



YOUTH, ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AND MIGRATION *

Chapter 16

Today's young people are feeling the effects of environmental change, and today's leaders must design policies aimed at minimising its impact on future generations. Adolescents and youth currently navigate the impacts of environmental change through a myriad of alternatives, including internal and international migration.

As changes in the environment compel millions of people to adopt new livelihood strategies, how do these changes affect the development prospects of adolescents and youth? In this context, is migration an option? If migration is a possibility, how can policy-makers best support and manage all forms of migration? Is it possible to make migration a part of adaptation and sustainable development strategies? How can other stakeholders enable young people to become empowered actors in the environmental migration process?

ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AS MIGRATION TRIGGER

Both sudden and gradual environmental change influence the propensity to migrate; however due to the multi-causal nature of migration it is difficult to isolate and measure the environmental factors that contribute to a decision to migrate. A recent survey suggests that 12 per cent of the world's adult population think that they will need to move because of severe environmental problems.¹ Very little is known, however, about the role of environmental triggers in adolescent and youth migration, due to the complexities associated with the decision to migrate.

Box 16.1. Working Definition of Environmental Migration

Neither an internationally accepted definition for persons moving for environmental reasons, nor a legal instrument dealing specifically with this issue has yet been developed. To fill this gap, IOM has put forward a working definition of "environmental migrant" in an attempt to capture the complexity of the issue:

"Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their territory or abroad."

Source: IOM 2007/2008/2012.

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Climate change negotiations in Cancun (2010) and Durban (2011) led to the inclusion of human mobility issues in the official text of agreements reached in relation to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). A Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Committees and National Action Plans for least-developed countries were addressed during these meetings. Youth will be directly affected by how these steps are implemented and funded. Since September 2009 youth has had a voice in the climate negotiations via the youth constituency called YOUNGO, which hosts events and participates in high-level panels.² The presence of youth representatives in climate change negotiations should help to ensure that this constituency is recognised, and that its views are fully integrated into the discussions.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE LEAD TO DIFFERENT TYPES OF MIGRATION

Migration in the context of environmental change takes diverse forms. Different types of environmental change, in particular gradual-onset vs. sudden-onset events, can lead to different forms of human mobility.

Box 16.2. Categorizing Climate-Related Migration

Four main questions can help to categorise migration in the context of environmental change:

1. Is migration voluntary or forced?
2. Is migration permanent or temporary (forms of circular or seasonal migration, permanent resettlement and relocation)?
3. Is migration internal, regional or international (are international borders crossed)?
4. Is migration seen as a failure or as an adaptation strategy?

Source: IOM, "Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Migration, International Dialogue on Migration", (Scene Setting Presentation), 2011.

Examples of sudden-onset climate events include:

- Monsoon floods
- Typhoons
- Lake outburst floods
- Hurricanes
- Fires

Such events compel individuals to rapidly flee their community in search of security; they disrupt livelihoods and can take a heavy toll on human life. In such cases, migration can be a survival strategy, especially in the event of acute natural disasters. Such displacements

represent a form of *forced migration* and can lead populations, including adolescents and youth, to cross borders and confront social and other protection gaps. Increased awareness about disaster risk-reduction strategies that help populations prepare for natural disasters can contribute to preventing displacement.

Examples of gradual-climate onset events include:

- Desertification
- Rise in sea level
- Salinization of agricultural land
- Water scarcity
- Food insecurity

Gradual-onset events slowly erode livelihoods. Over the long run, gradual environmental change – though less visible – tends to have a greater impact on migration than natural disasters. Over the last 30 years, twice as many people have been affected by droughts as by storms (1.6 billion compared with around 718 million).³ It has been estimated that that up to 10 million people who migrated (or were displaced) over the last two decades in Africa moved mainly as a result of environmental degradation and desertification.⁴ Gradual onset-induced population movements tend to be temporary or circular in nature; for example, some migration related to weather patterns is seasonal, as is the case for pastoralists.

Migration caused by environmental change is frequently internal or intra-regional. The British Foresight Report found that most migration in the context of environmental change takes place within countries, and that “as many people are likely move *into* areas of environmental risk as migrate *from* them”.⁵ The report calls for linking internal migration in the context of environmental change to urban planning and local development strategies.

