CLIMATE CHANGE

MIGRATION & DISPLACEMENT

Displacement and Out-Migration: The Marshall Islands Experience

Hilda Heine and Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner

Many Marshallese have their own migration story. Our migration story began when we moved from the capital city of Majuro to Hawai'i for work and educational opportunities. These opportunities included working with the nonprofit Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) while pursuing postgraduate studies (Hilda), and elementary and secondary education in the downtown area of Honolulu (Kathy). For twelve years, life revolved around school, work, family barbeques, and picnics at Ala Moana, and we welcomed a continuous tide of relatives from the Marshalls who came through the Honolulu airport with coolers and suitcases in tow to live with us in our 3-bedroom apartment on Makiki Street.

We always understood that our future was not in the United States. There were no plans to stay permanently—we had moved for a purpose and when we reached our goals, we returned home. Yet the years we lived as a family in Honolulu would set the foundation for understanding the nuanced difficulties of living and migrating as a Marshallese. And as we each entered the realm of climate change work, those experiences have continued to inform and shape the dialogue we pursue at local, national, and international levels.

Our perspective has always been that migration, while a necessary option and important response to climate change, is not meant to be—nor should it be—the only option for our citizens. Forced migration is not the way forward. Our family willingly chose to relocate—and our fellow citizens and future generations must be able to retain that right of choice as well.

The science tells us that climate change impacts will continue to worsen and that we can no longer just focus on mitigation. The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is currently developing its National Adaptation plan, a strategic plan that considers various responses to climate change, including the elevation of land, internal migration, or even the extreme option of building new islands. At only two meters above sea level, we have no higher ground to run to—we must, instead, build that higher ground ourselves.

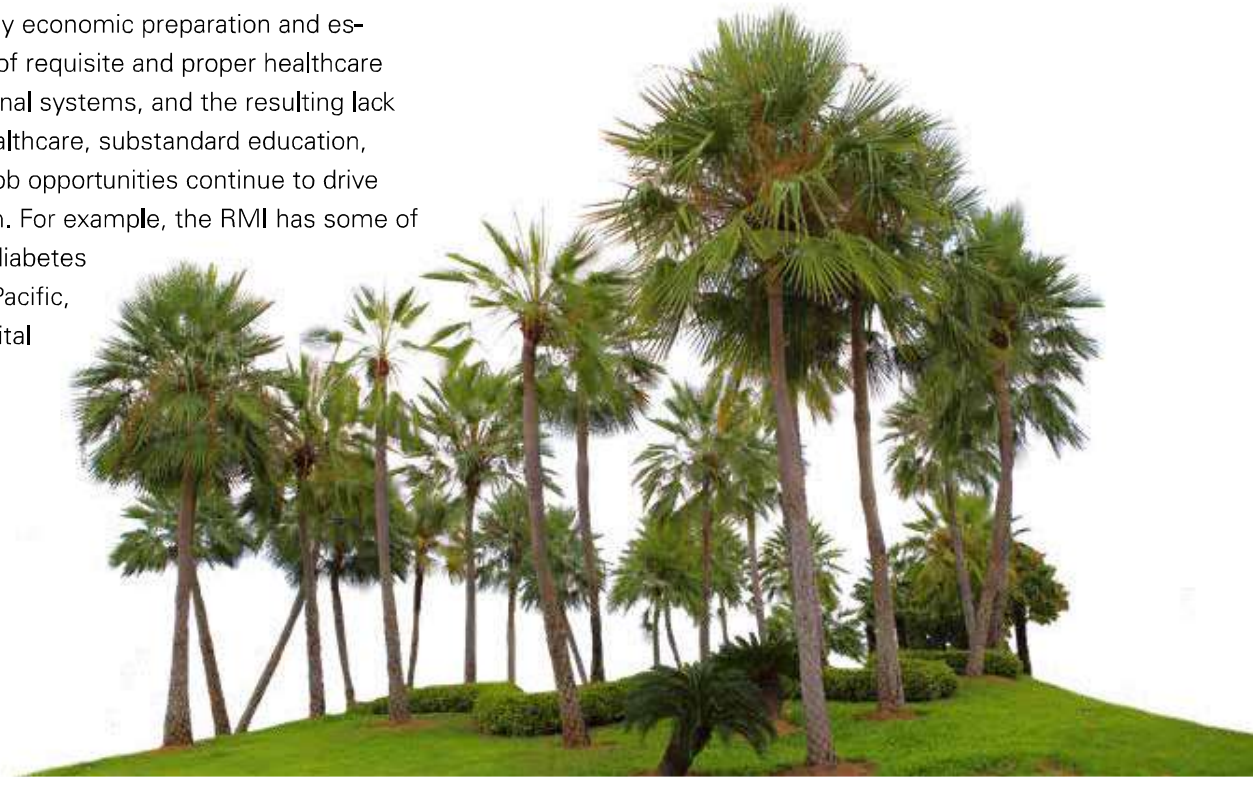
This is why policies to address climate change must not only continue to support mitigation efforts and create systems that enable a just transition into U.S. communities, but also continue to provide support for adaptation—especially for atoll nations, which are uniquely vulnerable. These policies must include funding mechanisms that enable atoll countries to access funds for adaptation sooner rather than later, resources to enable meaningful dialogues with stakeholders in our communities, and studies for understanding and supporting land reclamation or land elevation.

Our Giant, Distant Neighbor

The issues that the RMI is now planning for and considering do not exist in a vacuum. Our country has a long and complicated history with the United States, the country that most of our citizens have and will likely continue to migrate to as climate impacts worsen.

To properly understand our current and future migration patterns, one must also understand the history of the RMI's relationship with the United States, starting with the RMI's transition from a Trust Territory of the U.S. to an independent nation. This change of status took place without the necessary economic preparation and establishment of requisite and proper healthcare and educational systems, and the resulting lack of proper healthcare, substandard education, and limited job opportunities continue to drive out-migration. For example, the RMI has some of the highest diabetes rates in the Pacific, but the hospital system lacks proper dialysis equipment, forcing many Marshallese abroad.

The legacy of nuclear testing conducted by the United States continues to influence migration across the islands and the health of our people. After World War II and before the Compact of Free Association was enacted, the United States tested 67 nuclear weapons on Bikini and Enewetak atolls. Those tests destroyed our islands and ecosystems and had disastrous impacts on the health of our people. Marshallese from these nuclear affected islands were displaced within the Marshall Islands, and are still displaced 70 years later due to high levels of radiation on those islands. Understanding that their islands will never be restored to pre-nuclear testing conditions, many members from those islands in particular have emigrated to seek better lives. For example, a community of Enewetak islanders—the islands that house the Runit nuclear waste known for its cracked dome—currently reside on Big Island in Hawai'i. While our family does not come from the four islands the U.S. deems nuclear-affected, the elders in our family passed away from nuclear-related cancers long ago. No Marshallese citizen, regardless of where they reside in the RMI, is untouched by this legacy.



