Gandan Quguo Town households carry out poverty alleviation and relocation policy publicity work (甘旦曲果镇入户开展扶贫搬迁政策宣传工作),” July 15, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/V5rULHCSR4AtkoVhuU5tqw> archived at <https://archive.ph/4OqaV> on April 16, 2024.

⁶⁵ “Research on achievements of Tibet’s poverty alleviation and prevention of returning to poverty (西藏脱贫攻坚成果及防止返贫探究),” July 28, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/b7V8WG8n5hv27KmY78zLxw> archived at <https://archive.ph/IWddo> on April 16, 2024.

⁶⁶ “Life migration spanning half a century—Tibet’s extremely high altitude ecological relocation solves the problem of symbiosis between man and nature (跨越半个世纪的生命迁徙——西藏极高海拔生态搬迁破解人与自然共生难题),” *Xinhua News Agency*, March 17, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-03/17/c_1125726595.htm.

⁶⁷ “Gandan Quguo Town households carry out poverty alleviation and relocation policy publicity work (甘旦曲果镇入户开展扶贫搬迁政策宣传工作).”

⁶⁸ “Dondrub went to Karchung village in our county to publicize high-altitude ecological relocation policies (【视频】顿珠深入我县嘎琼村宣讲高海拔生态搬迁政策),” November 11, 2019, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/KvoCaQp2acYRHAfbBtKwow> archived at <https://archive.ph/1lWBo> on April 16, 2024.

⁶⁹ “Drongtsang [Zhongcang] township, Nyima county, organizes and conducts publicity and educational tours for extremely high altitude ecological relocation (尼玛县中仓乡组织开展“极高海拔地区生态搬迁”巡回宣传教育活动),” June 5, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Jh8MqAjKsKJWOSW7ppgisw> archived at <https://archive.ph/Q3Oh5> on April 16, 2024. See also “Amdo county has smoothly completed the work of soliciting the willingness of pastoralists in villages 2, 3 and 4 of Seu township for high-altitude ecological relocation (安多县顺利完成色务乡 2、3、4 村牧民群众高海拔生态搬迁意愿征求工作),” May 25, 2018, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/o7SKq2h9ANANfU_qaBoXgQ archived at <https://archive.ph/x37SG> on April 16, 2024.

“resistant to the relocation.”⁷⁰ One report referred to “the villagers’ nostalgia complex.”⁷¹ Although explicit references to reluctance to relocate are relatively rare in province-level media reports of relocation in Tibet, Human Rights Watch’s survey of county and township-level media reports showed a high proportion of such references: out of 328 such reports about relocation, 52 (16 percent) mentioned that some villagers were initially reluctant to agree to relocate. Given that such reports are designed to report the complete success of each relocation drive and rarely admit to disagreement with policies, the admission of any reluctance is notable.

In some cases, the reports of reluctance to relocate give the number or proportion of residents in a village who were initially unwilling to move. An official survey in November 2017 of 120 households targeted for relocation as part of a whole-village relocation scheme in a nomadic area of Tsonyi (Ch.: Shuanghu, 双湖) County, Nagchu Prefecture, found that only 40 percent relocated voluntarily, while 57 percent agreed to relocate because they felt obliged to “meet the requirements of Party policies,”⁷² and 3.4 percent had been “unwilling to relocate.”

In another case, highlighted by media as the flagship example of its Extremely High Altitude relocation program in the TAR, officials moved 1,102 people from a nomadic area of Nagchu in northern TAR to a new settlement in a farming area over 1,000 kilometers away. Out of 262 households in the village, initially “more than 200 households did not agree to relocate” and “only 40 households agreed to relocate at first,” according to a government news article in 2018 (see Case Study on Rongmar).⁷³

⁷⁰ “Wang Gang, an Aid-Tibet cadre: Always keep in mind the sacred mission of ‘aiding Tibet, benefiting a place’ (牢记嘱托·砥砺前行 | 天津市援藏干部王刚: 始终牢记‘援藏一方, 造福一方’的神圣使命),” September 17, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6UPLqo8HPqzaAtBQLclgQ> archived at <https://archive.ph/hbwXL> on April 16, 2024.

⁷¹ “Harge Town: ‘Party Building Leads’ High-quality Promotion of Old Reclamation Work Fully Completed (【乡村振兴】哈尔滨镇: ‘党建引领’高质量推进拆旧复垦工作全面完成),” May 27, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/3u4iDFgnIU832SHjzCtbg> archived at <https://archive.ph/uImDG> on April 16, 2024.

⁷² The official phrase used here is “relocated according to specific relocation policies and program requirements.” See “Shuanghu (Tsonyi) County conducts in-depth public opinion surveys on high-altitude ecological relocation (关注||双湖县深入开展高海拔生态搬迁 民意调查工作),” November 14, 2017, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6dUU2FenCVtaHvutU_HKMw archived at <https://archive.ph/1lfvG> on April 16, 2024.

⁷³ “The first group of pastoralists moving out of high-altitude areas write migration legends (西藏首批搬离高海拔地区牧民书写迁徙传奇),” *Tibet.cn*, September 20, 2018, http://www.tibet.cn/cn/cloud/xszqkk/zgxz/2018/05/201809/t20180920_6275045.html.

A report on a village targeted for relocation in Metog County, Nyingtri, in 2018, described the villagers as “worried about the relocation at first, and some older villagers were resistant.”⁷⁴ Multiple reports in 2019 described another village in Metog County where 11 out of 31 households opposed relocation for at least three years (see Case Study on Dokha).⁷⁵

In one village in Shigatse Municipality in March 2023, all the residents disagreed with a plan for it to be relocated except for one Party activist, according to an official media report. The villagers all changed their minds after the activist and the village cadres did “door-to-door ideological work.”⁷⁶

Senior Chinese officials in the TAR have also acknowledged initial reluctance among those asked to relocate. In the project to move 11,000 Tibetans from Sa-ngen in Gonjo County, Chamdo Municipality,⁷⁷ the then-Party Secretary of Chamdo observed during a 2018 visit that “the masses are unwilling to relocate” (see Case Study on Sa-ngen). In January 2020, when the topmost Chinese leader in the TAR, Party Secretary Wu Yingjie, visited Sinpori (Ch.: Senburi, 森布日), a mass resettlement site 60 kilometers southwest of Lhasa that is expected to hold 41,000 relocated people,⁷⁸ he was told by relocatees that before agreeing

Note that five months earlier, in April 2018, the reported figures for Rongmar were: out of 265 households, “179 households are willing to relocate, 42 households are unwilling to relocate, 117 households are willing to join economic cooperation organizations, and 104 households are unwilling to join cooperative organizations.” 42/ out of 265 is 15.8 percent. See “Nyima County solidly carries out field research on high-altitude ecological relocation (尼玛县扎实开展高海拔生态搬迁调研工作),” April 6, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/dyA78OwkVytDPjop8EDTEA> archived at <https://archive.ph/PbgdU> on March 21, 2023.

⁷⁴ “The working group visited Gangyu Village four times to solve the biggest “pimple” of the relocation of the masses (访真情、解真难——工作组四访岗玉村解开群众易地搬迁最大“疙瘩”),” June 19, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/j-oyT33WropcAnlgX-qTYQ> archived at <https://archive.ph/XhjNr> on April 16, 2024.

⁷⁵ “The working group went to Duoka Village to carry out the third relocation of the village (工作组赴多卡村开展该村第三次搬迁工作),” January 24, 2019, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/4AsIX1fvhKAlFMgaKxZcKQ> archived at <https://archive.ph/rYPQz> on April 16, 2024.

⁷⁶ “Old Party member Solang Zhuoga, by example, mobilized her family to support the relocation work (老党员索朗卓嘎以身作则发动家人支持搬迁工作),” March 18, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/R4JBKXQ2VVd9R8WUoAzbUg> archived at <https://archive.ph/QpfYv> on April 16, 2024.

⁷⁷ Xingguo Yu, “Study on Influencing Factors of Citizenization of Farmers and Herdsmen in Tibet—Take the relocation households in Sanyan area as an example (西藏农牧民市民化影响因素研究——以三岩片区易地扶贫搬迁户为例),” Dissertation, Tibet University, 2021, <https://www.soolun.com/degree/1d3b381d85b80doo8afd345cae5103c6.html>.

⁷⁸ “The fifth largest city in Tibet, Senburi, was born, which is more convenient than Lhasa to the airport (西藏第5大城市森布日横空出世, 比拉萨到机场更便利),” March 5, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/zgPFZ7Aisho6KlGIfuRCOA> archived at <https://archive.ph/ZVlkW> on April 16, 2024.

to move they “at first had a strong concept of ‘the homeland is hard to leave’ and were reluctant to leave the place where their ancestors lived.”⁷⁹ In October 2020, at an extremely rare press conference in Lhasa, Wu Yingjie told foreign and domestic journalists that “in the beginning of the relocation program, it was hard to persuade some elders, who hold deep affection to their homeland, to leave.”⁸⁰ He explained that because of extensive “publicity” work by officials, this initial reluctance had been overcome:

We have done a lot of work, on the one hand we publicized the relocation policy, and, on the other hand, the people in Tibet believe in the facts before them, and they believe in the places that they see ... at the relocation sites [and] in the end, they all moved in voluntarily.



Sinpori mass resettlement site. Source: TAR Propaganda Department (西藏自治区宣传部)

There is very little evidence of spontaneous or widespread requests by Tibetans for relocation in other instances in Tibet. As noted above, Human Rights Watch has so far identified only one official media article describing local Tibetans requesting to be relocated.⁸¹

⁷⁹ “Wu Yingjie and Qi Zhala conducted a field visit to the Sinpori extremely high altitude ecological relocation and resettlement site (吴英杰齐扎拉在森布日极高海拔地区生态搬迁安置点调研),” *Tibet Daily*, January 3, 2020, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0103/c117005-31533809.html>.

⁸⁰ “Tibet: How China’s toughest battleground defeated absolute poverty?” *CGTN*, October 16, 2020, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-10-16/How-Tibet-eliminated-absolute-poverty-despite-harsh-climate--UDkSdO4J5S/index.html>. The full transcript of the press conference is available at https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2020-10/15/content_5551547.htm.

⁸¹ “Villager A Gong said, ‘The villagers heard that Secretary Wu Yingjie came here to work on site, are very happy. We hope to move out to have more land for farming and for our children to have better education. If the conditions are better than where we are now, we are all willing to move.’” See “Wu Yingjie investigates poverty alleviation work in deeply impoverished areas in the Sanyan area of Qamdo), China Tibet News Network via Internet Information Gongjue (吴英杰在昌都三岩片区调研深度

Academic researchers have found other evidence of reluctance to relocate. In 2020, a postgraduate student at Tibet University in Lhasa published a survey of 97 households who had been moved one or two years earlier as part of a relocation program in Dzayul (Ch.: Chayu, 察隅) County, part of Nyingtri Municipality in the TAR. 38 percent of the respondents to that survey said that they had been unwilling to relocate,⁸² meaning that they had given consent unwillingly.



Satellite imagery showing Sinpori mass resettlement site, December 25, 2020. © 2020 Maxar Technologies.
Source: Google Earth.

贫困地区脱贫攻坚工作),” October 6, 2017, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/ZeyfNChce8gzNLZs6rS4pA> archived at <https://archive.ph/1YTSO> on April 16, 2024.

⁸² Haifang Yu 余海芳, “Study on the Difficulties and Countermeasures of Poverty Alleviation and Relocation in Tibet Case Study of Chayu County, Nyingchi (西藏易地扶贫搬迁存在困境及应对策略 研究—以林芝市察隅县为例),” M.A. thesis, Tibet University, 2020. It is not clear if the people surveyed had been relocated as parts of whole-village relocation or as individual households. If it was the latter, this would show that coercion is also used in individual-household relocation programs, but other evidence of this has not come to light so far.

Persuasion

Official Chinese reports about village-level relocation drives are uniformly positive: they either say that a project is ongoing, or they announce that it has been completed with 100 percent success, meaning that all those relocated gave their agreement to relocate. In general, the reports do not give details of the methods used by officials to achieve this remarkable level of success. However, taken as a whole, the reports indicate three stages or levels of persuasion. These three stages in the persuasion process have also been noted by academic researchers who have carried out fieldwork into relocation in Tibet.⁸³

In the first stage, the officials visit the targeted village and compile statistical information about the residents, sometimes conducting door-to-door surveys. They also meet with the villagers or their representatives in “centralized” meetings, at which participants gather in a single location to meet with officials, who ask the residents about their general concerns and aspirations regarding their current living conditions.⁸⁴

Next, the officials return and hold community meetings in which they offer to meet the concerns and fulfill the wishes expressed earlier by proposing relocation of the village. They will say that the Party and government have determined that relocation is the best solution for their concerns and are offering generous gifts in the form of economic incentives to the local people once they relocate. At the same time, the officials carry out initial “education and guidance.” That “guidance” includes telling people of the improvements in future livelihood this will bring for those who relocate and reminding them of the generosity of the Party and the state in offering to relocate them. In some cases, reluctant villagers are taken to the move-in site to see the new houses or are introduced to individuals who have already moved to the new site, who describe the benefits of moving.

For the local people who remain unpersuaded, officials return for a third series of meetings and visits. These usually involve officials visiting individual households. The home visits

⁸³ Yonten Nyima and Emily T. Yeh, “The Construction of Consent for High-altitude Resettlement in Tibet,” *China Quarterly* (2023) p. 1–19, doi:10.1017/S0305741023000206.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 10. Nyima and Yeh note from their research that “this stage initially presents resettlement as completely voluntary, and attractive.”

are referred to by such terms as “repeated home chats and face-to-face communication,”⁸⁵ “heart-to-heart assistance,”⁸⁶ “going to villages and visiting households,”⁸⁷ “entering the house to warm the hearts of the people,”⁸⁸ “household mobilization,”⁸⁹ and “many-to-one” or “one-to-one education and guidance.” The aim of these efforts is described as persuading individuals to make “the transition from ‘[they] want me to resettle’ to ‘I want to resettle.’”⁹⁰ One report describes such an exercise and the multiple visits it can entail:

For the masses who are unwilling to relocate, the propaganda team adopts a “one-on-one” approach, goes often to the village to enter the houses of those who are unwilling to relocate, eats and lives with the people, patiently explains the purpose and significance of the ecological relocation policy formulated by the higher-level Party committee and the government, eliminates their worries and concerns, encourages them to change their ideas and voluntarily choose to relocate.⁹¹

Unlike home visits by Chinese cadres in Xinjiang, it seems that visiting cadres in Tibet generally do not literally “eat and live” with the villagers or stay overnight in villagers’ homes, but return at night to their bases or to other accommodation in the village.⁹²

⁸⁵ 拉家常 (*la jia chang*), literally “repeated chats about family [life].” See “Concentrate on multiple measures and take Chaka Town to solidly promote the demolition and reclamation work (凝心聚力 多措并举 茶卡镇扎实推进拆迁复垦工作),” May 20, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/iF2DEJvApkdow6T6EC9oUw> archived at <https://archive.ph/hLiQQ> on April 16, 2024.