Few clear examples of forced or voluntary migration related to environmental change are available; often the decision to migrate can be considered as a choice, albeit tied to constraints. The multi-causal nature of migration also makes it difficult to identify clear cases of environmental migration, because of the many social, cultural, demographic, political and economic factors that may also be at play. For those who lack resources and networks, migration is not an option. These populations are vulnerable to the impact of environmental change on livelihoods, as well as to natural

disasters, and usually must remain in their communities of origin facing significant risks.

The many different forms of migration in the context of environmental change are highlighted here to stress that *migration should not be viewed simply as failure to adapt*. Migration can also be *part of adaptation*, (for example, when it removes pressure from heavily degraded areas), and can enhance income diversification, via remittances. Understanding migration as an adaptation strategy implies a need for policies that: (a) facilitate migration in environmentally degraded areas and (b) channel migrant's investments and financial transfers back to local sustainable development projects.

WHY FOCUS ON YOUTH?

Empirical studies generally conclude that the impacts of climate and environmental change will be important determinants of migratory behaviour and have the potential to permanently alter current migration streams. High fertility and rapid population growth in some developing countries with large youth populations create further pressures to emigrate (see box 16.3). Environmental change can create new push factors or exacerbate existing ones.

Box 16.3. Environment/Migration/Demography Nexus in Africa

Africa's population increased from 230 million in 1950 to over a billion in 2012, and is expected to reach 2 billion by 2050. As a result, more people will be contributing to environmental degradation, particularly given urbanization trends and the resulting growth of slum areas. Growing populations also mean that larger numbers of people in Africa will be subject to the impacts of climate change and may choose or be compelled to migrate in response.

One facet of Africa's growing population worth noting is its composition. While numbers are rising in all age groups in most countries due to past high fertility levels, most of the population is below the age of 35. Most fall into the 15-to-24 youth cohort, which is largely excluded and marginalised from development activities, and characterised by high levels of unemployment and a strong propensity to migrate both internally and internationally.

Across the continent, population growth has been a major cause of environmental degradation, as manifested in increased deforestation, soil erosion, and depletion of natural resources. In Malawi, for instance, fuel-wood provides 93 per cent of the energy source for the population, putting enormous pressure on the forest cover, which will only increase as the population grows. Similar trends are experienced across the continent, straining all forms of natural resources.

Source: Economic Commission for Africa, submission to Thematic Report.

Focusing on young people, both adolescents and youth, as a particular age and social group is of importance. Age and related socio-economic issues call for specific provisions concerning young people, migration and environmental change. Particular areas of concern related to youth include *protection needs* (unaccompanied minors, separated families, young people migrating alone) and the *options available* to youth (are they empowered to make the decision to migrate, do they migrate alone or as dependants, or are they left behind?). Protection and assistance to affected mobile populations, reducing vulnerabilities, and long-term management of risks – along with efforts to minimise forced migration – all directly concern youth populations affected by environmental change (see Box 16.4).

Box 16.4. Relationship between Adolescents and Youth, Migration and Environmental Change

- In the context of environmental change, migration can either aggravate young peoples' challenges (enhanced vulnerability on the migration route, moving to unsustainable locations, family separation etc.) or increase their opportunities (escape the effects of a natural disasters, diversify livelihoods, improve access to education, health and work opportunities).
- The rights and protection needs of adolescents and youth migrating due to environmental change require attention. Shared responsibility and respect for human rights are central to managing migration, including environmental migration. Human rights-based strategies and multi-pronged legal approaches offer a way forward in protecting and assisting environmental migrants.⁶
- Environmental change can impact other important push and pull factors influencing youth migration (employment, access to education and health services etc.).
- As environmental change often aggravates poverty, it can erode young people's capacities to migrate, thereby limiting their personal development opportunities.
- Young people need resources (information, education, networks etc.) to address the challenges posed by environmental change, and should have access to different options, which will shape their motivation and strategies. Migration can also be part of the alternatives offered to young people affected by environmental change, and thus can be part of adaptation strategies.
- Youth involvement is part of the response to environmental change. Raising awareness, involving and empowering young people is at the heart of the response to environmental change. It is also a significant component of the management of migration in the context of environmental change.

