



CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER DISPLACEMENT IN SOUTH ASIA

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INTRODUCTION

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) states,

”Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects 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 country or abroad.”

It apparently took one of the world 's scariest catastrophes, the 2004 tsunami, to drive home the need for government agencies all around the globe to create better efficient approaches to natural crises and the people displaced by them. In 11 different Asian and African nations, five million people were displaced and around 250,000 were dead.

During the last two decades, the number of reported catastrophes has more than quadrupled from about 200 to over 400 each year, with climate-related disasters accounting for nine out of ten. Over the last decade, the overall number of individuals affected by natural catastrophes has allegedly quadrupled to two billion, with far more than 200 million people deeply affected every year.

Natural catastrophes are projected to cause significant displacement, changing the world's perspective of forcibly displaced people, who are now largely thought of as refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) uprooted by oppression and war.

The great majority will be relocated inside their own nations, while substantial amounts will transcend globally recognized boundaries, particularly if island governments are swamped.

While projections of the percentage of people affected vary, a 2007 Christian Aid research forecasts that "climate change-related occurrences" (floods, storms, and drought) will "permanently" displace 250 million people between 2007 and 2050. According to the United Nations and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), while it is unfeasible to determine whether the people involved will be permanently or temporarily displaced, 36 million people were uprooted by sudden-onset natural disasters in 2008 alone, with 20 million displaced by disasters related to climate change.

OBJECTIVES

Environmental change is the characterizing emergency within recent memory and calamity uprooting one of its most destroying results. It has provoked more standard and more grounded environment related cutoff points like storms, floods, dry seasons, and savage blasts.

Those who flee their country as a result of climate change or natural catastrophes are not protected under international law. The 1951 Refugee Convention offers assurance to those escaping war and struggle who face mistreatment along grounds of race, religion, ethnicity, membership in a specific social group, or political assessment.

The human rights of persons displaced by calamity have gotten almost no consideration. Although the global reaction to natural catastrophes "has become ever swifter and more sophisticated" in the hurry to achieve life-saving assistance, "little attention" has been paid "to the rights of these displaced people," as Jan Egeland, former UN Under- Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, fittingly noticed.

Measures are being made to establish preventative and risk-reduction methods, improve rescue operations, accelerate relief distribution, and launch programs to "build back better" in the rehabilitation and reconstruction phases. Recognizing catastrophe victims' human rights concerns and determining the best way to safeguard them has gotten less attention.

Recent catastrophes, however, have revealed:

- Unequal access to food and supplies, notably by women
- Bias in relief giving based on ethnicity, social, race, religious, or sexual criteria
- Relocation preparations that prejudice towards the poor and other disadvantaged people
- Physical and gender-based abuse, particularly in settlements and shelters

- Victimization, smuggling, and army recruiting of separated children
- Ignorance and subjugation of the aged, impoverished, crippled, and sick
- Compelled disruptions of individuals to risky places with minimal economic opportunities

The study indicates a recognition of the importance of seeing catastrophes as fundamentally societal, rather than environmental, events. This point of view recognizes that humans may act and make decisions to lessen the possibility of a disaster occurring or, at the very least, to reduce the magnitude of loss and destruction connected with it.

Disasters thus, are no longer regarded as 'natural' or 'acts of God,' but rather as something over which humans have control and may thereby avert.

This scientific document is a first attempt to quantify the probability of disaster-related relocation in eight South Asian nations. It will highlight the obstacles to safeguarding catastrophe victims, particularly the inadequacies in present safeguarding mechanisms, and will recommend productive solutions.

WHY SOUTH ASIA IS VULNERABLE?

Cyclone Amphan stormed on Bangladesh and India in May 2020. It was among the most powerful hurricanes to strike the region in decades, eventually resulting in three million displaced persons and approximately two million wrecked or ruined dwellings. People were uprooted and lost their houses in three different countries: Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka. Many of the destroyed buildings were mud houses and rickety shacks, which were not disaster-proof.

Cyclone Amphan is only the latest reminder that the effects of climate change and climate-induced migration are real and present threats in South Asia. Authorities in the vicinity have devised policies to counteract these dangers. Such attempts, however, are hampered by capacity, administration, and budget restrictions. They are in desperate need of foreign assistance, that has been there but inadequate thus far.

The German watch think tank's Global Climate Risk Index has just rated India and Pakistan amongst the leading countries most vulnerable to climate change. Furthermore, a worrisome new report released in June 2020 by India's Ministry of Earth Sciences, based on rigorous climate modelling, forecasts that in the following decades, India— South Asia's most populous country by far—will become significantly dryer and hotter, with average temperatures expected to rise by roughly 4 degrees Celsius by the end of the century.



