

CHAPTER

18

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**United Nations  
Environment  
Programme**



UNEP



## United Nations Environment Programme

The UN Environmental Programme (UNEP)<sup>1</sup> is the environmental conscience of the UN system. Its mandate is to coordinate UN environmental activities and assist developing countries in implementing environmentally sound policies and practices. It coordinates the development of environmental policy, keeps the global environment under review and brings emerging issues to the attention of governments and the international community for action.

International migration is increasingly gaining importance and priority in the environment and development discourse at the global, regional and national levels. UNEP has mainly looked at migration as a response strategy to changes in the environment and regional climate, as well as its potential links to conflicts and increased tensions between livelihood groups.

### 1. Migration and Development activities since the 2006 High-level Dialogue

In June 2008 UNEP participated in a mission to the Sahel undertaken by Jan Egeland, then Special Advisor to the UN Secretary General for Conflict Prevention and Resolution. The mission highlighted three main risks: (a) the threat posed by the potential impacts of climate change for livelihoods, in particular for livelihoods that are dependent on natural resources, such as farming, fishing and herding; (b) increasing migration pressures due to disasters, conflicts and the associated loss of livelihoods; and (c) escalating tension and potential conflicts over increasingly scarce natural resources, coupled with the availability of small arms and light weapons.

The findings called for further research and analysis of historical climate trends in the Sahel, in order to understand more about how livelihoods were being affected, what coping mechanisms were emerging and how these changes related to behavioural responses such as conflict and migration. To answer this call, UNEP initiated a joint study in 2009 with partner agencies entitled “Livelihood security: Climate change, migration and conflict in the Sahel.” The project has two main objectives: (a) to analyse the historical climate trends in the region, identify hotspots and determine the potential implications for livelihoods which depend on natural resources; and

<sup>1</sup> UNEP is a programme of the United Nations designated to address environmental issues at the global and regional levels. It was created as a result of the UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. It derives its mandate, inter alia, from the UN General Assembly Resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972. UNEP has its headquarters in Kenya, and has six regional offices and various country offices around the world. The UNEP Governing Council reports to the UN General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council. Visit [www.unep.org](http://www.unep.org) and [www.unep.org/PDF/UNEPOrganizationProfile.pdf](http://www.unep.org/PDF/UNEPOrganizationProfile.pdf) for further information.

(b) to provide recommendations for improving conflict and migration sensitivity in adaptation planning, investments and policies across the region.<sup>2</sup>

The project was conducted by UNEP, in cooperation with IOM, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations University and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), with technical input from the University of Salzburg's Centre for Geoinformatics. It was funded by the Government of Finland, and published at the Durban Climate Change Conference in November 2011.

The findings show that changes in regional climate have taken place over the past 40 years in the Sahel region and Western Africa. Key migration trends include an increase in southward migration to cities and the coast, as well as environmentally induced migration caused by rapid-onset disasters (mainly floods) occurring in the study region. The study found that the impacts of changing climatic conditions on the availability of natural resources and food insecurity, combined with social, economic and political factors, have led to greater competition for scarce resources and to changing migration patterns in the region. The five main conclusions of the report are:

- (a) The regional climate trends observed over the last 40 years in the Sahel show that overall temperatures have risen, droughts have been recurrent and severe, rainfall has generally increased, and floods have occurred more frequently and with more intensity.
- (b) Changes in the regional climate are impacting the availability of natural resources essential to livelihoods in the region, as well as food security. Along with important social, economic and political factors, this can lead to migration, conflict or a combination of the two.
- (c) The migration and movement of people and livestock are an integral part of ancestral livelihood strategies in the region. However, migration also occurs as a result of traditional and non-traditional livelihoods no longer being viable due to changes in the environment.
- (d) The impacts of changing climatic conditions on the availability of natural resources, coupled with factors such as population growth, weak governance and land tenure challenges, have led to increased competition for scarce natural resources – most notably fertile land and water – and resulted in tensions and conflicts between communities and livelihood groups.

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<sup>2</sup> UNEP, IOM, OCHA, UNU and CILSS, *Livelihood security: Climate change, migration and conflict in the Sahel*, (Geneva, UNEP, 2011). Visit the project website at [www.unep.org/disastersandconflicts/Introduction/EnvironmentalCooperationforPeacebuilding/EnvironmentalDiplomacy/SahelReport/tabid/55812/Default.aspx](http://www.unep.org/disastersandconflicts/Introduction/EnvironmentalCooperationforPeacebuilding/EnvironmentalDiplomacy/SahelReport/tabid/55812/Default.aspx).

- (e) A number of adaptation policies in the region recognize the linkages between changing climatic conditions and behavioural responses such as migration and conflict, but few so far have included provisions addressing these risks. Systematically considering these issues in adaptation planning can reduce conflict and migration risk, help prioritize adaptation investments and strengthen climate change adaptation capacity.