⁸⁶ “Luo Bu, director of the village committee of Xisonggong Village, Zhubalong Township, gathered together: the director of the village committee who “has a way” (竹巴龙乡西松贡村村委员会主任罗布扎堆: “有办法”的村委会主任),” June 19, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/z-4S3F5ofzKfnhXU3n9aDQ> archived at <https://archive.ph/vATkW> on April 16, 2024.

⁸⁷ “Amdo county has smoothly completed the work of soliciting the willingness of pastoralists in villages 2, 3 and 4 of Seu township for high-altitude ecological relocation (安多县顺利完成色务乡 2、3、4 村牧民群众高海拔生态搬迁意愿征求工作).

⁸⁸ “A Quick Look at Zhanang (速览扎囊),” April 14, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Q4YvmO3gFdBzmxt8L1RmbA> archived at <https://archive.ph/mMCUj> on April 16, 2024.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ “要我搬迁到我要搬迁的转变.” See “Go to the grassroots level to do research to see changes and promote improvement (走基层做调研 看转变促提升),” September 27, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/cv7TjYk6LlZ-J8L66-HaxA> archived at <https://archive.ph/XhMiA> on April 16, 2024.

⁹¹ “针对不愿意搬迁的群众，宣讲组采取“一对一”的方式，经常性走村入户，与群众同吃同住，耐心讲解上级党委、政府所制定出台生态搬迁政策的目的和意义，消除他们的担心和顾虑，并鼓励他们转变思想观念，自愿选择搬迁，积极配合各级党委、政府的工作。” See “Amdo county has smoothly completed the work of soliciting the willingness of pastoralists in villages 2, 3 and 4 of Seu township for high-altitude ecological relocation (安多县顺利完成色务乡 2、3、4 村牧民群众高海拔生态搬迁意愿征求工作).

⁹² “China: Visiting Officials Occupy Homes in Muslim Region,” May 14, 2018, Human Rights Watch news release, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/14/china-visiting-officials-occupy-homes-muslim-region>.

If resistance continues, officials of increasing seniority sometimes visit a locality for further meetings to add pressure on people to agree to relocate. The purpose of these visits is to get villagers to “voluntarily” agree to the relocation of the village, meaning that they will sign a written undertaking to that effect. These face-to-face sessions, which in one case has been shown on national TV (see Case Study on Dokha), become increasingly intense over time and involve forms of pressure that amount to coercion.

There are so far no media reports of any village targeted for relocation that in the end did not relocate. In addition, no media reports on whole-village relocation drives indicate that, after officials came to meet directly with them, any villager included in such a drive did not eventually agree to relocate.

Forms of Pressure

Official media reports describe methods used to get villagers and nomads to agree to whole-village relocation, and several of these methods hint at officials’ use of extreme degrees of pressure. These methods include persistent assurances of economic benefits; intrusive home visits; denigrating the intellectual and cultural ability of the villagers and thus their capacity to make alternative decisions to those of the officials; implicit threats; banning criticism; threatening punishment for local officials who fail to meet targets; and requiring a consensus decision from the full membership of each targeted village or community.

The result is that villagers can refuse to agree to relocate, but only for a period of time: the pressure will continue and eventually they will have to agree to move.⁹³ As a Tibetan from what was then Chamdo Prefecture explained in an interview given to a Human Rights Watch researcher in 2005, “As of now there are few households who did not listen to the government arrangement [for relocation] and continue to live in their place, but they will have to move sooner or later.”⁹⁴

⁹³ We have no information from the last ten years on what happens if a household targeted for whole-village relocation refuses to give consent, because so far, no cases are known where a household has held out until the end of a whole-village relocation program. With the Sa-ngen Relocation program, where there are indications of refusals by locals to move, the project has been extended, apparently indefinitely, to allow more time for persuasion. Human Rights Watch’s 2007 report on resettlement in Tibet listed multiple protests, conflicts, and arrests in the early 2000s in the TAPs arising from attempts by officials to move Tibetan herders off their lands, and the 2013 report named two Tibetans sentenced to four and three years imprisonment respectively in 2012, partly for refusing to relocate. See Human Rights Watch, “*No One Has the Liberty to Refuse*,” p. 64-71. Human Rights Watch, “*They Say We Should be Grateful*,” p. 64.

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with a 28-year-old man from Gonjo, name withheld, interviewed in Kathmandu, January 7, 2005.

Requiring total compliance with the relocation requirements with no concessions, negotiation, or flexibility: The leaders told officials in one township in Gonjo in December 2018 that “there are no conditions to discuss” concerning the village relocation program, “there is no wait-and-see situation, there is no room for bargaining—this is the policy and the bottom line, which cannot be broken,” and that the signature requirement of the policy is “not to leave a single household, and not leave a single person.”⁹⁵ Local officials in that area were also told that “there are no conditions to be discussed” and that “pressure must be transmitted layer by layer ... to ensure that all relocations will be completed in 2019 without leaving a single household or person.”⁹⁶ In June 2019, an official told local staff in the same area that “the decision not to leave a single household or person behind in the relocation work is resolute and unchangeable, which is the determination of the Party Committee and the regional government, and cannot be shaken at any time.”⁹⁷

Repeated assurances of economic benefits after relocation: The principal method of persuasion, described in almost all reports, is telling relocatees that their income will increase or their access to education, health care, or other services will improve if they agree to move. This is referred to in the official reports as presenting “the economic account” or, more fully, “the ‘economic calculation’ of relocation benefits.”⁹⁸ It resembles the practice that scholars of relocation in China proper have termed “soft coercion.”⁹⁹ Innocuous in normal circumstances, the frequency with which state propaganda repeats this message is extreme, even to the casual reader of official media, and in face-to-face meetings the repeated insistence on such claims is likely to be overwhelming. Media reports almost always quote villagers as saying that they are enthusiastic about moving to

⁹⁵ “Sanyan area cross-city overall relocation for poverty alleviation “leave no household, no person” There is no room for maneuver, no conditions to talk about (【贡觉要闻】三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁“不留一户、不留一人”没有任何回旋余地、没有任何条件可讲),” December 5, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/rdqXfmNx21z37wYCSSNvCQ> archived at <https://archive.ph/lzICT> on April 16, 2024.

⁹⁶ “Re-preach, re-mobilize, and re-deploy to resolutely win the tough battle for poverty alleviation and relocation across cities in the Sanyan area (【贡觉要闻】再宣讲、再动员、再部署·坚决打赢三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁攻坚战),” December 6, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/OYTRauudqCtoMm8YDt3KfA> archived at <https://archive.ph/w1oAB> on April 16, 2024.

⁹⁷ “搬迁工作一户不留、一人不落的决策坚决不容改变·这是区党委、政府的决心·在任何时候都不能动摇.” See “Listen to public opinions and resolve public confusion - Tashi went deep into the cordyceps collection points to carry out mass mobilization work for overall cross-city poverty alleviation and relocation in Sanyan area (【贡觉要闻】听民意、解民惑——扎西深入虫草采集点开展三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁群众动员工作),” June 13, 2019, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/BWgNNQyKHL_ZaGZBmDYjvw archived at <https://archive.ph/WFkZX> on April 16, 2024.

⁹⁸ “A Quick Look at Zhanang (速览扎囊).”

⁹⁹ Hongzhang Xu, Xinyuan Xu, and Jamie Pittock, “Understanding social issues in a new approach: The role of social media in displacement and resettlement,” p. 9. See also Lo and Wang “How voluntary is poverty alleviation resettlement in China?” p. 34-42.

the new location because it will bring them higher incomes and greater access to services. A typical report in December 2021 described an individual family's move to Toelung Dechen near Lhasa:

Everyone praised his family's changes over the past year. Lobsang Tsering told reporters with a shy smile: "After moving here, the family of four no longer have to live in a small, rented house. Now they are working in a nearby park and their income is higher. Life is getting better and better, thanks to the Party's good policies."¹⁰⁰

Another report described a family arriving in Ne'u, near Lhasa:

"They moved excitedly into their new home in Liuwu New District, Lhasa City. The Tibetan furniture and color TV in the living room, the brand-new natural gas stove in the kitchen, and the independent bathroom made the two brothers Aze and Baima very happy."¹⁰¹ Hundreds of official articles describe similar contentment.¹⁰²

In many cases, the claims of improved conditions have proved to be inaccurate or exaggerated, if not actively misleading (see Misleading Information in Individual-household Relocation Programs).

Extended persuasion sessions at families' homes: Media frequently report that officials are required to visit reluctant families in their homes. The visits are often made by officials of increasing seniority or by "prestigious people."¹⁰³ The reports indicate that these "one-to-one education and guidance" visits are intensive. In June 2020, the county Party secretary in Gonjo County, Chamdo Municipality (see Case Study on Sa-ngen), instructed

¹⁰⁰ "Tour of local relocation work for poverty alleviation No. 20 | Working together to build a moderately prosperous society (地方易地扶贫搬迁工作巡礼之二十 | 携手共进建小康——西藏自治区“十三五”易地扶贫搬迁工作纪实)," December 7, 2021, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/GPPVR_jyYz1Xbo9rjHVqGA archived at <https://archive.ph/igvaa> on April 16, 2024.

¹⁰¹ "Summary of Poverty Alleviation and Relocation in the "Sanyan" Area: Changing the Land and Soil to Enrich the People ("三岩"片区易地扶贫搬迁综述: 换一方水土 富了一方人)."

¹⁰² Farewell "Sanyan Difficulties" | Poverty Alleviation and Relocation Opens Up a New World (告别“三岩之难” | 扶贫搬迁开辟一片新天地)," *CCTV News*, January 1, 2020, <http://m.news.cctv.com/2020/01/01/ARTIqrQF7e1puAmgoN4b7oaW200101.shtml>.

¹⁰³ "Nyima county solidly carries out field research on high-altitude ecological relocation (尼玛县扎实开展高海拔生态搬迁调研工作)."

officials in one township to “focus on one-to-one and many-to-one concentrated propagandizing for some people who are stubborn and unwilling to relocate.” He told them to “insist on eating, living, and working with the ‘nail households,’” a Chinese term referring to households that resist relocation, and “to persevere in carrying out mass education and guidance”¹⁰⁴ with them. Some media reports refer to hundreds of such visits by officials to households within a village or district. They rarely indicate how many of these visits are made to the same family, but a report on High Altitude Relocation in Amdo County, Nagchu, in 2018 noted that cadres made “more than a dozen visits to each family” that was reluctant to move, and subsequently achieved a “100 percent voluntary relocation rate.”¹⁰⁵ In some cases, visits by officials to a single household continued over several years until local villagers relented, such as with a village in Metog County, Nyingtri, where annual visits continued for at least three years (see Case Study on Dokha).¹⁰⁶

Denigrating Tibetan villagers and nomads who are reluctant to relocate: An article in Xizang Ribao, the main Party newspaper in Tibet, in June 2019 described persuading rural people to relocate as difficult because “the masses have backward ideas,” making it hard to “change their backward and conservative thinking,” so that it is necessary to “lead the masses to change their backward ideas.”¹⁰⁷

In September 2021, a Tibetan Party official in Lhasa gave a lecture advising recently relocated people that they had to “downplay the negative influence of religion in favor of the pursuit of a healthy and civilized lifestyle ... so that the relocated people can better integrate into urban life.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ The township was 凯里 (Keri). See “Zhaxi went deep into the Sanyan area to carry out a new round of Sanyan relocation publicity, education and guidance work (【贡觉要闻】扎西深入三岩片区开展新一轮三岩搬迁宣传教育引导工作),” June 12, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/xOh4lrlZohlf_FVC-M8Uow archived at <https://archive.ph/uQs3Q> on June 28, 2022.

¹⁰⁵ “The first group of pastoralists moving out of high-altitude areas write migration legends (西藏首批搬离高海拔地区牧民书写迁徙传奇).”

¹⁰⁶ “The working group went to Duoka Village to carry out the third relocation of the village (工作组赴多卡村开展该村第三次动迁工作).”

¹⁰⁷ “Moving out of the ‘poor den’ fulfilled the ‘dream of poverty alleviation’——Scan of relocation for poverty alleviation in Shannan City (搬离“穷窝窝”圆了“脱贫梦”——山南市易地扶贫搬迁扫),” *Xizang Ribao (Tibet Daily)*, June 6, 2019, https://www.sohu.com/a/318853604_160909.

¹⁰⁸ “Lhasa Economic Development Zone organizes relocated people to carry out ethnic unity propaganda to downplay the negative impact of religion (拉萨经开区组织易地搬迁群众开展民族团结宣传淡化宗教消极影响),” October 9, 2021, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/rosOzkoh2MyisaOTKc_q8g archived at <https://archive.ph/DZ87o> on April 16, 2024.

