Climate Change and Migration – Media Briefing

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Migration is currently a no 1 issue in Germany as well as Europe – but how will future migration look like globally, in the age of climate risks? Where is environmental migration happening already today, and what can we learn from it?

Five facts from research and experience in the field:

1. Migration is mostly driven by a multitude of factors – be it political, social, demographic, economic, or by security concerns – and almost never by a single cause.
2. At the same time, global environmental change and specifically climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels, is an additional and potentially severe risk multiplier.
3. The extent to which climate change impacts translate into actual migration largely depends on the local socio-economic conditions. Those most vulnerable are those populations that are "immobile" or "trapped", and cannot move although they would like or need to.
4. While forced migration has to be prevented wherever possible, migration can be beneficial for distressed populations as well as for migration destination regions.
5. Through their greenhouse gas emissions, big emitting countries like Europe and Germany are also partly responsible for global environmental migration.

Droughts and flood risks: some biophysical climate change impacts (PIK)

- Extreme weather events are projected to increase globally under unabated climate change, albeit with great regional differences. Already in 2015, more people have been driven out of their homes by extreme weather events than by violent conflicts, even though climate change impacts are limited so far. In the future, for instance more extraordinarily strong tropical cyclones (hurricanes) will likely occur.
- Longer-lasting droughts and heat waves are already observed to become more frequent and will continue to do so under unabated global warming.
- One out of ten people on Earth are likely to live in a climate impact hotspot where several different climate change impacts overlap by the end of this century, if greenhouse gas emissions continue unabated.
- Sea-level rise as a consequence of global warming increases the risk of storm surges and hence the vulnerability especially of low-lying coastal areas like Bangladesh.
- The severity of climate impacts will strongly depend on the global mean temperature level, and therefore on the implementation of the Paris Agreement which aims at limiting the increase to well below 2°C.

Poverty and Hunger: risks from agro-economic climate change impacts (PIK)

- Climate change impacts hit those hardest who contributed least to global greenhouse gas emissions, profited least from the exploitation of fossil fuels, and have the least resources for adaptation: poor populations in poor countries, mostly in the tropics.

- Unabated climate change would likely increase the risk of hunger in some world regions through rising local and global food costs already by 2030. While the rise might be greatest in East Africa and the Middle East, the hunger risk is greater in Sub-Saharan Africa due to a lack of options for adapting agricultural.
- By 2080, negative impacts on crop yields may lead to increasing average costs of food between 50 and 130 percent. For poor people who spend a high income share on food, even smaller increases in food costs may be challenging at the household level.
- Only a few agricultural regions will likely benefit from global warming, mostly Northern and relatively wealthy countries in cooler regions. Sources of uncertainty include the potential effect of higher CO_2 levels on agricultural crops (discussed as "fertilization"), as well as economic and demographic developments.
- Local adaptation must include investing in yield-increasing agricultural technologies and local insurance schemes to stabilize farmers' income. In addition, keeping inter-regional and international food trade open could help countries affected by harvest failures.
- If climate impacts become too severe, migration will also be an adaptation strategy, which may become ever more important over time.

Relocation and migration as adaptation to climate change: latest findings from 4 countries (IOM)

- *Data on environmental migration:* Environmental factors play a much bigger role for migration than the current debate on migration causes might suggest. However, due to the multi-causal nature of migration generally, no concrete figures on environmental migration exist. While data on migration caused by slow environmental processes is difficult to collect, the number of persons newly displaced by disasters is recorded. In 2015, the figure of people displaced due to disasters is more than twice the number who fled conflict and violence in the same period. (According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, in 2015 disasters displaced around 19.2 million people across 113 countries.) Between 2008 and 2015, a total of 203.4 million people were displaced by disasters within their own countries, in some cases several times. This almost equals the amount of all international migrants worldwide (244 million).
- *Atlas of Environmental Migration:* The new, forthcoming Atlas of Environmental Migration created by IOM shows how slow and sudden onset processes and events already play a significant role in the decision to migrate across the world.
- *Types of migration:* Internal migration, such as rural-urban migration or movement across immediate borders between neighboring countries, is predominant, not long distance migration.
- *Vulnerability of migrants:* In Haiti, seasonal migration has been found to be a positive adaptation strategy, as it reduces vulnerability compared to households that did not move and diversifies income. Those persons displaced by disasters, such as by the 2010 earthquake or floods, were most vulnerable and less able to cope with the consequences. Those people who cannot move, so called "trapped" populations, are the second most vulnerable group after the displaced.
- *Relocation:* In many areas in the world, communities are already being relocated due to environmental changes such as coastal erosion, river bed erosion, salinization, rising lake levels or impending disasters, which are expected to be exacerbated by climate change in the future. For example, tens of thousands of people in Haiti and Viet Nam, hundreds of thousands in Ethiopia, a million in the Philippines, and millions in China are affected by relocations.
- *Sustainable migration*: IOM research shows that sustainable livelihood options are essential to ensure sustainability of any movement in the long term. For example, in the Dominican Republic, households who were relocated were found to be in a better situation regarding access to health care, education and were saved from the impact of the impending disaster compared to non-migrant households. Yet in the new location their economic situation is unsustainable due to a lack of arable land for grazing. In case of migration to urban areas, preparedness for future disasters was found to be worse compared to the non-migrant households.

Human mobility in the global climate change negotiations: Post-Paris discussions on displacement and the role of IOM

- Different forms of mobility have only been taken up in the global climate change negotiations since 2010. The 2015 Paris agreement mentions migrants in its preamble and established the Warsaw International Mechanism on Displacement related to loss and damage in the context of climate change.
- These processes represent important advocacy tools and IOM has been contributing through research, policy, advocacy and capacity building.

For further information, please refer to:

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