

Climate Change :- Human Migration

Dr. Batakrushna Das

Lecturer

Dept. of Political Science

*Anchalika Degree Mahavidyalaya,
Banasingh, Dhenkanal, Odisha*

Abstract

The greatest single impact of climate change might be on human migration with millions of people displaced by shoreline erosion, coastal flooding and agricultural disruption. Migration and movement of people is a particularly critical source of potential conflict. Even a sea level rise of 30cm will make large low lying areas uninhabitable and result in forced migration. These force people off their land much more quickly and dramatically. Large scale population displacement will redraw the ethnic map of many countries. It is the poorest in the poorest countries who will suffer most and in the greatest numbers.

Keywords: Climate Change, Human Migration, Green House Gas, Movement, Immigration, Population, Displacement, Refugee, Warming, Exiles.

Date of Submission: 10-12-2022

Date of Acceptance: 24-12-2022

I. Introduction

Climate Change is the most important global environmental challenge facing humanity with implications for natural ecosystems, agriculture and health ^[1]. The greenhouse effect is causing melting of glaciers that are precious reservoirs of clean water. The Gangotri glacier is receding 23 metres each year. This is not the only Himalayan glacier vanishing. All of them are not only would the melt destroy the world's fresh water reservoirs. It is projected to cause floods and drought, reduce the area of arable land, adversely impact fish and food stocks, erode coast lines as sea levels rise, trigger large movement of population to safer areas, violent storms, rainstorms, heat waves, scourges in sea level and pandemics ^[2].

II. Human Migration

Migration and movement of people is a particularly critical source of potential conflict. Migration, usually temporary and often from rural to urban areas, is a common response to calamities such as floods and famines. But as in the case of vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, where multiple stresses could be at work on account of a diversity of causes and conditions, so also in the case of migration, individuals may have multiple motivations and they could be displaced by multiple factors ^[3].

Effects:

Scientists expect an average sea level rise to the extent of about half a metre to a few metres by the end of this century, resulting in an increase in the frequency, resulting in an increase in the frequency and intensity of cyclones and hurricanes, storm surges, coastal inundation, salt water intrusion and damage to coastal ecosystems, all of which will make life along low-lying coasts and small islands difficult or impossible. Even a sea level rise of 30cm will make large low-lying areas uninhabitable and result in forced migrations ^[4].

III. Climate Processes and Climate Events

The drivers of forced migration are classified into two distinct groups. First, there are the climate drivers. These themselves are of two types climate processes and climate events. Climate processes are slow on set changes such as sea-level rise, salinization of agricultural land, desertification, growing water scarcity and food insecurity. Sea-level rise patently makes certain coastal areas small island states uninhabitable. Climate events, on the other hand, are sudden and dramatic hazards such as monsoon floods, glacial lake outburst floods, storms, hurricanes, and typhoons. These force people off their land much more quickly and dramatically ^[5].

The Urban Flood: Increasing food and water scarcity due to climate change in rural areas will accelerate the dramatic rural urban drift in the developing world. Urban areas offer access to the cash economy (rather than

subsistence farming) and can make it easier to provide services. However, rapid and unplanned urbanization has serious implications for urban welfare and urban service provision (Amit Kumar Jha, 2009).

Hollowed Economies: Mass migration disrupts production systems and undermines domestic markets. In addition, the loss of “human capital” in the form of the labour force and investment in education undermines economic growth. This can establish a self-reinforcing of limited economic opportunity that contributes to future migration.

Political Instability and Ethnic Conflict: Large scale population displacement will redraw the ethnic map of many countries, bringing previously separate groups in to close proximity with each other and in competition for the same resources. In the context of poor governance, poverty and easy access to small arms these situations can easily turn violent ^[6].

The existing institutions and organizations international and national are not sufficiently equipped to deal with this challenge. The global community needs to extend support to climate refugees and assist them in obtaining refugee status under International law. One school of thought is that as the homes of this new category of refugees are destroyed as a result of non – environment friendly policies followed by Industrialized nations, it amounts to “environmental persecution” and this qualifies them, as legitimate refugees, for legal protection. Although rising sea levels are responsible for dislocation problems of unimaginable proportions, there are also several million environmental refugees who have been forced out of their lands because of numerous other factors like drought, soil erosion, deforestation, forest fires, earthquakes, nuclear accidents and toxic spills ^[7].

IV. Immigration as Climate Policy

The US can raise and attend to an urgent issue on the impacts of warming and at the same time reclaim its leadership position in global climate negotiations by tacitly accepting its historic responsibility for climate change. Among industrialized countries, the US has one of the most progressive policies on immigration. While illegal immigration is much in the news, legal immigration itself has been especially high in recent years, exceeding previous records set in the early part of the 20th century. Each year since 1990, over a million people were granted permanent residence status and over 5 million and their families were admitted on business and student visas, despite the additional restrictions since September 2001 . Indeed, half of the increase in population expected in the US in the next 25 years will be immigrants or the children of immigrants. In comparison, in Europe, only Germany and the United Kingdom have generous immigration policies. Yet, with its low fertility rates, Europe will face an especially serious crisis in the future if its economy begins to lose a young and productive workforce and struggles to support an aging population.