A scholar from the Chamdo Municipality Party School who studied relocation from Gonjo County in Chamdo in 2020 concluded that “the relocated people have ... a low level of social development, weak awareness of the rule of law ... lack the ability of communication, basic etiquette, and norms ... have insufficient language skills, poor work adaptability, are difficult to get along with and difficult to manage,” “do not want to work,” and have “distorted values,” because their “cultural quality is low” and they are “influenced by the religious forces.”¹⁰⁹

These views dismiss prospective relocatees’ realistic and rational concerns about relocation, including the fear of loss of livelihood and income, and high costs of moving.¹¹⁰

Implicitly or directly threatening residents who are reluctant to move: In some cases, officials tell relocation targets that their villages will no longer receive essential services if they do not agree to relocate, such as maintenance of roads or paths leading to remote villages where they live. “After most of the people resettle, the infrastructure here will not be built for individual people ... and the mountains will be closed for afforestation,” the Party secretary of Chamdo Municipality told villagers targeted for relocation in April 2020, “therefore, I suggest that people think more about the future and future generations, and relocate as soon as possible.”¹¹¹ In some cases, officials have said that relocation benefits

¹⁰⁹ Lanying Qin, “An Analysis of Promoting the Sustainable Development of Relocation for Poverty Alleviation in Tibet -- Based on the Relocation of Changdu 'Sanyan' Area in Tibet (推进西藏易地扶贫搬迁可持续发展探析——基于西藏昌都市‘三岩’片区易地搬迁的分析),” *China Tibet Development Forum*, July 28, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/dYojdERN3BwxvCNGYUgShg> archived at <https://archive.ph/ASwjL> on April 15, 2024.

¹¹⁰ Yonten Nyima and Emily T. Yeh, “The Construction of Consent for High-altitude Resettlement in Tibet.” Official reports rarely reveal financial details, but in one instance in Medog County in 2018, relocated villagers not registered as poor had to bear 15% of the cost of the new house. One household cited as an example owed the government 65,000 yuan (US\$10,000). Officials sought to persuade them that subsidies paid to border residents would cover the cost. See “The working group visited Gangyu Village four times to solve the biggest ‘pimple’ of the relocation of the masses (访真情、解真难——工作组四访岗玉村解开群众易地搬迁最大‘疙瘩’).”

¹¹¹ “After most of the people resettle, the infrastructure here will not be built for individual people, and the state-owned assets will not be allowed to be privately appropriated, and the mountains will be closed for forestry in the future. Therefore, I [Abu] still suggest that people think more about the future and future generations, and relocate as soon as possible.” See “Abu stays on a spot to guide the overall relocation of poverty alleviation across cities in the Sanyan area (阿布蹲点指导三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁工作),” April 19, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/vrBsp_-dKnElgybRYMrl5w archived at <https://archive.ph/44YW1> on June 21, 2022.

See also, “In the last visit, they [township officials] said we had better actively cooperate with the government, or we would be going against the wishes of the state and would be held responsible for any negative consequences and would not be given any future development projects.” Yonten Nyima and Emily T. Yeh, “The Construction of Consent for High-altitude Resettlement in Tibet,” p. 13.

such as subsidies or loans will not be available or “may not be as good” unless those asked to relocate immediately agree.¹¹²

A Lhasa resident told Human Rights Watch in early 2019 that officials get agreement to relocate by “using a number of techniques, such as they announce a deadline, saying—as they did when they moved people from Inner Lhasa to other parts of the city—that whoever moves first will be rewarded with the best place, and whoever moves last will get the worst.”¹¹³

Threatening surveillance, administrative punishment, or criminal prosecution for anyone discouraging others from agreeing to relocate: In 2018, two county leaders in Gonjo, Chamdo Municipality, instructed relocation officials to “speed up progress in mobilizing the masses who did not sign up spontaneously” for relocation by “keeping a close eye on key villages, key people, and key events, carry out targeted education and guidance” and by “taking tough measures in accordance with the law when necessary to crack down on some groups, educate some groups, and rectify some groups.”¹¹⁴

The Party secretary of Chamdo Municipality told officials in 2020 that if anyone uses “inducement, coercion, enticement or incitement” in any form to get others to refuse to relocate, “we should resolutely crack down and deal with them in accordance with the law.” He added that local monasteries and religious figures in particular are “strictly forbidden from interfering in the relocation process.”¹¹⁵ A series of relocation work teams in Nagchu in 2018 announced that they would “impose administrative penalties on those who maliciously create and spread rumors” relating to relocation,¹¹⁶ and that “for any acts

¹¹² “Xie Guogao went to Duoka Village to do in-depth and detailed work on the reluctance of some people to move (谢国高到多卡村就部分群众不愿搬迁问题做深入细致工作),” January 3, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6MfnpFD8gio49nFCdk2Zag> archived at <https://archive.ph/5fPdF> on April 16, 2024.

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch interview (name and place withheld), January 8, 2019.

¹¹⁴ “Start again with more powerful measures to make the Sanyan area cross-city overall relocation poverty alleviation and relocation work achieve “re-breakthrough” (【贡觉要闻】整装“再出发”以更加有力的措施让三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁宣讲工作实现“再突破”),” December 6, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/LiAm-wMo1Udf-RBoFFBePg> archived at <https://archive.ph/HHOPH> on April 16, 2024.

¹¹⁵ “Abu stays on a spot to guide the overall relocation of poverty alleviation across cities in the Sanyan area (阿布蹲点指导三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁工作).”

¹¹⁶ “Strengthen the supervision of public opinion and impose administrative penalties on those who maliciously create and spread rumors; grasp the direction of public opinion, actively publicize national policies and measures, and strengthen ideological education for herdsmen, so that herdsmen can understand the benefits of national policies ideologically and consciously invest in them.” See “Nyima County solidly carries out field research on high-altitude ecological relocation (尼玛县扎实开展高海拔生态搬迁调研工作).”

of incitement or undermining of the relocation work, we will strictly, swiftly, and resolutely crack down on them, and will not tolerate them.”¹¹⁷

Placing extreme pressure on local officials to obtain 100 percent agreement from local people to relocate: The higher authorities use a series of terms and phrases to signal to local officials that they will face severe consequences in terms of work prospects if they fail to meet the program goals. These measures include declaring relocation to be a policy directly ordered by the central authorities, defining it as a “political task,” listing it as a work priority, setting a rigid deadline for compliance, and forbidding exceptions or negotiations. In February 2023, for example, a county leader said in a meeting that “cadres, masses, and monks at all levels should ... have a sense of the overall situation and unconditional obedience” in relation to the relocation policy.¹¹⁸ In almost all reports of relocation drives, relocation is described as “the primary political task,”¹¹⁹ “as a major political task,”¹²⁰ or as “a major political responsibility and major livelihood project in the county,”¹²¹ signaling severe consequences for officials if the drive is not completed successfully.

In 2018, county-level leaders in Gonjo warned township officials “to ensure that the relocation task is completed on schedule [and] to take extraordinary measures to

¹¹⁷ “For acts of inciting and undermining the relocation work in violation of laws and disciplines, we will strictly, swiftly, and resolutely crack down on them, and will not tolerate them. We will escort the high-altitude ecological relocation of Rongma Township and ensure the smooth progress of the relocation work.” See “The supervision team of Rongma Township, Nima County supervised the work of the high-altitude ecological relocation furniture concentration stage in Zangqu Village (尼玛县荣玛乡督导组对藏曲村高海拔生态搬迁家具集中阶段工作进行督查),” June 6, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/IZzHUVVgTj2UJh-sH0mcYg> archived at <https://archive.ph/sL38x> on April 16, 2024.

¹¹⁸ “在现场办公会上，巴桑扎西同志强调：一是竹巴龙乡各级干部、群众、僧人要牢固树立“四个意识”，坚定“四个自信”，做到“两个维护”，在涉及到国家重大项目建设上要有大局意识，要无条件服从。” “The county magistrate Basang Zhaxi went deep into the Xisong Village of Zhubalong Township to supervise and investigate the land acquisition and relocation of the Kamai Exchange Station (县长巴桑扎西深入竹巴龙乡西松贡村督导调研卡麦换流站征地、搬迁相关工作),” February 14, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/85cehpjFQ9EskgK2t8yg> archived at <https://archive.ph/5d3Kz> on April 16, 2024.

¹¹⁹ “[Gongjue News] Gongjue county held a mobilization meeting for on-site inspection personnel of poverty alleviation and relocation across the city in Sanyan district (【贡觉要闻】贡觉县召开三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁实地考察人员宣讲动员会),” October 13, 2018, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/_WG7jShijic4UsEYXikUcw archived at <https://archive.ph/ZILCc> on April 16, 2024.

¹²⁰ “Comrade Pubu Duoqi led a team to go to Yadong County and Gamba County to connect and investigate the extremely high altitude ecological relocation work in Angren County (普布多吉同志率队深入亚东县、岗巴县对接、调研昂仁县极海拔生态搬迁工作),” July 22, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/21r1RnFj4QkZa3RNXPGlg> archived at <https://archive.ph/BNLee> on April 16, 2024.

¹²¹ “Cuoqin County's “three forces work together” to study, publicize and implement the spirit of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (措勤县“三力齐发”抓党学的二十大精神的学习宣传贯彻工作),” February 8, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/NaATARTechhCMYct4neXmw> archived at <https://archive.ph/qaePS> on April 16, 2024.

understand the spirit of the superiors,”¹²² and told them “to complete the relocation task in strict accordance with the established schedule.”¹²³ The same leaders told village headmen and officials that if they and their families do not themselves “unconditionally take the lead” in relocating, it will be “directly characterized as a problem with their political stance,” a serious offense in the Chinese political system.¹²⁴ One township official explained, “When the higher levels [of government] make relocation a hard target, we must fulfill it even if it goes against the wishes of pastoralists. What we can and must do is undertake thought work and try every means to make pastoralists accept the policy. Otherwise, we ourselves will be in trouble.”¹²⁵

Requiring all households of a village to agree to relocate before carrying out

relocation: The whole-village relocation programs do not allow individual households to opt out of a relocation scheme. If one family or household were to decide not to relocate, no other families would be able to relocate. Since relocation is often advantageous for the poorer members of a community, because of initially high economic incentives for poor families, usually some members in a community will want to move. Requiring a consensus decision removes any flexibility for villagers to make individual choices and increases pressure on those who are reluctant to agree to move.¹²⁶

¹²² “A new round of publicity group for the relocation of Sanyan in Gongjue county held a mobilization and deployment meeting for publicity work (【脱贫攻坚】贡觉县三岩搬迁新一轮宣讲组 召开宣讲工作动员部署会),” December 5, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/WXTvDzRutawlsfCBjjK3Vg> archived at <https://archive.ph/hwdFY> on April 16, 2024.

¹²³ “[Gongjue Highlights] Gongjue county held a meeting to promote the overall poverty alleviation and relocation work in Sanyan District in 2021 (【贡觉要闻】贡觉县召开2021年三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁工作推进会),” April 30, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/WaWgjHGllpA26TQEdWuoQ> archived at <https://archive.ph/oXkys> on April 16, 2024.

¹²⁴ “Sanyan area cross-city overall relocation for poverty alleviation “leave no household, no person” There is no room for maneuver, no conditions to talk about (【贡觉要闻】三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁“不留一户、不留一人”没有何回旋余地、没有任何条件可讲).”

¹²⁵ Yonten Nyima and Emily T. Yeh, “The Construction of Consent for High-altitude Resettlement in Tibet,” p. 9.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

III. Misleading Information in Individual-household Relocation Programs

Officials implementing individual-household relocation programs are also prone to apply pressure on households if the quota for relocations for that township or locality has not been met. The principal method of persuasion in such situations, which is widely used in efforts to obtain consent for whole-village relocations as well, is the assertion that relocation will improve people's economic situation. Many media reports describe officials repeating the official slogan of the Targeted Poverty Alleviation relocation program in the TAR, which says that those relocated will "get rich" after they move to the new location. Evidence collected by Human Rights Watch suggests that such claims of increases in income and services after relocation often turn out to be overstated, incorrect, or selective. This use of misleading arguments or "soft coercion" matches with a study of relocation in Shanghai that found that such claims are "often purposely fabricated by [local officials] to persuade resettles to move to [a] planned place."¹²⁷

The evidence that the authorities failed to provide full information during the pre-relocation process comes from two sources.

First, accounts given by former Tibetan nomads to family members overseas that have been shared with Human Rights Watch describe difficulties in finding stable sources of income after relocation. Their accounts raise doubts about the validity of information given to them prior to relocation.

One account, which took place in February 2022, came from a former nomad who had been relocated to the mass relocation site at Sinpori in 2019. He said the family had more spacious new housing than before and his children had better access to schooling, which they liked. But he said that even three years after relocation, "our biggest concern is

¹²⁷ Hongzhang Xu, Xinyuan Xu, and Jamie Pittock, "Understanding social issues in a new approach," p. 9. This study, based on analysis of 287,000 social media postings by people involved in a relocation project in Shanghai, found that officials "selectively present and exaggerate the positive aspects of post-resettlement lives, particularly the high value of their re-allocated new housing in the future [which, f]or most resettles ... is a major part of their compensation.... Local governments are also competitors [with] resettles for resources during displacement and resettlement and they have strong incentives to reduce the cost[s] of displacement by providing misleading information for resettles to accelerate displacement."

income.” He had worked at a construction site at Sinpori the year before, and his wife had work in an orchard for several months, but he said that those were just temporary jobs and the couple “did not have stable jobs here.”¹²⁸

In another conversation, a former nomad who had been relocated to the Sinpori resettlement site in July 2022 said that he and other relocated nomads there could not find a profession or trade in the area because they had little or no knowledge of Chinese and few other skills. When they get work, such as laboring on construction sites, he said, the contractors pay them far less than the rate the contractors receive from the government for hiring them, and less than is paid to local workers.¹²⁹

Apparently because the TAR government is aware that many of the 30,000 or more relocatees at Sinpori are finding it difficult to get work, officials are allowing them to continue to receive income from their livestock in their original village as a special temporary concession; this is not normally permitted after relocation. Both of the relocatees whose accounts are described above were therefore able to support themselves and their families from the income generated by the herds they had left behind with other members of their community on the grasslands and from government subsidies given to nomads under an existing program for compliance with partial grazing bans and for reducing livestock numbers, or just generally for “rangeland protection.”¹³⁰ One of these relocatees said he and others feared that this concession could be withdrawn at any time.¹³¹

Another conversation involved a former nomad who relocated from the grasslands to a local county town in northern TAR in August 2017. He said, “There are not many jobs, they are hard to get, and always short-term.” He said younger people who know some

¹²⁸ Information from overseas Tibetan, February 2022. Name and other details withheld.

¹²⁹ Information from overseas Tibetan, March 2023. Name and other details withheld.

¹³⁰ The official name of the program that provides these subsidies is the “Rangeland Ecological Protection Subsidy and Reward Mechanism.” It subsidizes pastoralist households for conforming to partial grazing bans and for reducing livestock numbers. See Yonten Nyima and Emily T. Yeh, “The Construction of Consent for High-altitude Resettlement in Tibet,” p. 1-19.

