

## Feature

# Climate crisis and local communities

Local communities around the world have been coping with the effects of a changing climate for decades. The articles published in this feature focus on the impact on local communities, their coping strategies, lessons arising, and broader questions of access, rights and justice. This 36-page feature, as a standalone A5-format PDF, is available online in English at [www.fmreview.org/issue64](http://www.fmreview.org/issue64).

The standalone PDF is not available in print but you are welcome to print your own copy (use the 'booklet' setting on your printer). However, all the articles have been published as part of FMR issue 64, which is available online and in print, free of charge. To request print copies of FMR 64, email [fmr@qeh.ox.ac.uk](mailto:fmr@qeh.ox.ac.uk).

All the articles except for two are also available in the shorter Arabic, Spanish and French editions of this issue.

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# Resilience, adaptation and learning: Malian refugees and their Mauritanian hosts

Fouda Ndikintum and Mohamed Ag Malha

**Malian refugees in Mbera, Mauritania, have brought with them the skills and experience they gained in managing the effects of climate change in their home country, and are learning new skills in exile. Both refugee and host communities are benefiting.**

Mauritania currently hosts 60,511 refugees who fled Mali in 2012. These refugees hail from the north of Mali and are now living in Mbera camp and its surroundings, in south-eastern Mauritania.<sup>1</sup> They left their home areas because of growing insecurity; prior to their flight, however, most of them had experienced the negative consequences of climate change over several decades or longer. Droughts, for example, have recurred every 10 years or so in northern Mali since 1973.

Being mostly herders, Malian refugees often bring their livestock with them into exile. Demand for natural resources in their host communities – such as water and pasture for livestock – has placed increased pressure on these resources, exacerbated by climate change. The natural environment has also been affected by other activities such as firewood collection and use of water for domestic and agricultural purposes. Fortunately, refugees bring solutions as well as their own needs with them. Having themselves dealt with the negative consequences of climate change in their home country, they are better equipped to deal with such challenges and to mitigate some of these in the host community. The refugees acknowledge that their openness to learning in their new situation was developed during their own search for solutions to the severe consequences of climate change which they experienced at home.

## Deciding to move: tipping points

Several Malian refugees now living in the Mbera camp had been forced to move previously from their homes because of climate change, though they remained in their country. Their immediate response to the negative impacts of climate change was then,

and remains, to attempt to build resilience by way of indigenous innovations, such as the use of various types of mulches to conserve soil water and the use of animal skin to wrap around jars in order to keep water cool. The sense of community also plays a central role as a means of survival, with the most resilient members of the community extending a generous hand to the less resilient.

When a community's innovative adaptation strategies are stretched beyond their limits, however, people start to consider moving further away from home. The tipping point is reached when, in addition to failed adaptation strategies, relationships become strained, as safeguarding personal and immediate family interests becomes the priority over generosity to others.

The decision to move is usually reached after consultation, following which there could be a large exodus of the greater part of community members. Decisions can also be reached individually, for example by youth who have reached the age of maturity and consider it an obligation to fend for themselves. At the other extreme, some people would rather die on their land than move elsewhere. Others would consider seeking refuge in a neighbouring country only if the predominant religion practised there were the same as their own.

## Facilitating integration

The existence of a democratic culture, national affinities, shared ethnicity and family ties across the border are all factors affecting the predisposition of host communities to embrace persons forced to move. The Government of Mauritania has maintained an open-door policy towards Malian refugees for decades, and has asked the

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UNHCR/Viola E. Brutton/Inesso

Malian refugee herders gather at Mbera camp to sell livestock.

local population to receive the refugees and to consider them as brothers and sisters.

Rearing of cattle and, to a lesser extent, small ruminants is the most important activity undertaken by the majority of Malian refugees. Moreover, the stock of cattle owned is an indication of wealth (savings that can be transformed into cash) and of status. Strategies used by Malian refugees to ensure they can integrate easily in the host country include recovery, rebuilding or adapting their livelihoods options.

With regard to recovery, displaced persons who left home in haste have two options. They can rely on a trustworthy herdsman to drive their cattle to a safe, accessible haven, probably with the help of reliable friends or traditional or administrative authorities who would provide safe passage. Alternatively, they can take the risk of returning personally to retrieve their animals. When possible, the rebuilding of livelihoods is achieved by cleverly selecting animals which yield the most milk, have the greatest number of calves or produce the most meat to be used as seed capital to commence rebuilding of stock in the country of asylum. If such rebuilding is not a feasible option, the refugees will instead adapt, embracing whatever livelihoods options are available in the country of asylum,

sometimes through partners funded by donors, and use this as a springboard to re-engage with small ruminant and subsequently cattle production. These strategies may indeed be carried out simultaneously.

### Adaptation strategies

Malian refugees in Mbera have successfully replicated several innovations developed in Mali in response to climate change. These include gardening (to grow produce for household consumption) and working through associations to resolve pressure on natural resources and to reduce environmental degradation.

Only 1.3% of refugee households living in Mbera had an agricultural background at the time of arrival at the camp; however, as of 31 December 2019, statistics available to UNHCR indicate that approximately 10% of households in the entire refugee community were engaged in **gardening** either independently or with the assistance of UNHCR's partners in the camp.

Refugees have replicated several techniques they had used to circumvent the negative effects of climate change when they were in Mali. Firstly, the refugees brought with them heat-resistant varieties of seeds not known to the host community,

including purple onion and tomato seeds. Secondly, they engaged in environment-friendly practices, such as the production of compost for enhancing soil fertility, whereas the norm in the host community was to use unfermented animal dung, which has the negative consequence of increasing attacks by soldier ants. Thirdly, indigenous water conservation techniques, such as the use of circular sunken seed beds as opposed to the Mauritians' usual flat beds or sunken rectangular seed beds, started being used.

The combined use of these techniques resulted in impressive yields during the 2019 farming season, and these positive results obtained by the refugees have aroused enthusiasm in the host community for the activity. An exchange visit was recently jointly organised by partners and UNHCR at the Mbera camp, which afforded Malian refugee women engaged in gardening an opportunity to share their experiences in water management, soil fertility enhancement and natural pest control techniques with women from the host community.

Mauritania has passed a number of laws in order to protect its natural resources from being over-exploited, with the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development responsible for enforcement. When there is no effective presence of the Ministry in an area of the country, such as is the case in the district of Bassikounou where Mbera is located, Natural Resources Management Associations (NRMA) are created to regulate access to and rehabilitation of natural resources. In Mbera camp, however, where NRMA do not exist, refugees have been inspired by their own experiences back home and have created several **associations** in order to combat environmental degradation. For example, a group, called *Volontaires Réfugiés pour la Propriété du Camp* (Refugee Volunteers for Camp Cleanliness), regularly organises clean-up campaigns within the camp which they occasionally extend to the host community.

Afforestation associations have meanwhile planted more than 60,000 locally adapted tree species distributed by SOS Desert, within the last five years. These campaigns are usually organised during World Environment Day

Celebrations (5 June) and National Day of the Tree celebrations during the first week of August. These actions, which have been spearheaded by refugees, have helped to dispel the idea that refugees are the greatest degraders of the environment. They are now rather seen as partners for change.

Refugees have equally learned from the host community and adopted local environment-friendly practices. Bushfires account for some of the worst environmental degradation in Mauritania. Following awareness-raising campaigns and directives on how to raise the alarm in case of a bushfire, the number of bushfire outbreaks and disasters caused were reduced to four in 2019. Malian refugees – who knew very little about fire-tracing – now have a fire-fighting brigade and jointly intervene with host community brigades and gendarmes to fight wild fires. They were also equally involved in preventive measures such as the establishment of over 100km of firebreaks.

The openness of refugees to **learning** has further resulted in their adopting small ruminant fattening techniques which enable animals to put on more weight for the same quantity of pasture consumed, leading to the reduction of the pressure on pastures in the long term. In addition, for example, the use of para-veterinarians – which was non-existent in the refugee community but is practised in the host community – has been embraced by the Malian refugees.

Local-to-local knowledge exchange takes place through both formal and informal channels. Informal channels include interactions among community members when they meet at water points, at pastures and at weekly markets or festive ceremonies. Formal platforms of interaction are often created by UN agencies and other partners intervening at hosting sites on occasions held to mark international days of observance and activism, such as World Refugee Day and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Moreover, a partner agency has facilitated the creation of mixed refugee–host community committees in the villages within the district of Bassikounou. These committees are empowered in the

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management of conflicts including those related to access to natural resources.

### Rethinking assumptions

There needs to be a rethink about the commonly held perception that an influx of refugees or persons relocating to other places because of climate change crisis or conflict or both is always negative. Refugees bring a wealth of resources with them, including human resources developed through facing climate-related crises in their home countries. These experiences often enable them to tackle similar challenges in the country of asylum and to inspire host country citizens to do the same. Harnessing the potential and resourcefulness of both refugees and host community members can

over time shape the way countries respond to climate change crisis, contribute to the promotion of food security and natural resource protection practices, and at the same time offer protection to refugees.

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This article is written in a personal capacity and does not necessarily represent the views of any organisations mentioned.

1. 61.3% Tuareg; 37.2% Arab; 1.5% other minority tribes

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## Environmental challenges and local strategies in Western Sahara

Matthew Porges

**Sahrawi refugee-nomads are finding ways to tackle the interconnected climate-related challenges that they face. Their responses show the importance of flexible, refugee-driven initiatives.**

Much of the attention paid to the Western Sahara conflict, particularly from the perspective of refugee and forced migration studies, has understandably focused on the Sahrawi refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria. These camps were set up in 1975 following the outbreak of war between Morocco and the Polisario Front (Western Sahara's pro-independence movement) and have an estimated population of around 173,000 Sahrawis, the indigenous people of Western Sahara. Polisario administers the camps, as well as about 20% of the territory of Western Sahara – an area it calls the Liberated Territories. This area may have a population of around 30,000–40,000 (although population figures here are even harder to measure), primarily comprising nomadic herders. Population estimates in both the camps and the Liberated Territories are politicised by both Morocco and Polisario,

and are also complicated by ongoing movement of families and individuals between Polisario's territory and northern Mauritania, as well as by temporary labour migration from the camps to Spain and Algeria. Population figures, particularly for the camps, are therefore best understood as snapshots of a continuously circulating set of inhabitants.<sup>1</sup>

The harshness of the desert climate combined with the population's historic reliance on nomadic pastoralism (of camels, goats and sheep) have left the population extremely vulnerable to climatic variations. Catastrophic droughts during the colonial period triggered rapid (though temporary) urbanisation, with much of the dispersed nomadic population coalescing around Spanish-controlled cities. The war with Morocco, which lasted until 1991, similarly resulted in significant damage to the

nomadic economy. Since the war, most of the population has resided in the Tindouf camps. Following the conclusion of the war with Morocco, Polisario – which itself maintains substantial camel herds – made a concerted effort to develop the Liberated Territories specifically for nomadic pastoralism by implementing large-scale landmine clearance, installing and maintaining wells, and rejuvenating the nomadic economy.