UNEP conducted a project entitled “Security in Mobility” in partnership with OCHA, IOM and the Institute for Security Studies, which advocated for safe movement of pastoralists within and across borders as part of a climate change adaptation strategy in the Horn of Africa region.

Currently, UNEP is conducting an assessment of conflicts and cooperation over natural resources in the border zone between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. A key challenge is the large-scale illegal migration from Haiti to the Dominican Republic, with estimates of up to one million Haitians (10 per cent of the population) having crossed the border into the Dominican Republic, creating tensions between the two countries. The interconnections between the two countries are, however, also creating positive opportunities for development, including through remittances, job opportunities and education.

UNEP is part of the Climate Change, Environment and Migration Alliance (CEEMA), a multi-stakeholder global partnership that brings together actors representing a range of perspectives including environment, migration, development and humanitarian assistance. Its objective is to bring migration considerations to the environment, development and climate change agendas, and vice versa. CEEMA was founded in response to the growing realization that there are complex interdependencies among climate change, environmental degradation and migration. UNEP, therefore, brings to this partnership its comparative advantage in environment-related issues and its strength to bridge the science and policy nexus.

The links between climate change, security and migration were also raised as an issue during the July 2011 debate on climate change and security within the UN Security Council, where the Executive Director of UNEP noted in his opening remarks that “Nationally and regionally climate change has the potential to sharply intensify human displacement bringing communities into increasing competition for finite natural resources with world-wide repercussions for the stability of the global economy.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Visit the UN Webcast website at [www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2011/07/achim-steiner-unesp-security-council-meeting-part-1.html](http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2011/07/achim-steiner-unesp-security-council-meeting-part-1.html).

## **2. Support provided to the Global Forum on Migration and Development**

To date, no direct contacts have been made between the UNEP-led project on “Livelihood security: climate change, migration and conflict in the Sahel” and the GFMD. Being a partnership between UNEP, IOM, OCHA, UNU and CILSS, however, the project benefits from the links that the partner organizations have to the GFMD.

## **3. Identified good practices**

Identified good practices include the cooperation between various international agencies, where each can bring their specific area of expertise to the table for a holistic approach to the issues. For example, the UNEP-led project on the Sahel benefited from the expertise of IOM and UNU on migration and previous field-level research, the experience of OCHA in the humanitarian field, the local presence and long-term involvement of CILSS in the region on the issues discussed, as well as the expertise of UNEP in regard to the environment and conflicts related to natural resources. Field presence and partnership with regional (or national) entities have also yielded important insights into the realities on the ground and more detailed understanding of the specific problems in specific areas.

The UNEP approach to migration as one possible response, through various interlinkages, to changing environmental conditions, availability of natural resources and food and water insecurity, has also been useful. The conceptual model used in the Sahel report highlights the indirect linkages between climate change, migration and security in the context of the Sahel. Climate change impacts are seen as compounding existing vulnerabilities, leading to: (a) greater food and water insecurity, as well as health issues; and (b) changes in natural resource availability. Both impacts could, in turn, result in competition for resources, local-level conflict, migration and, ultimately, broader political destabilization. Non-climate factors, however, such as political, governance, economic and social factors, as well as increasing demographic pressure and environmental degradation, play a significant role in influencing any results.

## **4. Challenges identified in carrying out UNEP work**

A key challenge in mapping migration and changes in the regional climate or conflict in the Sahel region is the limited availability of data. Very little data exist on migration flows in the region, with surveys conducted only in periods 1976–1980, 1988–1992 and 2000–2002. Whatever migration data exist tend to be static, showing one period, rather than a trend over time, which can be highly influenced by political events in the region. As such, it is not possible to draw generalizations on patterns of migration from the data.

Another challenge is the regional nature of both climate change and migration. As issues of climate change and migration are regional in nature, they should not only be managed at the national level, as is most commonly the case. Funds available for both climate change adaptation and activities related to migration should also be provided to a greater extent for regional initiatives.

Transforming findings and recommendation into concrete outputs is also challenging, inter alia, because of constraints on funds, coordinated approaches between the various stakeholders, and human resources.

A final challenge is the complexity and interconnection of the issues related to causes and consequences of migration. Despite these challenges, UNEP believes it is important to take a holistic approach when dealing with migration and development, including conflict sensitivities and potential effects of changing environmental conditions.