¹³¹ Ibid.: “One story was about a resettled pastoralist caught stealing because he had no meat to eat. The other claimed that some resettled pastoralists had returned to their home county to beg for meat and butter. ...Two years later [in April 2022, nearly four years after the Rongmar relocation], a Nyima County government report raised the need to improve relocation, including by making sure that those who were resettled “had meat to eat,” suggesting that the rumours were not without basis.” See “Caiwang Renzeng, a member of the city's high-altitude ecological relocation and resettlement leading group, and his entourage investigated the development of the early stage work for extremely high-altitude relocation in Nima County (市高海拔生态搬迁安置领导小组成员才旺仁增一行调研尼玛县极高海拔搬迁前期工作开展情况),” April 13, 2022, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/OYkC4ZgodKrlJyGfgtLVw> archived at <https://archive.ph/OAEXO> on April 16, 2024.

Chinese—which would be very rare among Tibetan nomads—and have outgoing personalities might be able to find stable work, but “otherwise it is quite difficult.” He also said that the water supply in his new house, along with sewage facilities and garbage collection for the new community, was not working, and that the relocatees at this site were having to draw water from a well.

The second source of evidence that raises doubts about the reliability of pre-location information given by officials comes from research about post-relocation conditions in the TAR by scholars within China or Tibet. Human Rights Watch collected seven such academic reports based on detailed surveys among Tibetans who had been relocated since 2016 and one long-term assessment of a project that began in 2004. Although the research papers all praise the government’s relocation programs and describe them as successful in some respects or for certain sectors of the community, the surveys all found significant shortfalls in employment, income, and sometimes even government services after relocation.

Given that such academic work is either commissioned by or otherwise approved by the government, officials—those who designed the relocation programs, and those who carried them out—would have been well aware of these shortfalls. Yet they still assure prospective relocatees that their incomes would increase after relocations.

Four of these research papers were studies of individual-household relocation schemes. They include:

- A 2022 study by two leading scholars from Tibet University in Lhasa, which found that “the relocation of 266,000 poor people from inhospitable areas in Tibet [since 2016] has brought change from absolute poverty to relative poverty, from explicit poverty to hidden poverty.”¹³²
- The above conclusion is based partly on a survey of 1,739 households in 2020 that had been relocated to four locations in the TAR between December 2017 and February 2018. That survey found that “the proportion of poor people who are not satisfied with their relocation amounts to 52.39 percent.” They noted that “it can be seen that the impoverished people’s satisfaction with relocation is low, indicating that satisfaction with the relocation policy needs to be improved.”

¹³² Xinling Yang 杨新玲 and Tudeng Kezhu 图登克珠 [Thubten Khedrup], “Research on relative poverty among people resettled under the Poverty Alleviation Relocation Program (西藏易地扶贫搬迁人口相对贫困问题研究),” *Frontier Governance Tibet Development Forum* 1 (2022) 边疆治理·西藏发展论坛 2022 年第 1 期.

- Dissatisfaction was particularly high among women relocatees. The researchers found that one of the major factors accounting for the dissatisfaction was the realization that “income increases after relocation, [but] consumption expenditure may also increase,” implying that the relocatees had not been given prior information about the increases in expenditure they would inevitably face after relocation. The researchers’ main recommendation to the government was that “it is necessary to improve the participation of the relocated people in the process of policy implementation.”¹³³ This again implied that relocatees had not been sufficiently advised, let alone consulted, during the pre-relocation drive.
- A similar research project by TAR Party School scholars in September 2020 assessed the situation for individual households relocated to sites near Lhasa. It found that “the number of relocated people who have been employed is small, the demand for jobs does not match the quality and ability of the relocated people themselves, and the jobs are not sustainable or stable enough.” It also found that the “sense of belonging and comfort is not strong” among relocatees in their new sites, that they are “are unwilling to move their household registration to the resettlement place,” that “there is still a phenomenon of ‘running back and forth’” (returning to the original homeplace), and that “some relocated people return to their old houses.”¹³⁴
 - A household survey of 97 Tibetan households at a relocation site in Dzayul (Ch.: Chayu, 察隅) County, Nyingtri Municipality, in 2020 also found evidence of post-relocation problems. The responses to the survey indicated that schools were chronically understaffed and underequipped, and that most employers in the area were Chinese and did not hire non-Chinese speakers. 31 percent of the relocatees complained of poor medical care, while 17 percent said water supplies were inconvenient. Overall, the author concluded that “the house distribution and internal design are unreasonable ... the migrants are faced with employment barriers, and the ability of sustainable development is insufficient ... the learning atmosphere of the resettlement area is not strong ... the infrastructure is weak, and the quality of life needs to be improved.” One to two years after relocation, over half of the families

¹³³ Weilian Zeng 曾维莲, Wenfeng Yang 杨文凤, and Zibao Sun 孙自保, “The satisfaction evaluation of the poor population in the relocated migration and the influencing factors—A case study of relocated migration in Tibet (贫困人口对易地扶贫搬迁的满意度评价及影响因素研究——以西藏易地扶贫搬迁为例),” *Science & Technology Review* 38.13 (2020), p. 113-121.

¹³⁴ Luosang Dajie et al., “Research on the Sustainable Development of Poverty Alleviation and Relocation in Tibet — Based on the investigation and analysis of Lhasa (西藏易地扶贫搬迁可持续发展探究——基于拉萨的调研分析).”

interviewed for the survey were making an annual income of less than 5,000 yuan (US\$700) per year, a third of the average rural income for the TAR.¹³⁵

Studies by Chinese academics of whole-village relocation schemes produced very similar findings:

- A July 2020 study by a researcher from the Chamdo Municipality Party School in the TAR found that there were “not enough jobs” for those who had been relocated from Gonjo County in Chamdo Municipality (see Case Study on Sa-ngen). The researcher concluded that “no employment service had been specially provided” for them, “the public welfare jobs provided by the government cannot meet the employment needs of all people,” infrastructure in the new site was “not perfect” or was still at the planning stage, the organizers “did not arrange employment channels,” and another site had “no specific plans for measures such as livestock sheds, industrial development, mass employment, and income increase.”¹³⁶ The survey also found that 95 percent of the relocatees were illiterate—making it even more unlikely that they would secure long-term employment after relocation. This must have been known before the relocation scheme was proposed, making it doubtful that officials were sincere when they assured future relocatees that they would find stable, long-term sources of income at their new homes.
- An academic survey of 700 relocatees at the Sinpori relocation site in 2021 found that, three years after moving, 63 percent found it difficult to find a suitable job, 77 percent found it difficult to balance income with expenses, and many “are full of confusion and bewilderment about their future lives” and “may become over-reliant on government subsidies, and become marginal urban dwellers who have lost their ... ability to get work.” Of those surveyed, 43 percent said they would go back to their pastoral villages if given the option, 88 percent were still relying on income from their original village, and 30 percent were depressed and finding it hard to adapt.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Haifang Yu 余海芳, “Study on the Difficulties and Countermeasures of Poverty Alleviation and Relocation in Tibet Case Study of Chayu County, Nyingchi (西藏易地扶贫搬迁存在困境及应对策略 研究—以林芝市察隅县为例),” M.A. thesis, Tibet University, 2020.

¹³⁶ Lanying Qin, “An Analysis of Promoting the Sustainable Development of Relocation for Poverty Alleviation in Tibet -- Based on the Relocation of Changdu "Sanyan" Area in Tibet (推进西藏易地扶贫搬迁可持续发展探析——基于西藏昌都市“三岩”片区易地搬迁的分析).”

¹³⁷ Details have been withheld to protect the author since the survey has not been released for publication.

- In 2023, a study by a scholar from Tibet University of Nationalities on the conditions among the 30,000 relocatees at the Sinpori relocation site found “deficiencies in education, medical care, housing, and other infrastructure” and said even after five years, the program’s “ability to absorb the relocated people into employment is far from expected.” The report said that the relocatees had “poor employment competitiveness,” that “their income is generally low,” and that they were still “mainly relying” for survival on income from their original village.¹³⁸
- In May 2023, a reporter for China’s main national paper, Renmin Ribao, visited the Sinpori resettlement site and described conditions there. The article praised the relocation program unreservedly, but the reporter noted that after three years many relocatees were still dependent for survival primarily on income from the herds that they had to leave behind on the grasslands, or on the subsidies and payments they were still being allowed to receive from their home area in compensation for herd reduction.¹³⁹
- These reports matched the findings of a 2014 survey of 464 relocatees at a relocation project in a Tibetan area of Qinghai. That survey was conducted 10 years after the participants had been relocated, by which time initial relocation problems should have been resolved. It found that 20 percent of the former nomads said that their standard of living had fallen, and 69 percent said they were facing financial difficulties. It also found that 26 percent wished that they could move back to their original homes on the grasslands, while another 24 percent indicated that they would also have wished to move back if they had not already sold all their livestock prior to relocation.¹⁴⁰

Human Rights Watch has been able to obtain some additional information about living conditions at the largest resettlement site in the Lhasa area. The site, which has been

¹³⁸ Yan Zhao, “[Research on Public Management in Ethnic Areas] Paths for Tibet’s extremely high-altitude ecological relocation areas to be integrated into new urbanization ([民族地区公共管理研究] 西藏极高海拔生态搬迁安置区融入新型城镇化的路径),” *Journal of Tibet University for Nationalities* 5 (2023), <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/F9lJqHD3SBschUYMeyepdg> archived at <https://archive.ph/kCreX> on April 16, 2024.

¹³⁹ “From the hometown of 5,000 meters above sea level in Tibet to the new house at an altitude of 3,600 meters above sea level, ecological relocation for more than three years - Rodawa family, embracing a new life (front-line research)” reprinted as “Attention | Ecological relocation for more than three years - Rodawa family, embracing a new life (关注 | 生态搬迁三年多——罗达瓦一家 · 拥抱新生活),” *Renmin Ribao (People’s Daily)*, May 26, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/EtLUMoKGFeyiRY1aFVpBEQ> archived at <https://archive.ph/V1LQi> on April 16, 2024.

¹⁴⁰ The relocatees in this survey had been moved as part of the Ecological Migration in the Three-River-Source Region, 2004-2010. See Wei Jim 靳薇, “Investigation report on the current situation of ecological migration in Sanjiangyuan, Qinghai (青海三江源生态移民现状调查报告),” *Scientific Socialism 科学社会主义* 1 (2014), p. 112-115.

named “Xiangheyuan” in Chinese, meaning “Auspicious and Peaceful Garden Community,” is attached to a village called Sangmo in Toelung Dechen District, just to the west of Lhasa. The site houses 6,605 former nomads in purpose-built 16- or 17-story blocks. The Lhasa resident interviewed by Human Rights Watch in early 2019 lived near the resettlement site and had daily interactions with the former nomads through his work. He said that a year or two after the nomads were moved to Sangmo in 2016, many of the resettled nomads at the site were jobless, unaccustomed to prices in or near Lhasa, and unable to afford even a bowl of soup. He described problems of litter, sanitation, and pollution at the site, and characterized the tower blocks in which they lived as “having very low building quality, with elevators and very little space, and the problem of frozen pipes in winter, and the electricity often is not working—so then they have no water and no elevators.”¹⁴¹

An official media report in March 2021, which described the Xiangheyuan resettlement site as “currently the largest, most numerous, and most difficult to manage in Lhasa,” said that “when the residents first moved here, uncivilized phenomena occurred from time to time such as littering and throwing rubbish from high up.”¹⁴² The article noted a case of a resettled nomad who “often plays cards and gambles and loses all [the household’s] living expenses,” though it said he had since been cured of his addiction. The article said that since October 2018, two years after the nomads moved to the site, teams of volunteers were “carrying out long-term environmental improvement” and providing assistance to the community.

¹⁴¹ Information from overseas Tibetan, early 2019. Name and place withheld.

¹⁴² “Xiangheyuan Community, Duilongdeqing District, Lhasa City, Tibet: Explore a new model of volunteer service team and build a happy community together (西藏拉萨市堆龙德庆区祥和苑社区：探索志愿者服务队新模式 共筑幸福社区),” March 18, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/z7RnHRxqwB4h5HlzehQFrg> archived at <https://archive.ph/qoS6K> on April 16, 2024.



Satellite imagery showing urbanisation of the Sangmo village area in Tolung Dechen District, where several formerly nomadic communities have been relocated. Images taken on March 7, 2009, December 25, 2016, and December 17, 2022. © 2024 Maxar Technologies. Source: Google Earth

A third source of evidence that the authorities failed to provide full information during the pre-relocation process is found in modifications to official phraseology about the relocation process. These modifications suggest that officials may have become aware that income-generation for relocatees at the new site is often doubtful or long delayed. By June 2022, reports describing the main relocation project in the TAR had changed the original policy slogan of the campaign: “move in, settle down, have things to do, get rich.” Instead, some reports were using a revised version of the slogan: “move in, settle down, gradually get rich.”¹⁴³ Even TAR Party Secretary Wu Yingjie told relocatees in January 2020, after they had moved, that they should “be prepared to endure the hardships of this generation for the sake of the happiness of future generations.”¹⁴⁴ That phrase is rarely found in media reports of official speeches in the TAR, but it has been used at least five times by Wu when addressing relocated people,¹⁴⁵ indicating official awareness that relocatees face economic hardships. Overall, these reports by relocatees, researchers, journalists, and local residents suggest that conditions after relocation are often problematic, for reasons that officials must have been well aware of from past experience.

¹⁴³ The slogan changed from “搬得出、稳得住、有事做、能致富” to “搬得进、稳得住、逐步能致富。” For the first version, see “Tibet plans for this year so that 25,000 people can move out, live stably, have something to do, and become rich (西藏今年打算这样做·让2.5万人搬得出、稳得住、有事做、能致富),” April 10, 2016, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/RC48BiDyAvKDY9loxRZq1w> archived at <https://archive.ph/vbw9w> on April 16, 2024. For the latter version, see “Realize the high-altitude ecological relocation of people in Rongma Township stable employment, gradually can get rich (实现荣玛乡高海拔生态搬迁群众稳得住有就业、逐步能致富),” April 10, 2022, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Cc4lOE6GLlBhlaiZCrCKSw> archived at <https://archive.ph/jblaw> on April 16, 2024; and “Visiting and inspecting people's sentiments and condolences to warm children's hearts — Wang Kun, Secretary of the Party Committee of Zhongsha Township, made an in-depth visit to condolences to the relocated people of “Sanyan” (走访察民情慰问暖童心——仲莎乡党委书记王昆深入走访慰问“三岩”搬迁群众),” March 4, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/cc9iMdWj25r2FqAfkUCYsA> archived at <https://archive.ph/ldkMy> on April 16, 2024.