It will also see longer monsoon periods and increased glacial melt, along with warmer temperatures in the Indian Ocean and forecast sea level rises of up to nearly a foot.

Climate susceptibility is compounded in the Indian Subcontinent by ineffective policymaking. Water scarcity in India and Pakistan is exacerbated by the government's subsidization of unsustainable irrigation facilities and water-guzzling crops like sugar. Builders and corporations have complete freedom to drain valuable water sources. Populations in flood-prone areas in India have blamed authorities of neglecting flood hazards during election campaigns.

The Sundarbans, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that contains the world's biggest mangrove forest, exemplifies South Asia's significant risk of climate-induced migration. It is very vulnerable to rising sea rise, catastrophic storms, soil degradation, and water salinity due to its location along the Bay of Bengal and spanning regions of Bangladesh and India.

Storms have forced people to flee the Sundarbans Islands in recent years. More flight may be on the way, considering that significant job sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, betel-leaf producing, and tourist industry have been seriously harmed by damaging weather events.

Climate migration is escalating in South Asia, posing a threat to regional peace as well as a human rights issue. Increasing rural mass migration will put further strain on already-overburdened metropolis to furnish fuel, housing, and employment. In an area where terror organizations frequently engage in major cities in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, their inability to provide these tools may increase the dangers of radicalization.

Furthermore, the widespread protest movement of disadvantaged, oppressed minorities - Pashtuns fleeing floods in northern Pakistan, Muslims fleeing drought-stricken rural India, and Rohingya refugees fleeing flooded cities in Bangladesh—may exacerbate communal tensions and violence in their new areas.

Moreover, a border fence by India in the 2000s to halt refugee massive influx from Bangladesh has resulted in violence, with border guards shooting down many migrants attempting to cross it. Future surges of climate migrants from Bangladesh could exacerbate this violence and exacerbate communal conflicts in Assam, India's border state, where many have disliked the presence of these migrants in prior decades.

CASE STUDY

Pakistan: Climate-Induced Displacement and Migration in Pakistan

Pakistan is one of the most susceptible countries to both slow and quick climate change catastrophes. Climate change's consequences are now clearly visible in Pakistan. Long periods of drought and frequent flooding have resulted in decreased agriculture output, increased cattle fatality, and levels of unemployment. Climate-induced displacement and migration have an impact on society's macroeconomic patterns, increasing disparities.

Women, children, the elderly, and persons with impairments are particularly vulnerable. This study revealed a correlation between people's compelled migration and climate change.

"Insights from Muzaffargarh and Tharparkar Districts" reveals that people's adaptive and responsive abilities are inadequate in the face of many threats posed by climate change to their lives, livelihoods, and property. Climate change has increased dangers to people's jobs, aggravating societal disparities in the country, according to the study findings emphasized in this article.

The existing degree of (cultural and organizational) readiness and capability is insufficient to address the challenges faced by climatic extreme weather events and their consequences. As a result, this research identified some major policy metrics that can influence to global development goals, particularly achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aims to 'leave no one behind' and is a component of Pakistan's growth narrative.

According to the report, displaced rural populations were the least ready to deal with floods and droughts.

India: Climate Induced Displacement and Migration in India

In India, migration is a complicated phenomenon influenced by a variety of variables, including societal, institutional, ecological, fiscal, and regional dynamics. In any given year, one hundred million individuals in the nation are on the move for a living, accounting for approximately one-fifth of India's labour force. These 100 million internal migrants pay 'home' massive quantities of money that are eight times bigger than the combined healthcare and education budgets of the Government of India.

Though migration has always been a fact, particularly for semiarid-area households, the previous two to three decades have seen a shift in the volume and patterns of mobility.

Every year for the five years ending in 2016, nine million individuals relocated between states for either school or job. That is nearly double the inter-state migration reported between 2001 and 2011, as reflected by Census 2011, that also puts the overall amount of domestic migrants in the nation (including inter and intra-state movement) at a startling 139 million.

Internal climate migrants are quickly taking on the role as the human face of climate change. According to a World Bank research titled "Groundswell - Preparing for Internal Climate Migration," if immediate global and national climate action is not taken, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America could see more than 140 million people relocate within their borders by 2050.

From 1970 to 2012, India's East coast has been hit by 200 cyclonic storms, resulting in the loss of lives and livelihood opportunities. According to a Climate Central assessment, Odisha and West Bengal are "especially vulnerable" to sea level rise and the accompanying floods might harm 36 million people who live along the shore. Large-scale migration seems to be the principal manner that makes sense for around 4.5 million people living in the Sundarbans delta region since storm Aila devastated the region in 2009. (Census, 2011).