This nuclear legacy is only one example of the complicated relationship that the Marshallese have with the United States. COVID-19 has also exposed the cracks in the U.S. system, and the many ways vulnerable populations fall through these cracks. Marshallese people in particular have had a higher percentage of deaths in Arkansas, where many are working low-wage jobs with little to no access to the health care that was promised by the Compact of Free Association treaty. We hear from our family members working in the Consulates and as healthcare professionals how they struggle to support Marshallese community members in navigating the complicated systems to gain access to unemployment benefits and health insurance.

This systemic marginalization, combined with the current atmosphere of hostility and outright racism towards immigrants in the United States, puts into stark reality the struggles Marshallese and other Pacific Island people will face as climate impacts drive increased migration. In our work through PREL as well as the time we spent living and growing up in the U.S., we have experienced this discrimination ourselves in our daily interactions with acquaintances and friends, teachers, and in institutional policies such as the eligibility for Medicaid.

A Framework for Mobility

The Compact of Free Association Treaty, a treaty between the Marshall Islands and the United States that first went into effect in 1986, originally extended education and health benefits such as student loans and Medicaid insurance. The Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau have also signed similar Compact agreements with the United States. The first Compact between the RMI and the U.S. was a fifteen-year treaty that was renewed in 2003 for another fifteen-year period, and is currently up for renewal again in 2023.

Migration out of the RMI increased after the Compact went into effect because of visa-free provisions that allowed easy mobility between the RMI and the United States. In 2011, 25 years after the Compact came into force, 22,343 Marshallese were living in the U.S. That number has since risen to an estimated 30,000. This means nearly half of all Marshallese have migrated to the States, with significant numbers in its territory of Guam as well.

While the Compact has enabled easier mobility, there are significant gaps in the agreement that must be addressed in the face of both COVID-19 and climate change. First, the status of Freely

Associated States (FAS) residents living in the United States must be made clearer. As it stands, confusion over our status means that some states allow certain critical benefits, like health insurance, while others deny them.

The discontinuation of Section 177 funds—a $150 million Nuclear Claims Fund for the four most affected the RMI atolls—also needs to be addressed. Without the funds, the Nuclear Claims Tribunal is no longer able to operate, despite the fact that numerous land compensation and personal injury claims have gone unresolved. The elders in our family—both of whom had nuclear-related cancers—were awarded personal injury claims by the Nuclear Claims Tribunal, yet they only received half of the payment because the funds ran out. How many other nuclear victims have experienced this?

We are currently in the process of renegotiating the Compact and working to ensure that climate change and its impacts are considered in the talks. The current U.S. administration's position on the issue, however, will create barriers to that discussion, despite the strategic importance of the Marshall Islands generally, and of Kwajalein missile test site, specifically.

Climate, Health, and Safety

The Compact of Free Association has provided important opportunities for the RMI citizens to access healthcare and education opportunities in the United States. But the gaps in the agreement, paired with the heightened risks posed by climate change and COVID-10 and the current administration's reluctance to address these risks, signal a need for broader foreign policy initiatives that support the Marshall Islands and other frontline nations and communities.

Opportunities lie in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as well as with the Human Rights Council, where Marshall Islands currently has a seat.

Our country is one of just 5 atoll nations that are severely threatened by climate change. King tides, intrusion of salt water into freshwater resources, and the difficulties of growing food have exacerbated the challenges of the harsh atoll environment. We are also facing increased health challenges as a result of climate change. Scientists have determined that dengue fever and other mosquito-borne illnesses are increasing as climate change worsens, and our country has been experiencing this first hand. From this past October to January 2020, our hospitals and staff were overwhelmed with patients sick with dengue fever.

This experience with dengue, however, helped inform our government's decision to close down borders early on in an effort to prevent COVID-19 from entering our country. Hospital administrators advised the National Disaster Committee to take swift action, learning from lessons months earlier that our system and staff lacked the capacity to deal with the pandemic sweeping the world.

COVID-19 has exposed the ways in which countries are capable of transitioning to low-carbon means of transportation, but at high costs. Climate change advocates, including representatives from our own country, have long been pushing for these transitions, but through processes that would provide the breathing room needed for systemic change, and without the high economic impacts and death tolls seen from the pandemic.

Ultimately, foreign policies need to provide the proper infrastructure for migrating—infrastructure that affords our citizens the access to essential services like health care that we desperately need. At the same time, policies must also address and support adaptation so that migration is a choice, and those that decide to stay are able to maintain our land, our identity, and our culture.

Living as a Marshallese family in Hawai'i for all those years gave us many opportunities—but it also taught us the many difficulties of living away from our homeland. We want to ensure that all Marshallese families have the choice to migrate, but can also continue to live in our islands for generations to come.

SENATOR HILDA C. HEINE, former President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), is serving her third term as Member of Parliament (Nitijela) from the constituency of Aur Atoll Electoral District, RMI. She is the first female President of RMI and one of two women elected to the Nitijela following the 2019 election. Previously, Senator Heine was Minister of Education and served the Marshallese government in various capacities, including as President of the College of the Marshall Islands. She worked for the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning in Honolulu, Hawaii for ten years. A crusader for women's rights, Senator Heine is a co-founder and advisor to Women United Together Marshall Islands. Under her leadership, the Pacific Women Leaders Coalition was formed in 2019. Senator Heine holds a BA from the University of Oregon, MA from the University of Hawaii, and EdD from the University of Southern California.

KATHY JETÑIL-KIJINER is a poet of Marshallese ancestry, born in the Marshall Islands and raised in Hawai'i. She received international acclaim through her poetry performance at the opening of the United Nations Climate Summit in New York in 2014. The University of Arizona Press published her collection of poetry, *Iep Jāltok: Poems from a Marshallese Daughter* in 2017. She has created art installations and performances with the Smithsonian and the Queensland Art Gallery, amongst others. In 2019, she was selected as an Obama Asia Pacific Leader Fellow and MIT Director's Media Lab Fellow. She received her Master's in Pacific Island Studies from the University of Hawai'i, and is currently a PhD Candidate at Australia National University. Kathy serves as Climate Envoy for the Republic of the Marshall Islands government and as Director for the Marshall Islands-based youth environmental nonprofit Jo-Jikum.

A Climate Crisis and a World on the Move: Implications for Migration Management

Mariam Traore Chazalnoël & Dina Ionesco

Climate migration is increasingly visible worldwide, from Pacific Islanders moving inland, to migrants in African countries whose livelihoods have been destroyed by desertification and land degradation.[1] And we have seen in the past few years—whether at the United States' southern border or in the Mediterranean—that migration can quickly become a pressing issue for foreign policymakers, who are often unprepared to handle the aftermath of migration crises.

The linkages between migration and climate change are drawing more attention in international policy forums. For many United Nations member states, discussing the adverse impacts of climate change on migration is no longer an option but a necessity. Indeed, even if we do not know exactly how many people migrate as a result of the slow and sudden onset impacts of climate change, we do know that policymakers in all regions of the world are—or will be—confronted by challenges linked to the increased mobility of people because of climate impacts on their livelihoods, physical safety, and health.

