

May 2015

Focusing on climate-related internal displacement

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Global attention should place a primary focus on the application of best practice and the development of innovative initiatives to solve climate-related internal displacement, rather than on grappling with the far rarer movements of people across borders.

States and communities already facing climate-related displacement within their borders need massive increases in technical and financial expertise and support to develop solutions to this new challenge. Experience shows that the majority of such displacement will not be about individual migration decisions but about risks faced by entire communities. Experience also shows that communities almost always want to stay but, if necessary, they want to move together and want safer land with adequate socio-economic support, including schools, hospitals and livelihoods.

Perhaps the reason that insufficient attention is given to these issues is simply that the relocation of communities is conceptually and practically more challenging than focusing on individual migration decisions. In cases of community relocation there is a need for genuine community consultation, a need for effective selection and preparation of relocation sites and ongoing support at the point of relocation. These are all seen as challenging and time-consuming processes.

There is also an apparent unwillingness or inability to accept that displacement events happening now are already linked to climate change, perhaps because of the perceived difficulty in determining a precise causal link between climate change and an individual's displacement, the 'causation conundrum'.

Donors and others who care about climate displacement can play a key role in developing and implementing innovative solutions, through political, financial and technical assistance, and support that is designed to resolve such displacement in the best possible manner. This includes the imperative to focus attention on the planned relocation of communities away from areas of high vulnerability, with communities guiding the process from the outset. Ensuring that climate-displaced persons within states receive adequate support will require a shift that is overdue in the mindset of the international community.

The Peninsula Principles on Climate Displacement within States (agreed August 2013) provide a useful normative and practical framework to achieve this change and deliver this support.¹ They provide a



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Filling sandbags at Bonriki on the island of Tarawa, Kiribati.

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consolidated rights-based framework for preparing for and responding to climate-related displacement within states, including measures of disaster risk reduction and community-level adaptation, the planned relocation of communities, measures to be undertaken during the emergency humanitarian phase of displacement and, finally, the implementation of rights-based durable solutions. The Principles are grounded in binding international legal standards, customary law, and best practice and experience from across the globe.

Individual governments and the international community still have a long way to go towards ensuring that the rights of every climate-displaced person – particularly those rights most at threat, such as livelihoods

and housing, land and property rights – are respected, protected and fulfilled. States should not just prevent violations of the rights of climate-displaced persons but also take proactive measures to create comprehensive institutional frameworks (with specialised laws, policies, institutions and programmes) to help states prepare adequately for climate displacement and respond effectively when displacement occurs.

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1. <http://displacementsolutions.org/ds-initiatives/the-peninsula-principles>. A further volume, *Repairing domestic climate displacement: the Peninsula Principles*, containing a legal commentary on the Peninsula Principles, will be published by Routledge in 2015.