

Global Migration Issues

Volume 6

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Frank Laczko

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Migration, Risk Management and Climate Change: Evidence and Policy Responses

 Springer

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Introduction – Climate Change and Human Mobility After Paris

Introduction

Following the climate negotiations in Paris which made more space than ever for the issue of human mobility, against emerging scientific evidence, and against the background of an ongoing refugee crisis in Europe, it is time for the international community to pursue an evidence and needs-based protection framework for environmental migrants and people displaced by climate stressors.

The current refugee crisis in Europe is about a brutal civil conflict in Syria and not about climate change. However, it sends a signal about the kinds of human movements we will see in the future as climatic stressors, such as storms, droughts, heat waves and sea level rise increasingly impacts jobs, food security, and the stability of urban and rural areas.

Science

What does current science say about human mobility and climate change? Science points to widespread current and future biophysical impacts of anthropogenic climate change (IPCC 2012, 2014; Fung et al. 2010). Human mobility—migration, displacement, potentially planned relocation—are themes woven through the Fifth Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2014). The report notes emerging risks and threats that affect livelihoods, food security, and safety.

These key risks have political importance as well, because they inform the evaluation of “dangerous anthropogenic interference with the atmosphere” as laid out in Article 2 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Article 2 outlines its ultimate objective as the ‘stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system... in order to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable eco-

conomic development to proceed in a sustainable manner’. One way to think about Article 2 is maintaining a ‘safe operating space for humanity’ (Röckstrom et al. 2009). These key risks are “potentially severe adverse consequences for humans and socio-ecological systems resulting from the interaction of hazards linked to climate change and the vulnerability of exposed societies and system” (IPCC 2014: 1043). These key risks include factors that have been directly linked to mobility pressures, in particular risks of food insecurity and breakdown of food systems, and risk of loss of rural livelihoods linked to insufficient water and reduced agricultural productivity.

Community-based empirical research across the world, such as the chapters in this book, indicate that people will move away from regions that climate change slowly renders uninhabitable, such as small island states in the Pacific affected by sea level rise and parts of South East Asia dealing with coastal erosion. They will move towards areas they hope will provide safe and sustainable livelihoods. Almost half of the world’s population depends on agricultural production for their livelihoods, and this sector is most severely impacted by a changing climate. Evidence from this literature, including scholarly leaders publishing chapters in this edited volume, underscores that vulnerable households use different forms of human mobility to manage climatic risks. Climate impacts such as changes in rainfall variability (untimely rain, unseasonal and unexpected precipitation, or shortfalls in rain) affect the stability of household livelihoods, which in turn can negatively affect household income and consumption (Afifi et al. 2015; Warner and Afifi 2014). Pressures to move involve multiple interacting systems and stresses—crop production, prices, and increased food insecurity (Adger et al. 2014; Oppenheimer et al. 2014). Now and in the future, research suggests that indirect, transboundary, and long-distance impacts (Oppenheimer et al. 2014) are expected to drive human migration and displacement when thresholds for livelihoods, food security, and safety are breached (Klein et al. 2014).

Policy

All countries and governments will be affected by people on the move whether those countries are areas of origin, transit, or destination. People will move either in anticipation of climate stressors or in response to them.

Over the past decade, discussions about climate change and migration, displacement, and planned relocation have moved from limited research or policy discussion to growing, robust evidence and significant policy milestones. The international community needs a robust legal framework to guide efforts to assist people on the move because of climate stressors. At the current stage, people leaving their countries due to climate stressors are not considered refugees under the Geneva Convention, which specifies that a refugee is fleeing from a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”

Climatic or environmental factors are not recognized as persecuting factors, and only some countries grant temporary protection status and waive visa requirements for migrants whose home country faces a severe natural hazard.

People who move are often particularly vulnerable and need a scope of assistance – from legal protection to access to labor markets, valid identification, and integration opportunities. The current situation in Europe shows us that we are not yet prepared for such large movements of people within or across borders. While the challenges of the current refugee situation are immense, governments and the international community are guided by national and regional policies that follow the clear normative and legislative framework of the Geneva Convention. Such policies and frameworks are currently not in place for environmental migrants.

In the autumn of 2015, over 100 governments have endorsed the Nansen Initiative Agenda for people displaced across borders in the context of natural disasters and the effects of climate change. This agenda, supported by the United Nations University as an Advisory Group member, helps point the way for filling legal gaps and providing evidence-based policy and operational support for vulnerable affected people. In Paris, the Conference of the Parties established a task force on human mobility to develop recommendations for the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (paragraph 50).

In the post-2015 world, all current signals point to a need to invest in research and policy analysis to develop a reference point which will not only help to protect vulnerable people but will also serve long-term sustainable development.

Chapters in This Volume

The largely evidence-based, case study-based chapters in this book reflect a collection of scholarly work that recognizes human migration as one of a number of attempts of vulnerable households to manage risks including climatic stressors. Chapters span three major veins of examination in the dynamics of migration linked to climatic stressors: the role of remittances in enhancing (or not) adaptive capacity of families that do have one or more migrant members; the interactions of decisions about livelihood security and how migration fits into those decision patterns; and the role of land tenure and related policies in migration and relocation in land-constrained areas like the Pacific ocean.

