

Implementing the Cancun Adaptation Framework: Vulnerability, changing populations and human mobility

**COP17, Durban, South Africa
Side Event, 6 December 2011**

Concept Note

Contributing Organizations:

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)
United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
United Nations University (UNU)
World Health Organization (WHO)
International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)
International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Over the past several years, there has been growing recognition that climate change will impact not only our physical, geological and meteorological environments, but also have profound and direct impacts on people. Climate change and variability already affect human lives and livelihoods, health, well-being and security, and will continue to affect the ways that these contribute to vulnerability, challenging people's capacity to adapt.

At the same time, those countries most vulnerable to climate change impacts are also the ones experiencing the most significant changes to their population. This includes rapid urbanization, population growth, including large and growing numbers of children and young people, and significant migration and displacement.

For instance, of the 12 countries the World Bank has identified as most at risk due to climate change related drought, eight are Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Most of these countries combine high population growth rates with high urbanization rates, from over 3%, which produces a doubling of the urban population in less than 25 years, to even 5%, or a doubling in 15 years. Such rapid rates of urbanization pose enormous challenges for orderly urban development in normal times. These challenges are now exacerbated by a changing climate, whereby the impacts often most severely affect newly arrived urban migrants, slum dwellers

and other vulnerable urban populations. At least five of these countries (Sudan, Chad, Kenya, Ethiopia and Iran) also host large numbers of refugees, who, given their vulnerability, will be among those most affected by climate change.

While reliable global and even regional figures are difficult to determine for either the current or future mobility triggered by environmental factors, climate variability and change is likely to increase both displacement and migration. IDMC has estimated that from 2008 to 2010 between 15 and 38 million people were newly displaced by extreme, sudden-onset weather events each year – primarily floods and storms – with at least three-quarters of those people located in Asia. The impact of mass displacement by mega-disasters, each displacing over a million people, accounted for more than 90% of the total number of people displaced globally each year.

To focus on one particularly vulnerable area, observable changes in the Sahel climate in the last 40 years are impacting issues linked to the availability of natural resources, including desertification, that are essential to livelihoods and food security. Along with important social, economic and political factors, this can contribute to underlying pressures on migration, conflict or a combination of the two. The intersection of poverty, population growth, urbanization, mobility and climate change vulnerability is clear and is happening now.

At COP16, Parties developed the Cancun Adaptation Framework, which helped identify areas of activities that qualified as “adaptation” and which later may be considered for climate finance support. Among the areas specifically referenced are displacement, migration and planned relocation in paragraph 14(f).

Following the adoption of the Cancun Adaptation Framework, the so-called “Nansen Principles on Climate Change and Displacement” were endorsed at an intergovernmental event on vulnerability, resilience and adaptive capacity in disaster prone and environmentally vulnerable communities convened in Oslo last June.

On 15 November, 2011, the Global Migration Group adopted a joint statement on the impact of climate change on migration – the first common position on this issue to be adopted at the level of the United Nations. It recognizes that migration and displacement resulting from environmental degradation and climate change is a global challenge that requires urgent international action. On this basis, it puts forward strong recommendations – to strengthen the human rights and improve the livelihoods of those affected, to assist the Least Developed Countries in integrating climate change and migration into national development strategies, and to address the normative gaps that exist for the protection of those affected.

Our task now is to seek ways to implement paragraph 14(f) in light of our common global understanding, taking account of the needs of the most vulnerable populations and mainstreaming climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction with humanitarian action and long-term sustainable peace and development.

Human mobility exists along a double continuum: from forced to voluntary, and as humanitarian response to a component of sustainable development. This means that migration, and planned relocations, migration and the prevention of forced displacement are part should be regarded as being part of adaptation strategies, requiring appropriate policies to support them. It also means that, despite international efforts to lessen the negative impacts of climate change, there have already been and will continue to be devastating consequences requiring humanitarian responses for the most vulnerable persons in our societies, including those forced to flee or abandon their homes.

However, implementation remains a work in progress. 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 increase their capacity to pursue those options, thus reducing their vulnerability in the short, medium and long terms. In the context of migration, climate change and the environment, this implies approaches that address the causes and consequences of forced migration and displacement as much as possible. Where displacement does occur, it is essential to provide assistance and protection to those that are being and will be displaced.