### **Climatic challenges – and appropriate responses**

Camp life has presented unique challenges for the previously nomadic population, and many of those challenges have been exacerbated in recent decades by a changing climate. Attempts by NGOs to encourage sedentary agriculture – Oxfam, for instance, has invested in the cultivation of the multi-use plant *Moringa oleifera*<sup>2</sup> – have met with mixed success, in part because the camp population is more familiar with animal pastoralism. Another increasingly severe problem has been the increased frequency of flooding in the camps. Rather than experiencing a steady, continuous decline in rainfall, the Algerian desert around Tindouf has seen long droughts interspersed with brief but very intense rainfall. Most semi-permanent structures in the camps were initially built by the refugees from mud-bricks made using locally sourced materials. In some cases, the refugees resisted building with more permanent materials for ideological reasons, preferring to remain perpetually ready to return to Western Sahara and a future independent State. Flooding, previously very rare in the region, has become an almost annual occurrence. In 2015, for instance, many of the mud-brick houses dissolved in the heavy rains, leaving hundreds of refugees homeless. Building with water-resistant materials, like cement, partially mitigates the problem, though the production of mud-bricks in the camps provides employment for many refugees.

Another problem exacerbated by climate change is the depletion of groundwater. The Tindouf camps were deliberately built near a large aquifer, and nomadic movement throughout the Liberated Territories is

contingent on the replenishment of either naturally occurring surface water or small man-made wells. Irregular, unpredictable rainfall patterns and prolonged drought, however, make it difficult to depend on ephemeral water sources, and also increase pressure on the Tindouf aquifer. This problem can be partially mitigated by the use of mechanical wells. The development of artificial water resources in the Liberated Territories, moreover, has also allowed for the development of community gardens, with Polisario-run gardening projects emerging in a number of locations.

The unpredictable rainfall, generalised drought and depletion of groundwater are problems for both nomads and refugees, but the population of the Western Sahara camps is unusual in that it retains a tie to both refugee and nomadic worlds. The anthropologist Cindy Horst, writing about Somali refugee-nomads in Kenya's Dadaab refugee camp, defined Somalis' nomadic heritage "as consisting of three elements: a mentality of looking for greener pastures; a strong social network that entails the obligation to assist each other in surviving; and risk-reduction through strategically dispersing investments in family members and activities."<sup>3</sup> In a sedentary community, this nomadic mentality persists in the form of opportunism, flexibility, social solidarity and resisting single points of economic failure – which are largely the values that Sahrawi refugees ascribe to their own nomadic heritage. Any climate resilience strategy implemented in the Tindouf camps, then, will have to bridge the refugee and nomad categories.

It is perhaps unsurprising that the most promising strategy comes from the population itself. In 2016, a Sahrawi refugee named Taleb Brahim, who had previously trained as an engineer in Syria, began experimenting with hydroponic agriculture. Hydroponics is the practice of growing plants without soil, typically by immersing the roots in nutrient-enhanced water. Hydroponic agriculture is vastly more water-efficient than most other methods, and is therefore a promising strategy for intensive agriculture in arid climates. Brahim's earliest hydroponic

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crop was barley, a very simple crop to grow. Using his first home-built hydroponic system, Brahim was able to feed his own goats, reducing his need to move in search of pasture while also increasing the quality and quantity of the milk and meat produced (goats in the camps often eat plastic refuse, contaminating their products).

Expensive, complicated, high-tech units are not a scalable solution by themselves. In 2017, Brahim demonstrated the success of his initial system to the Innovation Accelerator initiative of the World Food Programme (WFP) in Munich. Brahim's system was selected for Innovation Accelerator funding and a WFP programme called H2Grow was subsequently established, under which Brahim – working with WFP and Oxfam staff – developed a range of hydroponic units derived from his first model, reducing the unit cost while retaining productivity. These new units were cheaper, relied on locally available materials, and were easier to use and repair. Crucially, they could also be adapted to specific local requirements. With assistance from WFP, Oxfam and Polisario, Brahim began running hydroponic workshops in the camps, eventually training over a thousand Sahrawi refugees in the use of the low-tech systems. Under the H2Grow programme, Brahim's hydroponic systems were tested in refugee camps in Chad, Jordan, Sudan and Kenya; in each case, the units could be modified and optimised for local requirements. This, Brahim argued in a speech in 2019, "allows people to become part of their own solution", implementing a refugee-driven, refugee-focused aid programme.<sup>4</sup>

### Lessons for climate resilience

There are several lessons here for analogous contexts of displacement. Most obviously, the specific technologies and practices of hydroponic agriculture and climate-resistant construction can be exported, and in some cases have already been tested elsewhere with



Taleb Brahim tends plants grown using a hydroponic system.

positive results. In cases where refugees have a history of nomadic movement, that heritage presents specific opportunities (involvement in regional economies, pastoralist autonomy) and challenges (discomfort with sedentary life, reliance on modes of production that may not be possible in a camp context) that must be taken into account by host communities and aid providers. More generally, the lesson of climate resilience in Tindouf is that refugee communities are not essentially alike; they retain the practices, skills and cultural contexts of their pre-displacement worlds, and climate resilience policies must be implemented in that context. Finally, it is likely that in many cases refugees are best positioned to devise these strategies themselves, approaching problems from their

own perspective and side-stepping the pitfalls of unilaterally applied external solutions.

It is also significant, from the perspective of aid provision, how one chooses to define the parameters of the problem. A limited approach to environmental challenges in Tindouf might focus on irregular rainfall patterns, or the accumulation of plastic in the diets (and products) of camp-raised livestock. Broadening the perspective, however, to the involvement of the refugees in, for instance, the nomadic economy of the Liberated Territories means that drought and loss of pastureland must be included in the analysis. A comprehensive environmental strategy will have to incorporate the full range of these entanglements. No single environmental policy can tackle such disparate challenges, but individual refugee-centred strategies

have already had promising success in Tindouf and the Liberated Territories.

This article was prepared with assistance from Sahrawi refugees Taleb Brahim and Sidahmed Jouly.

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## Climate-induced involuntary migration: nomadic-pastoralists' search for elusive pastures in Kenya

Eikai Nabenyo

**As the impacts of climate change grow more severe, Turkana nomadic-pastoralists are increasingly being forced to move, rather than choosing to move. Their voices must be heard at the local and international level, and their knowledge and insights must inform policymaking.**

I hail from Turkana, a nomadic-pastoralist community that numbers approximately one million and occupies the most arid parts of northwestern Kenya. Our region, Turkana County, stretches to the Ethiopian, South Sudanese and Ugandan borders. We keep cattle, donkeys, camels, goats and sheep, and engage in transhumance, moving livestock from place to place in search of water and greener pastures.

Turkana County is also known for its fragile state of security, with repeated internal and cross-border attacks and counter-attacks from other pastoralist communities in the region. While the world now considers climate change as a new driver of internal displacement, pastoralist communities have long had their own ways of tackling the impacts of climate

changes – by moving into neighbouring countries where they may either collaborate or clash with their new neighbours.

Largely due to a feeling of being neglected by government, there is a general reluctance by the Turkana and indeed all other pastoralists to follow immigration policies. On its side, the government evidently does not consider the challenges faced by the Turkana as a priority, yet the conditions of this region demand innovative approaches. Governments need to wake up to reality, and to be alert to weather patterns and the likelihood of pastoralists having to move with their livestock. The Turkana experience has highlighted how reactive the government is, rather than proactive, even when information about a planned 'distress migration' of the pastoralists is available beforehand.



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### Learning from the Turkana way of life

It is a common misconception that the pastoralist communities of the world are constantly on the move. The Turkana debunk this narrative. While they do move from place to place, when Turkana pastoralists have access to water and green pasture they do not keep moving on. The decision to move is therefore not a voluntary one. Additionally, the decision is usually made on an individual basis, especially for movement within their own country. The decision to cross international borders, however, is often made as a group because, as they often move into volatile security situations, there is greater security in numbers when they move together. The community's council of elders plays a critical role in assessment and decision making. The elders may send out emissaries to neighbouring communities or countries to inspect the pastures and report back.

In the Turkana context, numerous factors influence the community's decision about whether to move or not. Before any decision is taken to move on, the depletion of local pastures is first countered by controlled

grazing, communal sharing and rotational grazing. These restrictions are established by consensus and the elders take the lead in implementing the rules. The Turkana attach a lot of importance to land and consider it a blessing from *Akuj* (God), with the current generation holding it in trust for future generations. Other pastoralist communities that permit an open policy where individuals permit their animals to graze as they wish are often adversely affected. As different animals have different grazing patterns, an uncontrolled system will create a tragedy of the commons that will have devastating effects for all. The Turkana people have learned such survival tactics – which are worth emulating.

Turkana is a region that is grappling with the harsh realities of climate change, and there is an urgent need to enable local pastoralist voices to be heard in climate discussions, something that has hitherto been lacking. Recognition of pastoralists' opinions on climate change and of their knowledge pertaining to climate adaptation has generally not been accorded international



attention, especially when such tribal minorities and indigenous communities as the Turkana are detached from the societal fabric of the rest of the country. Indeed, community strategies are not reflected in climate modelling – a significant failing in our approach to climate adaptation.

Bilateral negotiations by the countries involved to allow reciprocal grazing by pastoralists as well as concerted efforts to encourage joint grazing appear to be the best solution in order to call a halt to the incessant conflicts over pasture. In 2019, Uganda and Kenya signed an agreement to allow grazing rights for the Turkana pastoralists in Uganda and for the shared use of Kobebe dam (owned by Uganda). This has been effective, and such initiatives – if adopted by communities facing similar challenges elsewhere – may have the potential of allowing climate-hit communities to escape the climate wrath in their indigenous lands by seeking refuge in foreign lands, undisturbed.

Despite historically being purely nomadic, the Turkana have been forced by climate change to increasingly embrace agro-pastoralism. This is evident especially along the region's Turkwel and Kerio rivers which, due to aridity, now only flow during the rainy seasons. Here the government and NGOs have helped the Turkana to adopt agro-pastoralism. Additionally, a number of the Turkana community engage in fishing in Lake Turkana. Such grassroots adaptation efforts need to be adopted and supported as mitigation measures to enable pastoralist communities to diversify their livelihoods, recover and rebuild. However, this is only possible for those who live around the lakes and rivers and have access to land on the banks.

Culture and faith play a big role in the life of the Turkana. Making sacrifices to ancestors is a common practice, traditionally geared towards preventing and reducing the negative impacts of climate change. While science indicates that climate change is a result of disastrous human activities, the Turkana believe that the aridity that pushes them into moving is a result of the *Akuj* being unhappy. Two worlds apart! The climate debate needs

to take into consideration such beliefs, debunking them if need be in order for science and tradition to read from the same script.

### **The involuntary nature of migration**

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees does not address the emerging issue of people displaced because of the impact of climate change. Some scholars argue that the correct terminology to be adopted ought to be 'climate migrants' – as the term 'climate refugee' has no legal standing – but this ignores the involuntariness which characterises most, if not all, climate-induced migration, especially in a pastoralism context. There is a need to place climate change at the heart of the refugee discourse by recognising it as a ground for flight. Additionally, UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration should endeavour to monitor climatic conditions and weather patterns in pastoralist-occupied areas in order to be sufficiently prepared to assist pastoralists forced to move.