¹⁴⁴ “Wu Yingjie and Qi Zhala conducted a field visit to the Sinpori extremely high altitude ecological resettlement site (吴英杰齐扎拉在森布日极高海拔地区生态搬迁安置点调研).”

¹⁴⁵ “这代人吃苦·子孙后代享福” “This generation will endure hardships for future generations.” See “Wu Yingjie investigates poverty alleviation work in deeply impoverished areas in the Sanyan area of Qamdo), China Tibet News Network via Internet Information Gongjue (吴英杰在昌都三岩片区调研深度贫困地区脱贫攻坚工作); “Wu Yingjie visited the relocated households in the “Sanyan” area of Qamdo for poverty alleviation in Lhasa (吴英杰在拉萨看望昌都“三岩”片区易地扶贫搬迁户),” July 2, 2018, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/u8aCIS-Xcvc9A7W2_VxO1w archived at <https://archive.ph/Sou8K> on April 16, 2024; “The Standing Committee of the Party Committee of the Autonomous Region studied the rural revitalization strategy, the ecological relocation of extremely high altitude areas, etc. (自治区党委常委会会议研究乡村振兴战略、极高海拔地区生态搬迁等),” April 11, 2019, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/l32Xl2vEdzQKlf5njWUkA> archived at <https://archive.ph/7UumO> on April 16, 2024; “Adhere to the people-centered development philosophy and continuously enhance the sense of gain, happiness, and security of people of all ethnic groups (区内要闻 | 吴英杰：坚持以人民为中心的发展思想 不断增强各族群众获得感幸福感安全感),” May 15, 2019, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/H5pNMz8Xd84WasvjfleBbg> archived at <https://archive.ph/yorax> on April 17, 2024; 吴英杰齐扎拉在森布日极高海拔地区生态搬迁安置点调研, “Wu Yingjie and Qi Zhala conducted a field visit to the Sinpori extremely high altitude ecological resettlement site (吴英杰齐扎拉在森布日极高海拔地区生态搬迁安置点调研); “Video | Wu Yingjie investigates poverty alleviation and temple management in Shannan (视频 | 吴英杰在山南调研脱贫攻坚和寺庙管理工作),” June 13, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/8JwogCFyppeBDAZo8JdRMA> archived at <https://archive.ph/bsqMz> on April 17, 2024.

This raises serious concerns about the credibility of information and assurances given by officials to villagers during the pre-relocation process.

IV. Demolition

The Chinese government takes extreme measures to prevent people from changing their mind after relocation and returning to their homes: it requires them to demolish their former homes once they have been relocated.¹⁴⁶ This practice applies to all forms of relocation. National regulations issued in 2019 say “a rural villager can only own one homestead, and the old one must be vacated when occupying the new one ... for relocated people, after moving into a new house, the original house shall be demolished” (article 70). The demolition “must be done as a whole for all buildings and ancillary facilities” including “courtyard walls and sheds,” and must not be “just symbolic demolition or partial demolition” (article 71).¹⁴⁷ The regulations allow in general a year between relocation and demolition, but “the former houses of relocated people whose land has been transferred or who have achieved employment should be demolished immediately” (article 74). Relocated households are not allowed to sell, mortgage, or rebuild their original houses—the policy of “one household, one house” in rural areas means that “they are not allowed to apply for a second homestead construction site in the village group where their household registration is located.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ “Gar County promotes the demolition of old houses for poverty alleviation and relocation in an orderly manner (噶尔县有序推进易地扶贫搬迁旧房拆除工作),” August 27, 2019, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/eTtS6wtabQkF8fBwDXzjLw> archived at <https://archive.ph/xLLp1> on April 17, 2024; “Consolidating the effectiveness of poverty alleviation | Amdo is in action (脱贫攻坚成效巩固 | 安多在行动(五十八)),” October 18, 2019, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/4RwZOUdcJAgf7Tj2TyCjTA> archived at <https://archive.ph/LC5Do> on April 17, 2024; “Wang Lei, former secretary of the Party committee of Tashi Raodeng Township, Milin County, Nyingchi City (群众心中的“雅布哪”书记——记林芝市米林县扎西绕登乡原党委书记王磊),” July 21, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/dMKzhmzeT5BE7KrPo4lSZA> archived at <https://archive.ph/23BKP> on April 17, 2024; “Luoza County Commission for Discipline Inspection and Supervision “Three Focuses and Three Escorts” strengthens special supervision to provide strong disciplinary guarantees for strengthening the frontier, prospering the frontier and enriching the people (洛扎县纪委监委“三聚焦三护航”强化专项监督为强边兴边富民提供有力纪律保障),” April 24, 2022, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/1QzYUjBq349tRo8PLdC31A> archived at <https://archive.ph/PkLk5> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁴⁷ 发改振兴 (Reform and Development, Revitalization) [2019] No. 1068,” issued by the National Development and Reform Commission and other ministries, quoted in “Hundred Questions and Answers on Poverty Alleviation and Relocation in the New Era” - Relevant Requirements for Demolition and Reclamation (《新时期易地扶贫搬迁工作百问百答》——拆旧复垦工作的相关要求),” April 30, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/2l2SGoW9JHHuIEkEReAgbA> archived at <https://archive.ph/qJ5Wq> on April 17, 2024. For full text of the “Hundred Questions,” see for example Hezheng County Government in Gansu Province, “Hundreds of questions and answers about poverty alleviation and relocation,” <http://xxgk.hezheng.gov.cn/Article/Content?ItemID=deob3070-82f3-4a05-8b04-66263b0cc193>, archived at <https://archive.fo/9d21t> on June 25, 2022. Repeated in “Gar County promotes the demolition of old houses for poverty alleviation and relocation in an orderly manner (噶尔县有序推进易地扶贫搬迁旧房拆除工作).”

¹⁴⁸ “Gandan Quguo Town held a meeting to issue real estate certificates for relocated houses (甘旦曲果镇召开易地搬迁房屋不动产权证书发放会),” May 25, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/yUlks4mGu7pLu6xo8uFf2A> archived at <https://archive.ph/19qxL> on April 17, 2024.

TAR regulations specify that the former house of a relocatee must be demolished within a year of relocation, but exceptions are made for households the government designates as poor: they are allowed to retain use rights to their former agricultural or pastoral land—but usually not to their former houses—for up to five years after relocation.¹⁴⁹ This exception has been applied for nomads resettled in the TAR as part of the ongoing High Altitude Relocation program, apparently because many of the relocatees have not been able to find sustainable income sources in their new homes and still need to rely on income from their remaining herds in the former homes.

The post-relocation demolition policy in Tibet aims to prevent the practice of “one household with multiple residences” in rural areas,¹⁵⁰ and “the phenomenon of relocated people occupying houses in ‘two places.’”¹⁵¹ The policy is sometimes referred to as “one household, one house; moving into a new house, demolishing the old house.”¹⁵² Often, local authorities say that the purpose of the demolition is to reclaim land so as to enhance ecological conservation in that locality. In some cases, households are given a subsidy to compensate for the demolition of their house, which amounts to 8,000 yuan (US\$1,115) per household, according to a report from Lhundrup County, Lhasa Municipality in 2021. However, the sum was only payable if the demolition of the home was completed with a specified time.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ “Questions and Answers on Poverty Alleviation Knowledge in the Tibet Autonomous Region,” TAR Government (2017), art. 37. Reproduced in e.g.: “Q&A on poverty alleviation in Coqên County, Ngari Prefecture, Tibet (西藏阿里地区措勤县脱贫攻坚知识问答?)” December 27, 2018, <https://cq.al.gov.cn/info/1035/4920.htm> archived at <https://archive.ph/n72fx> on June 25, 2022.

¹⁵⁰ “Gandan Quguo Town households carry out poverty alleviation and relocation policy publicity work (甘旦曲果镇入户开展扶贫搬迁政策宣传工作).”

¹⁵¹ The phenomenon of “relocated people occupying houses in ‘two places’” is also referred to as “running at both ends” or “occupying at both ends.” See “Gandan Quguo Town held a meeting to issue real estate certificates for relocated houses (甘旦曲果镇召开易地搬迁房屋不动产证书发放会).” See also, “Langkazi County held a symposium on high-altitude ecological relocation (浪卡子县召开高海拔生态搬迁座谈会),” October 23, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/eFY-PQYKfkvTfLrbyE8Gwg> archived at <https://archive.ph/clwsk> on April 17, 2024; “Harge Town: ‘Party Building Leads’ High-quality Promotion of Old Reclamation Work Fully Completed (【乡村振兴】哈尔盖镇：‘党建引领’高质量推进拆旧复垦工作全面完成).”

¹⁵² “Xiazangke township has solidly carried out demolition, relocation work (我县下藏科乡扎实开展易地搬迁拆旧复垦工作),” June 24, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/_hUa3DJgXEFgDgSk7trydA archived at <https://archive.ph/pxbEo> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁵³ “Gandan Quguo Town households carry out poverty alleviation and relocation policy publicity work (甘旦曲果镇入户开展扶贫搬迁政策宣传工作).”



Villagers demolish their former houses, Tanggu Xiang, Lhundrup, June 2021. Source: Tanggu Township Government, Linzhou County, Lhasa TAR (林周县唐古乡人民政府)

One report from Tanggu Township in Lhundrup County, Lhasa Municipality, shows that 80 percent of 198 targeted houses were demolished over an eight-day period in June 2021.¹⁵⁴

All media reports of demolition drives in Tibet seen by Human Rights Watch refer to reluctance or refusal by at least some people to demolish their homes. As a Xinhua commentary put it in a 2020 article, “the demolition of old houses has always been a difficult problem at the grassroots level,” especially in poorer areas of China.¹⁵⁵ A team from the Tibet Party School found in a 2020 study that “a considerable part of the people who have relocated still have the phenomenon of ‘living in the new house and occupying the old house,’ and there are certain hidden dangers of returning” to the former location.¹⁵⁶ That resistance is attributed either to “people who do not understand the policy well or to those who violate relevant policies for their own self-interest.” One report from a Tibetan area in Gansu Province attributes the reluctance to demolish to the fact that “some people would rather stay in the house where their ancestors lived than move; some people could

¹⁵⁴ “Newsletter on the demolition of old houses in Tanggu Township (唐古乡搬迁户旧房拆除工作简讯),” June 8, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/FkgPWU6T3lBhc9UtwQJDAA> archived at <https://archive.ph/dLbs1> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁵⁵ “Poverty alleviation and relocation “demolition and reclamation” cannot be dismantled | Daily Quick Review (易地扶贫搬迁“拆旧复垦”不能一拆了之 | 每日快评),” *Xinhua Daily Telegraph*, May 27, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/6O18RYOvUgK9SHCZoC72Aw> archived at <https://archive.ph/VyXV9> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁵⁶ “Research on achievements of Tibet’s poverty alleviation and prevention of returning to poverty (西藏脱贫攻坚成果及防止返贫探究).”

not understand the policy and did not want to move; and there are even people who have a wait-and-see attitude and are not in a hurry to move.”¹⁵⁷

Officials have developed a number of strategies to overcome this problem, which aim to “fundamentally eliminate the ideological dependence of the relocated people on their original housing and land.”¹⁵⁸ These include requiring relocatees to sign contracts at the time of relocation, committing to demolition of the former home. In some areas, local officials are also required to sign “responsibility letters and letters of commitment for work objectives layer by layer, forming a horizontal-to-edge, vertical-to-bottom, and specific-to-person responsibility system,” obliging them to complete a demolition program. This is described as “providing a strong organizational guarantee for fully promoting the demolition of old houses in cases of off-site relocation and homestead reclamation.”

Additional strategies have been developed by officials for households that refuse to demolish their homes. These include “joining the battle and taking up the method of door-to-door visits to vigorously publicize the policies related to relocation”¹⁵⁹ and “household interviews before the relocation, visits and investigations after the relocation, follow-up investigations on the demolition of old houses, and organization of information on relocation and demolition.”¹⁶⁰ In May 2023, in a town in Kangtsa County, Tsojang (Ch.: Haibei, 海北) Prefecture, a largely Tibetan area of Qinghai Province, teams were formed, each with 10 officials and a law enforcement officer, and were instructed to hold “repeated family work and face-to-face communications regarding the demolition of old ‘nail households’ after relocation and to implement policies to focus on tackling the difficulties with each household.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ “还有的群众持观望态度不忙搬。” See: “[Taking root in the grassroots, exhibiting style, caring for the masses and offering true feelings] Dieshan outstanding youth - Jiabaota (【扎根基层展风采 心系群众献真情】迭山优秀青年——加宝塔),” December 7, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/sY6scBoUfj3f1FCp-_jVuQ archived at <https://archive.ph/JMXKa> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁵⁸ “The relocation and demolition of old houses in Jiajia township in Chentsa (【脱贫攻坚】尖扎县贾加乡易地搬迁旧房拆除暨宅基地复垦工作圆满收官),” June 11, 2020, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/edInZ6u_oa2BurT4ywcPg archived at <https://archive.ph/xoXyb> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁵⁹ “Concentrate on multiple measures and take Chaka Town to solidly promote the demolition and reclamation work (凝心聚力 多措并举 茶卡镇扎实推进拆迁复垦工作).”

¹⁶⁰ “The relocation and demolition of old houses in Jiajia township in Chentsa (【脱贫攻坚】尖扎县贾加乡易地搬迁旧房拆除暨宅基地复垦工作圆满收官).”

¹⁶¹ “Harge Town: ‘Party Building Leads’ High-quality Promotion of Old Reclamation Work Fully Completed (【乡村振兴】哈尔盖镇：‘党建引领’高质量推进拆旧复垦工作全面完成).”