Policy makers need to take a holistic approach to tackling adverse impacts of climate change that addresses both the drivers of human mobility in areas of origin (e.g., livelihood insecurity, environmental hazards, conflict, demographic pressures, gender inequality) and the pull factors in destinations (e.g., demand for labor, aging population). A set of recommendations developed by the German Marshall Fund Study Team on Climate Change and Migration and added to by a group of international organizations last year provided key insights that were used in the elaboration of the Nansen Principles, and are also in line with the recommendations made at the International Dialogue on Migration on "Climate change, environmental degradation and migration", hosted by IOM in 2011. Some of these recommendations include:

- 1) Supporting the collection, analysis and sharing of more useful primary data on population movements, particularly on internal, short-term and cyclical migration and displacement, which is essential for informing better policy-making for adaptation. Taking these important population data and overlaying them with hydro-meteorological data using geographic information systems and mapping technology will contribute to effective policy formulation, at national and urban/local levels.
- 2) Identifying guiding principles, effective practices and institutional frameworks to help governments in developing appropriate comprehensive policies, laws and targeted programmes to address both internal and external displacement as well as internal and international migration resulting from climate change.
- 3) Building capacities in terms of policy, institutional, administrative and legal frameworks as well as operational and technical capacities.
- 4) Fostering adaptation alternatives. Migration can be part of the strategies of vulnerable populations to adapt to climate change if the security and sustainability of their new homes and livelihoods is ensured and their dignity respected. 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 in safety and dignity.

- 5) Supporting 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.
- 6) Involving diasporas in designing and funding adaptation strategies that enable their home countries and communities to cope with climate change.
- 7) Supporting those without the resources to migrate, who may be more vulnerable to forced displacement and less able to use mobility in an adaptive way.

In addition to migration and displacement, the Cancun Adaptation Framework should take other key issues, such as population growth and location, age structure and conflict sensitivities into consideration, as each of which are essential to an adaptation framework that protects and empower vulnerable people in a changing climate and ensures people's human rights, health and well-being. Many of the most significant impacts of climate change will come in places where vulnerability is high, where populations are changing rapidly, and in areas of heightened conflict. The impacts of changing climatic conditions, coupled with factors such as environmental degradation, extreme weather events, population growth, rapid urbanization, weak governance and land tenure challenges, have led to increased competition over scarce natural resources – most notably fertile land and water – and resulted in tensions and conflicts between communities and livelihood groups. In addressing these changes, and taking account of them in adaptation plans and programmes, critical recommendations would include:

- 1) Recognizing that maximizing opportunities and choices of individuals contribute both to greater adaptive capacity and to positive trajectories of population change. Better access to health care services, including sexual and reproductive health, and education beyond the primary level can provide the foundation for greater climate resilience, can contribute to falling infant, child and maternal mortality, can help to arrest the spread of communicable diseases, and can contribute to decreasing fertility levels. These interventions are also at the core of greater women's empowerment and inclusion, which many have advocated successfully within the climate change talks.
- 2) Empowering young people, including their active participation in economic, social and political life, the climate change negotiations most certainly included. With large numbers of young people in many countries, understanding the expected impact of climate change on children's health, education, nutrition, safety and access to adequate housing and sanitation is critical to strengthen the child focus of climate policies as well as youth community-based climate action. If successfully done, particularly in the context of education, employment and livelihood opportunities, countries will be able to cultivate and seize the powerful potential of young people, be they in small or large

numbers. In this regard, there are particular opportunities to engage urban youth in climate change mitigation and adaptation action.

- 3) Addressing population changes before they unfold rather than reacting after they have happened. Planning that factors in trends in population growth, urbanization, age structure, migration and displacement, through systematic use of available data and projections, will be a major determinant of whether these changes are an opportunity or a challenge to climate-resilient development. Capacity development for effective urban planning to prepare for rapid urban expansion and strengthened institutions to deal with shifting conditions are some of the most effective ways of reducing long term vulnerability.
- 4) Seeking funding to support adaptation strategies and policies, at national and urban/local level and climate proofing measures across critical sectors, such as water and sanitation, health and livelihoods, agriculture and food security, shelter and physical planning to help populations cope with their changing environments, to prepare for the expected increase in extreme weather events and in the event where migration is imperative, to support this as an essential adaptive strategy.

With these recommendations, and with the progress made in institutionalizing the recommendations on human mobility, there is a strong foundation for influencing adaptation implementation. Many of the organizations that are contributed to this note and this event work on the ground in precisely these areas, increasingly in collaboration with each other. With continued collaboration, and continued progress in the climate talks, we can look forward to making even more progress in the years to come.