In 2019, 25 million of people were displaced within their own countries by weather-related disasters[2], including over 900,000 people in the United States. The World Bank estimates that by 2050, 140 million people could be compelled to move within their home country borders because of climate impacts.[3]

We are not prepared for this anticipated surge in mobility. Existing migration management policies and practices are often inadequate to address the challenges associated with the movement of people in the context of climate change, environmental degradation, and natural disasters. Even where there has been progress in national policies, it is insufficient.

The pace at which the climate is changing combined with other economic or social shocks should prompt governments to urgently consider how to anticipate and respond to evolving migration patterns.

Better Climate Migration Management Will Help States Weather the Storm

COVID-19 is an extreme shock that currently is at the forefront of our thoughts.[4] But there will be more shocks to come—some that we can predict and others that will disrupt our societies with little or no warning. These crises all have the potential to affect the individual fate of millions of migrants, including climate migrants and those left behind. While there is no one-size-fits-all blueprint applicable to crises, better migration management is always going to be an essential component of crisis response.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration[5] (GCM) and the Task Force on Displacement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change[6] (UNFCCC) have produced solid recommendations and principles that can guide states in the development of forward-looking policies on climate migration. As has been the case for many years, the emphasis is on privileging climate change adaptation[7] and resilience strategies *in situ* so that people aren't forced to move because of circumstances beyond their control.

More recently, however, the discussion has evolved to acknowledge, importantly, that migration policies need to be expanded by states to facilitate safe migration for those who cannot remain in, or return to, their areas of origin due to climate and environmental conditions.

The political acceptance of this concept is relatively new—therefore, these ideas are mostly still at the level of principles in international policy texts. However, there is hope that the increased political awareness at the global level can trigger a review of existing national and regional migration and climate change policy frameworks to align them with agreed upon global principles. This is the case for example in Tajikistan where the United Nations Migration Agency (IOM) is currently undertaking a policy review to analyze how national policies and planning processes can better integrate migration and climate dimensions.

New mobility policy frameworks could also be developed on the basis of the GCM, opening the possibility to further mainstream climate and environmental dimensions. For instance, in the 3 year implementation plan of action for the GCM of the African Union[8], one priority centers on addressing drivers of migration in the context of climate change. For most countries and regions, however, translating these principles into national and regional policies is both a political and a technical challenge. Many national policymakers are hamstrung by the negative connotations of migration and sensitive nature of discussions focused on helping people to migrate to cope with the impacts of climate change. They also need better information and guidance on how to analyze their national policy frameworks and propose relevant changes.

The language adopted in these global policy documents is constructive, but words will not mean much unless governments actively develop and implement migration management policies that provide comprehensive legal migration options to climate migrants. In a world where the mere mention of migration is politically loaded, having a frank conversation on this topic will not be easy. Yet the pace of the climate crisis leaves no other choices than to tackle this question head on.

Moving Beyond a Fear of More Migration

Some states are already implementing migration management policies that can be applied to disaster contexts[9], such as visas granted on humanitarian grounds in the Dominican Republic, Argentina, and Panama. However, these measures do not usually apply to people migrating because of the slow impacts of environmental degradation.

A recent mapping of human mobility and climate change in relevant national policies and institutional frameworks produced by IOM found that out of 66 countries and territories reviewed, 53 percent referenced climate change and environmental factors in their national migration and displacement frameworks.[10] Notably, this includes several African countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Botswana, and Uganda. Some countries—like Nepal, Georgia, and Vanuatu—have even developed specialized policies on climate and human migration. But these discussions are often ad hoc and not systematized.

As we enter an uncertain post-COVID-19 period, there is an opportunity to rethink climate action and climate migration management in the context of building back better.[11] It is time for states to engage in a systematic and comprehensive analysis of their migration policies and practices with dual ambition: to understand how their different migration management tools can be repurposed to fit new environmental realities, and determine what new practices and policies might be needed.

The goal is not only to provide protection and assistance to climate migrants, but to also enhance and elevate the benefits that these migrants bring to their host societies. The United Nations system and civil society actors can support states by extracting lessons learned from existing initiatives and providing general guidance and recommendations across the whole spectrum of migration management policies.

To this end, many migration management approaches can be rethought and stepped up. One of the clearest approaches is for states to

provide exceptional or special migration measures (including visas and residency permits) to those affected by the impacts of climate change. Another approach is to leverage more common migration categories—for instance permanent residency and citizenship applications—in cases where migrants are affected by severe climate impacts and returning is not an option.

Existing labor, educational, and training bilateral agreements can better target communities particularly vulnerable to climate impacts, quotas can be expanded, and new options created to serve those most vulnerable to climate change. Regional free movement protocols can explicitly include climate migrants and persons displaced by disasters.[12] Migrant voluntary return and reintegration policies and programs can be tweaked to systematically be environmentally sustainable and create opportunities in the green economy.[13] Measures to prevent and combat trafficking and smuggling of migrants should systematically consider how disasters and climate impacts increase risks of trafficking and smuggling.[14] Formulating economic measures to reduce the cost of transferring remittances and incentivize diaspora investments[15] in climate action is also a promising avenue that remains underexplored.

Health dimensions should be taken into account across the board, including—as noted repeatedly by the UN Secretary General[16]—through the integration of climate action and COVID-19.

Climate migrants have their specific vulnerabilities, but they are also a genuine asset to their host communities and societies. A comprehensive migration management approach can help to offer dignified and legal opportunities that are beneficial to all. Such measures will come as a *complement* to climate mitigation and adaptation efforts that seek to prevent forced migration and allow people to remain in their communities of origin. As the world face the dual impacts of the COVID-19 and climate crises, it is time to create better systems to provide dignified options to migrants and support the states they leave and enter in a warming world.

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

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Reorienting Perceptions of Climate Change, Migration & Displacement

Maxine Burkett &
Lauren Herzer Risi

The role of environmental conditions in triggering migration has long been hotly contested. Climate change as the definitive condition is no exception. How exactly climate change impacts forced or voluntary migration is difficult to decipher and riddled with complexity, yet the essence of climate change is a dramatic and decisive departure from the past. Despite the inconclusive and sometimes contradictory historical record for the environment-migration nexus, it is clear that climate change will increasingly influence migration patterns around the world. Estimates for how many people will move as a result of climate change are wide-ranging and fraught with uncertainty. What we do know is that migration is an important factor in climate adaptation, for both sending and receiving countries.

The actions that have led to climate change and its impacts (migration chief among them), and the geographically lopsided nature of them, make "climate change" as much a geopolitical term as a scientific one. To date, however, diplomacy related to climate change has been generally relegated to environment ministers, climate

negotiators, and scientists who are tasked with managing a phenomenon with geopolitical implications. Those engaged in other areas of diplomacy have not seen its relevance to their portfolios. Many within the diplomatic class, such as trade envoys, actively disregard or oppose climate change curbing goals, despite the consequences for the globe and their very remit.

