

**DISPLACEMENT AND MIGRATION:  
EXAMPLES OF INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION**

**UN System Side Event  
30 November 2010  
18:30-20:00, Águila, Cancún Messe**

**Towards a Shared Approach to Climate Change, Displacement and Migration**

IPCC forecasts suggest that climate change is likely to cause an increase in migration. This means that the well-being of even more people and communities will be at stake in our ability to manage migration in a way that harnesses the benefits and opportunities and reduces vulnerabilities. States and the international community at large need to recognize the urgency of tackling the migration, climate change and environment nexus and its complexities and start addressing the gaps in research, policy and practice.

Migration exists along a **double continuum**: from forced to voluntary, and from part of humanitarian response to part of sustainable development. This means that migration is one of a set of potential adaptation strategies, requiring the right policies to support it. It also means that, despite international efforts to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change, there have already been and will continue to be devastating consequences for the most vulnerable persons in our societies. It is essential to bring the human rights dimension of climate change to the climate change debate. Climate change-related effects are felt not only by States and economies, but also – and more fundamentally – by individuals and communities, and especially those on the move, irrespective of their status.

Climate change and environmental degradation can reinforce the global inequalities that drive much of both international and internal migration today. There is a wide continuum of drivers and outcomes related to climate change and migration. Climate-related migration not only involves people fleeing from the imminent threat or aftermath of a climate disaster, but also entails planned relocation by households and communities with governments as an adaptation strategy to search for alternative livelihoods and sources of income. Population vulnerability to climate change is dynamic, not static, mainly because of mobility and displacement. Mobility is a critical part of people's changing exposure to climate hazards and their adaptive capacity. In identifying vulnerable populations and ensuring effective adaptation, it is essential to incorporate people's mobility into the equation.

While reliable global and even regional figures are not available for either the current or future population flows triggered by environmental factors, climate change, demographic trends and globalization all point to increased migration. IPCC forecasts suggest that climate change is likely to be an increasingly important variable in this equation. Most movements are likely to be internal, as people move to areas within their own countries that provide greater human security. Some migration will likely occur across international borders. In many cases, people affected by climate change in one developing country are likely to move to neighbouring developing countries, whereas smaller numbers will likely move longer distances to more developed regions.

These movements will result from a number of different pathways: increased drought that undermines agricultural livelihoods and reduced food security; rising sea levels that affect coastal deltas and especially low lying island countries which affect habitability of these areas; intensification of acute natural hazards such as cyclones and hurricanes which threaten the physical safety of affected populations; and competition over scarce natural resources that may lead to conflict especially where other mediating factors are at play in the same region, including social tensions, extreme poverty, weak governance and pre-existing fault lines. The first two pathways will likely result in slow onset

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deterioration of conditions and “hidden” livelihood and food security crises, whereas the latter two may well result in humanitarian emergencies.

**Implementing Better Climate Change Related Displacement and Migration Policies**

The overarching policy and programmatic objective for adaptation is to increase the range of options open to those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and thus reduce their vulnerability in the short, medium and long terms. In the context of migration, climate change and the environment, this implies a three-pronged approach:

- 1) Preventing forced migration and displacement as much as possible;
- 2) Where forced migration does occur, providing assistance and protection to those that are being and will be displaced; and
- 3) Facilitating migration as an adaptation strategy to climate change.

This approach requires thinking ahead and planning for change, as well as developing integrated solutions that link migration and climate change adaptation and other relevant domains such as disaster risk reduction and sustainable development.

A human rights perspective in climate change negotiations and policies would usefully direct attention to the situation of vulnerable individuals and communities, especially internally displaced persons and refugees, and underline the importance of procedural rights, particularly access to information, participation in decision making processes and access to effective remedies of affected individuals and communities. A human rights-based approach (HRBA) begins with the recognition that both the causes of climate change and options for responding to it and mitigating its effects are matters of human choice – choices that are in the hands of governments, companies, and other actors at the local, national and international levels.

In practical terms, a HRBA can be used to guide policies and measures of climate change mitigation and adaptation. It can inform assessments and strengthen processes, ensuring access to essential information, effective participation, and the provision of effective remedies. Particular attention should be paid to the needs of groups vulnerable to the short and longer-term impacts of climate change. These include societal groups that are often marginalized with respect to development processes and outcomes on the basis of factors like gender and age, and those more vulnerable given their livelihoods and geographic location. Governments and other actors should empower such groups to take a more informed and active role in the climate and migration policy responses affecting their lives. A joint effort by all countries is required to create avenues for legal and safe migration that address the underlying social, economic and climatic drivers of migration by supporting sustainable human development, increasing disaster preparedness, mitigating climate change and accelerating adaptation measures.