Focusing on the inter-linkages between environmental change, migration and youth calls attention to the post-natural disaster phase: recovery and reconstruction. Both protecting and building sustainable livelihood solutions for young people are of importance at this stage, in relation to return, relocation or resettlement. Environmental change is a process that exacerbates some of the most pressing human rights issues, whether adolescents and youth are migrating as independents,

dependants, or being left behind. Specific protection issues apply to unaccompanied children, separated children and young migrants and marginalised young male and female migrants.

Box 16.5. Challenges for Girls and Young Women

Girls and young women often find themselves facing particular risks when migration is compelled by environmental change or disasters. Adolescent girls escaping either the ravages of sudden disasters or the permanent disappearance of their home environment from climate change consequences face risks due both to their youth and to the dominant power relations and predatory sexual behaviour of males in many cultures. As happens in other emergency situations, such as flight from conflict, they suffer danger of rape, have little or no access to education or to preventive and responsive health measures that are critical and unique to them, especially as adolescents. The lack of organisation and protection in many IDP and refugee camps pose particular dangers and difficulty for girls. A 2009 IOM study of families fleeing flooding of the Mekong Delta confirmed the particular vulnerability of youth “especially girls” to human trafficking.

Both girls and boys as well as adolescents displaced by environmental factors face exclusion or marginalization from meaningful participation in policy and practical decisions over their own lives. Those displaced by slow-onset climate change rendering their home environments permanently uninhabitable are likely to have few options to return whereas those temporarily fleeing storm induced flooding or destruction may be able to go home again. Relief and development responses to either case require participatory inclusion of adolescents and youth - -equally for girls and boys-- in the decision-making on policy as well as practical measures. The responses also need to include specific measures to provide young females with appropriate preventative and responsive health care and to prevent sexual harassment and abuse.

Source: NGO Committee on Migration, citing: UNFPA “Facing a Changing World: Women and Climate Change (2009); Michelle Leighton, “Climate Change and Migration”: Women’s Refugee Committee, “Refugee Girls”; IOM, “Migration, Environment and Climate Change.”

YOUTH MIGRATION AS AN ADAPTATION STRATEGY: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Both internal and international migration phenomena are considered in this section. There are common considerations, as well as differences according to the nature of the migration process: when considering international migration, policy responses extend beyond individual states’ strategies and are influenced by bilateral, regional and multilateral agreements or the lack thereof. Major challenges include mobilising resources and building capacities to manage environmental migration.

For populations coping with environmental stresses, labour mobility can represent an adaptation strategy. However, migration as adaptation has suffered several setbacks. For example, none of the initial 14 National Adaptation Programmes for Action (NAPAs) consider migration as a possible response. NAPAs generally seek “to adapt agricultural practices, management of pastoral lands, infrastructure such as dykes and coastal barriers, fishing patterns and other strategies to reduce pressures on fragile eco-systems, thereby allowing populations to remain in place”.⁷ A review of 38 NAPAs submitted to the UNFCCC in October 2008 showed that while many countries acknowledged that climate change may affect migration patterns, the majority still regarded adaptation more as a mechanism to reduce migration, rather than manage it for the benefit of all stakeholders.⁸ There is still much work to be done to mainstream migration into NAPAs and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs).

Migration in the context of adaptation to environmental change implies two different approaches: on the one hand it means offering alternative livelihoods in environmentally degraded areas that allow populations to remain. This implies, for instance, engaging youth in innovative green economy activities, in particular entrepreneurship that can offer alternative employment opportunities. This sector is emerging in many places, and is potentially profitable and capable of generating employment opportunities for young people. Examples of businesses in the environmental sector include the production of recycled goods, composting and ecotourism. Jobs can be created to address emerging environmental issues such as wild fires, soil salinization, disappearance of mangroves, deforestation, floods and sea rise, which all threaten the development of affected localities and, combined with poverty and lack of jobs, are triggers for migration. Migration as an adaptation strategy, especially in response to gradual-onset environment-related events means that moving away from environmentally degraded areas can be a *choice*; migration can provide new livelihoods via the migration to new places; the right policies can facilitate these movements.