The effect of this positioning is that climate and environment negotiators, armed with the limited capacity and resources to "manage the trees," are now burdened with saving each and every forest, as well as the peoples and political economies that depend upon them (i.e., the global population).[1] Consistent with the intent of the "21st Century Diplomacy" project, Susan Biniaz persuasively argues the same in her article, reminding fellow diplomats that "it's your problem too" and "climate is foreign policy," both militating in favor of intentional and intensive streamlining of climate change in diplomatic work.

Climate migration touches on innumerable areas across international law, and down to domestic and sub-national decision-making. Notably, climate-induced migration breaks through the typical silos more so than the impacts of climate on other sectors, like agricultural productivity, transportation, and energy. This is in part because climate-induced migration is commonly used to illustrate how climate change can act as a "threat multiplier." Without additional context, however, the (unintended) consequence of this framing is that it presents climate-induced migration first and foremost as a security risk. It obscures the very practical role that migration plays in climate adaptation, and the need and potential for interventions that prevent *forced* displacement—that is, interventions that allow people to *decide* whether or not to move.

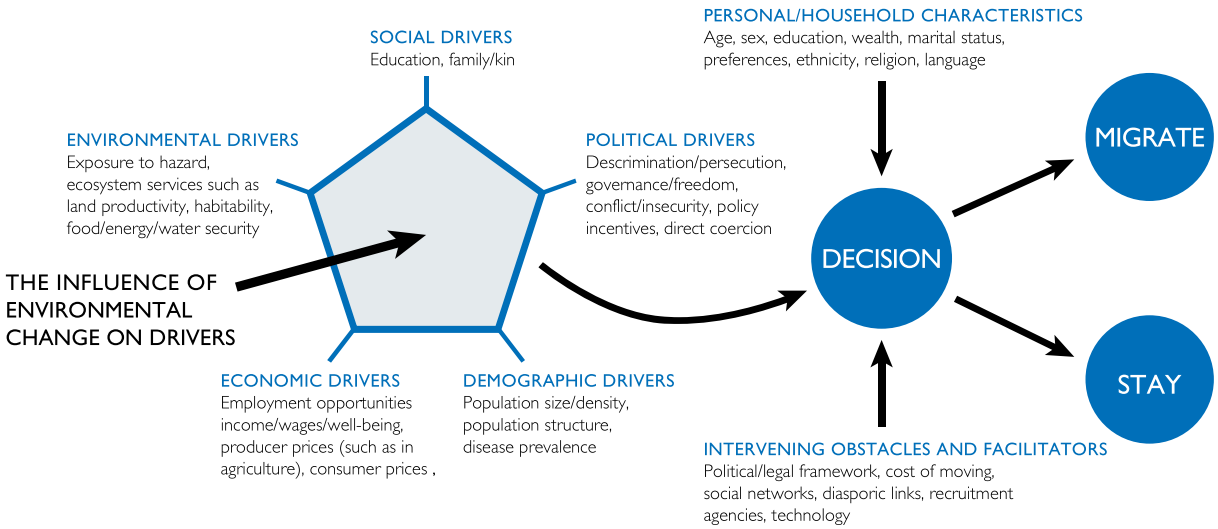
This piece surveys relevant evidence and current policy proposals related to climate change and migration, explores the shortcomings of the predominant security framing, and seeks to inspire and advance diplomatic responses that provide meaningful choices for those at the crossroads of climate change and human mobility.

Climate Migration - Evidence and Projects

Although experts are quick to maintain that migration has always been a feature of human behavior and the product of multiple drivers, climate change is increasingly a factor in the decision to move. Perhaps the clearest indication of this is the growing number of people displaced by weather-related impacts. In fact, weather related displacement now represents a significantly larger number of internally displaced people (IDPs) than those displaced by conflict and violence. In 2017, there were 18.8 million new IDPs associated with disasters, compared with 11.8 million new IDPs as a result of conflict and violence.[2]

Climate change will also impact migration through its effects on the five broadly recognized drivers of migration: economic, political, demographic, social, and environmental.[3] Together these drivers comprise a conceptual framework for deciphering the range of factors that might affect the volume, direction, and frequency of migratory movements. Climate will redistribute economic activity and shift trade routes[4], impact agricultural productivity, expose weak governance in fragile states, and deepen inequities. As climate change impacts the primary drivers of migration, its influence on migration decisions and pathways will grow.

Fig 1: A conceptual framework showing the influence of environmental change on drivers of human migration.



Source: Black et al. (2011). Migration and Global Environmental Change.[5]

Climate change will also influence mobility patterns more directly, however, as global change increases sea level and the number and intensity of droughts, floods, heatwaves, and other extreme weather events. There are, of course, variations in the responses to these triggers. Sea level rise, for example, is more likely to influence the timing and volume of ongoing migration rather than produce novel patterns of migration.[6] Migration responses and displacement as a result of extreme, sudden-onset events vary widely across socioeconomic groups, as seen in the United States following Hurricane Katrina.[7] Droughts and extended extreme heat events suggest wholly different patterns. Where livelihoods and food security are undermined, but homes left intact, these events do not generally lead to "immediate, large-scale displacement or migration."[8] However, if the conditions persist and there is insufficient adaptive capacity, internal rural to urban migration may increase.[9] These divergent responses, under varying scenarios, make a precise prediction of the scope and scale of climate-induced migration a fundamental challenge.

Evidence of Climate-Migration Linkages Around the World

The interplay of climate migration drivers is born out in the results of studies on migration in West Africa. One review examined 15 empirical case studies that concentrate directly on the links between climate and human mobility in West African drylands.[10] The authors found that the studies were consistent on three points: 1) environmental conditions and changes tend to result in temporary migration; 2) migration is commonly leveraged to diversify income; and 3) migration is caused by multiple factors. They also determined that environmental factors are often *not* the main driver but can trigger movement in regions where there are other drivers at play. Again, however, whether the future stays consistent with current and former studies is unclear in light of accelerating climatic changes.

Increased temperature may have a more significant impact on migration as it can more directly, and more permanently, impact those whose livelihoods are dependent on the environment (e.g., declines in agricultural productivity). A 21-year longitudinal survey conducted by Mueller et al. in rural Pakistan that measured the relationship between weather and long-term migration found that while flooding—a climate shock commonly associated with large relief efforts—has "modest to insignificant impacts on migration," heat stress "consistently increases the long-term migration of men, driven by a negative effect on farm and non-farm income."[11] Interestingly, they explain that flooding's more modest impact on migration may be because flooding increases demand for local labor and hence reduces migration.

Similarly, Bohra-Mishra et al. demonstrate that increased temperatures have had a much stronger effect on inter-provincial migration within the Philippines than disasters by using a detailed longitudinal dataset, combined with data on temperature and precipitation.[12] Another study by Feng, Krueger, and Oppenheimer found that climate-driven changes in crop yields in Mexico had a significant effect on Mexican emigration to the United States.[13]

Three broad, possible shifts in mobility due to climate change can be deduced[14], however:

1. Larger flows of people along established migration routes as the destinations become safer or more attractive, sending areas become less safe or less viable, and migration network effects continue to facilitate movement.