Agriculture, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), is the first and most impacted sector during a drought, absorbing around 80% of all direct impacts, with numerous consequences on agricultural production, nutrition security, and rural incomes. Droughts may cause starvation and migration, as well as a loss of natural resources and a major deterioration in financial outlook, creating considerable misery in rural populations.

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. In addition, 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—were impacted by at least one climate-related disaster.

In recent years, the German watch think tank's Global Climate Risk Index has ranked India and Pakistan among the top ten countries vulnerable to climate change. 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 Celsius by century's end. 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 India and Pakistan, 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.

MANIFESTATIONS OF CLIMATE-INDUCED MIGRATION

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

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. Pakistan's 2010 floods damaged or destroyed 1.1 million homes and displaced about 11 million people—and large numbers settled in major cities instead of returning home. In 2012, floods displaced 1.5 million in the Indian state of Assam. Impacts that are more gradual 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. However, 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.

South Asia's high risk of climate-induced migration is particularly vivid in the Sundarbans, 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 Sundarbans 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.

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. 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

South Asian governments have enacted statutes and programs to combat climate change and climate-related migration. Furthermore, they have been doing so for quite some time: Following the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami in 2005, the Maldives devised a plan to relocate the people to higher land. In recent times, the idea has grown to include the creation of entirely new islands.

Furthermore, these regulations are hampered by causes ranging from inadequate enforcement to bad infrastructure, corruption, and insufficient financing. The South Asian authorities are well aware of climate migration concerns and have made preliminary attempts to mitigate them but the size of the climate change and displacement danger magnifies the region's lack of preparedness. In this sense, international help is needed at a greater level than is now available.

National remedies already in place span from penal (fines for individuals who chop down trees) to helpful (the construction of shelters, mud and concrete walls, and embankments to protect against cyclones). There is also a diverse set of guidelines in effect.

The national action plan for climate change in India supports sustainable power, fuel efficiency, environmental sustainability (such as the production of climate-resilient crop varieties), and watershed management. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) guarantees manual workers 100 days of paid employment every fiscal year in order to mitigate migration risks caused by climate-related economic deficits.

Moreover, on the urban side, the Jawaharlal 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. 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.

Moreover, Pakistan has a climate change strategy with actionable measures to fix agrarian migration, as well as a national food security policy aimed at making agriculture more robust to climate change.

The general ledger on these flagship initiatives, on the other hand, is far from fantastic. The absence of precise strategy and clarity in India's climate change national action plan has been questioned. According to a scholarly evaluation of NREGA, a paucity of general knowledge about the program adds to poor enrolment among rural individuals. Another claim is that NREGA has enhanced economic security in wealthier states far more than in rural ones.

The most current NREGA research, published in 2019 by the International Food Policy Research Institute, reveals that, while the programme has increased earnings for affected citizens, participants have not used the additional funds to make their farms more climate-resilient.

Meanwhile, the JNNURM has failed to finish a number of projects, including housing. It was discontinued in 2014. Additionally, official evaluations of water supply are hampered by untrustworthy data and a failure to communicate across states.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's national climate change strategy includes a basis for the execution, although many climate adaption measures are yet to be implement. The absence of assessment and management procedures is also highlighted in the implementation framework. Pakistani environmentalists criticize Islamabad for enacting new climate-related legislation rather than focusing on administering and developing existing ones.

Going to make matters nastier, provincial authorities, who are primarily responsible for implementation, frequently lack the technical and financial competence to carry out climate change policy—a problem that has plagued Pakistani policymaking in general since 2010, when a constitutional amendment transferred authority for numerous policy topics to under-prepared provinces.

Attempts to develop climate resilience in the Sundarbans, and therefore to reduce the danger of climate-induced migration, have been hampered by poor infrastructure. Water aquifers that are too deep to reach, dwellings built of materials (such as tin or asbestos) that do not allow for rainwater gathering, and weak embankment constructions are examples of this.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Promote more livelihood opportunities in non-agricultural sectors.

Agriculture is a major source of employment in many South Asian countries, but it is also the region's most sensitive industry to climate change. As a result, its workers are particularly vulnerable to climate-related relocation. While national governments work to mitigate climate threats to farming, the global community should encourage the emergence of other, less climate-vulnerable job opportunities. Donors can support technical education and other skill-development programs that will make the region's millions of youth more marketable for urban-centered jobs in telecoms, electronics, and retail, among other fields—all-critical, high-growth-potential fields in a rapidly urbanizing region.