Meanwhile, there is a need to provide opportunities to people such as the Turkana to migrate with dignity, especially in cases of distress migration. For this community of people, who have increasingly embraced agriculture, there are a number of climate adaptation initiatives that may strengthen resilience, including training and assistance with growing more drought-resistant crops. It is imperative to increase pastoralists' access to alternative sources of livelihoods outside traditional nomadism. However, it should also be noted that the most appropriate interventions largely depend on the specific context of a local community. Governments and the international community must do more to support pastoralists' own adaptation efforts and to promote legal migration pathways. If the voices of the people at the grassroots are anything to go by, this is what those most affected most want.

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## Community strategies for diversification in Ethiopia

Pablo Cortés Ferrández

**The 2015–17 drought in the Horn of Africa displaced more than 300,000 pastoralists in the eastern part of the Somali region of Ethiopia. Many who lost their livestock have instead engaged in grassroots action to improve livelihoods recovery and to build resilience.**

For the pastoral communities in the Dollo zone of Ethiopia's Somali region, the 2015–17 drought was the worst in living memory. "We have never experienced a drought of this kind. ... Around nine years ago, we suffered one, but it was not as severe as this one because we kept a considerable number of animals alive. In the [2015–17] drought, two consecutive rainy seasons failed ... and we lost all our animals," explained a 40-year-old pastoralist who, since 2017, has been living with her husband and seven children in a temporary shelter at the Koracle site for internally displaced people (IDPs).<sup>1</sup>

Pastoralism is the main livelihood of communities in the drylands of southern Ethiopia, and families are very vulnerable to displacement associated with climate change. As at the end of July 2019, 425,000 people were living in displacement associated with drought.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 94% of households in Gafow and Koracle IDP sites defined their lifestyle before displacement as nomadic pastoralism but during the latest drought households lost up to 80% of their livestock. As a result of the repeated shocks, local authorities in Dollo zone estimate that the proportion of pastoralists in the area has decreased from around 80% to 20%.

Alongside movement of people has also come huge and early movement of livestock, as pastoralists move their animals from areas with low rainfall to areas of higher rainfall. Districts with higher rainfall levels are experiencing high grazing pressure, leading to fears of pasture and water depletion. Many pastoralists face challenges because of the high vulnerability of prevailing livelihoods, low productivity, and limited market links, diversification opportunities and social and economic services. Loss of livestock is forcing people to adapt.

Both camps in the case-study, Gafow and Koracle, were opened in January 2017, and IDPs displaced by drought are now living

in protracted displacement, with scarce opportunities for self-reliance and local integration. "It is a feeling of hopelessness. You have no means of livelihood. You don't have any other support and you are the responsible person in your family. We came with nothing," explained a male pastoralist in Gafow. Food insecurity and lack of access to drinking water and health care are the main challenges. Displaced pastoralists live in temporary settlements in relatively underdeveloped and marginalised settings where their peri-urban host communities also experience precarious socio-economic situations – including chronic malnutrition, limited access to basic social services and economic infrastructure, poor livelihood opportunities and a diminishing natural resource base. Consecutive years of drought and profound food insecurity have severely depleted communities' coping mechanisms and resilience at a time when they are most needed.

### Livelihoods recovery and resilience building

In the Somali region, where communities affected by displacement are highly dependent on aid, resilience building is one of the main priorities of local actors, where committees of IDPs and host community grassroots organisations are keen to develop diversified and sustainable livelihoods. During interviews, IDPs and host community representatives proposed the creation of a diversification framework to support a livelihoods resilience approach. This framework would be designed to identify gaps related to skills and economic activities, and then to support households to find individual and community-focused solutions which are appropriate to the local context. The focus would be on providing training in vocational skills and capacity building, plus start-up capital, for IDPs displaced by drought and especially for

groups such as women and youth. “If we could get some initial capital, we could work in the market, build some *berkas* [wells] to sell water or build a small tea shop,” said a female pastoralist in Koracle. Displaced communities also suggested that small cooperative groups and savings associations should be set up to support the development of income-generation activities.

IDPs in Gafow and Koracle said that, because of the severity of the last drought, they had developed new coping strategies: “We can do two things if another drought comes. First, we can sell the animals and make money before we run out of pasture and water and, after the drought, buy animals again. Second, in small towns like Warder, there are more services and infrastructure. We can come here to the animal feeding centres during the drought,” reflected a male pastoralist.

An important debate about the option of restocking and how it fits into a livelihoods resilience strategy is currently taking place in Ethiopia. Most IDPs prefer to be locally integrated but opinion is divided as to whether having animals again would be beneficial if it meant returning them to a pastoral and semi-nomadic way of life. Some people felt the best option was that some members of the family, particularly women and children, should stay close to the peri-urban areas such as Warder to learn new skills and to have better access to water and to services such as education and health care – while the men would return to rural areas to raise livestock. “If we have livestock again, we are not taking our children out of school,” said a male pastoralist in Koracle.

### Community-based strategies

The community-based disaster risk management strategy, developed in zones such as Dollo by the government’s Disaster Risk Management Bureau together with the support of international NGOs, has proved successful. The whole community, including women, youth and elders, participate in disaster risk reduction committees. They are given an initial cash grant to discuss the current situation and produce weather

forecasts for the next season based on their experience of previous droughts and as traditional pastoral communities.

The current disaster risk reduction committees comprise the host community, IDPs and local authorities as key partners in decision-making processes. The objective of this structure is to involve the population in planning processes and to generate agency and ownership in building durable solutions. Throughout this process, any grassroots responses need to include a sensitive approach to gender, age, disability and marginalisation, and should (i) integrate gender perspectives into programming, ensuring that interventions have a positive impact on enabling – in particular – women’s rights, voice and participation, and (ii) include an analysis of social exclusion (the elderly and people with disabilities) and how this arises in particular communities, to ensure that programming benefits every member of the community.

Additional committees were created in 2017 in each IDP camp; these comprised both male and female local elders, who represented IDPs in conversations with the government and NGOs. However, in the absence of government support, many of these committees are no longer functioning.

Identifying durable solutions that emerge from and are appropriate to the communities themselves is one of the challenges facing the development of and support for durable solutions in the region and in the country. A stronger commitment to local counterparts, starting with committees of IDPs and host community grassroots organisations, would enable greater acceptance, ownership and sustainability.

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# Trapped or resettled: coastal communities in the Sundarbans Delta, India

Shaberi Das and Sugata Hazra

**When local communities face the brunt of the impacts of climate change, how able are they to make choices in their response? And whose responsibility is it to provide support?**

Forced migration due to environmental stressors must be differentiated from voluntary migration. Blurred and contradictory definitions abound, leading to inadequate or an absence of regulations regarding the provision of support and compensation. Culpability – and responsibility – can be established relatively easily in instances of development-induced displacement. In cases of forced migration triggered by climatic factors, however, no single party or parties (whether the displaced individual, the government or an international agency) can be held unquestionably accountable and therefore responsible for alleviating related hardship. The human costs are borne by local communities in locations rendered inhospitable by the interplay of different forces – climate change and sea level rise being key among them. Glimpses from communities in the islands of Ghoramara and Sagar in the Indian Sundarbans Delta convey the stark realities of forced migration for these communities.

## **Ghoramara: a highly vulnerable island**

With lush green fields, abundant freshwater, nutrient-rich soil and a breathtaking view of the river Hooghly, Ghoramara Island is picturesque – but is rapidly being submerged. Located in the south-western edge of the Hooghly estuary, Ghoramara has experienced high rates of coastal erosion since the 1970s, and from the 1970s to the 1990s there was sustained government action to resettle displaced households to nearby Sagar Island. With 34% of the population in the Indian Sundarbans living below the poverty line<sup>1</sup> and 47% unable to afford two proper meals a day throughout the year,<sup>2</sup> the population in vulnerable islands like Ghoramara has

limited capacity to adapt to and cope with adverse environmental changes. Electricity on the island is powered by solar panels which the government and NGOs have installed in almost every household, and drinking water is obtained from tubewells. Infrastructure investment remains low, however, because of the high rate of coastal erosion; within the last 40 years, the island has been reduced to less than half of its original size, displacing thousands.<sup>3</sup> The first storm shelter is currently under construction, while the school building serves as a makeshift refuge.

Respondents to semi-structured interviews revealed that health care and education remain inadequate, with children often travelling to or boarding on the mainland in order to attend high school. Loss of livelihoods or inadequate returns from more traditional rural livelihoods forces at least one male member of most households to migrate seasonally to the far-away states of Kerala or Tamil Nadu for construction work. Over the last two decades, seasonal migration has become a coping mechanism for a large proportion of the population in the Sundarbans. Recently, the households of these seasonal migrants have been taking the decision to migrate permanently to safer places where wage labour is in demand, thereby turning a temporary coping mechanism into a means of long-term adaptation to environmental degradation and climate change. However, the absence of support and compensation for the land that has been lost to erosion (or soon will be) not only makes such adaptation measures extremely challenging in terms of people's finances and mental health but also raises concerns about the State's refusal to acknowledge this migration as forced rather than voluntary.

Displaced families who have the means to purchase land further inland tend to choose to rebuild their houses in comparatively safer locations rather than to migrate permanently elsewhere, either because they lack the means required for more distant, permanent migration or because they are unable to bear the notion of being separated from their land. Although they know that the present rate of erosion means that Ghoramara will be completely submerged within the next 30 to 40 years and that they will inevitably be displaced again, their deep attachment to place keeps them rooted on the island. Those who lack the means to move are increasingly demanding government assistance to enable their migration to and resettlement in a safer zone.

Until the 1990s, the Government of West Bengal gave out land tenures and financial aid to displaced households, acknowledging the challenges faced by households forced to move because of environmental factors, and thereby setting a precedent. This is particularly significant in a country where policy and regulations – such as the National Policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation – recognise development-induced displacement but no other type of displacement as a legitimate cause for financial aid and rehabilitation support. Legislation and policies targeted at disaster risk management overlook displacement resulting from slow-onset events and are limited to immediate post-disaster relief.

In the 1990s, as assisted resettlement of people from Ghoramara continued, the Government of West Bengal began to run out of land to give to those seeking resettlement in Sagar.<sup>4</sup> Smaller landholdings were awarded, until the scheme ceased altogether. Those who cannot afford to move are trapped; they continue to live in misery and despair, receiving no additional support from the government apart from what is available from existing national- and state-level rural poverty alleviation programmes.