America’s social policy and political culture are supportive to immigrants for a variety of reasons. Historically, the fact that the US is a country of immigrants is deeply embedded in the national psyche. Second immigrants in America are more likely to entertain the idea of a single national identity that is less tied to a particular race, ethnicity or religion than in many countries in Europe and Asia. Third, the fact that the US welfare system is generally weak and also hard to access, especially for temporary workers, implies that there is comparatively little political resentment towards legal new comers. The result is that immigration can be treated as a mainstream issue, open for discussion in the US, whereas in Europe, the topic has increasingly become far more sensitive as a political problem. Given its relative openness towards immigrants, therefore, the US has a unique advantage and can shape a climate policy that takes seriously the needs of climate exiles and challenge other countries to follow it lead.

As a first step, the Obama administration can declare its willingness to provide immigration rights over, say, a five year period to up to 1,00,000 or so of the most vulnerable climate exiles currently living in low lying at all nations in the Pacific and Indian oceans, without increasing its overall intake of legal immigrants. Such action may be supported domestically as an honourable and humanitarian step that “only the US has the moral fibre to undertake”, and viewed internationally as having positive climate policy implications. It would provide the US sufficient leverage to get the international community to formulate a broader treaty that provide immigration rights to climate exiles from vulnerable regions in advance of disastrous impact. Once the basic principle of providing fair rehabilitation for climate exiles is accepted, there could be several ways to determine who should be considered for immigration rights, which countries should absorb exiles, how the rights could be exercised, how and whether internal displacement needs to be considered as part of the international treaty and what institutional and political mechanisms should be established to reduce the risks of a massive humanitarian crisis as climate impacts become more severe (Byravan and Rajan, 2006).

In one possible framework, people living in nation states that will become physically unviable or will face an unendurable burden will be given special rights under a separate “climate exile” status, giving them the right to migrate to a particular or previously agreed upon country. Hosts will, in turn, be determined on the basis of their shares of cumulative emissions of greenhouse gases. In this scenario, the US and the European Union will need to be prepared to provide immigration rights for roughly half the total exiles expected by the middle to

end of the century, based on their current shares of cumulative greenhouse gas emissions. Other countries, including China, Japan, India and Mexico, whose cumulative shares can be expected to increase over time, will need to set up similar shares for immigrants in proportionate terms. If the rights were distributed in a phased manner, the numbers of annual entrants of climate exiles may be well under the number of legal immigrants currently taken up by many countries. Also some countries like china may be both the source of large emissions and have vulnerable populations. In such cases, relocations within countries may be included as part of, or in addition to, shares for displaced climate exiles from elsewhere. Advance planning for an influx of climate exiles can further be perceived by hosts as an opportunity to provide education and training to the regions from where they will eventually take in people, thus ensuring that those who arrive are suitably skilled.

Whether and how people exercise their climate exile rights is a different matter altogether. For instance they may indeed choose to move into another developing country close to them. In fact, people from Bangladesh might prefer to move to India, rather than far away. India itself is expected to experience large scale internal displacement of people. Whatever forms of actual movement within and across borders many ensure, an international framework and institutions that provide special and enabling rights to lead fulfilling lives will be essential to limit chaos and global insecurity.^[8]

V. Climatic Migration

Climate change migration is clear that the international community has to face up to the prospect of large-scale displacement caused by climate change. There is a need for international recognition of the problem, a better understanding of its dimensions and a willingness to tackle it. This should take several forms:

1. The International community needs to acknowledge formally the predicament of forced climate migrants. While it is not clear that an expanded definition of a refugee under international law that included environmental degradation as a “valid” driver of displacement would lead to net benefits for all (traditional and environmental) refugees, some kind of international recognition is required to cement the issue on the international agenda.

2. Development and adaptation policies in potential source countries of forced climate migrants need to focus on reducing people’s vulnerability to climate change, moving people away from marginal areas and supporting livelihoods that are more resilient. In particular more efficient use of existing resources would offset some of the predicated impacts of climate change.

3. A great deal more research is needed to understand the causes and consequences of climate migration and to monitor numbers. Practitioners, meanwhile, should develop better communication and working relationships between the different human rights, population, environmental and migration organizations that share a mandate to respond to population displacement.

4. Finally, the international community needs to help generate incentives to keep skilled labour in developing countries but also to allow developing countries to capitalize on the benefits that fluid labour markets can bring. The international regulation of labour migration, adaptation to climate change and capacity building in vulnerable countries are inherently intertwined. Migration will be used by some households in vulnerable countries as a means of adapting to climate change^[9].

With climate change threatening agriculture in Asia, 10 nations met in a three-day United Nations. Sponsored meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam on December 17, 2007, to discuss sustainable farming practices to feed growing populations.