In some cases, the policy emphasizes getting the relocatees to demolish their houses themselves—this approach is summarized as “fully mobilize the enthusiasm and initiative of the villagers, encourage self-demolition,”¹⁶² or “rapid dismantling of all that can be dismantled, dismantling of all that should be dismantled, with self-dismantling to be encouraged.”¹⁶³

Once a family has been persuaded to demolish their house, they then have to provide proof that the demolition has been completed. In Jamdun (Ch.: Xiangdui, 香堆),¹⁶⁴ a town in Drayab County, Chamdo Municipality, in May 2022, each village or community had to sign a “demolition and reclamation agreement” with each household that had relocated. They then had to demolish the houses within a month and then “hand over photographs and video evidence of the house before and after the demolition in accordance with the requirements of the relocation agreement to the Town Security Committee.”¹⁶⁵

Depriving relocatees of the possibility of returning to their homes if relocation proves unsatisfactory contravenes international standards. The UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement provides that states should, when circumstances allow, prioritize the rights of restitution and return. The guidelines say that “when return is possible or adequate resettlement in conformity with these guidelines is not provided, the competent authorities should establish conditions and provide the means, including financial, for voluntary return in safety and security, and with dignity, to homes or places of habitual residence.” They also say that “competent authorities have the duty and responsibility to assist returning persons, groups or communities to recover, to the maximum extent possible, the property and possessions that they left behind or were dispossessed of upon their eviction.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² “Party building ‘red engine’ promotes high-quality ex situ relocation, demolition, and reclamation (党建“红色引擎”高质量推进易地搬迁拆旧复垦),” April 27, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/mJoO3iCs6GKxv5Jo9kLwsw> archived at <https://archive.ph/15TBz> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁶³ “Xiazangke township has solidly carried out demolition, relocation work (我县下藏科乡扎实开展易地搬迁拆旧复垦工作).”

¹⁶⁴ The town ཇམདུན་ (Jamdun) is known as 香堆 (Xiangdui) in Chinese.

¹⁶⁵ “Xiangdui town held a work arrangement and deployment meeting for demolition and reclamation of ex situ poverty alleviation and relocation (香堆镇召开易地扶贫搬迁“拆旧复垦”工作安排部署会议),” May 24, 2022, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/wH5aAD-TKD405i8hq8Elyg> archived at <https://archive.ph/uRc2o> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁶⁶ UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement, Annex 1, 2007, paras. 65-66.

V. Whole-Village Relocation: Three Case Studies

The following are summaries of official reports on three villages or sets of villages in the TAR that have been selected for relocation. In each of these cases, we were able to reconstruct from official reports detailed accounts of the techniques of persuasion and intimidation used to get entire villages to agree to relocate. The three cases are: Rongmar, a nomadic community in Nagchu Municipality, which was moved in the beginning of 2018 as part of the Extremely High Altitude relocation program; Dokha, a farming village in a mountainous area of Metog County, Nyingtri Municipality, which was moved between 2018 and 2020 as part of the Poverty Alleviation program; and Sa-ngen, a set of farming villages in an area of steep valleys in Gonjo and Markham counties, Chamdo Municipality, where relocation is still ongoing as part of the Poverty Alleviation program.

Rongmar

The whole-village relocation drive at Rongmar¹⁶⁷ received significant media coverage because it was the first case of relocation as part of the High Altitude Relocation program in the TAR.

As a result, the authorities took exceptional steps to ensure that all 1,102 members of the Rongmar community would agree to move. The date for the move was fixed in advance as June 17, 2018. From April 1 to 5, just two months before the scheduled move, four special research teams were sent to Rongmar to carry out the “survey” stage of the relocation drive. This stage involved a survey of people’s willingness to move and “listening carefully to public opinions and wishes.” The results of the survey showed that the nomads were “worried about employment after relocation,” or feared that they would not be able to adapt because of their “low level of education,” or had “misunderstood the policy.” The teams announced that solutions to these problems were to increase propaganda and education work, and to “impose administrative penalties on those who maliciously create and spread rumors.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Tibetan: རོང་མར་ (Rongmar) is known as 荣玛 (Rongma) in Chinese.

¹⁶⁸ “Nyima county solidly carries out field research on high-altitude ecological relocation (尼玛县扎实开展高海拔生态搬迁调研工作).”

A month later, just five weeks before the scheduled date for the move, it was clear that some people were still unwilling to relocate, according to a statement by the deputy head of Rongmar Township on May 9.¹⁶⁹ Three days later, in a highly unusual move, two of the top leaders in the TAR were brought to Rongmar to talk to the population. After listening to “the thoughts and difficulties” of “the masses,” TAR Vice-Chairman Jampel (Ch.: Jiang Bai, 江白) told the people that “the relocation measures are to improve the production and life of the masses, thereby protecting the ecological environment” and that “the relocation is carried out voluntarily by the masses. It is not compulsory or forced.”¹⁷⁰ However, he also told them that the government would increase “ideological guidance work” with them to “further enhance their gratitude,”¹⁷¹ adding that they were “not to impose all problems and difficulties on the Party committee and the government” once they relocated.

Che Dralha (Ch.: Qizhala, 齐扎拉), the TAR chairman, then gave a speech in which he conceded that there were problems in the Rongmar relocation drive, saying “a job is impossible without difficulties.... We must try our best to solve it and overcome it. ... This is what we should do.” But he concluded by telling the community that they must “pay attention to the Party's kindness and love the core, we must closely surround the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core, support it, trust it, be loyal to it, defend it, and always align with the core.” Since the relocation program in Tibet is described as a policy coming from the central authorities in Beijing, this meant that people must accept it.

¹⁶⁹ “At the end of the meeting, in order to determine the final number of relocation households, non-relocation households, and of people willing to take [non-pastoralism] jobs, Tsering Tenzin, vice head of the township, who is also in charge of poverty alleviation, stressed: Among those households willing to resettle, unwilling to resettle, and those people willing to take [non-pastoralism] jobs, if they change their minds, they should register with the Poverty Alleviation Office of our township in a timely manner today, and we will adjust the final data.” (会议最后，为确定牧民群众搬迁户数、不搬迁户数以及就业意愿人员的最终数据，政府副乡长兼扶贫主管次仁旦增同志强调：如果在意愿搬迁户、不愿搬迁户和就业意愿人员改变主意的群众，今天及时到我乡扶贫办进行登记，我们将对最后的数据进行调整)。“Rongma Township held a special meeting on re-arrangement and re-deployment of high-altitude ecological relocation (荣玛乡召开高海拔生态搬迁工作再安排再部署专题会议),” May 11, 2018, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/h5YOljvW8_pgWPKfOhGmiw archived at <https://archive.ph/6gxEl> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁷⁰ The working group led by Chairman Qi Zala of the Autonomous Region visited Rongma Township to inspect and guide the ecological relocation work, 自治区齐扎拉主席一行工作组莅临荣玛乡检查指导生态搬迁工作, May 14, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/PikZiYesxMoiaVFpSt-Fvg> archived at <https://archive.ph/68Xoj> on April 17, 2024

¹⁷¹ “三是加强政策宣传和思想引导工作，进一步增强群众的感恩之心。”

The meeting ended with another senior leader—the head of Nagchu Municipality, Ao Liuquan—saying, “I hope that everyone will take a correct view of the ecological relocation work, support it vigorously, and fully cooperate with it.”

These statements were made to a public meeting of the entire community, with numerous official journalists present; it is likely that more intense forms of pressure were used in one-to-one or many-to-one sessions with those who were still unwilling to move. Those efforts, however, appear to have been insufficient: on June 5, just 12 days before the move date, the Rongmar Party secretary called on all officials to “crack down severely” on “acts of inciting and undermining the relocation work.” He did not describe these acts but said “we will strictly, swiftly, and resolutely crack down on them, and will not tolerate them.”¹⁷² The media reports indicate that by June 17, everyone had “agreed” to move.

Dokha

The most detailed official documentation of a persuasion drive consists of a series of online official articles¹⁷³ and a 49-minute documentary broadcast by China’s national television channel in 2020.¹⁷⁴ The documentary and articles show how, over the previous two years, a Han Chinese cadre from Guangdong Province named Xie Guogao and his team had persuaded reluctant families to agree to relocate from a remote mountain village called Dokha.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² “For acts of inciting and undermining the relocation work in violation of laws and disciplines, we will strictly, swiftly, and resolutely crack down on them, and will not tolerate them. We will escort the high-altitude ecological relocation of Rongma township and ensure the smooth progress of the relocation work.” “三是严厉打击。对违法违纪煽动、破坏搬迁工作的行为，从严从快、坚决打击，绝不姑息，为荣玛乡高海拔生态搬迁保驾护航，确保搬迁工作顺利进行。” See “The supervision team of Rongma township supervised the implementation of the concentrated stage of high-altitude ecological relocation of furniture in Zangqu village (荣玛乡督导组对藏曲村高海拔生态搬迁家具集中阶段工作开展情况进行督查),” June 6, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/EDcbGtlwN4RBm-W2Co4UHg> archived at <https://archive.ph/eKjxw> on April 17, 2024; “The supervision team of Rongma Township, Nima County supervised the work of the high-altitude ecological relocation furniture concentration stage in Zangqu Village (尼玛县荣玛乡督导组对藏曲村高海拔生态搬迁家具集中阶段工作进行督查),”

¹⁷³ “The working group went to Duoka Village to carry out the third relocation of the village (工作组赴多卡村开展该村第三次动迁工作),” and “Xie Guogao went to Duoka Village to do in-depth and detailed work on the reluctance of some people to move (谢国高到多卡村就部分群众不愿搬迁问题做深入细致工作).”

¹⁷⁴ *Poverty Alleviation Stories: Lotus Flower in the Clouds*, CGTN Documentary, November 26, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sTaQl-Rekl>.

¹⁷⁵ The village name is written in Tibetan as ཨ་ཁ་ (Dokha) and in Chinese as 多卡 (Duoka).



Dokha village before relocation in official CCTV screengrab. © CCTV13 News



Duolonggang relocation village in official CCTV screengrab. © CCTV13 News



Chinese Communist Party cadre Xie Guogao (second from right) at a relocation meeting in Dokha village in January 2019. © WeChat name: foshanyuanzang 佛山援藏 (individual account of an Aid Tibet cadre)

The cadres had carried out their persuasion drive, which they refer to as “ideological mobilization work,” through a series of visits to the 31 households in the village over three years. Xie, the leading cadre, is shown in the documentaries refuting repeated statements by some older villagers who say categorically that they do not wish to leave and have no need to leave, since their valley is exceptionally fertile.¹⁷⁶ Xie tells the villagers that they will make more money in the future if they relocate. He does this mainly by calculating the size of economic incentives the villagers will receive from the government if they relocate, while downplaying the increased costs that they will face. He tells one skeptical villager, “Think about the worth of the house that awaits you. Brother, can you do the math? You’re onto a good thing.”¹⁷⁷ But he also tells one family they will have to contribute “only”

¹⁷⁶ *Poverty Alleviation Stories*, at 18:49.

¹⁷⁷ *Poverty Alleviation Stories*, at 30:33.

99,000 yuan (US\$15,200)—about nine times the average annual income of a resident in that county—towards the cost of their new house.¹⁷⁸

Xie convened a public meeting with the villagers in which he accused an older villager, who is wearing the robes of a *ngagpa* or lay Buddhist practitioner, of “using his status as an elder and his religious status to obstruct the relocation.” Xie then “pointed out that being an elder means to be considerate of future generations and that someone who does not consider future generations is not a good elder.”

Xie tells reluctant villagers that after the relocation date, government services to people remaining in the village will be discontinued and “the current roads into the village will no longer be repaired, [so] future generations will only be able to enter and exit on foot.”¹⁷⁹ He mocks a young villager who says the villagers are not accustomed to the Chinese food they would have to eat after relocation and are therefore not willing to move, telling the villager, “I’m 45 years old, and I’ve been eating that food for 45 years, and if it were bad for health, I’d be ill by now, right?”¹⁸⁰ Xie tells the villagers in a meeting that young men who remain in the village “won’t be able to find wives, so won’t have any children.” He holds meetings with holdout villagers, at least one of which continues until 1 a.m. In one scene, he pursues the religious elder to a cave far from the village to which he had moved, to continue to pressure him to agree to relocate. Speaking separately to his team, he describes those who are reluctant to move as lacking understanding or appreciation: “Those that have never left this remote place tend to be stubborn. They clearly interpret the kindness of the government and the Party committee as menacing interference.”¹⁸¹ The documentary in fact shows the villagers expressing gratitude to Xie and his fellow-officials and treating them with extreme deference.

The film and the articles also show Xie “mobilizing” the grandchildren and younger relatives of the village elder to “mobilize their relatives and family to relocate” and telling

¹⁷⁸ *Poverty Alleviation Stories*, at 15:53. “The Sixth Session of the 11th People’s Congress of Metog County was grandly opened (墨脱县第十一届人民代表大会第六次会议隆重开幕),” April 22, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Xe8L-gNj-F97NObG0munWA> archived at <https://archive.ph/gYdl2> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁷⁹ “Xie Guogao went to Duoka Village to do in-depth and detailed work on the reluctance of some people to move (谢国高到多卡村就部分群众不愿搬迁问题做深入细致工作),”

¹⁸⁰ *Poverty Alleviation Stories*, at 30:10.

¹⁸¹ *Poverty Alleviation Stories*, at 19:49.

the son of the village elder, “You must persuade him.”¹⁸² Xie tells the villagers repeatedly that it is their choice whether to move or not, but one of the villagers says “some leaders say it’s for us to decide, [but] others say it’s different.”¹⁸³

The documentary later shows one of the fittest and most determined of the younger villagers facing extreme difficulty in earning a living after relocation. He borrows money from a local bank, buys a large truck, and tries to find work. But when he eventually gets an order to deliver construction materials to a local road-building site, it takes him three days and multiple additional costs to complete the first delivery because of weather conditions and other problems.



Satellite image of Duolonggang relocation village, January 13, 2020. © 2020 Maxar Technologies. Source: Google Earth.

¹⁸² *Poverty Alleviation Stories*, at 26:10.

¹⁸³ *Poverty Alleviation Stories*, at 19:12.