Remittances

In their chapter on the role of remittances, Banerjee et al. ask whether and how remittances help reduce the vulnerability of recipient households to a flooding in the Upper Indus subbasin. The vulnerability assessments find that remittance-recipient households are marginally less vulnerable than non-recipient households and are

less likely to reduce food consumption during floods. Interestingly, for farming households, non-remittance-recipient households may demonstrate other forms of adaptive capacity, such as changing agricultural practices in response to floods.

In a second coauthored chapter, Banerjee et al. explore the relationships between mobility, remittances, and adaptive capacity in the rural Sagarmatha transect of Koshi subbasin of Nepal through building farm assets such as farm size, livestock, irrigation, and farm mechanization. They find little difference in the flood response strategy of remittance-recipient and non-recipient households but find that the longer a time a household receives remittances, the more likely it is to reduce its farm holding.

Kagan uses the lens of a case study in Tuvalu to analyze empirical evidence of the relationship between remittances and disaster risk management. The author finds that while remittances form a key part of coping strategies after a disaster, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that remittances improve *ex ante* risk management.

Bendandi and Pauw ask whether remittances could constitute international adaptation finance. They find that incentives for diaspora communities need to be provided in order to channel remittances toward adaptation. They conclude that remittances can help to support adaptation at household and community level.

Livelihoods

Brandt et al. analyze risk management and migration decisions in the face of climate variability and water scarcity in two rural areas near La Paz, Bolivia. Their findings correlate with that of the growing literature that social, economic, and environmental factors drive decisions about managing livelihood risks with migration.

Cascone et al. explore the potential of resilience-building measures and circular migration programs as part of household strategies to diversify livelihoods and manage risks associated with environmental and climate change in Las Palomas, Central Mexico. The authors find that sending one or more migrants abroad as a risk management strategy at the household level can allow the rest of the household to stay where they are and to increase their adaptive capacity through increased income and livelihood risks reduction.

Stojanov et al. examine household adaptation strategies in the face of floods between 1997 and 2012 in selected rural municipalities in the Bečva river basin in the northeastern part of the Czech Republic. Their research revealed a link between difficulty migrating and social consequences, meaning that the increasing occurrence of floods is a serious problem for residents who cannot leave, because they had limited opportunities for resettlement.

Etzold and Mallick find that translocal households with migrants employ livelihood choices, human rights, and freedoms that enhance their resilience to environmental and socioeconomic risks. They argue that it is necessary to move beyond

framing migration as a failure of adaptation to environmental risks and instead recognize the normality of people’s mobility, the persistence of regional migration systems, and the significance of the practices and structures that enable Bangladeshis to live secure translocal lives. Such a change in perspective has significant repercussions for the politics of climate change adaptation and the management of migration.

Land

Simonelli examines migration and limits to adaptive capacity in the isolated Kandholhudhoo fishing community in the Maldives. The author proposes that policy responses are needed—particularly tailored to the vulnerabilities of small island states—which more fully utilize options for internal migration, with implications for population densities, island structural integrity, and economic resource bases.

Gharbaoui and Blocher examine the role of customary land tenure and land use in complex relocation processes in the Pacific. Against a historical analysis of ancestral and recent community relocation and land tenure in Fiji, the authors argue for participatory adaptive relocation processes which consult, cooperate, and negotiate with customary leaders of both sending and receiving communities at an early stage.

Finally, in the last chapter of the book, McLeman traces how migration in policy and research has increasingly been framed in terms of vulnerability and adaptation. The author examines critiques of this conceptualization and suggests promising avenues for further theoretical development and policy discussion.

Looking Forward

Looking forward, science is needed that will inform decisions about climate-resilient development pathways which includes human mobility. It is common for debates to form around normative questions such as whether different forms of mobility are a “positive” form of adaptation or an indicator of the severity of climate impacts. What will be important moving forward, however, is a focus on leaving no group of vulnerable people behind in the quest for improved human welfare. Climate change poses significant challenges to this overarching aim of the Sustainable Development Goals. What will emerge in the next rounds of research will be an understanding of human mobility as a global process of societies adjusting culturally, geographically, politically, and economically to the adverse effects of climate change.

Both the emerging science (IPCC 2014) and the Paris outcomes acknowledge the relationships between a range of climatic stressors and forms of human mobility, the need for actions that reduce vulnerability factors and enhance resilience factors for affected people, and principles that can guide support and work on climate-related

human mobility. These major science and policy milestones in 2014 and 2015 thus provide insights into directions for research, policy, and operations in coming years:

- First, research can help fill gaps in understanding on factors which affect vulnerability or resilience of people who are moving and the networks they are part of (families, communities), and it offers insights into the factors and thresholds relevant to household decisions to move or not.
- Second, policies drawing on this research are needed to guide risk averting and minimizing actions, as well as actions to address human mobility related to climate change (displacement in particular).
- Third, action and support to address human mobility in the context of climate change will be needed which include participation of affected people, guided by the best available science and other knowledge systems (traditional, indigenous, local) and aimed at integrating these actions into relevant socioeconomic and environmental policies and actions.

Human mobility in the face of climate change is a risk management strategy and livelihood diversification strategy in the face of many pressures and aspirations to better human welfare. The chapters in this book examine evidence from Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Tuvalu, Bolivia, Mexico, the Czech Republic, and Pacific Region and bring cutting edge analysis, insights, and suggestions for research and operational work to help vulnerable people on the move in the face of climate and other risks.

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