### **The inordinate burden on women**

Women in Ghoramara from households where some male members are seasonal migrants

bear disproportionate burdens. They shoulder responsibility for heading the household, caring for children and the elderly, disabled and sick members of the family, growing crops for household consumption, and tending to domestic chores and the family's betel vine sheds. Their socio-economic position within a rural society also severely limits their mobility and their access to finance, health care, and participation in decision making; while awaiting the return of their husbands every four or six months, they live in constant fear of climate hazards and face intense deprivation. Women respondents emphasised the need for a gender-sensitive analysis of the impacts of seasonal migration and forced displacement. As one of them noted:

*"It gets very hard for me sometimes to manage everything here without my husband. Extreme poverty forces us to take on additional work like weaving nets."*

The role of the community and local women's informal support networks features prominently in the narratives of all women respondents in Ghoramara. However, responses also reveal the reluctance of families from other islands and the mainland to marry their daughters into families in Ghoramara. Even impoverished families in Ghoramara who have sons must offer a high bride price for the son's marriage.

### **Sagar: a 'safe' island?**

Although not connected to the mainland, Sagar – the largest island in the Sundarbans – has better infrastructure than all others in the region. The island has a lower rate of erosion than nearby Ghoramara, and benefits from the proximity of the Haldia Dock Complex (a major port on the opposite bank of the Hooghly) and from the presence of the Kapil Muni Temple on Sagar. Every January, the Gangasagar fair at the temple site attracts millions, and in recent years this alternative source of income has brought asphalt roads, electricity and 17 storm shelters to the island.

Despite the obvious benefits expected from migration to Sagar, the decision to migrate is by no means an easy one, especially due to the unavailability of assistance for

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resettlement. Accounts from the Ghoramara respondents show that consultations with and support from displaced members of the community who have resettled in Sagar greatly influence the decision of other households to relocate. It is in hope of improved access to rights, resources and protection that families take a leap of faith and leave for a new life in Sagar. Thus, interaction between communities in different localities promotes the sharing of knowledge and experiences of forced relocation.

Interviews with migrants in the villages of Gangasagar and Bankim Nagar indicate a higher sense of well-being among the resettled households than among the displaced or soon-to-be displaced households in Ghoramara. However, seasonal migration continues even after resettlement, not only to supplement the family income but also because it has become a systemic practice within many islands of the Indian Sundarbans due to higher returns than from agriculture or fishing (despite loans available to farmers). While the wives of seasonal migrants continue to be overburdened, their condition is by no means as miserable as that of those still living in Ghoramara.

Improvement of life and livelihoods does not, however, prevent memories of lost homes from resurfacing. While every visit home to Ghoramara brings news of friends and relatives suffering land loss and displacement, respondents report frequently experiencing a yearning for the past. When asked whom they hold responsible for their loss, respondents variously lay the blame on the river Hooghly, sea level rise, unsustainable development, water displaced by ships, natural geomorphological processes and even the wrath of God. While this reveals a human tendency to understand phenomena in terms of culpability and cause and effect, it also shows islanders' attempts to reconcile themselves to the trauma of displacement and climate-related distress by reminding themselves that they only abandoned their home when there was no other choice. However, respondents are also well aware that they might again suffer displacement and destitution due to erosion in Sagar.

## Looking ahead

Cases of forced migration such as these in the Sundarbans throw up questions about culpability and responsibility. It is worth our while, as thinkers and practitioners, to search for answers to some of the questions raised. Who pays the price for unsustainable collective human development which manifests itself in the form of environmental shocks and climate change phenomena: the affected individuals, the community or the State? Whose responsibility is it then to compensate for losses resulting from such disasters and to protect affected communities? Insights from academic institutions, State agencies, civil society and local practitioners within affected communities must be pooled to gain a broader understanding of the highly complex processes involved. This will not only promote interaction and sharing of expertise but also better planning and implementation of grassroots action by communities on the frontline of climate change.

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# Climate crisis and local communities in South East Asia: causes, responses and questions of justice

Laura Geiger

**Civil society networks with experience, knowledge and passion are fighting climate injustice and promoting the rights of those displaced by the impacts of climate change.**

Imagine walking four hours every day to fetch fresh water because the rising sea level has made your nearby groundwater salty. Imagine being carried, while in labour, in a basket to a hospital several kilometres away because more frequent flash flooding has washed away the roads. Or imagine your children having to leave home – because traditional farming is no longer possible due to drought and land erosion – to work 12 hours a day, seven days a week, as a rickshaw driver or in a garment factory in order to earn enough to help your family survive. People are not leaving their homes because they seek a similar lifestyle to that enjoyed by many societies in the Global North; often they are forced to leave their loved ones and their homes simply for survival.

Over the past century, wealthy nations have benefited significantly from the generation of greenhouse gases and the exploitation of ecosystems, while others around the world – usually the poor and vulnerable – suffer the consequences. In the Global South, although colonial landownership has ceased, land grabbing and exploitation of natural resources continue where labour and land are kept cheap as an incentive to foreign investors and environmental and where social protection is barely enforced; in this sense, governments in the Global South also bear responsibility. Monopolistic industries dominate the markets and set the rules while community-owned enterprises or small-scale producers struggle against unfair competition. Those who have to bear the burden of the direct and indirect costs of historical and current exploitation are often abandoned to the devastating effects of climate change. And, worse still, once they are forced to migrate there is little or no protection in place for them.

## Challenges – and community responses

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, natural hazards triggered approximately 24.8 million new displacements in 2019, affecting all inhabited continents; IDMC also cites predictions ranging from 100 million to 1 billion climate migrants by 2050.<sup>1</sup> Many South Asian, Southeast Asian and Pacific countries face severe climate change-related challenges. Coastal areas, for example, are threatened by the increased frequency and potency of storm surges, cyclones and sea level rise (which contributes to increased salinity). People have started to convert their rice paddies to salt-tolerant shrimp ponds but this adaptation measure has drastic consequences. Where there were once opportunities for paid labour on agricultural fields and a chance for subsistence agriculture, there are now powerful owners of shrimp companies, with foreign capital, trading their goods on international markets and marginalising the landless farmers.

In Indonesia, since 2000, fishermen in several locations on the north coast of Java have experienced the effects of rising sea level through the submergence of their villages and reductions in their catch. Their fishing boats used to have a crew of three to five fishermen but the reduced catch forces the fishermen to reduce the size of their crew. Masnuah, a 46-year-old woman who lives in the Demak district, went to sea for the first time to accompany her husband, whereas previously it would have been considered shameful for a fisherman to ask his wife to help in his work. She now chairs the Indonesian Fishermen Women's Association (PPNI<sup>2</sup>). Thanks to their advocacy work it has finally become acceptable for women to fish. Organising themselves was initially difficult because many people, particularly village elders and



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religious figures, were convinced that joining PPNI was contradictory to being a woman.

PPNI now comprises 16 groups from northern Sumatra to West Timor who advocate for fisherwomen's rights. Until 2017 only men could obtain insurance – to pay for medical treatment and in the event of lives lost – but now women can get the same provision. PPNI also helps to strengthen the fishing economy through several projects such as providing training in processing fishery products.

Advocacy work done by organisations such as PPNI is important because women working in fisheries and aquaculture sectors usually have lower wages, less recognition, less social and economic protection, and precarious and invisible jobs. These factors, combined with the reality that women in vulnerable contexts are often already more affected by the impacts of climate change than men are, add to the precarity of their livelihoods and therefore to the likelihood of them being forced to move.

Kodriyah, a 17-year-old Indonesian girl, has seen the population of her village decreasing over the last ten years, from 200 families until today when only her family remains. To reach her school, Kodriyah and her five-year-old sibling travel by small boat, paddling five kilometres to the nearest land to then continue by bicycle and bus. The ground floor of her house is now permanently covered by water, forcing her family to build a platform in their own home in order to stay dry. To reduce the impact of sea level rise, her family is planting mangrove trees for which they get occasional support from

a student-run organisation. Her mother, Pasijah, supports the family income by selling mangrove seedlings. Kodriyah hopes the government can help by undertaking more widespread mangrove planting and by building a dam so her village can be saved.

Adaptation measures such as these can help – but will not stop people from migrating once they lose their land and homes multiple times. According to the International

Organization for Migration, up to 70% of residents in the slums of Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, moved there as a result of environmental challenges. It is estimated that Bangladesh hosts six million such migrants, making climate change and environmental causes the country's primary drivers of internal migration, yet little assistance is provided to support those who have been displaced.

The Bangladeshi NGO Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust (COAST) is

strengthening its work on climate adaptation measures and has been advocating for the government to develop a national displacement policy. The government has agreed in principle to develop such a policy and the NGOs have submitted a draft policy for their attention.

Local community responses include working not only on adaptation measures but also on mitigation measures. For example, the Bangladeshi National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports (NCBD) is fighting the root causes of climate change. NCBD was formed in 1998 to build the capacity of local communities to mount resistance to deals



Kodriyah outside her house.

AEER/Khoiron



Manila Conference participants protest with local activists and the community of Talitip, Philippines.

that damage the environment, are against local people's interests and undermine the country's sustainable development. This broad alliance of political parties and organisations of – among others – students, peasants, workers, women, indigenous people, artists, teachers, writers, experts and journalists has campaigned on these issues for over 22 years. They are also fighting to protect the vulnerable Sundarbans region (including its UNESCO-protected mangrove forest) from the introduction of a coal-fired power station as the area is very important for protecting coastal areas from the impacts of climate change.

### **The power of networking, and the Manila Initiative**

There is much to learn from NGOs and movements to support those affected by, and displaced by, climate change. In September 2019 the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung/Foundation (RLS) organised an International Solidarity Conference on the Rights of Climate Migrants in Manila, in the Philippines. The conference welcomed over 70 guests from more than 20 countries, bringing together academia and civil society actors to learn from each other, show solidarity, and build alliances to strengthen

the power of their networks to fight climate injustice and to promote the rights of those displaced by the impacts of climate change.

Participants shared their personal stories, scientific findings, and what their organisations have learned (each with their own examples of localised solutions), plus responses from their governments. Bringing together those people who are currently leading the climate, development and migration conversations in their countries helped to unite them and demonstrate that this is one struggle with many fronts. Three NGOs co-organised the conference: Kalikasan, the International Migrants Alliance, and the Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD); APMDD is also a member of the Demand Climate Justice Network – one of the leading international networks in the Global South working on the topic of climate justice.

Climate justice can, of course, be understood and approached in multiple ways, with many different nuances, but there is a common understanding that addressing the social, economic, environmental and political aspects of the climate crisis requires more than a few adaptation and mitigation measures. Climate action does not lead necessarily to climate justice.

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Firstly, the richer countries of the Global North should be required to pay climate change compensation. This will require not only providing funding for adaptation and mitigation, but also taking responsibility for the historical ecological debt they owe, and ensuring that climate finance and technology are allocated and used equitably, democratically and appropriately. The policy of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities” is a principle enshrined within the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change that acknowledges the different capabilities and differing responsibilities of individual countries in addressing climate change. And in 2013, after more than 20 years of international climate negotiations, the *Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage* stated that the impacts of climate change cannot be addressed by adaptation alone. In this respect displacement caused by the impacts of climate change always means a loss and therefore demands compensation, a crucial element in climate justice discourse.