Sa-ngen

In Chamdo Municipality, officials are conducting an ongoing, multi-year effort to relocate 45 villages with at least 11,000 inhabitants. The villages are situated within six townships in an area of Gonjo which, together with a township in the neighboring county of Markham, is historically known as Sa-ngen. Officials said the relocation of these villages is necessary because the mountainous area has “serious shortages of resources” and “the land is also very difficult to cultivate.”¹⁸⁴

The current project to relocate these villages was first made public on October 5, 2017, when TAR Party Secretary Wu Yingjie made a special trip to the Sa-ngen area. He was introduced to local Tibetans who, according to China Tibet News Network, told him that everyone there wanted to move out.¹⁸⁵ Four days later, the TAR Party Committee formally declared that, out of “respect for the wishes of the masses, it had decided to carry out the overall relocation of the masses in the Sa-ngen area.”¹⁸⁶ On May 24, 2018, Chamdo Municipality issued an eight-point instruction to local officials on relocation work in Sa-ngen. It described the work as “the main battlefield for poverty alleviation” and warned officials to “pay close attention to the dynamics of the masses and temple monks to ensure stability”—a clear hint that monks and lamas were already being singled out as potential sources of resistance to relocation.¹⁸⁷

By June 25, 2018, after what the official media called “a tough battle of more than eight months,” the first batch of relocatees, 140 people, were on their way to new homes in Lhasa,¹⁸⁸ a small fraction of the 4,990 scheduled to move there from Sa-ngen.¹⁸⁹ Three

¹⁸⁴ “There are more than 11,000 people in two counties and seven townships. This “moving” in Tibet has touched the hearts of everyone... (两县七乡、11000多人·西藏的这次“搬家”·牵动了众人的心.....),” July 1, 2018, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/lu5x3w6NW3FJYNbulE_44A archived at <https://archive.ph/OMuAl> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁸⁵ “Wu Yingjie investigates poverty alleviation work in deeply impoverished areas in the Sanyan area of Qamdo, China Tibet News Network via Internet Information Gongjue (吴英杰在昌都三岩片区调研深度贫困地区脱贫攻坚工作).”

¹⁸⁶ “Wu Yingjie presided over the Standing Committee's study on the work of ex situ poverty alleviation and relocation in the Sanyan area (吴英杰主持常委会研究三岩片区易地扶贫搬迁等工作),” October 9, 2017, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/u6aoBfDsG9RKTZ-VGbsNew> archived at <https://archive.ph/dm9Zn> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁸⁷ “Eight “needs,” Chen Jun rearranged, redeployed, and reemphasized the relocation of the “Sanyan” area (八个“要”·陈军对“三岩”片区搬迁工作进行再安排、再部署、再强调),” May 24, 2018, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/bKRpLmP5eC_xA_VVoBC6vw archived at <https://archive.ph/3GtOM> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁸⁸ “There are more than 11,000 people in two counties and seven townships. This “moving” in Tibet has touched the hearts of everyone... (两县七乡、11000多人·西藏的这次“搬家”·牵动了众人的心.....).”

¹⁸⁹ “Relocation for Poverty Alleviation in Tibet: The first batch of cross-city relocated households in the “Sanyan” area of Changdu City to Lhasa (西藏扶贫搬迁：昌都市“三岩”片区首批跨市搬迁户到拉萨),” June 29, 2018,

other batches would leave Sa-ngen over the next 12 months,¹⁹⁰ in line with instructions given by the Party to local officials in Gonjo: “easy first, difficult later,” meaning that those willing to move should be moved as soon as possible.

The administration expended significant effort to achieve the goals of the relocation project. Chamdo Municipality dispatched working groups five times to the area in the first year-and-a-half of the project “to conduct research ... and assess the willingness and demands of the local people to relocate.”¹⁹¹ On August 15, 2018, Gonjo County sent a team to carry out relocation propaganda work,¹⁹² and in October local officials held meetings where they showed villagers videos of the sites that they would be moving to.¹⁹³ On November 1, a “strong propaganda group” of local officials arrived in villages to promote the relocation plan, using “various methods such as professional counseling, collective training, going to villages and households, using familiar language and vivid examples to carry out ... ideological education, and guiding the poor to develop good habits.”¹⁹⁴

There must have been continuing concerns about resistance to relocation, because once again officials targeted monks as a source of their problems. In September 2018, the Public Security Bureau of Gonjo issued a formal announcement denouncing as criminals anyone “spreading rumors during the overall relocation of Sa-ngen [or] using feudal superstition methods such as divination and fortune-telling to obstruct the relocation.” This was an attack on Tibetan decision-making customs, which routinely involve asking

http://m.tibet.cn/cn/index/syyc/201806/t20180629_6000823.html?from=singlemessage&isappinstalled=0 archived at <https://archive.ph/v0F5f> on July 10, 2023.

¹⁹⁰ The fourth batch consisted of 523 people relocated to Nyingtri. See: “There are more than 11,000 people in two counties and seven townships. This “moving” in Tibet has touched the hearts of everyone... (两县七乡、11000多人·西藏的这次“搬家”·牵动了众人的心.....).”

¹⁹¹ “There are more than 11,000 people in two counties and seven townships. This “moving” in Tibet has touched the hearts of everyone... (两县七乡、11000多人·西藏的这次“搬家”·牵动了众人的心.....).”

¹⁹² “[Gongjue News] The overall poverty alleviation and relocation of Sanyan, Kuri, Luomai, and Shadong Townships in Gongjue County, has been fully rolled out, (【贡觉要闻】贡觉县克日、罗麦、沙东三乡三岩整体易地扶贫搬迁宣讲工作全面铺开),” August 24, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/qc7-Vaovnp-S1DQftWzNw> archived at <https://archive.ph/bRwDB> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁹³ “[Gongjue News] Gongjue county held a mobilization meeting for on-site inspection personnel of poverty alleviation and relocation across the city in Sanyan district (【贡觉要闻】贡觉县召开三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁实地考察人员宣讲动员会).”

¹⁹⁴ “I went back to my hometown to persuade my relatives (“我回家乡劝亲属”),” November 1, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Y6QU5gOqNUz38aGkZLSYtw> archived at <https://archive.ph/FFu5J> on April 17, 2024.

monks to carry out divination rituals.¹⁹⁵ This ruling meant that Tibetans could no longer safely consult with monks or religious leaders in the community about whether or not to agree to relocate.

In December 2018, county-level officials began intensive persuasion work in the six townships. They held a series of “mobilization” meetings with villagers and with village-level officials, providing “publicity and education of the masses who have not signed the intention to move, and for “nail households.”¹⁹⁶ Nearly daily meetings were held in townships and villages in the first half of December.¹⁹⁷ These efforts seem to have had limited success, because in May 2019, the top leader in Chamdo Municipality, Abu, was brought to the area, where he visited “township after township, and village after village.” His purpose was to “dispel the concerns of the masses.” He acknowledged that there was reluctance to move, telling local people that “it is normal for the masses to have concerns about relocation,” but informed them that “we should see that there is no way out and no prospect for development in Sa-ngen.” Abu told the local residents that they should “effectively change [their] mindset, look at the relocation with the long-term vision of

¹⁹⁵ “[Announcement] Gongjue County's announcement on focusing on cracking down on 10 kinds of evil forces and illegal and criminal acts (【公告】贡觉县关于重点打击10种黑恶势力和违法犯罪行为的通告),” September 21, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/k9Numx6yOZT1A5tpCojDUA> archived at <https://archive.ph/Suaip> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁹⁶ “[Gongjue News] A new round of propaganda group for the relocation of Sanyan in Gongjue County held a mobilization and deployment meeting for propaganda work (【贡觉要闻】贡觉县三岩搬迁新一轮宣讲组 召开宣讲工作动员部署会),” December 4, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/ZrtrroosgNWOSRhyKGOxdw> archived at <https://archive.ph/qq1kd> on April 17, 2024.

¹⁹⁷ “A new round of publicity group for the relocation of Sanyan in Gongjue county held a mobilization and deployment meeting for publicity work (【脱贫攻坚】贡觉县三岩搬迁新一轮宣讲组 召开宣讲工作动员部署会);” “Sanyan area cross-city overall relocation for poverty alleviation “leave no household, no person” There is no room for maneuver, no conditions to talk about (【贡觉要闻】三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁“不留一户、不留一人”没有何回旋余地、没有任何条件可讲);” “Re-preach, re-mobilize, and re-deploy to resolutely win the tough battle for poverty alleviation and relocation across cities in the Sanyan area (【贡觉要闻】再宣讲、再动员、再部署·坚决打赢三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁攻坚战);” “Start again with more powerful measures to make the Sanyan area cross-city overall relocation poverty alleviation and relocation work achieve “re-breakthrough” (【贡觉要闻】整装“再出发”以更加有力的措施让三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁宣讲工作实现“再突破”);” “[Gongjue News] The cross-city poverty alleviation and relocation of the Sanyan District is in progress (【贡觉要闻】三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁宣讲进行时),” December 7, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/V6Q1b7Gj1YiFRoga2vCFow> archived at <https://archive.ph/rtGkU> on April 17, 2024; “[Gongjue News] A new round of cross-city poverty alleviation and relocation of Sanyan District has been carried out in depth in Muxie Township (【贡觉要闻】新一轮三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁宣讲工作在木协乡深入开展),” December 9, 2018, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/a_61a_odBelRQdOIYluJUQ archived at <https://archive.ph/2SoWf> on April 17, 2024; “The cross-city poverty alleviation and relocation propaganda group in Sanyan District mobilized all forces to carry out the relocation propaganda work in Mindu Township (【贡觉要闻】三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁宣讲组在敏都乡动员一切力量开展搬迁宣讲工作),” December 11, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/EXeFLbtdAoACHk-1f9h7w> archived at <https://archive.ph/XvsB3> on April 17, 2024; “The cross-city poverty alleviation and relocation propaganda group in Sanyan District carried out a small-cooked “small classroom” accurate lecture (【贡觉要闻】三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁宣讲组开展小灶式“小课堂”精准宣讲),” December 10, 2018, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/q31dPuzhEOilphC6jW_kbQ archived at <https://archive.ph/bmMPq> on April 17, 2024.

sacrificing one generation and being happy for future generations, and relocate out of the poor ravine of Sa-ngen as early as possible.”¹⁹⁸ The implied acknowledgement that benefit from relocation will be delayed until the next generation may have been because officials had realized that members of the community had heard reports of a previous relocation drive in the area that had not led to increased incomes.¹⁹⁹

In June 2019, more meetings were held in the villages to “solve the doubts of the masses,”²⁰⁰ and from late June, a “special supervision team” carried out “inspections and publicity activities,” including arriving as “special guests” at the homes of reluctant villagers.²⁰¹ Photographs and videos produced by local media outlets show that by then the persuasion method had reached the third stage: “face-to-face” meetings in residents’ homes.

¹⁹⁸ “一方面要看到三岩没有出路和发展前景，另一方面要看到搬迁地将来的美好生活和发展前景，切实转变思想观念，以牺牲一代人、幸福子孙后代的长远眼光来看待搬迁，尽早搬迁出三岩这个穷山沟，过上幸福生活。” See “Abu investigates the overall poverty alleviation and relocation work across cities in Sanyan area (阿布调研三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁工作),” May 23, 2019, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/De9G1L1VdshVKFO-5kyFDQ> archived at <https://archive.ph/tNN29> on June 28, 2022.

¹⁹⁹ According to two former residents of Gonjo interviewed by Human Rights Watch in 2005, participants in the “Natural Forest Relocation” program in their area in 2001 and 2002 had not received promised compensation from the government or had been given land that could not be cultivated.

1. “After the migration [in 2001-2], even if we asked [the government] to give us the stated migration compensation of 70,000 yuan to each household, they said that it was [already] spent building new houses for us. [So those who migrated say], “we were duped by the leaders of Chamdo Prefecture and Gonjo County” ... Because of that, in 2003 the people did not register to migrate.” Human Rights Watch interview with a 24-year-old woman from Gonjo, name withheld, interviewed in Kathmandu, December 30, 2004.
2. “8 mu of farmland with crops cultivated were given [to us] on uneven deforested land but because water cannot be brought to the uneven farmland, the crops dried and could not ripen. One day, all the leaders of the township and county came for inspection during which the poor families were crying that we cannot live in this place, we will go back to our native place, and we cannot live our life here. When they said that, these leaders told them that if you return to your native place, you will not be considered a member of that place because you have been moved to this place with the help of the government.” Human Rights Watch interview with a 28-year-old man from Gonjo, name withheld, interviewed in Kathmandu, January 7, 2005.

²⁰⁰ “Listen to public opinions and resolve public confusion - Tashi went deep into the cordyceps collection points to carry out mass mobilization work for overall cross-city poverty alleviation and relocation in Sanyan area (【贡觉要闻】听民意、解民惑——扎西深入虫草采集点开展三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁群众动员工作).”

²⁰¹ “By the Jinsha River, they sat on the ground, talking about policies, relocation, and the next generation... (金沙江畔·他们席地而坐·谈政策、谈搬迁、谈下一代……),” July 2, 2019, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/R8RPC2d5HXZegy9765_HLg archived at <https://archive.ph/3vWtQ> on April 17, 2024.



County officials announce relocation policy, Mindu Township, Gonjo, December 2018. Source: WeChat account Internet Information Gongjue (网信贡觉)

Several more busloads of villagers from Gonjo were sent to relocation sites, but the authorities now faced a problem: they had announced in December 2018 that the relocation drive in Sa-ngen must be completed by the end of 2019.²⁰² In addition, the Sa-ngen relocation program required “entire-village” agreement for relocation. Still, according to media reports, some villagers had what were called “rigid concepts” and “relocation concerns,” and “had still not registered for relocation,” constituting what was described as a “hard bone” in the relocation process.²⁰³

²⁰² “的政策和要求没有任何条件可讲，在2019年必须实现三岩整体搬迁，没有任何观望的余地，没有任何讨价还价的条件，这是政策、更是底线，底线是不能突破的。” “The policy and requirements have no conditions to speak of, and the overall relocation of Three Rocks must be realized in 2019, with no room for wait-and-see and no conditions for bargaining.” See “Sanyan area cross-city overall relocation for poverty alleviation “leave no household, no person” There is no room for maneuver, no conditions to talk about (【贡觉要闻】三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁“不留一户、不留一人”没有何回旋余地、没有任何条件可讲).”

