



Global South Perspectives on Climate Change and Displacement

Overview

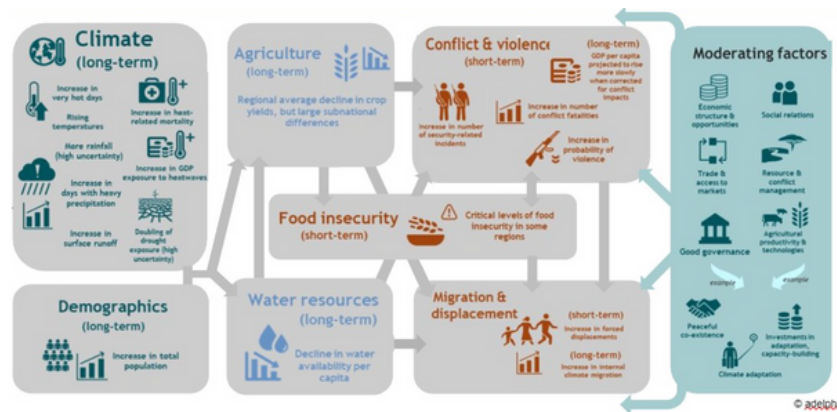
The UN Climate Change Conference convened in Baku in November 2024 (COP29) included a focus on how to support Global South states in protecting their people and economies against climate disasters and sharing the benefits of the clean energy boom. COP29 also sought to affirm the benefits of inclusive approaches that ensure the meaningful participation of highly vulnerable people from the climate frontlines, including those who are forcibly displaced. Given the limited progresses witnessed at COP29, the IDRC Research Chairs Network on Forced Displacement [1], a collective of voices from the Global South, argue that localized knowledge and thought leadership from the Global South can contribute to more effective responses [2].

Debates, Critiques and Challenges: Perspectives from the Global South

Understanding Climate Change beyond an 'external' phenomenon:

It is necessary to challenge the conceptualization of climate change as a phenomenon that is exclusively external to the society it affects. The characterization of climate change as a phenomenon that originates exclusively outside the affected community, thus leading to a primary focus on external

solutions, complicates the global policy process as it means that policies are constructed outside the contexts in which they need to be applied and do not address the climate change challenges prioritized by communities most affected. When climate change is seen as an external phenomenon, the normal everyday adaptation strategies of the communities tend not to be supported or reflected in global policies. In the Global South, the impact of climate change and displacement are co-caused by several factors, like *drivers* and *triggers*.



For example, in case of the nomadic Maasai pastoralists in East Africa, given their history, climate change is a 'trigger' for displacement while the 'driver' has been a history of land loss and marginalization. The relationship between climate change and displacement is not simple, but rather it requires us to consider the interlapping drivers of vulnerability which include, climate change, conflict and violence, water resources, demographics, food insecurity, migration and displacement and other moderating factors.

[1] <https://carleton.ca/fd-chairs-net/>

[2] [Call to Action on Climate Change and Forced Displacement, 2023](#) by the IDRC Research Chairs Network on Forced Displacement.

There are also many efforts to ‘define’ the category for climate induced displacement, which in turn challenges the efforts of creating new categories of displacement.

Gaps in Policy and Practice:

Exclusion of climate induced displaced persons from discussions:

In global forums, like in COP, there is limited attention to the specific challenges faced by displaced people and communities. Where the relationship between displacement and climate change are discussed, it is only discussed indirectly under the category of mitigation efforts. There are very limited efforts to establish the number and circumstances of people displaced in the context of climate change. Likewise, at national and/or regional-level discussions and policy making platforms, the nuanced understanding of the relationship between climate change and displacement are rarely captured. For example, the census data and the national panel survey data in Tanzania can provide a suggestion of areas affected by climate change and the scale of people who move regionally, but does not capture the movement of people within regions and over shorter distances. Difference also exists between those affected by ‘slow onset’ (example, by drought), and ‘sudden or rapid’ onset (example, by flood or mudslides) climate events. In Tanzania, trends show that the state has responded mostly to those in rapid and sudden onset, but for the slow onset, most of who are nomadic pastoralists, it is still a challenge. Another trend shows that there are no efforts to follow up on those in the receiving areas, but most interventions taking place in the sending areas. In Morocco, climate-related displacement is increasingly tied to slow-onset events (e.g., desertification, water scarcity, agricultural collapse).

The Souss-Massa region, for example, is a hotspot for displacement due to the interplay of climate stressors and socio-economic vulnerabilities (e.g., gender inequalities, agricultural precarity). The current policies remain insufficient to address the complexity of migration as both an adaptive strategy and a forced displacement dynamic.

Climate change policies and laws: at the expense of the poor and the marginalized

Climate change policies and laws, especially carbon credit programs, have paid attention to the commercialization of the forests, which works at the expense of the poor who are likely to be displaced instead of receiving support. In the context of Caribbean islands, for example, inconsistencies between practice and discourse show how the commitment and perspective of small island states is assumed on the island of Santo Domingo and in countries like the Dominican Republic. In case of Tanzania, because the issues of climate change and displacement cut across two different offices (climate change comes under the Office of the Vice President and disaster under the Office of the Prime Minister), efforts to mitigate affected areas have not been given serious attention. For example, tree planting initiatives has been politicized where seedlings are planted with no budget or plans for irrigation, and the care is left to the community, resulting in more than 70% death of the seedlings.