*“By not addressing climate justice as a central issue and by focusing more on adaptation, that was one way of containing migratory trends or displacement within the region itself without it being a burden of responsibility for the North.”*  
Meghna Guhathakurta, Research Initiative Bangladesh

Secondly, there needs to be legal recognition by the international community that those displaced by the impacts of climate change are a group in need of special protection. That means firstly that the right to move if your life is in danger has to be ensured. And secondly that after you have moved, other rights should be ensured – such as the right to medical assistance, legal protection, and education. Social security systems would of course be a major pillar of protection for those forced to move. It is to be hoped that the statement by the UN Human Rights Committee in January 2020 that “countries may not deport individuals who face climate change-induced conditions that violate the right to life” will exert pressure on other countries to

change their immigration policies in order to allow those displaced by the impacts of climate change to claim asylum.

*“We want our people to have the option to migrate with dignity should the time come that migration is unavoidable.”* Anote Tong, President of Kiribati (during the 67th Session of the UN General Assembly in 2012)

Thirdly, there needs to be fundamental system changes, incorporating elements such as the Green New Deal and an international climate agreement that is rooted in science, equity and justice. For some countries that would imply a radical reduction in consumption, an end to fossil fuels, fair shouldering of the environmental and social costs, and incentives to support local and regional production.

In the light of discussions on the above, one major outcome of the September 2019 conference in Manila is the Manila Initiative on the Rights of Climate Migrants. This presents the conference participants’ vision for the future and their demands for improvements, and issues a call to civil society and policymakers to sign up to the initiative.<sup>3</sup>

*“We hope that [the Manila Initiative] will play a strong role in strengthening our voice on an international level because displacement issues are now losing momentum in both global climate negotiations as well as UN human right processes.”* Aminul Hoque, COAST, conference participant

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## Lessons from internal climate migration in Mongolia

Simon Schoening

**Rural communities in western Mongolia are increasingly abandoning their traditional livelihood systems. Strengthening the rural economy may lessen the need to migrate to urban areas but must take into account the long-term impacts of climate change.**

The Centre for Rural Development at Berlin's Humboldt University recently conducted a study on the adaptation of rural livelihoods to structural and climatic changes in western Mongolia, and found that migration is one of the most common strategies implemented in the search for income and improved living conditions.<sup>1</sup> Since the 2000s, internal migration in Mongolia has been largely characterised by a unidirectional movement from rural to urban areas<sup>2</sup> with the country's capital, Ulaanbaatar, by far the most popular destination. More than 550,000 people have moved there in the past two decades alone, one-third of the city's current population.

Surveys suggest that 80% of all newcomers settle in the capital's outskirts. Ulaanbaatar's suburbs are known as the *ger* districts, taking their name from the traditional mobile homes made from felt used by the rural population and which they reassemble in their new urban destination. But living conditions in urban migrant settlements are precarious. Ulaanbaatar ranks among the most polluted cities in the world, in large part due to the burning of coal in the city's *ger* districts for heating during winter – creating pollution that has a significant impact on the health and well-being of migrant communities.

Given the rapid influx of people and growing pressure on the city's infrastructure and public services, to restrict internal migration the government introduced an official ban in 2017 whereby migrants were barred from registering at their new place of residence. Registration is a pre-condition for individuals to access basic public services and formal employment opportunities, and to receive legal support. Unregistered households have no legal basis for claiming housing or being granted permission to use land. Reports by local government officials confirm that pregnant women

and newborns are in fact the only groups of people from unregistered households who are eligible for medical services.

However, people without permission to resettle continue to migrate to the city. While registration within a certain time period is required by law, only about half of people proceed with registering at their destination; many expect their migration to be temporary and therefore do not attempt to register. The government's migration ban subsequently not only worsens conditions for communities at their destination but also distorts data on migration flows.

### Climate change and vulnerabilities

The annual mean surface temperature over the Mongolian territory has increased by 2.24°C since 1940, and warming is happening particularly fast in the mountainous regions of western Mongolia, home to more than 400,000 people. Rural lives in this part of the country are dominated by pastoral livestock keeping, horticulture and crop production. Recent years have seen extreme weather events – including the country's notorious winter storms, or *dzuds* – become more frequent and more devastating.<sup>3</sup> The 2009–10 *dzud* took the lives of more than ten million animals, equal to 24% of the country's entire livestock population, hiking up poverty in rural areas to 49%. As extreme weather events have become more severe in their scale, communities and their agricultural production systems are often left in a state of shock, with the rural population forced to resort to immediate coping strategies. Many find themselves unable to cope, however, and decide to abandon their rural livelihoods and move to the cities.

While the direct impacts of climate change may not be mentioned by surveyed households as the trigger point for abandoning traditional agricultural practices, the prolonged economic

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impacts of such events certainly are. Once the number of livestock held by a household drops below a certain threshold (surveys suggest this is 200 animals), a family's quality of life is significantly impaired. Those left without any options to either restock or diversify their income locally are eventually forced to migrate in search of alternative incomes.

The severity of climate-induced shock events in Mongolia has in fact become a strong predictor for rural households to drop out of the pastoral economy. The same may hold true for slow-onset events such as decreasing surface water availability due to the melting of glaciers and more frequent drought events. Glaciers in the Mongolian Altai mountains have already shrunk by 30% since the 1940s, and resulting water shortages lead to local conflicts over the use of resources. The situation is set to intensify amid the currently unsustainable use and inadequate governance of water resources.

The underlying vulnerability of Mongolia's rural communities to the impacts of climate change is embedded in the country's recent political, social and economic developments. The State-controlled agricultural support system of the past provided those severely hit by weather-related losses with resources, cash transfers and in-kind contributions, ensuring the stability of the rural economy. Since the collapse of the country's socialist regime in the early 1990s, however, the management of risk exposure has been transferred into the hands of individual herders and farmers.

Today, herders can buy into market-based insurance schemes that issue pay-offs once a mortality rate of 6% of an insured herd is reached. While such insurance helps to mitigate some of the economic losses, asset-poor households are often unable to afford it. Others try to cope by taking loans, adding to the already high level of indebtedness in the rural economy. Notably, what has been found to offer adequate support for loss-affected pastoralists is the aid received from other herders in the form of livestock transfers. A renewed, donor-supported interest in the collective organisation of the rural economy and the formation of agricultural cooperatives further reflects the recognition

of the role of social capital in dealing with the impacts of climate change on a local level.

### **Gender, income diversification and cultural heritage**

The decision of rural households to migrate is mainly driven by their desire to access stable income opportunities and financial security. Many also seek to reunite with family members who have previously migrated. While women traditionally undertake caring duties and therefore often only limited or part-time income-generating work, they exercise a considerable degree of influence over a family's decision to migrate. Women play an important role with regard to managing household finances and ensuring children's access to education, often moving with children and young adults to urban centres while their male counterparts generate income in the rural economy. Such 'translocal' livelihoods, while not to be confused with permanent migration, are a common feature of family life in Mongolia, with many families being split during parts of the year at least.

Another important strategy of households that are dealing with external pressures is the diversification of their incomes. As mobile pastoralism and farming are poised to become increasingly difficult due to slow-onset climate change and shock events, many households have started to generate income from two or more sources, usually assigned on a gendered basis depending on customs and the availability of work. This either excludes women from certain income opportunities or creates additional workload.

While income diversification tends to benefit communities financially, it may come at a cost – and not only for female household members. Adaptation strategies, such as the permanent resettlement from rural to urban areas and the take-up of presumably more profitable and stable income sources, may over time erode communities' long-standing connectedness to place. Central to customs and norms in western Mongolia are beliefs about sacred sites, mountaintops and formations in the local landscape. As communities are forced to abandon traditional agricultural practices and their places of

origin, this may eventually lead to substantial disruptions in their tangible and intangible cultural assets, some of which have defined Mongolians' unique culture for millennia.

### To stay or to go?

Although people and rural livelihood systems in Mongolia have historically shown a high degree of resilience, they are now becoming increasingly vulnerable. Serious concerns about the prospects of youth in particular were raised by rural community members during interviews:

*"They [youth] all want to go to the [provincial] centres or Ulaanbaatar. [...] Very few young people want to continue herding as a herder's life is quite tough and herders can't adapt to the climatic changes. [...] I don't have any children who want to be herders in the future. The children want to be educated and then they want to get a job."*

Others paint a more nuanced picture, recognising the absence of decent work opportunities in urban destinations:

*"Children from herder families realise, 'why should I waste my parents' money to go to university and study something to then not find a job in this field.' [...] Also, herders do not want to be unemployed; this is why they stay in the countryside."*

Holistic solutions for strengthening the rural economy in the long term in order to counteract the need for internal migration as an adaptation strategy may therefore need to focus on:

- increasing the resilience of, and quality of life provided by, existing local livelihood systems (particularly for pastoralists and farmers) by providing direct assistance in the form of subsidies rather than loans or inaccessible insurance schemes to households identified as most at risk of sudden asset loss
- promoting cooperatives and the collective organisation of economic activities in agriculture and other sectors, drawing on existing social networks and thereby strengthening community self-reliance
- taking into consideration the needs of women in accessing income-generating

work and creating year-round, diversified employment opportunities and relevant education for youth

- improving governance of natural resources by providing financial support to local water user groups (paying special attention to the needs of disadvantaged and downstream users), while also focusing on enhanced soil and pasture management practices
- monitoring migration flows by conducting regular surveys which reflect the combined longer-term impacts of climate-induced extreme weather events and slow-onset changes on households' economic situation.

Current efforts by international donors often either lack an adequate assessment of climate change or tend to duplicate past and ongoing development interventions. Government agencies, development finance institutions and the donor community must better integrate lessons learned, coordinate their activities (in education, health, employment, women's empowerment and capacity building for youth) and avoid promoting highly carbon-intensive practices that are unsustainable in the context of climate change. Lastly, reflecting the needs expressed by local communities, interventions should take a community-led, bottom-up participatory approach and adhere to the concept of sustainable adaptation by taking the projected long-term impacts of climate change into account when planning projects and programmes.

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# Climate crisis, gender inequalities and local response in Somalia/Somaliland

Amy Croome and Muna Hussein

**Various factors intersect when looking at the gendered effects of climate crisis on local communities in Somalia/Somaliland.**

Climate-related shocks and humanitarian crises are closely inter-linked. As climate change becomes more extreme and unpredictable, hundreds of thousands of people living in poverty in Somalia are already paying a heavy price. As well as facing a fragile political situation after the collapse of the government in 1991, Somalia has experienced recurrent droughts which have in turn increased clan conflicts.<sup>1</sup> In 2018, 547,000 people (3.6% of its population) were newly displaced by extreme weather events<sup>2</sup> and it is expected that in 2020 6.3 million people will face acute food insecurity and 5.2 million people will be in need of humanitarian assistance, of which 1.72 million people will be internally displaced.<sup>3</sup>

Gender inequality in Somalia/Somaliland<sup>4</sup> in general was already very high before the current climate crisis: women have less power and participation in economic, educational and political spheres, and gender-based violence, early girl-child marriage and female genital mutilation are all prevalent.<sup>5</sup> Now, climate shocks – creating resource scarcity and stress on livelihoods – have shifted many cultural norms in Somali society and are having an impact on gender dynamics.