RETURNS ON HUMAN, SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL CAPITAL

Migration as a legitimate adaptation strategy is particularly attractive in the early stages of environmental degradation. It can reduce risk to lives and livelihoods and reliance on depleted resources. For instance, migration can enable communities to diversify resources through the productive use of remittances. Countries struggling to

devise strategies to better manage resources – in particular those with young populations – can consider migration as a potential mechanism to improve food security and water availability. While the social costs of migration should not be underestimated, migration can benefit countries (or areas) of origin through human, financial and social returns. The return and circular mobility of human and financial capital can play a major role in strengthening the capacities of households and communities suffering from environmental degradation, thereby improving the lives and opportunities of young people. In 2013 it is projected that migrants will send home around US\$404 billion.⁹ During the economic crisis, the significance and magnitude of remittances as a source of external financing for development has been unmatched.

Facilitating migration as a response to environmental change requires proactive policy making and direct support to vulnerable communities *before* migration becomes a matter of survival, rather than an autonomous choice. The ability of adolescents and youth to adapt, migrate and learn new skills represents an important plus for development strategies. The environmental change and migration nexus implies managing youth mobility as part of sustainable development solutions. Migration can be one of the alternatives offered to young people affected by environmental change; youth involvement is critical to shaping an effective response to the challenge of environmental change.

KEY MESSAGES

- Environmental factors, of both sudden and gradual onset, directly and indirectly influence the propensity to migrate. Migration can be a successful adaptation strategy for adolescents and youth that also benefits environmentally degraded areas.
- Shared responsibility and respect for human rights are central to managing migration, including environmental migration. Human rights-based strategies and multi-pronged legal approaches offer a way forward in protecting and assisting environmental migrants.
- Youth involvement is part of the response to environmental change. Raising awareness, involving and empowering young people is at the heart of the response to environmental change. It also represents a significant component of managing

migration in the context of environmental change.

- A proactive migration management approach that includes youth is necessary to address the full migration cycle and mitigate the potentially adverse environmental impacts of unmanaged mobility.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improve knowledge about adolescent and youth migration and its linkages to environmental change; gather data disaggregated by gender, age and other key factors.
- Ensure that young people have the means (information, education, resources, networks etc.) to address the challenges posed by environmental change, and access to different options, in the context of well-informed and carefully managed migration.
- Incorporate adolescent- and youth-related issues into a comprehensive migration management agenda that takes environmental change into account, to reduce the potential negative impacts of environmental change; particularly forced migration.
- Identify principles and mechanisms to address the rights and protection needs of adolescents and youth migrating due to environmental change.
- Frame migration and the climate change/environmental degradation nexus within the development agenda; facilitate youth migration, arrange student schemes and temporary and circular labour migration programmes on a bilateral basis to support young people affected by environmental degradation and natural disasters.

NOTES

¹ Findings of the Gallup World Poll Survey (*Gallup World Poll: the Many Faces of Global Migration*, IOM Migration Research Series, n° 43, 2011) was conducted in 150 countries surveying more than 750,000 adults (typically aged 15 and older).

² See: http://youthclimate.org/about_youth_climate/younggo-unfccc

³ International Emergencies Disaster Database (EM-DAT).

⁴ Grégoire G. de Kalbermatten (2008), "Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought as Push Factors of Forced Migrations", presentation at UNCCD.

⁵ Foresight (2011), "Migration and Global Environmental Change", Final Project Report, The Government Office for Science, London.

⁶ International Dialogue on Migration IDM 18, *Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Migration 2011*, IOM

⁷ Global Forum on Migration and Development (2009), "Integrating Migration Policies into Development Strategies for the Benefit of All", Report of the Proceedings-Annex II, Third Meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), Athens, Greece 2-5 November 2009. Available at <http://www.gfmd.org/en/docs/athens-2009>

⁸ S. Martin (2009), "Managing environmentally induced migration," in F. Laczko and C. Aghazarm, *Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Assessing the Evidence*, IOM.

⁹ Mohapatra *et al.* (2011), "Outlook for Remittance Flows 2011-2013," *Migration and Development Brief 16*, Migration and Remittances Unit, World Bank.