The UN works with governments to support vulnerable, food insecure communities in finding solutions to migration and displacement issues that build resilience to climatic shocks, are environmentally sustainable and enable people to escape the poverty and hunger trap. Properly designed and well targeted asset transfer and assistance programmes, such as social protection schemes and productive safety nets using food, cash and vouchers, are flexible tools that are able to address the multiple vulnerabilities and risks that the displaced may face. Such tools can become platforms for governments to pro-actively manage migration and displacement flows as they provide an opportunity to link to

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immediate protection against climate change impacts with efforts to build resilience and adaptive capacities among vulnerable communities – before they become displaced, or after they have migrated.

Policy makers need to take a holistic approach to tackling adverse impacts of climate change that addresses both the drivers of migration in origin areas (e.g., livelihood insecurity, environmental hazards, conflict, demographic pressures, gender inequality) and the pull factors in destinations (e.g., demand for labor, aging of the population). A comprehensive set of policies would include the following:

- **Support the collection, analysis and sharing of more useful primary data on migration**, particular on internal, short-term and cyclical migration, which is essential for informing better policy-making for adaptation.
- **Identify guiding principles, effective practices and institutional frameworks** to help governments in developing appropriate comprehensive policies, laws and targeted programmes to address both internal and international migration resulting from climate change.
- **Foster adaptation alternatives.** Migration can be part of strategies to help people adapt to climate change if the sustainability of their new livelihoods is ensured. With sustainable rural and urban development and social protection mechanisms that ensure access to adequate and nutritious food as well as land or other assets, people will be better able to migrate adaptively. And where necessary, governments will be better able to help people move with safety and dignity.
- **Support disaster risk reduction and conflict mediation strategies while strengthening humanitarian responses.** If governments do not take action to reduce the risks people face from acute crises arising from natural disasters and competition over resources leading to conflict, they will be called upon to help later, when the problem will be much more difficult to address. Investments should be made today in resilience building strategies designed to preempt uncontrolled crisis situations as well as in more effective humanitarian responses to natural hazards and conflict.
- **Involve the diaspora** in designing and funding adaptation strategies that enable their home countries and communities to cope with climate change.
- **Support those without the resources to move**, who may be more vulnerable to displacement and forced migration and less able to use mobility in an adaptive way, to migrate in safety and dignity.

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**SELECTED UN SYSTEM KEY MATERIALS ON CLIMATE CHANGE, DISPLACEMENT AND MIGRATION**

**International Organization for Migration (IOM)**

Migration, Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

<http://www.iom.int/envmig>

“Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Assessing the Evidence”

[http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/migration\\_and\\_environment.pdf](http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/free/migration_and_environment.pdf)

“Compendium of IOM's activities in migration, climate change and the environment”

[http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/index.php?main\\_page=product\\_info&products\\_id=540](http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=540)

**Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)**

Human Rights and Climate Change

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/climatechange/index.htm>

**United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**

Human Development Report on Migration

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2009/>

Guidance note on migration and mobility

[http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/Migration\\_GN.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/Migration_GN.pdf)

**United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)**

Climate Change Programme

<http://www.unitar.org/climate-change-at-unitar>),

Secretariat of the One UN Training Platform on Climate Change, UN CC:Learn, a collaboration of 22 UN agencies to support country driven climate change learning

<http://www.unclearn.org>

Seminar on “Environmental Migration and Climate Change”

<http://www.unitar.org/ny/international-law-and-policy/migration-and-development-series/migration-and-climate-change>

**United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)**

*Population Dynamics and Climate Change* (UNFPA and IIED)

<http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/publications/pid/4500>

Expert Group Meeting, “Population Dynamics and Climate Change II: Building for Adaptation”

<http://www.unfpa.org/public/site/global/lang/en/pid/6715>

Global Migration Group Fact Sheet on Climate Change and Migration

[http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/pdf/UNFPA-Fact-Sheet\\_Climate\\_Change\\_and\\_Migration\\_2.pdf](http://www.globalmigrationgroup.org/pdf/UNFPA-Fact-Sheet_Climate_Change_and_Migration_2.pdf)

**United Nations University (UNU)**

“In search of Shelter: Mapping the effects of climate change on human migration and displacement.”

[http://www.ciesin.org/documents/clim-migr-report-june09\\_final.pdf](http://www.ciesin.org/documents/clim-migr-report-june09_final.pdf)