

The Tragedy of Armero, Columbia : Studying How Land Rights Have Been Managed in the Aftermath of the Volcanic Eruption of the Nevado Del Ruiz in 1985

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SUMMARY

In November 13th, 1985, after giving signs of activity for many weeks, the Nevado del Ruiz Volcano erupted at night, causing the destruction of nearby towns. The town of Armero, located in the Colombian Andean region, was severely hurt as 90% of its urban area was destroyed and causing the sudden death of 85 % of its population (23 000 people out of a 29 000 population). This tragedy transformed abruptly Armero's biophysical and social environment and affected the land tenure of its inhabitants. Almost 30 years later, a master's degree research has been undertaken to study the Armero's case, in order to find how the survivors have been treated and land rights of the stricken area have been managed, compensated or relocated in the aftermath of the eruption.

A diagnosis was realized to find out what were the consequences of the relocation strategy adopted for the survivors. Adopting a wide cartographic approach, the reconstruction of the pre-disaster cadastral map was necessary to assess the number of land properties that have been affected. An impressive total of 17 000 cadastral paper forms have been scanned to support the integration of land property data and the mapping of the area. Also, systematic examinations of the land property registry and the legal framework of the survivors' relocation were realized. Our research underlines the fact that survivors were relocated in nearby towns, as leaseholders and not land owners or landlords. The land rights of deceased people have been left untreated. This shows us that relocation is a double-sided issue: the relocation of surviving people must not overshadow the relocation of land rights.

Today, disaster risk management is still weak in the region. A total of 601 farms are located within the volcanic risk area, mainly because lands are very fertile by receiving regularly volcanic ashes. The 1985 eruption survivors are still very vulnerable from a social point of view because they didn't receive a proper compensation for their lost houses, land, culture, and property rights. The

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land tenure management is still very chaotic in the “Old” Armero, even 30 years later, but the Colombian government shows a recent interest to settle the land issue in order to create a memorial site dedicated to the tragedy and the victims.

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