Gendered perspectives of women and girls in climate induced migration and displacement:

The South-South Climate Summit, organized in Rabat in the University Mohammed VI Polytechnic in 2023, highlighted the disproportionate impact of climate change on women[3]. For example, women, who are already at a disadvantaged position in employment opportunities and valued less compared to men as workers, find themselves in harsher work conditions when their usual

[3] <https://carleton.ca/fd-chairs-net/2024/global-south-summit-on-climate-displacement-we-need-a-holistic-approach/>

work opportunities become less viable due to climate change. Typically, they must find opportunities in informal sectors, which are not often sustainable. The negative impact on women migrant workers is not only in unequal distribution of income and resources within families, giving men more control over women's finances due to the existing patriarchal family structures, but women also find themselves as victims of vulnerabilities when they return home from abroad. The absence of the women from their family, for which they are held solely responsible, cause negative impacts on the cohesion and functionality of the family.

Recommendations for Policy Makers and Implementing Stakeholders

1. Reducing gaps between policy and practice:

Developing a broader and inclusive resilience strategy:

Current policies remain insufficient to address the complexity of migration as both an adaptive strategy and a forced displacement dynamic. Climate induced forced displacement and migration should not only be seen only as a crisis, but rather as a part of a broader climate resilience strategy where populations being affected must be included not only in the participation of research to generate evidence-based knowledge that is crucial for better policies, but also be included in the decision-making processes of policies.

Financial institutions should not be used only for short-term emergency responses, but their roles must expand to investing in adaptation and resilience strategies for long term resettlement programs.

Localization through meaningful participation in decision making processes:

For relocation and resettlement to be successful, it is necessary for policy makers to be more attentive to critical everyday

issues such as availability of information, participation, involvement, transparency, and substantial compensation to take care of livelihood and social unity of the climate migrants and refugees. Decision making process must be inclusive and reflect the diverse priorities and perspectives of local communities. 'Participation' of the local needs to go beyond being tokenistic by including affected populations.

Representation must be inclusive and go beyond the heads of communities to include the perspectives of women and youth who often have different vision of a future compared to men who want to keep their affiliation to the land and assets.

Localization should mean accountability and making sure that money reaches to people who need it.

The need for a multi-scalar policy approach:

The recognition of migration as one of the adverse effects of climate change qualifying for loss and damage in the Baku COP marks a significant milestone in global climate governance. However, its effective implementation at the national and local levels remains crucial. A multi-scalar policy approach is necessary to integrate loss and damage mechanisms into domestic policies, ensuring that responses are not only reactive but also forward-looking. Additionally, the disconnect between international climate finance and local adaptation efforts must be addressed by establishing direct funding channels for affected communities, enabling them to access the resources they need to build resilience.

It is essential to move beyond top-down approaches and develop a new framework for understanding human vulnerability to climate change—one that is built through listening to affected populations and co-constructing policy strategies with them. By prioritizing local knowledge, lived experiences, and participatory governance, climate migration policies can become more effective, just, and sustainable.

2. Plan for tomorrow is to be done today: role of localization of knowledge.

Research data can generate invaluable local embodied knowledge can inform better adaptation and integration strategies and policies. The challenges for climate-related displacement, especially for cities, are immense. They include stress on infrastructure, inadequate affordable housing, social tensions, increased poverty, and inequality.

It is important to map and plan for cities that will become the hubs for climate migrants in near future. Mapping of these cities can help authorities to plan accordingly to anticipate the movements of climate migrants and prepare with public services. Research and evidence-based local knowledge can help develop new measures, practices and tools for preparing these cities that are to become the hubs of climate migration and forced displacement – through the lens of displaced population as well as the host communities. Organized and structured approaches developed by academics

and researchers can support policies made based on localized knowledge to ensure that cities and communities are better prepared to cope with the challenges of inequalities, vulnerabilities and social tensions that climate crisis can bring.

3. Comprehensive Gender Approach to public policy:

A comprehensive gender approach should be adopted in the formulation and implementation of public policies. Inclusion of mental health services in disaster recovery plans are a must as forcibly displaced women often experience a wide range of trauma including gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women (VAW). It is important to recognize gendered impacts of climate displacement on individual's experience of violence, economic inequalities and hardships. These realities require targeted adaptation programs that address livelihood diversification, access to resources, and mobility rights.

This Policy Brief is a result of ***Global South perspectives on Climate Change and Displacement*** webinar organized by IDRC Research Chairs Network on Forced Displacement, 30 January, 2025.

Listen to the full webinar here: <https://carleton.ca/fd-chairs-net/2025/idrc-lerrn-webinar-global-south-perspectives-on-climate-change-and-displacement/>



The IDRC Research Chairs Network on Forced Displacement is a community of twelve scholars based at universities in countries experiencing mass displacement working to reframe the narrative of forced displacement and transforming the field of forced migration studies to mainstream Global South perspectives.