The loss of livestock because of drought has resulted in men being unable to secure income for the family. This is causing tension and conflict in households and driving domestic violence towards women and children. Many men also turn to chewing the stimulant qat, which all communities interviewed reported as increasing domestic violence. Domestic violence has also increased as women have, in many cases, become the breadwinners – either through keeping and selling goats, becoming street vendors in camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) or in villages, or by taking up casual

work in urban centres. This has caused a shift in gender roles and is perceived by some men as a threat to their role. In some cases, men leave their families to look for work in the cities, join the military, leave to escape clan violence, or die by suicide. Divorce rates have risen and female-headed households have become more common.

Caring and domestic work, traditionally the responsibility of women and girls, have become more demanding and time-consuming. Both firewood and water are increasingly scarce, resulting in women and girls walking longer distances to collect these resources. Girls are asked to support the increased daily domestic work, resulting in more girls dropping out of school. Furthermore, when parents cannot afford to register both boys and girls in school, they prioritise boys' education.

Resource scarcity has also increased clan conflicts as more groups compete over land, water and pasture. This is especially dangerous for men, who can easily become victims of revenge killings or armed clashes, and consequently limits their freedom of movement. Evictions and land disputes arising when people are displaced also cause violence, affecting mostly men.

Other forms of gender-based violence, such as rape, have also been on the rise. Women feel vulnerable at water points, open defecation areas, livestock grazing areas, areas where they collect firewood, on roads to markets and in their homes (because of lack of safe shelter and lighting). Perpetrators are men both from within and outside the community. Seeking justice for sexual violence or rape remains difficult as confidentiality is compromised when cases are reported in the community, the informal court system often imposes small fines on

Oxfam/Pablo Tesco



Women head to the water point in Eilmidgan village where Oxfam has built a water desalination plant.

perpetrators who are then released back into the community, and the formal systems are inaccessible due to distance and cost. Many women are raped during the night while sleeping, especially in those areas where clan conflicts happen frequently:

*“My husband brought us here and left to find work. I have eight daughters and two sisters with me in this IDP camp. They are all under 17 years. I don’t sleep at night. I keep on watching them to sleep safely. I try to sleep at noon time.”* (Woman from Fadhigaab IDP camp, Sanaag region)

When struggling to secure livelihoods, families will often marry their daughters to wealthy men and this was one of the main issues raised in focus group discussions, with many of the girls interviewed fearing early and forced marriage.

Communities have developed a variety of coping mechanisms to deal with the gendered effects of climate crisis and displacement. To avoid sexual violence and rape, women and girls travel in groups, change times they leave camps, do not share their movements with men for fear of being stalked, and carry

sticks and torches, while elderly women collect water or look for missing livestock. Men in fear of revenge killings stay away from homes at night, either sleeping in hiding, staying awake in shifts, or sleeping outside and posting guards. Many men carry guns for their protection, travel in groups, use torches and keep in touch to warn each other of potential danger.

### Local response and programming

The response to rising humanitarian needs is being met largely by the UN and international NGOs (INGOs), to whom most of the donor funding flows directly. However, much of the response is delivered by local and national NGOs, especially in conflict areas, to which international agencies lack access. Through the Grand Bargain agreement and the Charter for Change, donors and INGOs have committed to localisation – giving local and national organisations and Somali government agencies more direct funding and more space to lead humanitarian responses by, for example, increasing their participation in decision making.



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However, while some progress has been made on localisation, the UN and INGOs still dominate the humanitarian system.

There are many local and national NGOs who are responding to the humanitarian needs caused by climate crisis in Somalia/Somaliland, delivering a variety of activities to tackle the gendered effects of drought. Protection activities are widely undertaken and several organisations have referral systems and counselling for rape and sexual violence survivors whereby community members are trained to respond and refer survivors to medical centres and to help those seeking justice for the survivors. Many also carry out protection awareness-raising activities, visiting households and speaking about various issues such as domestic and sexual violence and explaining what women can do when they face such issues. A few organisations also deliver community awareness-raising activities, such as community dramas – performances of various situations with the help of actors. Local organisations understand that Somali society has strong oral traditions and that dramas are a good way to raise awareness and to generate discussions and reflection. Local actors are better placed than international actors to do this type of work as they have ongoing relationships with affected communities and have deep understanding of the cultural and religious context.

Local and international NGOs (and, to a certain extent, the government) have mainstreamed gender across the various activities such as WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene), resilience and livelihood activities, unconditional cash transfers and cash-for-work programmes (serving both men and women). For example, when selecting beneficiaries, gender is carefully considered and female-headed households are taken into account. According to Nafisa Yusuf of the Somali women's rights network Nagaad: "In a drought those most affected are women and children [...] Women are the first to know when the disaster is going to happen. They are the provider of the family. They know."

Local NGOs encourage women's leadership and participation in decision

making, for example in IDP camp committees. Kamal Hassan Isak of local NGO HAVAYOCO explains that encouraging such roles requires a careful and culturally appropriate strategy: "We talk to men and women about women in the Quran, who are leaders, for example the Prophet's wife who was a business leader – people cannot refuse our Prophet." Many local organisations share that changing norms and perceptions of what women can and should do takes time, many discussions and the building of strong relationships. Given the limitations of both local and international NGOs when it comes to fully integrating gender in their work, it is important to make visible the gendered effects of the climate crisis. When the differences are researched, analysed and shared, all actors can more easily adapt their programming.

### Localisation – still waiting

The absolute and relative amounts of funding available to local Somali actors (State and non-State) remains very small. In 2017, direct funding of local/national actors accounted for 3.5% of overall humanitarian funding for Somalia, with the majority of this going to the government.<sup>6</sup> This has done little to change the power dynamics between international and national actors. All local and national NGOs we spoke with raised the fact that doing long-term work to shift norms is very difficult in a humanitarian system which often sees local actors as sub-contractors and where funding is short-term and project-dependent. "We have a programme [in women's leadership], it runs for a year, we train and engage, then it stops, and then we get new funding and we have to start again," says Nafisa Yusuf of Nagaad. Omer Jama Farah of local NGO Taakulo describes the humanitarian funding cycle and the slow dispersal of funding by saying "Aid comes when the rain comes".

Interviewees are worried about the long-term sustainability of efforts, and find it difficult to be able to lead in the sector when their access to decision-making spaces and their capacity to invest in their organisations remain limited. Restrictions

on how funds can be spent, which exclude work for organisational development, have a negative effect on local NGOs' managerial quality and technical competence and cause a vicious cycle that creates a deadlock for advancing the localisation agenda.<sup>7</sup>

More flexible and longer-term funding is needed for local organisations to create sustainable programmes and for these organisations to truly become leaders within the sector. Capacity building alone will not shift power but more and different kinds of funding and the recognition and inclusion of local NGOs as leaders could.

### Climate justice advocacy

As the focus in Somalia/Somaliland thus far and for good reason has been on responding to humanitarian needs created by the climate crisis, there is not a large climate justice movement in the country. Local organisations currently do not have the capacity to mobilise and advocate for global policy changes, focusing instead on responding to the effects of climate crisis and the urgent needs of communities. But there is a lot of potential for local actors, and international agencies and local government, to build a coherent narrative around the climate crisis and to connect with global movements to reduce climate crisis effects. In countries like

Somalia/Somaliland large numbers of people are being displaced by the climate crisis, despite not bearing the greatest responsibility for the emissions that contribute to climate change. The international community needs to make progress in providing new funds to help poorer countries support men and women affected by drought and other climate shocks, taking gender fully into consideration.

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## Indigenous perspectives on gender, power and climate-related displacement

Sarah Pentlow

**Across the Greater Mekong subregion, Indigenous Peoples are employing a range of strategies to respond to the effects of climate change and climate-related displacement.**

The impacts of climate change are most severely felt by those who live closest to their natural habitats. Indigenous Peoples in the Greater Mekong subregion of Southeast Asia are facing threats to their livelihoods and traditional ways of life, and are being forced to migrate as an adaptation strategy. Within these communities, women bear the brunt of the work to

adapt as they, culturally, are responsible for the food supply and livestock care.

In this context, the Climate Smart Women initiative<sup>1</sup> undertook village-level field research in selected Indigenous communities in Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam to understand the gendered impacts of climate change at a community level and how communities are responding

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in order to adapt, share knowledge and build resilience. At a gathering in Bangkok in December 2019, Indigenous Women leaders, policymakers and civil society representatives from across the region met to exchange knowledge and build connections in response to this growing crisis.<sup>2</sup>

### Gendered impacts

Pre-existing inequalities are exacerbated by climate change, resulting in differentiated vulnerabilities. To understand these impacts at a community level, research teams examined gender roles within the household and labour roles linked to livelihoods.

There was a range of experiences among the communities, particularly relating to women's literacy and participation. In communities in Laos, women's low level of literacy limited their ability to participate in decision-making forums. One respondent said, "...only men go to meetings and women stay at home. So, women do not know about climate change or adaptation." However, in Cambodia, women held more power within the households: "In Krang Teh village, women are always active in seeking advice from the local authority to deal with the drought situation and [one woman] also encouraged her husband to purchase a pumping machine to rescue her rice and other crops."

Although the whole family contributes to a household's livelihoods, there are distinct gender roles in the division of labour. Within agriculture, women are involved in more of the frontline work of planting, weeding and cultivating home gardens, which means they are the first to experience the consequences of unpredictable and extreme weather patterns. As they seek new ways to manage these resources they increasingly experience 'time poverty' because of the additional roles they also fulfil within the household related to care-giving and cooking. Men take on more physically demanding jobs – whether on their land, in the forest, or as hired labour – and are usually the first to leave in search of employment when resources are scarce as they do not have the same household obligations as women.

In Myanmar, one woman told us that when her husband migrated to Malaysia for better employment opportunities, she had to take on management of all the household activities such as agricultural production as well as managing the remittances sent by her husband. However, despite what might be seen as gains in gender equality, the status of women continues to be lower than that of men. Female-headed households remain in communities which do not recognise women as having the same status as men and consequently suffer as a result.

Many seasonal workers leave their villages with their entire families during the lean periods when there is no agricultural work. This has become so commonplace that people view it as a livelihood adaptation to climate change. However, in discussions during the conference, participants expressed concern over how migration is increasing the vulnerability of already marginalised people and increasing risks of gender-based violence for women.

Women interviewed in Laos also pointed to the differential impact of displacement for women. They observed how women do not have information on safe migration and are forced to migrate without passports and work permits, and are unsafe travelling alone; that women lack independence to travel for work; that disasters have destroyed their homes; and that they lack income and jobs in the community. And in the event of natural disasters such as cyclones, typhoons or floods, women's responsibility for children and elderly people may hinder their own escape, access to shelter or access to health care, as was seen when Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar in 2008.

### A question of power over land

Indigenous Peoples hold ancestral rights to their lands but these rights are not always recognised or protected, even when appropriate legislation exists. In Cambodia, a national policy provides strong direction towards respect for and recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights and their role in the sustainable management of natural resources. However, threats from private

companies have pitted these rights against the interests of developers, resulting in rapid environmental degradation, deforestation and loss of land.