2. Unchanged or even decreased flows of people along established migration routes, either because destinations become less attractive or less viable relative to the sending area, or because migrant networks are not able to facilitate greater levels of migration.

3. New flows of migrants between sending and destination areas that have not historically been connected, leading to the creation of new migration networks.

Given the way in which recent migration crises have unfolded, countries—including those in the Global North—are woefully ill-prepared. In an assessment of "distress-driven migration," researchers found that climate change could drive a huge increase in the number of migrants seeking asylum in Europe if current trends continue.[15] They forecast the number of migrants attempting to settle in Europe each year to triple by the end of the century based on current climate trends alone, independent of other political and economic factors.[16] Warming of 2.6 degrees Celsius to 4.8 degrees Celsius (which climate experts deem likely unless stringent measures are taken to bring down greenhouse gas emissions) would result in as many as 660,000 additional asylum seekers coming to Europe each year by 2100, based on their proposed model.[17]

Numbers like these dominate the climate migration discourse, with estimates of global climate migration ranging from as few as 25 million to as many as 1 billion climate migrants. These numbers can tell a compelling story but are hampered by the limitations of crude population estimates and fail to consider the countering effects of climate adaptation, particularly to facilitate potential migrants' preferences to stay in place.[18] They also leave out the stories of those unwilling or unable to relocate, sometimes referred to as "trapped populations." Of equally great concern is the absence of broadly recognized and formal legal infrastructures and clearly articulated and enforceable rights of migrants, much less a spirit of readiness and welcome for receiving countries.

The focus on the projected number of potential migrants obscures another important fact: Migration is a critical and long-practiced resilience strategy with benefits for both sending and receiving communities. In fact, as a response to climate change, it may serve as "the most effective way to allow people to diversify income and build resilience where environmental change threatens livelihoods."[19] Temporary migration can be a necessary and pragmatic response to disasters, and is capable of strengthening the resilience of affected communities.[20] Migrants often provide significant remittances to their places of origin, increasing the resilience and adaptability of those who remain. In 2019, for the first time, remittances exceeded foreign direct investment and official development assistance flows to low- and middle-income countries.[21]

These potential benefits of migration, however, are dependent on policies that facilitate safe, affordable, and legal migration, ensure equal rights for both migrants and host communities, and avoid real or perceived disparities in opportunity

or access to services between migrants and host communities.[22] Decision-makers should institute these migration policies in concert with broader climate strategies such as aggressive decarbonization, sustainable urbanization, climate-smart development, conflict resolution and prevention, and emergency preparedness.[23]

Relevant Laws & Governance Gaps

The instruments and regimes related to migration that are currently in place fail to respond effectively to current migration flows, and increased and potentially erratic movement will likely further stress and strain them. In short, the mobility options for those on the move are circumscribed by increasingly antiquated 20th century parameters. They include: a move to (the rare) neighboring country that allows unrestricted entry; formal international migration programs that facilitate entry to high-income countries, such as a skilled worker visa programs; and the extralegal, clandestine, and often life-threatening journey to another country to seek asylum.[24]

Most climate change and mobility scenarios fall outside of almost all legal frameworks, prompting numerous and sustained calls[25] for a global governance regime to manage international migration.[26] Some have called for a new legal instrument, such as a standalone treaty to address cross-border climate-induced migration[27], while others remain skeptical that migration spurred by climate change differs substantially from other kinds of survival migration to warrant a new instrument—never mind the difficulty of drafting and passing a new one or amending the Refugee Convention.[28]

Certain migration scenarios may meet the elements of the oft-invoked Refugee Convention's definition of "refugee." If authorities were to deny assistance and protection following a slow or sudden-onset event to "certain people because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion and as a consequence expose them to treatment amounting to persecution," protections might be available.[29] The overwhelming consensus, however, is that climate-induced migration, particularly triggered by relatively slow-moving sea level rise, for example, falls outside of the Convention's scope and protections.

More recent international attempts to manage movement related to climate change include three United Nations initiatives relevant to migra-

tion: The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), the Global Compact on Refugees, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Task Force on Displacement (Task Force). The Task Force seeks to enhance the capacity of governments and regional and international organizations to address climate-related drivers and impacts of displacement by developing recommendations for integrated approaches in response. Some believe that a combination of extant approaches, if fully taken up, would be effective. The GCM, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the UNFCCC displacement efforts "collectively provide all of the policy-making tools necessary for responding successfully to the risks posed by climate change."[30] Yet the United States, Australia, and a number of European states did not vote to approve the GCM, despite the fact that it doesn't create any legal obligations. Meanwhile the current U.S. administration has initiated withdrawal from the UNFCCC's Paris Agreement and appears thoroughly unmotivated by the goals and content of the SDGs.

International agreements related to the protection of human rights may be increasingly relevant. In 2013, an i-Kiribati man was denied asylum in New Zealand after claiming that, if deported, he faced irreparable harm to his right to life because climate change is rendering Kirabti uninhabitable. In a subsequent appeal, the UN Human Rights Committee found that New Zealand did not violate the man's right to life when they deported him. In their ruling, however, they recognized that "without robust national and international efforts, the effects of climate change in receiving states may expose individuals to a violation of their rights,"[31] suggesting that future claims based on violation of human rights might be available. There are also relevant principles and soft law provisions, such as the Peninsula Principles on Climate Displacement within States and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, that, while pertinent, are not binding on any nation state, providing very limited protection for migrants. Some individual nation-states also provide temporary or subsidiary protection for disaster-induced cross-border displaced persons that, while promising, remain ad hoc.[32]

Informing More Effective Diplomatic Reponses

Explore State to State Engagement

The diplomatic community might explore avenues adjacent to the multilateral initiatives described above. While there are no legally binding regional conventions or treaties that prescribe obligation for developed countries, existing or newly crafted regional, bilateral, and multilateral agreements may be relevant.[33] And countries with strong transnational communities can develop bilateral arrangements.[34]

The Compacts of Free Association between the United States, and the "Freely Associated States" of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau, for example, allow for visa-free entry to work and live in the United States. These agreements were negotiated before climate related threats to habitability emerged but may, nonetheless, provide an avenue for migration in response to climate impacts. Even so, there are gaps in the existing agreements that, if addressed, would strengthen them. While the agreements do allow

for indefinite stay, they do not provide a pathway to citizenship for migrants. The lack of financial assistance restricts eligibility to those with existing resources or family networks.[35] Finally, the Compacts may not serve as an adequate solution to permanent or large-scale population displacement in large part because they are unilaterally terminable by any party.[36]

