Central Asia

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Three of the 24 EACH-FOR case-studies are in Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – where environmental challenges are triggering displacement.

The environmental challenges facing Central Asia include the industrial legacies of the former Soviet Union – contaminated land and pollution of soils and rivers. The area is also prone to earthquakes and landslides and it is anticipated that the melting of mountain glaciers will increase the frequency of floods and mudslides. The area has already seen significant changes in water usage. By 1991, for example, the level of the Aral Sea had fallen by about 15 metres, its surface area had been halved and its volume reduced by two-thirds.

Nowhere better exemplifies the inter-twining relationship between environmental degradation, climate change and migration than the Ferghana Valley. The Valley has a complex history, unclear property rights over the land and access to water, a varied ethnic mix and an extensive list of present or potential environmental threats. There are an estimated 10.5 million people living in the Ferghana Valley, and a significant part of this population may potentially be affected by forced migration.

Migration patterns in the Valley involve internal migration, cross-border migration among the three nation-states sharing the Valley and migration out of the Valley into other regions or countries. In the southern provinces of Kyrgyzstan, the population is regularly affected by natural disasters and entire communities are often displaced and in need of resettlement to safer areas. There are also significant population and refugee movements from an increasingly unstable Uzbekistan into the south of Kyrgyzstan.

Border regions between Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (where most pastures and grazing areas are located) are becoming a place of tension. A shortage of land for newcomers (and subsequent pressure on forests) increases environmental impacts. In addition, about 3,000 earthquakes are registered annually in Kyrgyzstan. Floods and landslides are frequent in the Valley, and their

frequency is expected to increase as a result of climate change.

There is an urgent need to:

- secure better data in order to better analyse linkages between environment, migration, economics and security; this will require increased transparency from governmental agencies, harmonisation across countries and an increase in data-collection capacities.

- develop resettlement programmes for areas where public health and livelihoods are at risk

- reduce human vulnerability – i.e. adequately address the needs of victims of slow and fast natural disasters, uphold human rights and provide economic opportunities to settle and integrate elsewhere.

- forecast future flows: this is vital to help governments prioritise scarce budgetary resources.

Kyrgyz Valley.

EACH-FOR Project

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