The UN World Meteorological Organisation held its Regional Association Asia Working Group on Agricultural Meteorology meeting from December 17-19, 2007, which was attended by representatives from China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Thailand, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

Global warming is responsible for more frequent and serious droughts, floods and storms across Asia and this is expected to intensify in the future. Seven of the 10 countries most affected by extreme weather events in 2006 were in Asia: The Philippines, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), Indonesia, Vietnam, India, China and Afghanistan.

In 2007, floods in China forced nearly 800,000 people from their homes, caused almost \$400 million worth of damage and affected over 3,00,000 hectares of crops. Meanwhile in Bangladesh, more than 3,000 people were killed and millions were left homeless when cyclone sidr struck on November 15, 2007.

“In view of the growing populations in Asia and the need for secure access to food for these populations, indoor and urban agriculture is also receiving special attention to make most efficient use of space using controlled environments”, said WMO Secretary General Mr. Michel Jarraud.

Participants conferred on issues critical to promoting sustainable agriculture in the region, including drought response, impacts of climate change, water resources pest disease.

WMO recommends that countries invest more in urban and indoor agriculture that can assist greatly in providing food for the hundreds of millions of people living in Asian cities whose populations are surging.

The agency also measures providing seasonal prediction and from that stand point, early warning systems, as well as monitoring systems for regional droughts are crucial to guide farmers decisions on when, where and what crop is best to grow. Forecasts can also help in better managing the spread of pests and diseases^[10].

VI. Principles on Internal Displacement

It is the world's poorest people who are hardest hit by devastating droughts, floods and other extreme weather events. This is a massive injustice climate change is caused by the world's richest countries. The world is familiar with refugee movements caused by war, famine, and natural disasters, it is overwhelmingly the poorer third world states that do not close their borders and accept millions of refugees, some of whom remain for years. Today, among developed countries, the United States, Sweden and Finland offer temporary shelter to victims of natural disasters, and Denmark accepted some Afghan drought victims from 2001 to 2006. Global Warming, however, is already on the point of creating a new category the climate refugee. According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), current mitigation efforts could result in a global average temperature rise of 3 degrees Celsius rather than 2 degrees. In that event, the Economic Review of Climate Change (the stern Review) suggests, 550 million more people would be at risk of hunger, and 170 million more would suffer severe coastal floods. Crop yields would fall sharply, and there would be more droughts interspersed with more severe flooding. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that climate change may displace 150 million people by 2050; the stern Review puts the figure at 200 million.

VII. Conclusion

Larger climate changes pose potentially gigantic refugee problems. To start with, it is harder to identify the victims of slower processes than those of sudden natural disasters. Secondly, the victims of wider climate change fall through the net of definitions in international law. The current U.N treaty, the convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees, dates from 1951, and applies only to those who fear or flee persecution. As for internal displacement, the current U.N. documents, Guiding principles on Internal Displacement, dates from 1998 and is not legally binding though it seems to cover most of those who flee natural disasters but do not cross national borders. The problem with more severe climate change is that those who cross national borders will not be covered by any U.N instrument as they will not satisfy the 1951 definition of refugees. A senior U.N. official says that reopening the 1951 convention would be legally risky because the original negotiations that brought it into being were very difficult, and it may be no easier to reach an agreement now the difficulty of reaching, let alone enforcing, any agreement will be compounded by the fact that it is the poorest in the poorest countries who will suffer most and in the greatest numbers^[11].

References

- [1]. Editorial (2009): Kurukshetra, July, P.17
- [2]. Kumar, Dr. Dharmendra & Gangwar, Dr. Satya Prakash (2011): Climate of Threat, Third Concept, February, P.37
- [3]. Pachauri, R.K (2008): Greater Climate Change, SPAN, March/ Arpil, PP.7-9
- [4]. Byravan, Sujatha & Chella Rajan, Sudhir (2009): Climate Migrants and Exiles, EPW, Vol. XLIV, No. 45, November-7, PP.19-20
- [5]. Jha, Amit Kumar (2009): Climate Migration, Crisis in the Making, C.S.C, May, P.8
- [6]. Jha, Amit Kumar, op-cit, P.10
- [7]. Editorials (2009): Climate Refugees, Economic & Political Weekly (EPW), Vol. XLIV, No. 23, June-6, P.7
- [8]. Byravan, Sujatha & Chella Rajan, Sudhir (2009): Warming up to Immigrants : - An option for the U.S in Climate Policy, Economic & Political Weekly (EPW), November -7, PP.45-46
- [9]. Jha, Amit Kumar (2009): Climate Migration: Crisis in the Making, C.S.C, May, P.10
- [10]. U.N. Climate Change Conference in Bali- A Prospective road ahead for the Post Bush World (2008): C.S.R, February, P.16
- [11]. Factor in Climate Refugees (2009): The Hindu, Editorial, Visakhapatnam, December – 26, P.10

Dr. Batakrushna Das. " Climate Change :- Human Migration." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 27(12), 2022, pp. 40-43.