In Laos, land is allocated by the government but households are given smaller plots than their traditional farming practices require to produce sufficient food without resorting to herbicides. In other cases, land has been sold off to private companies. Some communities have been displaced by large hydroelectric projects and have been relocated to sites where they do not have access to land. But in the words of one activist, “Indigenous Peoples and forests cannot be separated; without forests, their lives will be gone.”

### Knowledge sharing and other adaptation strategies

There is a wide diversity of views and perspectives within communities concerning the possibility of adaptation to climate change:

*“Local villages feel hopeless and don’t know what to do about the future due to different weather. They don’t know how to solve these problems. Even myself, I don’t know how to deal with this, but I try to improve crop productivity.”* (Indigenous Woman leader from Myanmar)

*“When there is flooding, we know to move to high lands with our family so we can survive. Trees are one of the resources to protect us from flooding. We know which ones to cut and which ones to keep to prevent the effects of climate change.”* (from report by Cambodian women)

Judging from the research done by the Climate Smart Women initiative, the selected communities in Cambodia appear to have employed successful adaptation strategies and are able to maintain their livelihoods without needing to leave their communities, in contrast to the communities in Laos and Myanmar. It is doubtlessly relevant that there is a stronger international NGO presence in Cambodia – INGOs of which the communities spoke favourably – than in Laos or Myanmar.

In Pu Chhorb village in Cambodia, for example, NGOs have supported climate change adaptation by working with local stakeholders (including networks of

Indigenous Women and of Indigenous Youth) to build a small reservoir to supply the village with water all year round, for household consumption as well as for irrigating home gardens. Similar experiences were found in Krang Teh in Cambodia where the NGO-led setting up of savings groups has contributed to the economic empowerment of Indigenous communities. Members are now more active in community business and enterprise groups; they have successfully implemented a model farmer and producer group, established agriculture cooperatives and farmers’ networks, supported irrigation systems, and built capacity for business management.

However, reliance on NGO intervention cannot be the first port of call in responding to the challenge of climate-related displacement. In Cambodia, Indigenous communities are saying that “We think we could access information better. We want the Cambodian government to have Indigenous representatives at all levels, especially on the disaster committee.”

In Myanmar, with the support of the UN Development Programme, local women-led civil society organisations known as ‘township leading groups’ were created to develop networks to support income-generation activities and capacity building for rural women, as well as to provide vocational training and awareness-raising workshops on trafficking and gender-based violence, health and nutrition. These individual village-level groups first gradually formed higher-level clusters for the sake of better coordination, then self-organised at the regional level, and finally created the country’s first national network of rural women – May Doe Kabar (National Network of Rural Women<sup>3</sup>) – to connect rural women across the country and to share their needs with donors, development actors and the government.

A culture of learning and knowledge sharing exists among Indigenous Women as they share with each other and pass on their knowledge of farming and adaptation practices from one generation to another. Within the 18 key messages and recommendations to emerge from the Climate Smart Women Connect conference

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in Bangkok in December 2019, half of them relate to knowledge sharing and exchange.<sup>4</sup>

One persistent challenge for local knowledge exchange is around language: there is a huge diversity of languages among Indigenous Peoples in Southeast Asia, not only between countries but within countries. Additionally, the reality is that much of the information around climate change, human rights and gender equality exists primarily in English.

One tool being used for knowledge exchange in Myanmar is the iWomen Inspiring Women app which was developed by MDK to enable rural women to have their voices heard through opinion polls, detailed surveys and storytelling. Rural women can gather evidence through the app on issues of concern such as gender-based violence or safe migration, which they can then share with other rural women, and with local and national government. As of May 2020, the app is being used by over 1,000 women across 31 different townships.

### Recommendations for programming

Given the inter-generational nature of knowledge sharing between community members and the way in which whole families are involved in livelihood activities, any training or workshops on climate adaptation strategies or gender equality should take a **family-oriented approach**. This method was used in Laos as part of CARE's Remote Ethnic Women programme,<sup>5</sup> where it was successful in starting to break down social norms and gender barriers.

Emerging from the research was a clear call for specific **capacity building for women** to increase literacy, leadership skills and local political participation. The example of MDK is a model of how local

village groups can evolve into national networks. However, women need the requisite skills to be able to participate.

The **role of external actors** should be limited to supporting community-led interventions, using their influence to build bridges with larger networks. In the Cambodian and Myanmar examples, it is clear that the technical assistance provided by development organisations has been helpful; however, often it needs more than just a technical intervention to shift gender norms – and it is the local people who have insight into what is needed in their communities.

A final recommendation is to **document traditional knowledge and practices** in order to preserve Indigenous knowledge and to influence policy. As one participant in Bangkok said:

*"After attending the conference, I have realised that women in other countries also have the same challenges we have in Myanmar and I learned from them.... Therefore, we have to work together at a policy level on women's participation in climate change decision-making processes and [share information about] our challenges."*

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1. This one-year project, implemented by Cuso International and Asia Indigenous Peoples' Pact, was funded by Stockholm Environment Institute as part of their Strategic Collaboration fund and Global Affairs Canada Volunteer Cooperation Programme; the focus was on engaging with Indigenous Women in Southeast Asia for a more inclusive climate policy dialogue.
2. This was a joint research project and knowledge-sharing event convened by Cuso International and Asia Indigenous Peoples' Pact. [bit.ly/2Sxzdxu](http://bit.ly/2Sxzdxu)
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## Whose voices are heard through FMR?

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## Multiple mobilities in Pacific Islands communities

Fanny Thornton, Karen McNamara, Olivia Dun, Carol Farbotko, Celia McMichael, Merewalesi Yee, Sabira Coelho, Tim Westbury, Sharon James and Frances Namoumou

**Types of mobility in the Pacific Islands are numerous and diverse. Case-studies from the region offer insights into the actions and agency of people, households and communities in the face of accelerating climate vulnerability.**

The Pacific Islands feature prominently in global debates around climate-related mobility in light of the region's vulnerability to climate change impacts. Some estimates suggest that up to 1.7 million people in the region will migrate or be displaced by 2050 because of climate impacts.<sup>1</sup> Such movement manifests itself in various ways, including planned relocation of communities, migration from rural to urban areas (or towards main islands), and cross-border migration.<sup>2</sup>

### Relocating – Fiji

In Fiji, at least 42 villages have been identified by the Fijian government for planned relocation as a potential adaptive response to climate change risks. The communities concerned are low-lying coastal sites that variously experience inundation of homes and ancestral burial grounds, shoreline erosion, storm surges, and saltwater intrusion into arable farmland and potable water sources. Several villages – some with the support of government ministries, donors and NGOs – have undertaken the process of relocating their homes, livelihoods and communities away from sites of environmental risk

The coastal village of Vunidogoloa in Vanua Levu, for example, relocated to higher ground in 2014 to reduce exposure to coastal erosion and inundation. The new location is about 2km inland – situated on customary clan land – and offers improved housing and infrastructure, access to farmland and livelihoods activities, and improved access to health and educational services, main roads and markets. The move was community-initiated with community members and leaders playing key roles in planning and decision making, and facilitated through partnerships and collaboration between community leaders and members,

church networks, donor agencies and the Provincial Council and government ministries. Challenges of relocation have included changes in diet and lifestyle (not least due to easier access to urban centres), disrupted attachment to place, lack of a place of worship (which is being addressed through community-funded construction of a church) and incomplete infrastructure. Other Fijian villages are also retreating from encroaching shorelines, both with and without government and donor support, although some are not relocating their entire community. In the coastal settlement Vunisavisavi in Vanua Levu, for example, in 2015 just four new houses were built (with donor support), beyond the inundation zone, while other houses were upgraded for cyclone proofing. Short-distance retreat of a few households has limited disruption to daily lives, livelihoods and place attachment.

These planned relocations offer lessons, including the need for: inclusive decision-making processes prior to, during and following relocation; continuation of spiritual and cultural lives of communities; maintained or improved standards of living, including access to services (health, education, markets) and infrastructure at household and community levels; and livelihood planning so that all community members can pursue sustainable livelihoods activities.

### Drawn to the city – Fiji

Rural to urban migration can be a positive strategy for livelihood diversification and resilience building, including among communities facing climate risk in the Pacific Islands region where urban centres and main islands already attract large numbers of people. Some urban migrants channel part of their income towards efforts to build

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resilience and adaptive capacity in rural and remote areas. Some residents of the rural Fijian village of Lobau, for example, have moved from agriculture and subsistence farming to working in the cash economy in urban centres but part of their income is directed to community projects and facilities – such as building and repairing Lobau’s community hall which is used as an evacuation centre in times of disaster. Urban migrants also send cash to those who remain in the village, while villagers send local produce to those who have migrated to urban environments. Rural to urban migration in Fiji, and elsewhere in the region, not only can help people achieve sustainable livelihoods but also is increasingly used as a way of building resilience to environmental change and disaster (even though, as is true with most types of mobility, it can also involve risks). In rural areas, people’s survival depends on a precarious mix of agricultural and non-agricultural sources of income. Greater engagement by, and support from, public authorities in ensuring that these sectors connect and complement one another are needed if livelihood strategies such as internal migration are to help improve livelihood outcomes for rural households.

### Going abroad for work – to Australia

Australia’s Seasonal Worker Programme (SWP), in operation since 2012, permits citizens from nine Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste to work temporarily in the Australian agriculture and accommodation sectors. The purpose is to fill Australian labour gaps while contributing to economic development in the countries from which workers originate. Of 12 Solomon Island SWP migrants interviewed, all planned to use money they were earning in Australia to construct or upgrade housing in Solomon Islands. For example, one worker explained how upgrading his house from a thatched leaf construction to one of iron, concrete and timber would provide greater protection for his family during inclement weather. Another worker was considering exactly where to build his new house, given that his current house was situated very close to the coast and he had witnessed the encroachment of the shoreline over recent

years. Finally, one worker was contributing to the construction of a village guesthouse, on the premise that this might help attract NGOs to establish environmental projects in the village.

In short, climate resilience building is a key part of Pacific Island migrants’ pursuit of work opportunities offshore. Given this, integrating training in building climate-ready housing – which is at the same time culturally, contextually and geographically relevant – into the SWP is one example of how addressing climate risk could be better mainstreamed into international labour mobility.

### Renewing cultural attachment to place – Tuvalu

Funafala village in Tuvalu is only accessible by sea. Infrastructure there is limited, with no schools, shops or roads and with no public ferry service to the nation’s capital, an hour away by small motorboat. Funafala, as with all of Tuvalu, is on a low-lying atoll and experiences coastal erosion. This remote island community, which has no cash economy, might reasonably be expected to be experiencing out-migration but in fact the opposite is true. The 10 households that comprise Funafala are well aware of climate change risk, particularly that stemming from sea-level rise, yet nobody plans to leave. On the contrary, the number of households is increasing. Why is this the case?