## 5. Gaps evident within the migration and development sphere

The following are some of the major gaps that need to be addressed by all parties involved with migration and development issues:

- (a) Migration tends to be viewed as instrumental for development, rather than intrinsic to development. Yet people move as an expression of a minimum level of the human capabilities which they enjoy.<sup>4</sup> Policies that support the intrinsic value of migration are largely absent from the migration–development sphere, as migration has been mostly viewed as the result of a development failure.
- (b) Governments have little knowledge about the development impacts of emigration beyond just the migrants’ monetary remittances. The effects of “social” remittances are largely unknown. (Social remittances are ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that flow from receiving to sending country communities, which can impact immigrant entrepreneurship, community and family formation, and political transformations.<sup>5</sup>)
- (c) The impact of the migration–development relationship on receiving and sending countries may be observable on the micro-level, but little is known about its macro-level effects. This gap is the result of the heterogeneity of the migration–development relationship. The impact of migration and development varies according to the characteristics and circumstances of the receiving society, sending society and migrants, and can change over time. Hence, there is no single mechanism that can “tap” positive development and migration outcomes.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> H. de Haas, Migration and Development: A Theoretical Perspective, *International Migration Review*, 44(1):227–64 (2010).

<sup>5</sup> H. de Haas, “Mobility and Human Development,” *Human Development Reports*, Research Paper 2009/01 (New York, UNDP, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> de Haas 2010 (see footnote 4).

- (d) There exists a gap in the awareness of the transnational impacts of migration on development. Migration impacts are often measured as either the contributions or costs that migrants bring for receiving or sending societies. However, these are rarely viewed alongside one another, although migrants are impacted by the social, economic and political conditions in both sending and receiving countries. For example, restrictive immigration policies in receiving societies affect the ability of migrants to integrate and prosper economically. This in turn impacts their ability to send remittances to or invest in their home societies.
- (e) There exists a gap between the responsibility of sending countries to promote development, and more generally, the role played by sending countries in the migration–development relationship. Sending countries often overlook the importance of strengthening institutions that promote development to realize the full development benefits of migration.
- (f) An undue focus on States and migration policies has produced a gap in the role played by supra and subnational forces – such as global economic restructuring, migrant networks or employers – in impacting the migration–development relationship.<sup>7</sup>
- (g) Policies targeting the positive development effects of migration have primarily focused on South–North (between developing and developed countries), rather than South–South migration (between developing countries), which constitutes the major part of all migration.<sup>8</sup> As a consequence, the impact of remittances sent between developing countries is relatively unknown, as is the impact of diaspora communities in the global South on their origin societies.

## 6. Recommendations for the 2013 High-level Dialogue

UNEP recommends that the 2013 HLD support and call on States and their partners to pursue the following:

- (a) *Adopt climate change adaptation policies that are migration- (and conflict-) sensitive.* Adaptation policies and programmes that aim to reduce livelihood vulnerability, promote alternatives and improve the availability and access to natural resources can mitigate the drivers of migration and conflict and help secure development gains. A comprehensive conflict analysis engaging local communities should be conducted before designing and implementing climate change adaptation strategies, in order to fully understand and integrate local and regional conflict dynamics. Finally, the benefits of climate change adaptation

<sup>7</sup> de Haas 2009 (see footnote 5).

<sup>8</sup> O. Bakewell, “South–South Migration and Human Development: Reflections on African Experiences,” *Human Development Reports*, Research Paper 2009/07 (New York, UNDP, 2009).



policies should be carefully considered across social groups so that they do not reinforce inequalities, for example, with regard to ethnicity or gender.

- (b) *Consider the positive role of migration.* This is particularly true for communities facing less advanced stages of environmental degradation.
- (c) *Root national adaptation strategies in the “green economy” and promote the creation of “green jobs”.* A green economy aims to improve human well-being and social equity while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. Employment opportunities and enhanced food security resulting from improved agricultural productivity based on sustainable practices, for example, could increase resilience to climate stressors and reduce local tensions and forced migration while securing development gains.
- (d) *Strengthen the capacity of receiving areas.* Where migration occurs, it is important also to strengthen the capacities of receiving areas, which are often urban and coastal, as in the case of the Sahel region. These areas are often ill-equipped to receive a large number of migrants, which can result in uncontrolled urbanization and growing slums, or conflicts with the local population as a result of increased competition over land, water or other natural resources.
- (e) *Promote regional environmental cooperation.* Issues of climate change and migration are regional in nature, and as such should not only be managed at the national level, as is most commonly the case. Similarly, many cases of conflict are transboundary conflicts, as competition for scarce natural resources pushes various groups beyond national borders in search of improved livelihood conditions. These issues should therefore increasingly be addressed through regional cooperation.
- (f) *Harmonize national laws and policies on migration, natural resources and environmental issues across the region.* This avoids inconsistencies or discrepancies between neighbouring countries that could lead to increased pressure on natural resources in areas with weaker legislation.
- (g) *Strengthen preventive action, resource rights and dispute resolution.* Early action on the environmental drivers of crises can help prevent and defuse both imminent threats and broader instability. Dispute resolution should be promoted by building local, national and international capacity to conduct mediation between conflicting parties where tensions are linked to natural resources. Traditional conflict mediation practices should also be adapted to the new realities on the ground as a result of changes taking place in the climate and local environment. Also, clarifying resource rights and land tenure is a prerequisite for effective national and local-level governance. When doing so, national or regional authorities need to consider potential conflicts between national and local/traditional governance structures, and, where possible, build on existing and accepted dispute resolution mechanisms.