²⁰³ “Abu stays on a spot to guide the overall relocation of poverty alleviation across cities in the Sanyan area (阿布蹲点指导三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁工作).”

In March 2019, officials brought the most senior leader in the municipality, Abu, back to the area once again to “explain policies to the masses, [and] clear up doubts.”²⁰⁴ This time, his remarks appear to have had a harsher tone. He informed the local people that the poverty alleviation plan had been made by the Party Central Committee and General Secretary Xi Jinping, and that it was a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to live a happy life.” He told them, “You think that your current living conditions are okay and are worrying that you will not be able to live a happy life in the place you will move to after relocation, [but] this is completely unfounded,” because “getting rich and becoming well-off is the fundamental purpose of our Communist Party and the essential attribute of the socialist system.” He acknowledged that “some people reported that the place to move to is at high altitude and has poor conditions, and so they don't want to move,” but said that “this is because everyone only sees the short-term and the local area and does not have a long-term and overall perspective.” He admitted that “conditions cannot be greatly improved immediately,” but said that after relocation, people will come to “feel that the current locality is not as good as the relocation site.” According to the report, he did not, however, contradict rumors that the new site was at high altitude.²⁰⁵

Abu also made implicit threats. After most of the people have moved, he said, infrastructure “will no longer be built for individual people,” and “the mountains will be closed for afforestation.” He added, “I suggest that everyone think more about the future and do more for the sake of future generations and relocate as soon as possible.”

He told local officials to take punitive action against anyone encouraging others not to relocate: “[As for] the masses [who] are unwilling to relocate ... if there are external factors such as temptation, coercion, and incitement, we must resolutely crack down on them and deal with them according to law.” Again, he singled out local monks and lamas as a potential problem, telling them “The local Party committee and government strictly prohibit temples from intervening in the relocation work.” He also told officials that they were required to “seize those with vested interests, those with fantasies, and especially

²⁰⁴ “Abu stays on a spot to guide the overall relocation of poverty alleviation across cities in the Sanyan area (阿布蹲点指导三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁工作).”

²⁰⁵ Radio Free Asia received reports from local informants of the forced relocation of 12 households in March 2019. One source noted that “Under the terms of the China-ordered relocation scheme, the villagers are allowed to come back during harvesting of the caterpillar fungus for the next 20 years,” suggesting that this concession was made to persuade villagers concerned by loss of livelihood. “Tibetan Villagers Forced From Their Homes in Gonjo County,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 4, 2019, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/forced-04042019150724>.

those who incite the masses with ulterior motives, [and to] carefully study measures that are effective, in place, and precise, and do the work one by one.”²⁰⁶

Three weeks later, six “special research teams” were sent by the county Party “to clear up the resistance related to the organization and interference that affects the progress of the relocation work.” This was the only mention of the word “resistance” (zuli, 阻力) in reports on relocation reviewed by Human Rights Watch.²⁰⁷ The teams criticized township and village officials “who have not played their role clearly, seriously hindering the progress of the relocation work” and instructed them to “adopt the ‘one-on-one’ and ‘one-household-one-policy’ method to carry out publicity and mobilization,” and to “adopt a group-style household contracting method.”²⁰⁸

By November 14, 2020, a total of 19 batches of people from Sa-ngen had been relocated to new settlements over the previous three years, but almost no news about the project has appeared since then in the Chinese media. There must have been significant delays to the Sa-ngen relocation drive because in May 2023, three years after the original end-date for the project, the new leader of Chamdo visited to “investigate the progress of Sa-ngen's relocation work,” once again telling local officials to “ensure that the people can move out of the mountains and valleys as soon as possible.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ “要抓住既得利益者、抱有幻想者特别是蛊惑煽动群众别有用心的人，认真研究管用、到位、精准化的举措，一件一件、一项一项去做工作。” See “Abu stays on a spot to guide the overall relocation of poverty alleviation across cities in the Sanyan area (阿布蹲点指导三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁工作).”

²⁰⁷ “严重阻碍了搬迁工作的进展，为疏通影响搬迁工作进展的涉组涉干涉编阻力，努力推动三岩片区各级党组织和党员...” See “[Gongjue News] The Organization Department of the Gongjue County Party Committee went deep into the Sanyan area to carry out a special survey on cross-city overall relocation for poverty alleviation (【贡觉动态】贡觉县委组织部深入三岩片区开展跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁专项调研),” May 9, 2020, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/KwkgIK98SrQy5z4KoONIUA> archived at <https://archive.ph/RJWhR> on April 17, 2024.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. “[Gongjue News] A new round of cross city poverty alleviation and relocation promotion in the Sanyan area is underway (【贡觉要闻】新一轮三岩片区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁宣讲进行时),” December 8, 2018, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/tWmlaZXSP7q937t9KONvDg> archived at <https://archive.ph/Ojebq> on April 17, 2024.

²⁰⁹ “[Reprinted] Gong Huicai is investigating in Gongjue County (【转载】龚会才在贡觉县调研),” May 7, 2022, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/SKkKqMPGe3zyThaNBHDFow> archived at <https://archive.ph/iZCnw> on April 17, 2024.

In March 2022, a team was also sent to Keri township to push for relocation. See “[Gongjue News] Gongjue County is actively carrying out the publicity activities for the overall relocation of the Sanyan area across the city (【贡觉动态】贡觉县积极开展三岩片区跨市整体易地搬迁宣讲活动),” March 21, 2022, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/oxThiDUhyApdVkjQxf-OSw> archived at <https://archive.ph/vvyvQ> on April 17, 2024.



Local officials visit relocation site to check occupancy, Drubarong Township, Markham, September 2023.
Source: WeChat account Zhubalong on the Jinsha River (金沙江畔竹巴龙)

Acknowledgments

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Human Rights Watch is grateful to Dr. Sophie Richardson, who edited the report while serving as the China director at Human Rights Watch.

Appendix 1: Table Showing Relocation and Sedentarization Policies in Tibet since 2000

Relocation and Rehousing Programs in Tibetan areas of the PRC since 2000	Locations	Households	Number of people relocated	Number of people rehoused or sedentarized *	Number of people “involved” **	Years
TAR (Central and Western Tibet)						
“Natural Forest Relocation” program, part of China’s “Natural Forestry Protection Project” (天然林保护项目)	TAR		15,183			2000-2010
“Rangeland Construction and Pastoralist Sedentarization” program (西藏草场建设与游牧民定居工程) (The official numbers include those required to build their houses at their camp sites as well as those relocated.)	TAR			400,009		2001-2008
Comfortable Housing Project (西藏农牧民安居工程, CHP) ²¹⁰	TAR	460,300	150,000	1,880,000		2006-2013
Targeted Poverty Alleviation Relocation (易地扶贫搬迁) ²¹¹	TAR (largely individual household relocation)	62,199	254,395			2016-2020
The Sa-ngen Cross-municipality Whole-village Relocation Program (三岩片 relocation)	TAR (Whole-village relocation)	1,801	11,605			2017-ongoing ²¹³

²¹⁰ The number of those relocated rather than rehoused on the same site is based on a statement in January 2012 by two scholars in the official Chinese media that “in the past six years the number of farmers and nomads who have been relocated [in the TAR] is about 150,000.” See Luorong Zhandui and Yang Minghong, “Report distorts facts on Tibet housing project,” *China Daily*, January 28, 2012, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2012-01/28/content_14497756.htm.

²¹¹ “Tour of local relocation work for poverty alleviation No. 20 | Working together to build a moderately prosperous society (地方易地扶贫搬迁工作巡礼之二十 | 携手共进建小康——西藏自治区“十三五”易地扶贫搬迁工作纪实).”

²¹³ The plan for the Sa-ngen program was confirmed by the TAR authorities in October 2017, but the official launch of the program was in May 2018. See “Farewell “Sanyan Difficulties” | Poverty Alleviation and Relocation Opens Up a New World (告别“三岩之难” | 扶贫搬迁开辟一片新天地).” See Case Study on Sa-ngen.

区跨市整体易地扶贫搬迁) ²¹²						
Construction of Well-off Villages in the Border Areas of the TAR (The official numbers include people “involved” or already resident in the new villages as well as those who were relocated.)	TAR (individual - household relocation)	62,160			241,835	2017-2020; ongoing
Extremely High Altitude Ecological Relocation in the TAR (极高海拔生态搬迁) ²¹⁴	TAR (Whole-village relocation)	31,721	130,302			2017-2025 ongoing
TAPs (Eastern Tibetan Areas)						
Ecological Migration in the Three-River-Source Region (三江源地区生态移民安置)	Qinghai Province (whole village relocation programs)	10,140	55,773			2004-2010
The Pastoralist Sedentarization program (游牧民定居工程). The official numbers include those required to build their houses at their camping sites as well as an unknown number who were also relocated)	Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan (largely individual household relocation)	226,825		1,078,385		Gansu 2008- Qinghai 2009- Sichuan 2009- ongoing
Targeted Poverty Alleviation program	Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, Yunnan (largely individual household relocation)	79,266	313,192			2016-2020

²¹² “Farewell “Sanyan Difficulties” | Poverty Alleviation and Relocation Opens Up a New World (告别“三岩之难” | 扶贫搬迁开辟一片新天地).” Other reports put the planned number of villages to be relocated from Sa-ngen at 45 “administrative villages” with “more than 16,600 people.” See “Summary of Poverty Alleviation and Relocation in the “Sanyan” Area: Changing the Land and Soil to Enrich the People, (“三岩”片区易地扶贫搬迁综述：换一方水土 富了一方人).”

²¹⁴ See “Tibet Vigorously Implements Grassland Ecological Protection and Restoration Projects, to Promote the Construction of a National Grassland Park This Year (西藏大力实施草原生态保护修复工程 今年推进国家草原自然公园建设).”

Totals	TAR		561,485	2,280,009	241,835	
	Eastern Tibetan areas		368,965	1,078,385	-	
	All Tibetan areas in the PRC		930,450	3,358,394	241,835	4,530,679

* “Rehoused” refers to households who were required to rebuild their houses, usually with government loans to support a proportion of the costs, and to pastoralist families who were required to build houses at what had been until then their camping sites. “Relocated” refers to the proportion of these households who were required to build new houses at new locations. The Chinese authorities have not released full figures for those who were relocated in these projects.

** “Involved” is the term used in official Chinese reports for participants in the Well-off Border Village program. We assume that, besides the hundred or so new villages constructed under this program, a number of existing border villages were redesignated as “moderately well-off border villages,” and that their existing residents are included in the number of those “involved” in the program, together with those who were relocated to the new border villages as part of this program. The Chinese authorities have not released figures for those who were relocated in this program.

Appendix 2: Human Rights Watch Letter to the Chinese Government

350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10118-3299
Tel: 212-290-4700
Fax: 212-736-1300; 917-591-3452

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Manny Maung, *Researcher*
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HRW.org

March 19, 2024

Wang Junzheng
Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Tibet
Autonomous Region Committee

Yan Jinhai
Chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Region People's Government

Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States
3505 International Place, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008

Re: Mass Relocations in Tibet

Dear Party Secretary Wang and Chairman Yan,

Human Rights Watch is an international nongovernmental organization that investigates and reports on human rights violations in about 100 countries, including China.

Human Rights Watch has been carrying out research on relocation policies in Tibetan areas of China. We have identified concerns about the voluntary nature of these programs, their impact on Tibetans' way of life, and their enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights protected under international human rights law.

Our research is largely based on official media sources in China, since like other independent observers, the Chinese government has not allowed us access into the country to safely conduct human rights investigations.

Attached are several questions. We would appreciate that you provide responses to these questions and any other relevant information by April 19, 2024, so that they can be reflected in our upcoming publications.

Please send your response to Jody Chen, associate in the Asia division, at



Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Maya Wang
Acting China Director
Human Rights Watch

Questions to the Government of China regarding mass relocations in Tibet

- Official Chinese media sources suggest that, in the case of programs where whole villages are being relocated, local officials use persistent coercion—including repeated home visits and persuasion sessions by officials of increasing seniority, and threats of administrative and criminal penalties—to pressure people to assent to these programs. These sources also suggest that declining to participate is not presented as an option to the villagers. Do you have any comments on these findings?
- According to our research, Chinese government policies pressuring Tibetans to relocate do not meet international human rights standards, which require that authorities explore “all feasible alternatives” prior to forcibly evicting them, ensure that the evictees “have a right to adequate compensation” and other procedural protections such as providing legal remedies and legal aid to those affected. What steps does the government take to ensure the relocations comply with international legal standards?
- In the case of relocation of individual households for poverty alleviation, our research found that official information provided to those targeted claims that participation will result in improved employment prospects and higher incomes. Such claims are contradicted by the outcomes of previous relocation programs in Tibetan areas described in previous Human Rights Watch reports, and by reports published by researchers within China. How does the government ensure that people in Tibetan areas who are asked if they wish to relocate, are provided full, clear, and accurate information about the economic consequences of relocation, including regarding costs and finding work?



(left) Sinpori mass resettlement site, Tibet Autonomous Region. Source: TAR Propaganda Department (西藏自治区宣传部)

(front cover) A Chinese Communist Party deputy secretary of Gonjo county visits households to persuade them to agree to the proposed relocation of their village, in Sa-ngen, Tibet Autonomous Region, March 2024. © 2024 Gongjue Pioneers (贡觉先锋) WeChat Account

“Educate the Masses to Change Their Minds” China’s Forced Relocation of Rural Tibetans

Since 2016, the Chinese government has accelerated the relocations of Tibetans, citing poverty alleviation and ecological preservation. Despite assurances that the program is voluntary, official government reports indicate that participation in “whole-village relocation” programs is effectively compulsory. Chinese authorities wield extreme forms of persuasion to pressure Tibetan villagers and nomads to move to areas often hundreds of kilometers away from their homes, including by using repeated home visits and implicit threats of punishment.

Based on a review of government publications, academic field studies, and over 1,000 official Chinese media articles, *“Educate the Masses to Change Their Minds”* reveals that China’s own media reports document the coercive tactics used by officials to pressure Tibetans, in violation of international human rights law standards. The report also highlights three case studies where Human Rights Watch was able to reconstruct detailed accounts of persuasion and intimidation used by Chinese authorities.

Human Rights Watch urges China to halt relocation initiatives in Tibet until an independent, expert review of relocation policies and practices is carried out.