Empower non-federal authorities to tackle climate-induced displacement risks.

Domestic policy is a non-federal topic in much of South Asia. However, state/provincial governments frequently lack the necessary skills and resources for this job. International donors can fund or support training or other instructional initiatives to help non-federal politicians deal with the undoubtedly daunting task of climate change and, by extension, displacement. Support for local governments is very important. Decentralization changes in certain South Asian countries have provided additional technical and financial resources to state/provincial authorities, but these reforms frequently do not reach down to local levels, where much of program execution including service delivery—takes place.

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.

Diplomatic tensions abound in South Asia because of long-standing disputes between India and Pakistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and India and various smaller republics. These divisions are worse by a lack of regional connectivity, which is due in large part to South Asia's poor infrastructure, particularly lousy highways and malfunctioning energy grids. Intraregional commerce is, predictably, low in comparison to other areas, and this lack of business collaboration robs the area of a possible road for greater confidence and compassion.

Furthermore, discussions within South Asia's largest regional organization, SAARC, are virtually stalled due to the tense relationship between India and Pakistan. Track II conversations and multilateral conferences should be convened by foreign diplomats and other external players, ideally from nations considered as impartial by all South Asian governments, to help establish regional agreement behind a shared strategy to address climate change and displacement.

REFERENCES

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-NidhiAdlakha , The Hindu

<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/how-the-climate-crisis-is-uprooting-more-people-than-war/article30942108.ece>

Picture this: a decade or so from now, you are forced to leave your country due to recurring floods or air quality so bad you can't step outdoors. It may seem impossible right now as you read this in the comfort of your home, but for many across the world, this is reality. And it isn't too far for us either.

- “Climate refugees – their rights and duty of the law”

-DakshGhai, Symbiosis Law School

https://blog.ipleaders.in/climate-refugees-rights-duty-law/#Indias_stance_on_conventions

The article provides a brief overview of the mechanism of climate change, and the steps taken by various organizations to protect the interests of people who have been displaced internally and across borders as a consequence of natural calamities and to mitigate these climate changes.

- “Strategic Framework for Climate Action” -UNHRC

<file:///F:/Old%20data/Diksha/SEMESTER%206/DISSERTATION/Strategic%20Framework%20for%20Climate%20Action.pdf>

This document sets out the parameters for UNHCR's response to the growing, global climate emergency. It provides a common framework and approach to step up our ambition under three core pillars for action. The Framework will be implemented primarily through the development of plans of action driven at regional and country levels in collaboration with affected communities, host governments, UN Country Teams and a wide range of partners.

•“Climate change could create 63 million migrants in South Asia by 2050”

-Megan Rowling, Thomson Reuters Foundation

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-change-migration-southasia-tr-idUSKBN28S1WV>

The growing impacts of climate change have already pushed more than 18 million people to migrate within South Asian countries, but that could more than triple if global warming continues on its current path, researchers warned on Friday.

• “Climate change and disaster displacement”

• -UNHRC

[https://www.unhcr.org/en-in/climate-change-and-](https://www.unhcr.org/en-in/climate-change-and-disasters.html?__cf_chl_tk=m1hXnc1mT72CdA9jYYitMyhPygVplcak0pRiY5KuzrA)

[disasters.html?__cf_chl_tk=m1hXnc1mT72CdA9jYYitMyhPygVplcak0pRiY5KuzrA-1648223071-0-gaNycGzNCj0](https://www.unhcr.org/en-in/climate-change-and-disasters.html?__cf_chl_tk=m1hXnc1mT72CdA9jYYitMyhPygVplcak0pRiY5KuzrA-1648223071-0-gaNycGzNCj0)

The impacts of climate change are numerous and may both trigger displacement and worsen living conditions or hamper return for those who have already been displaced. Limited natural resources, such as drinking water, are becoming even scarcer in many parts of the world that host refugees. In such conditions, climate change can act as a threat multiplier, exacerbating existing tensions and adding to the potential for conflicts.

• India’s Climbing Rate of Climate Refugees

-Kota Sriraj, The Pioneer

<https://www.dailypioneer.com/2021/columnists/india---s-climbing-rate-of-climate-refugees.html>

The recent decade has been a testament to this new and concerning pattern wherein climate caused disasters have displaced millions of people globally making them climate refugees. The World Migration Report 2022 of the United Nations maps the worsening displacement of people due to climate-change-related events. 2020 witnessed displacement of 30.7 million people across 145 countries.