

# The Hamburg Conference: Actions for Climate-Induced Migration 16-18 July 2013

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## Opening Panel Statement, 16.07.2013

Question 1: Is climate-induced migration a problem for human security?

Question 2: How to ensure human rights in the context of planned relocation as adaptation to climate change?

According to the acting High Commissioner on Human Rights, Bertrand Ramcharan, human rights define the content of human security.<sup>1</sup>

As we all know from the 2009 Report on human rights and climate change of the Office of the High Commissioner, climate change puts considerable additional pressure on many livelihoods, increases the human insecurity of those affected, and impairs their substantial human rights. Increased livelihood insecurity does not lead to migration in all cases; but in several instances, it does. The migration process itself then might again lead to increased human insecurity of migrants and of their families. I want to give some examples:

- After a disaster, a husband might leave (his home/family) to seek job opportunities elsewhere in order to support his family with remittances. For various reasons, however, it often happens that the man does not keep in contact and the female-headed **household back home is without external support**. In many societies, particularly its **female members** thus become extremely vulnerable. In lack of other income opportunities, they might be blackmailed in exchange for services, or they might slide into outright prostitution and beggary.
- Equally, the migrants themselves, whether male or female, can easily become victims of **human traffickers** and might end up in forced labour and prostitution without the financial gains they hoped for. Even if they reach their chosen destination safely, they might not find a job and experience **material deprivation and social discrimination**.
- Out-migration can also have adverse impacts on the **community of origin** as a whole. It may lead to **social fragmentation** because migration is typically a selective process. It is usually the working-age population which leaves. Those who stay behind are typically children, elderly people, and community members who are too poor to afford the costs of mobility. Losing their most potential members, the overall resilience of the community of origin is thus threatened to decline.
- Equally, **destination places** face huge challenges. Destinations are often the slums of large cities, because migration patterns tend to follow established routes. The sheer amount of people then poses practical **problems of service delivery** with respect to shelter, education, clean water, medical care, and so on. Authorities might simply be overwhelmed by the task ahead. Moreover, original residents and authorities might **perceive migrants as a threat** to the social fabric and might tend to exclude them from services. A general **lack of job opportunities** might contribute to increasing delinquency rates.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unocha.org/humansecurity/chs/activities/outreach/ramcharan.pdf>

These are all problems for which we have no easy solution. But one solution often suggested is **planned and preventive relocation**. At first glance, the relocation solution offers **many advantages**. Families or even communities could move to safer areas as social units, and **social fragmentation could be avoided**. It would also **prevent migrants and their families from becoming victims of human traffickers**, as planned relocations are typically implemented by governments, international organisations, and/or assigned NGOs. The **basic infrastructure** at the destination (such as shelters, water taps, health centres, schools, etc.) could be planned and installed before the arrival of the beneficiaries. The construction work could even be **carried out with the support of the same** in exchange for money and/or food, thus improving their human security already before finally moving in.

Last but not least, planned relocation is not only attractive as a strategy for adaptation, but will also be required in the course of other adaptation and mitigation measures such as building dams. **Planned relocation** as preventive measure and **planned relocation as a side effect of other climate policies** might even go hand in hand. The removal of slums to create flooding areas can serve as an example par excellence.

However, planned relocation faces many pitfalls, which are well known from experiences in development cooperation. For example:

- More often than not, planned relocation is, **involuntary relocation**. Even if the relocation exercise is an adaptation measure in itself and only done for the sake of the beneficiaries, they might experience it as forced resettlement. Why? Firstly, in countries with a top-down or authoritarian style of governance, even preventive relocation might be carried out **without meaningful involvement** of the target groups and even with **use of disproportionate force**. Secondly, in spite of living in zones of high risk with respect to climate change and extreme weather events, people might have **good reasons to stay**.
- Indeed, relocation often exposes people to severe livelihood threats: Often they face **loss of land** with respect to the size of plots or to the quality of soil. If the new location is at a large distance from the old one, people also lose access to shared community resources such as forests. They might also lose their **income opportunities** because they cannot access the markets and neighbourhoods where they usually sell their products or offer their labour power. All this reduces, for example, the food security of the alleged beneficiaries.
- Planned relocation does not necessarily result in the preservation of the **social fabric** of communities and families, because those in charge do not always regard it a priority to avoid the separation of existing social units. Social disarticulation can also result from political marginalisation during the relocation process and declining living standards which compromises the authority of the established community leaders. Also families might fall apart, because again household members might leave in search for income but do not show up again.
- Deliberating the relocation of vulnerable settlements might lead to **de-investment** by authorities and inhabitants, which accelerates the process of declining (adaptive) capacities of the communities. At the same time, **basic infrastructure** at new settlements is often inadequate or only partly implemented due to **governance failures**. In both cases, people might end up unattended in their basic needs and even become homeless.
- **Additional issues that could be mentioned**: The **spiritual needs** of people, such as access to cemeteries and holy places, might be impaired; their human security and

peace might be disrupted due to **conflicts with new neighbours**; and finally, the stress people experience in the context of (forced) relocation often leads to increased **mental and physical health problems** and even to increased mortality.

- There is, finally, also a **political side** to this. Authorities might use preventive relocation to justify resettlements that serve distinct policy goals. This might be the creation of necessary flooding areas, but it might also be, for instance, the beautification of certain urban quarters by removing slum dwellers. There are also several examples where governments in the past used resettlement policies to shift power relations within constituencies.

The crucial question is: what we can do in order to ensure that preventive and planned relocation as an adaptation strategy does actually benefit the target groups and does not result in more human insecurity and infringement of human rights than they experienced before moving? Here some suggestions:

- Beneficiaries have to be deeply involved in the decision and planning of relocation. This includes the right to make alternative proposals for in-situ solutions (!) as well as for the selection of the new site.
- Furthermore the host community, if there is any, has to be involved in order to avoid distrust and conflicts.
- The citizen and human rights of relocated people have to be respected and protected during all phases of a relocation process (decision, preparation, moving, settling) and in the aftermath. Equally, the rights of host communities must not be violated.
- Adequate compensation for assets is crucial. This concerns the size and quality of land as well as of other assets (re-establishment value).
- Another priority should be the preservation of the social fabric of the communities but also of the business networks forming the basis of their members' income.
- Thus, short distances to the former places of living and adequate mobility to commute are key to preserve established networks and to enable new ones.
- Additionally, the generation of new income opportunities, e.g. by offering appropriate job training, is needed.
- This only works if responsible authorities regard the above points to be priorities. We thus need official safeguards that meaningfully target the aforementioned challenges for the national as well as the international level. Authorities have to be trained accordingly.
- Those safeguards need to be based on human rights and have to include, at a minimum, (1) prior assessments and the right of the target groups to adequate information, (2) meaningful and continuous participation during all phases (decision, implementation, monitoring/follow-up), and (3) access to legal recourse, redress and the right to return if authorities and authorised agents fall short of complying with such guidelines and/or their human rights duties. An easily accessible complaint mechanism is thus crucial.