Regional governance of migration, effectively exemplified by the free movement agreements (FMAs), may offer a more facile, practical response to climate migration and displacement. Such 'bottom-up' approaches acknowledge that regions experience climate displacement differently and have differing capacities for protecting those who are displaced.[37] FMAs—provisions within broader regional economic agreements that liberalize mobility restrictions between participating states—have the potential to offer comprehensive protection to climate migrants.[38] They exist across all continents and have already proven effective in facilitating migration in the disaster context. For instance, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) FMAs were both used during the 2017 Atlantic Hurricane season to provide displaced persons a right of entry into neighboring island nation-states, waivers of travel document requirements, indefinite stays in some circumstances, and access to foreign labor markets by waiving work permit requirements. For instance, after Hurricane Maria in 2017, displaced Dominicans were able to migrate to Trinidad and Tobago using the CARICOM FMA's six-month visa-free stay program, and others were able to migrate to Antigua, St. Vincent, Grenada, and St. Lucia under the OECS FMA.[39] Expansion of FMAs may provide effective protection in the climate change context.[40]

FMAs may also resonate in the Pacific, as free movement harkens back to pre-colonial Oceania in which islanders' freedom of movement was not hindered by national borders. Historically, interconnections among islands were inherent to the Pacific experience, "but active travel and resettlement activities were stifled by the migration and mobility restrictions of the colonial powers."[41] Indeed, current South Pacific negotiations processes seem shaped by these earlier conceptions of mobility when facing contemporary discussion of climate migration.[42] Similarly creative, collaborative, and humane proposals can emerge if the security frame is right-sized to address the multidisciplinary nature of climate change generally, and climate and human mobility specifically.

Loosen the Security Frame and Expand the Toolbox

In the academic literature there is a consistent concern regarding the exceptionalism used to describe climate-induced mobility (as if mobility has not been a defining feature of human history) and the subsequent securitization of climate migration. The larger numbers of potential migrants estimated and disseminated in policy reports are often used to fuel the negative perceptions of migrants themselves, strengthening the "threatened borders" narratives and anti-immigrant sentiment prevalent around the world today. As noted by Boas et al.'s review and reflected in the migration agendas of the European Union, United States, and Australia, among others, the effect of this narrative is that "'climate-induced migration' is now a common rationale for measures to strengthen and protect national and regional borders in the Global North."[43] These countries are implementing migration policies that include

restricted entry, discouragement of asylum claimants, and criminalization of undocumented migration—and, in some instances, are pressuring other countries to do the same. This is suboptimal from the perspective of the migrant as well as host countries and communities.

The growth of anti-immigration sentiment and border tightening is also happening within the Global South, where South-South migration is empirically more prevalent and is projected to grow. In Johannesburg last September, a dozen people were killed in a spate of xenophobia-fueled violence against migrant shop owners.[44] Also of note are the stricter border controls Venezuela has erected with its neighbors, the Dominican Republic's deportation of Dominican-born descendants of Haiti, and Kenya's border fence with Somalia.[45]

In addition to military grade weapons, vehicles, and even uniforms, high-tech surveillance tools are being deployed by the U.S. Border Patrol. We see increased border surveillance as well in the European Union with the use of biometric visas for third-country nationals. Robert McLeman underscores the stark consequences of this turn:

> *…turning these technologies with military origins against civilians … securitizes the act of migration. It blurs the distinction between surveillance actions to detect and deter the approach of armed enemy agents — something that every state has a sovereign right to do — and monitoring borders to prevent the approach of unarmed civilians seeking entry: something every person has a right to do under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Refugee Convention. In this collision, the rights of the individual are lost.*[46]

These trends carry their own security risks. Migration can act as an important "release valve." Restrictions on mobility—including hardened borders and the criminalization of asylum-seekers —force migrants into "expensive and physically dangerous attempts to reach their destinations."[47]

Severely impeding mobility can have knock-on effects on livelihood security more broadly, and not just in regard to remittances. For example, in the Lake Chad Basin, where more than 2.5 million people have been displaced by conflict and 10.7 million are in need of humanitarian assistance, an assessment of the region's climate and fragility linkages found that "restrictions on the places that people can live and travel [compound] the impacts of displacement and population growth on livelihoods and natural resources."[48]

A reorientation that does not reinforce decontextualized narratives about climate-fueled mass migration is sorely needed at this time. A narrative that is focused on both the risks faced by affected populations' and their rights, and is as attentive to the need to migrate as it is to efforts

to "stay in place," will be the most effective. It is only through this reorientation that policymakers and practitioners will be able to identify an expanded set of entry points for interventions that bolster the resilience of both sending and receiving communities.

Conclusion

The single defining global policy decision regarding human mobility and climate change is the rate of greenhouse gas emissions and their rapid drawdown. But the fact remains that even if greenhouse gas emissions were reduced to zero tomorrow, the world would continue to warm for several more decades.

The rhetoric needs to shift from a fear of migrants and unregulated migration to one focused on the impact of investing in countries experiencing high levels of displacement and the facilitation of safe and sanctioned movement for those who need it most. To allow those who are at the climate and mobility crossroads to enjoy meaningful choices, the diplomatic community will need to facilitate the protection of life and dignity, whether individuals and communities are on the move or choosing to stay in place. Key to this is the recognition of the role played by domestic and international institutions, agencies, and international regimes that are tasked with addressing and responding to the increased movement of people across and within borders.[49]

We must address the magnitude of 21st century human migration, which has no historical analogue, by crafting solutions that are not shaped by, nor perpetuate, fear and othering. Instead, mediated approaches that are inclusive and rights-driven should be the only non-negotiable.

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Climate-Induced Displacement:
South Asia's Clear and Present Danger

Michael Kugelman

In May 2020, Cyclone Amphan slammed into Bangladesh and India. It was one of the strongest storms to hit the region in decades, resulting in three million evacuees and nearly two million destroyed or damaged homes.[1] People were displaced and lost their homes in three different countries—Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. Many of the lost homes were mud huts and dilapidated shacks, and therefore not at all disaster-proof.

Cyclone Amphan is just the latest reminder that climate change effects and climate-induced migration are clear and present dangers in South Asia. Governments in the region have crafted policies that aim to mitigate these threats. However, capacity, governance, and financial constraints encumber such efforts. They are in great need of international support, which to this point has been present but insufficient.

Acute Climate Change Vulnerability

Many observers, when thinking about climate vulnerability in South Asia, reflexively fixate on Bangladesh—a low-lying, lower riparian nation often convulsed by destructive floods. In reality,

the entire region is dangerously vulnerable. Rising sea levels and flooding threaten the coastal states of India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—as well as Bangladesh. These nations' large and dense urban coastal populations compound the threat that climate change effects pose to their residents. Meanwhile, landlocked Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Nepal face rising temperatures, drought, and glacial melt. And the tiny yet densely populated island of Maldives—the lowest-lying country in the world—faces the real prospect of complete submersion in the not-too-distant future.

Not surprisingly, over the last decade, nearly half the region's people—almost 700 million in all—have been impacted by at least one climate-related disaster.[2]

In recent years, the Germanwatch think tank's Global Climate Risk Index has ranked India and Pakistan among the top ten countries vulnerable to climate change.[3] Additionally, a troubling new study by India's Ministry of Earth Sciences, released in June 2020 and based on extensive climate modeling, predicts that in the coming decades India—South Asia's most populous country by far—will become far dryer and hotter, with average temperatures poised to increase by nearly 4 degrees celcius by century's end.[4] It will also experience longer monsoon periods and more glacial melt, along with warming temperatures in the Indian Ocean and predicted sea level rises of up to nearly a foot.