Funafala land is traditionally owned by the indigenous people of Funafuti, part of the same indigenous group who are also landholders in Tuvalu’s capital. The village site has historically been an area of settlement for Funafuti people, but changes such as increasing urbanisation in the capital have meant population numbers have varied over time. The present community members all value the opportunity to live a more traditional life compared with life in the capital itself, and this is driving in-migration to the village. Fishing and household food cultivation provide at least partial subsistence livelihoods, and handicraft materials are easier to source here. Most households supplement their subsistence livelihoods with some paid employment in the capital. Water tanks and solar panels supply water

and power to all houses. Locally sourced and constructed sea walls are recent additions, and mangroves have been planted as protection against coastal erosion. The community has built a new chapel and a community hall. The community has lobbied for a school, which has been promised by the national government; when it is built, the population of Funafala is likely to increase further. Currently, families with children split their time between the capital and Funafala so that their children can attend school and indeed, the population of Funafala is currently lacking a younger cohort. The residents agree that more young families are likely to move to Funafala once a school is established.

Community members speak about the importance they attach to preserving their culture and health – priorities which they carefully balance against the longer-term risks of climate change. Currently, nobody feels physically unsafe, and the simple houses are relatively easily reparable from damage associated with flooding, storms and erosion. Funafala people are well aware of the prominent wider debates about Tuvalu becoming uninhabitable at some point in the future but meanwhile are renewing their indigenous connections to land while there is still time, building cultural and social as well as livelihoods resilience. The Funafala example aligns with the national policy priority in Tuvalu to adapt to climate change *in situ*. Physical fortification of low-lying islands, which is probably necessary to enable communities to remain on indigenous land in the long term, is an issue that needs to be more highly prioritised by Tuvalu's international partners. While the technical and financial challenges to achieving physical fortification are many, local cultural, social and environmental impacts will also need to be carefully considered should large-scale projects such as land reclamation become feasible.

### Policy context

Affected island communities are pursuing a range of mobility strategies to lower their

risk and to increase resilience and adaptive capacity; these strategies are undertaken at the individual, family and community level, and are distinctive in their variety of motivation, direction and outcome. Although much migration policymaking in the region is, for the time being, only broadly taking account of mobility pressures and processes in the climate change context, there are some dedicated policy instruments. For example, the Fijian government has developed national Planned Relocation Guidelines, launched at COP24 in 2018,<sup>3</sup> to guide stakeholders in all stages of the process of relocation in response to climate change. The Fijian government has also set up a Climate Relocation and Displaced People's Trust Fund (launched at the UN General Assembly in 2019): the world's first relocation fund for people who are displaced or who relocate due to climate change impacts. Meanwhile, Vanuatu has established a National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster Displacement, an instrument guiding public authorities and non-governmental actors in implementing sectoral and systems-oriented approaches where displacement occurs. However, moving from broad policy goals and guiding principles to clear directives and implementation arrangements for the Pacific Islands continues to prove challenging. In the meantime, any policy development needs to be based on a sound understanding of the reality of people's mobility strategies and the factors at play in their decision making. Importantly, policy development should recognise that people address climate risk (directly and indirectly) across the multiple places where they live and through the act of being mobile, and should incorporate innovative, flexible mechanisms of support.

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## When the two seas met: preventive and self-managed relocation of the Nova Enseada community in Brazil

Giovanna Gini, Tatiana Mendonça Cardoso and Erika Pires Ramos

**A collaboration between community members and researchers examines how a traditional coastal community in Brazil overcame environmental and legal challenges to manage their own relocation.**

The Ilha do Cardoso, in the state of São Paulo on the south-east coast of Brazil, is home to the Enseada da Baleia community. As Caiçara people, their livelihoods depend on the particular characteristics of where they live, and include itinerant agriculture, artisanal fishing, extractivism, sustainable tourism and crafts activities. Enseada is located between two worlds – the sea and the estuary; this physical location is both part of their traditional identity and a contributor to the community's socio-environmental vulnerability over the years.

The island has long been affected by erosion caused by the destructive force of an ever more unpredictable sea; moreover, its designation in 1962 as a State conservation reserve led to the expulsion

of many Caiçara communities and makes it difficult for those who remain to maintain a sustainable way of life. After several years, the combination of these forces destroyed the place where Enseada was, splitting the island in two and forcing a relocation.

### Decision to relocate

*"We need to start again. Our family is a big tree and needs to go to a new place and plant its roots."*  
 Malaquias Cardoso<sup>1</sup>

According to Enseada members, the effects of erosion began to become critical in the 1990s, prompting them to construct a sea wall. In 2008, the State Prosecutor launched an investigation into the situation and in 2013 the Forestry Foundation – which



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manages the reserve – set up a working group to monitor the area. At the request of the community, the State Public Defender began participating in meetings of the working group to ensure that the right to remain on the island was respected, in light of discussions being held about potential relocation. However, these first early attempts to organise relocation bore no fruit.

Between 2015 and 2016 the erosion process accelerated as a result of strong and frequent tidal surges, reducing the strip of sand that separates the estuary from the open sea from 22 to 12 metres. In October 2016, a very strong tidal undertow reduced the strip to a width of two metres, and it was this situation that urged the community to begin the process of relocation. The total rupture of the strip would leave the community submerged in a matter of hours. Leaving was the only option. The big question was how to summon up the courage to leave their only known home, and much negotiation and consultation within the community were needed to reach agreement.

The criteria for choosing a new area on the island for relocation were security

(from a geographical point of view) and the possibility of maintaining traditional activities and generating sustainable income. At the request of the community, the new location's viability was corroborated in a study by a group of researchers.<sup>2</sup> The personal link with the land was what finally determined its identification: inhabited in the past by the former matriarch who assured the community that it had all essential resources – drinking water, fruit trees and fishing places.

### Difficulties

State and municipal authorities offered two solutions to Enseada members: integration into another community on the island or transfer to the periphery of the nearest city. Both options were rejected by the community, since these would fundamentally change their relationships (within the community and with other communities), their lifestyle, their traditions, and their system of socio-political organisation. Since 2010, the community has been organised according to a system of economic and political feminism based on principles of solidarity, which has been key in the relocation process.

The authorisation for self-organised relocation only came after a difficult process, involving the intervention of the Public Defender's Office, the Prosecutor's Office and the State Secretary of the Environment. Negotiating relocation within a conservation area, especially in a national political environment that questions the rights of traditional communities, is extremely tricky. It was necessary to bring together the different entities involved, obtain the support of public bodies and elicit the support of wider society in order to ensure a constructive dialogue with the Park's management bodies. All this engagement was undertaken by the women of Enseada, who had organised themselves as the Association of Residents of Enseada da Baleia (AMEB, from the Portuguese).

*"People who work don't get tired because everything is for the common good."* Jorge Cardoso

Despite receiving authorisation, there was no State financial assistance – an obstacle that was overcome by the community by

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drawing on their creativity, solidarity, traditions, and a lot of work. AMEB arranged the division of the area of land for houses, establishing a pyramid of priority where the most vulnerable were placed first. Any improvements to the original house structures had to be negotiated with the administrators of the park, since they were not allowed to exceed the original number of square metres of each house being rebuilt in the new location.

### Strategies

To achieve their objectives, the community instituted *mutirões* – a system of collective mobilisation to achieve a common goal, based on free, mutual help. These involved the participation of the extended community (tourists, friends and family from other regions and countries). Through such community networks, they raised funds to cover the cost of construction activities and materials and organised the transport of the materials.

*“Without resources, the test of our resolve begins: you have to buy and transport the materials needed ... all predominantly through using the mutirões system of mobilisation.”* Tatiana Cardoso

Throughout the process, the entire community worked every day to rebuild their homes – construction work that prevented them from pursuing any income-generating activities. Women worked the land, cooked for the community, and soothed the children who missed their hammocks in the trees. The health of many people deteriorated because of the physical and emotional effort required.

The elderly had long been living in fear of relocation but for the younger people it was a time of renewal and the opportunity to seek and use new sources of knowledge. This attracted young people from the community who had emigrated to cities in search of work. The community saw their work as an example of resistance, where traditions combine with the ability to reinvent skills. The community took up residence in the new location, called Nova Enseada, in June 2017. When the force of the sea finally broke through the strip of sand in August

2018, destroying much of the community’s material past, the community had by then successfully created a new beginning.

### New challenges

*“I’m very sad to leave here, but we are forced to by danger.”* Erci Malaquias (former matriarch)

The effects of the climate crisis are continuing to change the dynamics of fishing, water salinity, and the island’s vegetation. Other communities that live on the island are also experiencing changes, and a new era is beginning – that of dialogue between the communities in an attempt to understand what is happening. By continuing the work that has been started, and in the spirit of solidarity that has been built through this long and difficult process of relocation, the islanders are hopeful of devising ways to protect their community before a new crisis arises. They currently plan to continue defending their territory, especially from speculation from the private sector and from a State-backed proposal to privatise the management of the island that threaten the integrity of the territory, life and permanence of the Caiçara communities on Cardoso Island.

### What have we learned?

*“Each community has its way of working, its way of living.”* Antonio Mario Mendonça

The experience of the Nova Enseada community is a successful case of relocation, enabled by years of empowerment and political awareness. However, it is also a case of climate injustice, given their abandonment by the State. Despite greater global awareness around the need for recognition and protection of those affected by the impacts of climate change, many local communities remain invisible for several reasons. In the case of Enseada we identify the following reasons:

**Legal invisibility:** The lack of normative and institutional governance for these contexts meant a series of ad hoc strategies had to be devised by the community. This



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legal invisibility increases community vulnerability and precariousness – exacerbated by emotional and economic stress and by the conflicts between the different parties who are either directly or indirectly involved (neighbouring communities, park management and local authorities).

**Political invisibility:** The strategy of self-identification as a traditional Caiçara population experiencing vulnerability in the face of the forces of nature was essential to their fight to stay in the territory and ensure that their identity, culture and rights were respected by the State. Traditional wisdom combined with academic and scientific studies resulted in the harmonisation of different knowledge systems to facilitate effective and fairer relocation. The use of *mutirões* demonstrated that community-based solutions are less intrusive and more efficient than strategies based on a top-down approach. And from these practices emerged an inter-community capacity to cope with

shared risks and obstacles. However, the lack of political response by the State to the frequent storms and the relentless erosion that forced the relocation demonstrates a disconnect between the narrative in international arenas and local realities.

**Emotional invisibility:** The local authorities gave no consideration to the emotional impacts involved. Members of the Enseada community knew it was crucial not to lose heart during the relocation process and for everyone to feel included in the decision-making process; they also recognised that the relocation process would not be complete until they not only had rebuilt the same physical structures as before but had also learned to understand and adapt to the changing environment and to construct memories linking them to the new place.

*"I go with my broken heart ... it was here that we created ourselves."* Débora Mendonça

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1. All the quotations are from members of the community, and are taken from the following audiovisual recordings: *Tomorrow has come* <http://oamanhaehoje.com.br/eng/>; *Vazantes* <https://curtadoc.tv/curta/cultura-popular/vazantes/>; *Alta da maré expulsa pescadores de vila centenária* [www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrRdQ-8EDs4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrRdQ-8EDs4); *Ajude a Nova Enseada! Ilha do Cardoso* [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qu1b5AhfWic&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qu1b5AhfWic&feature=youtu.be)

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