- (h) *Prioritize systematic data collection and early warning systems.* Systematic collection of data should be established and improved. Surveys should also be conducted directly with migrants in order to better understand the reasons behind the decision to migrate. Finally, early warning systems can help defuse livelihood insecurities by providing the information required to mitigate disaster risk, food insecurity and related conflict and migration outcomes. Environmental and natural resource issues should thus be included in international and regional conflict early warning systems to support preventive action and encourage environmental cooperation.
- (i) *Do not forget those who are too poor or unable to migrate and who are “left behind”.* Poverty plays an important role in the decision to migrate, with the very poor and often most vulnerable parts of a population sometimes lacking the resources to move away from hazardous or slowly degrading areas.
- (j) *View the relationship between migration and development (and the environment) as reciprocal.* Migration and development are intrinsic parts of each other. Furthermore, migration and development (and certain environmental conditions) are driven by the same structural socioeconomic factors as those affecting migration–development outcomes.
- (k) *View migration as an expression of human development, rather than a sign of development failure.* People who do not enjoy a sufficient level of human development may be “forcibly immobile.”<sup>9</sup> Research shows that an increase in development in relatively deprived regions will increase emigration, as people gain the means, capacities and aspirations to migrate and pursue improved livelihoods. This is why middle-income countries such as Mexico and Morocco have markedly high levels of emigration.<sup>10</sup>
- (l) *Explore migration –development causes and consequences from a transnational, rather than national, perspective.* This is because both migration and development (and the environment) are affected by global, structural socioeconomic factors, and international migration involves at least two countries.<sup>11</sup>
- (m) *Migrant-receiving countries should implement policies that promote rather than constrain socioeconomic integration and facilitate demand-driven labour*

<sup>9</sup> J. Carling, Migration in the age of involuntary immobility: theoretical reflections and Cape Verdean experiences, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 28(1): 5–42.

<sup>10</sup> H. de Haas, “Migration Transitions: A Theoretical and Empirical Inquiry into the Developmental Drivers of International Migration,” *IMI Working Papers* No. 49 (Oxford, University of Oxford and H. de Haas, 2010); and S. Vezzoli, “Migration and Development: Lessons from the Mexico–US and Morocco–EU experiences,” *IMI Working Papers* No. 22 (Oxford, University of Oxford, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> S. Castles, Understanding global migration: A social transformation perspective, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 36(10):1665–86 (Special Issue: Theories of Migration and Social Change); and N. Van Hear, Managing Mobility for Human Development: The Growing Salience of Mixed Migration, *Human Development Reports*, Research Paper 2009/20 (New York, UNDP, 2009).

migration. Increasingly restrictive immigration policies deprive migrants of their rights and push them into irregular channels of migration and jobs and sectors that do not fully value their skill levels.<sup>12</sup> In receiving countries which are also developing countries, money transfer services can be costly and impede the flow of remittances. Thus, obstacles in receiving societies hinder the positive development impacts of migration on both the host and origin societies, causing migration in some cases to have a negative development outcome.

- (n) *Governments of sending countries should not view emigrants as agents of development.* This is despite the potential that emigrants have to positively impact the livelihoods of their families and communities back home. This assumes that migrants want to contribute to the development of their origin countries. Governments, not emigrants, must assume responsibility for their countries' socioeconomic development.<sup>13</sup>
- (o) *Sending country governments should focus on reforming their countries' economic and political institutions.* This can promote diaspora investments and maximize the positive impact that such investments and private remittances will have on development. Policies that improve the general welfare and functioning of the economy and social services, including health care and education, are more likely to promote the positive development impacts of migration than targeted emigrant or remittance policies.<sup>14</sup> This is because some pre-existing level of development can optimize the positive impacts of migration-driven development. Thus, the socioeconomic prosperity of a household, community or State will affect its ability to enjoy the development benefits of migration, in particular remittances.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> H. de Haas and F. Rodríguez, Mobility and Human Development: Introduction, *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 11(2):177–184.

<sup>13</sup> de Haas 2009 (see footnote 5); Bakewell 2009 (see footnote 8).

<sup>14</sup> de Haas 2009 (see footnote 5)

<sup>15</sup> de Haas 2010 nd Vezzoli 2010 (see footnote 10); Bakewell 2009 (see footnote 8).