On the Indian Subcontinent, climate vulnerability is exacerbated by problematic public policy. In ndia[5] and Pakistan[6], water shortages are intensified by the government's subsidization of wasteful flood irrigation and water-guzzling crops, such as sugar. Developers and industrialists are given free rein to deplete precious water bodies. In India, communities in vulnerable neighborhoods have accused officials of ignoring flood risks—except during election campaign seasons.[7]

Manifestations of Climate-Induced Migration

In recent years, millions of South Asians have been displaced by the effects of climate change.

Destructive weather events like Cyclone Amphan are frequent displacement triggers. Back in 2009, Cyclone Aila displaced 2.3 million in India and nearly a million in Bangladesh.[8] Pakistan's 2010 floods damaged or destroyed 1.1 million homes[9] and displaced about 11 million people[10]—and large numbers settled in major cities instead of returning home.[11] In 2012, floods displaced 1.5 million in the Indian state of Assam.[12] More gradual impacts can also cause displacement. In dry, rural regions, acute water shortages have caused farmers, fisher people, and others with water-dependent livelihoods to migrate to cities. This climate-induced mass displacement is compounded by two enabling factors: the large number of people who work in the agricultural sector, and densely populated coastal areas.

Most of South Asia's climate-induced migration is domestic, from rural to urban areas. Asian Development Bank research finds that floods and agricultural land losses are increasingly contributing to decisions to migrate to major Indian cities.[13] But cross-border migration is possible as well. Recent scholarship predicts that in Bangladesh, climate refugees from rural areas are increasingly likely to migrate internationally as Bangladeshi cities become less desirable destinations for the displaced due to population pressures and a lack of jobs.[14]

South Asia's high risk of climate-induced migration is particularly vivid in the Sunderbans, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that houses the world's largest mangrove forest. Located along the Bay of Bengal and straddling areas of Bangladesh and India, it is highly susceptible to sea level rise, destructive storms, land erosion, and water salinity. Recent years have seen human flight from the Sunderbans Islands due to storms. More flight could be on the horizon given that major sectors of employment—farming, fishing, betel-leaf growing, and tourism—have been severely damaged by destructive weather events.[15]

A 2018 World Bank study projects nearly 40 million climate migrants in South Asia by 2050 in a worst-case scenario—one in which the region suffers from a dearth of climate-friendly policies.[16] The Bank predicts, under this scenario, that nearly a quarter of all internal migrants in South Asia—and nearly 2 percent of the overall regional population—would be classifiable as climate migrants. And even in the best-case scenario, where climate-friendly policies abound, the Bank projects nearly 20 million climate migrants by 2050. According to the Bank's predictions, out-migration "hotspots" will range from eastern and northern Bangladesh and coastal cities in India and Bangladesh to the Delhi-Lahore corridor spanning India and Pakistan. In-migration activity will be strongest in the southern Indian highlands and areas in Nepal. Bangladesh is projected to be a regional ground zero for climate migration. Under the worst-case scenario, the country could have more than 13 million climate migrants by 2050—more than any other type of internal migrant.

Intensifying climate migration in South Asia is not only a looming humanitarian crisis—it is also a regional stability risk. Growing rural-to-urban migration will place added burdens on already-overcrowded cities to provide food, shelter, and jobs. Their inability to provide these resources could raise the risks of radicalization in a region where terrorist groups often recruit in major cities in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. Additionally, the mass movement of vulnerable, persecuted groups—ethnic Pashtuns fleeing floods in northern Pakistan, Muslims displaced from drought-ridden rural India, Rohingya refugees leaving flooded cities in Bangladesh—could stoke communal tensions and violence in their new communities. Furthermore, a wall that India built in the 2000s to prevent influxes of refugees from Bangladesh has led to violence, with border police gunning down several migrants trying to cross it.[17] Surges of future climate migrants from Bangladesh could intensify this violence and deepen societal tensions in the Indian border state of Assam, where many have resented the arrival of these migrants in previous decades.

National Responses

Governments across South Asia have crafted laws and policies to mitigate climate change and climate-induced migration. And they have done so for quite some time: Back in 2005, after the catastrophic Indian Ocean tsunami, the Maldives developed a plan that envisioned relocating the population to higher ground. In more recent years, the plan has expanded to building new islands altogether.[18]

However, these policies are hobbled by factors that range from problems with enforcement to poor infrastructure, corruption, and insufficient funding. While South Asian authorities are highly aware of climate migration risks, and they have

Right: Emergency Medical Team examine a boy who is showing symptoms of diphtheria in the Kutupalong refugee camp, Bangladesh picture courtesy of - Russell Watkins/Department for International Development

taken initial steps to curb these risks, the magnitude of the climate change and displacement threat amplifies the region's unpreparedness. In this regard, international support—at higher levels than at present—is essential.

Existing national responses range from the punitive (fines for those that cut down trees) to the proactive (the construction of shelters, mud and concrete walls, and embankments to protect against cyclones). There is also an impressive array of policies in place. India's climate change national action plan promotes renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable agriculture (including the development of climate-resilient crops), and water management.[19] The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) ensures 100 days of paid employment per financial year to manual laborers, in order to reduce migration risks stemming from climate-driven livelihood losses.[20] And on the urban side, the Jawharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) has provided $10 billion to 60 major cities for infrastructure upgrades, thereby strengthening cities' capacities to absorb climate migrants from rural areas.[21] Additionally, micro-insurance programs have offered financial relief to disaster-affected communities in return for a modest annual premium. One of the main such programs, AfatVimo, covers damage or losses for earthquakes, floods, cyclones, and landslides.[22]

Meanwhile, Pakistan has a climate change policy with action plans to address rural-urban migration, and a national food security policy that aims to make agriculture more resilient in the face of climate change.[23] Bangladesh has several major initiatives expressly focused on climate migration: a National Strategy on the Management of Disaster and Climate-Inducted International Displacement[24], and a framework within the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief that tackles climate-induced internal displacement. The country has also made major headway in developing the sustainable production of forest, fruit, and fish resources in coastal areas. More broadly, Bangladesh has been a pioneer in the region for its efforts to integrate climate change into the government's interagency structure. Plans are afoot to establish a climate change agency in every government ministry, and the Planning Commission—a government advisory body—releases five- and ten-year plans on climate change.

However, the balance sheet on these signature policies is far from stellar. India's climate change national action plan has been criticized for a lack of clear strategies and specificity. An academic assessment of NREGA finds that a lack of public awareness about the program contributes to low enrollment among rural adults.[25] Another asserts that NREGA has strengthened economic security much more in wealthy states than rural ones.[26] The most recent study of NREGA, released by the International Food Policy Research Institute in 2019, concludes that while it has helped boost incomes for vulnerable residents, recipients haven't used the new income to make their farms more climate-resilient.[27] Meanwhile, the JNNURM failed to complete many initiatives, including housing projects.[28] It was terminated in 2014.[29] Furthermore, government assessments of water supplies are undermined by unreliable data and poor communication between states.[30]

Meanwhile, Pakistan's national climate change policy boasts an implementation framework[31], but many climate adaptation plans haven't been implemented. The implementing framework is also singled out for its lack of monitoring and evaluation measures.[32] Pakistani environmentalists fault Islamabad for passing new climate-related laws instead of focusing on implementing and enforcing earlier ones.[33] Making matters worse is that provincial officials, who have the main responsibility for implementation, often lack the technical and financial capacity to carry out climate change policy—a challenge that has afflicted Pakistani policy making more broadly ever since 2010, when a constitutional amendment[34] devolved responsibility for many policy matters to ill-prepared provinces.

Additionally, Bangladesh, for all its success stories, still doesn't have a national climate change policy. And its closest analogue—a climate change strategy and action plan[35]—has struggled with budgetary and implementation challenges.[36]

Efforts to build climate resilience in the Sunderbans—and by extension to mitigate the risk of climate-induced migration—have lagged because of problematic infrastructure. This includes water aquifers that are too deep to access, homes made of material (such as tin or asbestos) that don't allow for rainwater harvesting, and fragile embankment structures. Other problems include poorly coordinated and communicated disaster responses and relief efforts, as well as insufficient funding for concrete installments and mangrove bio shields that would ensure more robust climate-proofing.[37]

International Responses

There are no specific international legal frameworks related to climate-induced displacement, and there is no consensus within the international system on a definition for an "environmental refugee."[38] However, while there may be no legal justifications for international interventions to address "climate refugee" threats, there are compelling normative ones—and especially in South Asia, where climate vulnerability is acute and climate-induced migration is already taking place.

Fortunately, global players have already stepped in. The International Organization for Migration supported a research project between Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka on climate and migration that resulted in a framework product[39] on combating climate-induced migration. On more operational levels, the World Bank and the Red Cross have offered technological and scientific support for national disaster risk management programs. The Bank's South Asia Water Initiative provides technical and analytical assistance to states to operationalize flood forecasting in the Ganges Basin.[40] A new Bank initiative, the Climate Adaptation and Resilience for South Asia project, funds the development of climate-resilience policies and investments.[41] Bilateral donors are involved as well; the Asia Regional Resilience to a Changing Climate program, a project of the United Kingdom's National Weather Service and aid agency DFID, helps develop early-warning systems for climate-vulnerable communities in South Asia.[42]

Policy Recommendations

These international efforts are encouraging, but insufficient. There is much more the global community can and should do to help reduce the risk of climate-induced migration in South Asia.

- **Promote more livelihood opportunities in non-agricultural sectors.** Agriculture is a top source of employment in many South Asian nations, but it is also arguably the region's most climate-vulnerable sector. Consequently, its workers are highly susceptible to climate-driven displacement. Even while national governments aim to reduce climate threats to agriculture, the international community should help promote the growth of alternative, less climate-vulnerable employment options. Donors can fund vocational training and other skills-development programs to make the region's millions of young people more marketable for urban-centered jobs in telecommunications, electronics, and retail, among others—all critical, high-growth-potential fields in a rapidly urbanizing region.

- **Empower non-federal authorities to better tackle climate-induced displacement risks.** In much of South Asia, domestic policy is a non-federal matter. However, state/provincial authorities often lack the requisite expertise and resources for this work. International donors can provide or sponsor training or other educational programs to bolster the ability of non-federal policymakers to tackle the admittedly overwhelming challenge posed by climate change and, by extension, displacement. Support for local-level authorities is particularly essential. In some South Asian nations, decentralization reforms have brought more technical and financial resources to state/provincial authorities, but these

reforms often don't extend down to local levels, where much of the on-the-ground policy implementation—including service delivery—takes place.[43]

- **Host and sponsor dialogues and other exchanges to generate greater regional cooperation, so that South Asian states can jointly combat the shared—and transnational—threats of climate change and climate-induced displacement.** South Asia is rife with diplomatic tensions, thanks to longstanding strains between India and Pakistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and India and several smaller states. These divides are exacerbated by an absence of regional integration, thanks in great part to South Asia's shoddy infrastructure—especially bad roads and poorly functioning electricity grids. Not surprisingly, intraregional trade is low[44] relative to other regions, and this lack of commercial cooperation deprives the region of a potential pathway toward more trust and goodwill. Furthermore, deliberations within South Asia's main regional organization, SAARC, are effectively paralyzed because of the tension-filled India-Pakistan relationship.

  Foreign diplomats and other external actors—ideally from countries perceived as neutral by all South Asian states—should convene Track II dialogues and multilateral forums to help build a region-wide consensus around a joint plan to address climate change and displacement. Some frameworks are already in place, thanks to two initiatives that have languished within SAARC for years: the Dhaka Declaration on Climate Change, which promotes capacity building and regional cooperation[45], and a SAARC food security reserve, which creates a food grains reserve for vulnerable communities during humanitarian disasters.[46]

- **Washington should integrate climate change mitigation assistance into its Indo-Pacific strategy, the administration's main Asia policy.** White House officials now view South Asia as a part of the Indo-Pacific region[47], and recent policy documents call for strengthening ties with the region under this policy[48]—though to this point, areas of cooperation are limited to security-focused spheres such as counterterrorism and maritime collaboration. Washington should leverage the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), a recently established American development bank that partners with the private sector, to make new investments in sustainable agriculture, disaster-resistant infrastructure, and other initiatives that can reduce the risks of climate-induced displacement. The DFC should look for corporate partners in South Asia—entities that often boast more resources and capacity than public sector interlocutors.

The Stakes of Inaction

Discussions of climate-induced migration in South Asia should not be divorced from the broader challenge of displacement. Here, the recent travails of Rohingya refugees are instructive—and a sobering reminder of the complex and

tragic nexus between conflict, displacement, and climate change.

In 2017, military forces in Myanmar staged a brutal crackdown on the Rohingya, a heartbreakingly marginalized religious minority. Hundreds of thousands were displaced, and they fled next door to Bangladesh. Since then, they have toiled in overcrowded refugee camps. However, in 2019, Dhaka announced its intention to relocate up to 100,000 of them to Bhashan Char—an isolated island that is a three-hour boat ride from Bangladesh's mainland, and that is prone to sea-level rise, storm surges, and floods.[49] Officials initially held back, following an outcry from human rights activists, but in May 2020 nearly 300 Rohingya attempting to enter Bangladesh by sea were taken to the island. Officials cited the need to reduce the risks of COVID-19 infections within the Rohingya camps on the mainland.[50]

First the Rohingya were displaced by conflict. Now they are at risk of being displaced by climate. And yet, if the nearly 300 souls stranded on Bhashan Char—and the thousands more that could join them—are displaced again, they will have nowhere to go.

This ongoing tragedy illustrates the seriousness of the twin threats of climate change and climate-induced migration in South Asia. It also highlights the urgency with which governments in the region, with stepped-up international support, must act to help curb these threats. And it underscores the terrible and potentially deadly costs of failing to do so.

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