

May 2015

## An integrated focus

William Lacy Swing

**The key to successfully addressing the challenges of environmental, climatic and natural disasters is integrating migration concerns – including displacement – into all climate change, disaster risk reduction and development policies and frameworks.**

One of every seven people in the world is a migrant and more people are moving today in the context of disasters than ever before, mainly as a result of the concentration of populations and livelihoods in disaster-prone areas. Migrants are often among the worst affected by disasters, being more exposed to hazards, less prepared and consequently less able to cope with and recover from the impacts of disasters.

One of the main challenges in protecting and assisting those displaced by environmental processes and events, and across national borders in particular, is coordination among policy actors and practitioners. Relevant laws and good practices exist, even though approaches vary depending on whether the policies are adopted as part of migration, climate, security or human rights frameworks. Protectionist and institutional blind spots persist, given the fragmented, sometimes partial approach to linking climate change and human mobility in many regional and national policy settings.

Research and operational experience show that moving is neither an inevitable nor necessarily a negative consequence of environmental shocks and change. In fact, a number of efforts are already being made – as part of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation – to prevent environmentally induced displacements; to assist those moving, as well as home and host communities; and to realise the positive potential of moving in the context of disasters and environmental change.

We do not need another new policy framework; we need to integrate migration into the existing frameworks at national, regional and global levels. This will

provide the coherence required for coordinating an effective response.

### Collect and share better data

Data on displacement is essential to understanding vulnerabilities, delivering humanitarian assistance and designing durable solutions. Most of the available data are not disaggregated by the duration and distance of displacement. This makes it difficult to distinguish between the types and address the different effects.

The key to good data is partnership. For its annual reports, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) uses national data to describe displacement caused by natural disasters. National data are complemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). DTM supports national and local partners, and collects information in a series of 'snapshots' to show trends in flows and conditions of displaced persons.

There is a strong need to collect quantitative, longitudinal data on how migration and planned relocation can strengthen adaptive strategies – particularly by identifying the risks they mitigate. Unfortunately, some regions are very under-studied. Although in 2013 almost 9 out of 10 newly displaced persons forced to move by disasters were in Asia,<sup>1</sup> only 26% of global research on migration and the environment – including climate change – was on Asia. Europe (7%) and the Middle East (2%) are also under-studied, despite environmental processes that can trigger population displacement in these regions.

To address the lack of comparable data on displaced populations, the Migration,

May 2015



IOM, in collaboration with the Philippine government's Department of Social Welfare and Development, facilitates a Camp Coordination and Camp Management workshop in January 2013 as part of disaster preparedness planning.

Environment and Climate Change: Evidence for Policy project, funded by the European Union, has developed a cross-country comparative analysis of six pilot countries.<sup>2</sup> The surveys of internal migrants' places of origin and destination inform policy on how human mobility promotes resilience and the ability to cope with environmental change. Lessons identified and good practices will be based on the types of mobility (migration, displacement, planned relocation) rather than the country specificities, thereby providing comparative insights for other countries with similar migrant populations and environmental contexts.

### Enhance partnerships

National Disaster Management Authorities (NDMAs) play a central role in preparing

for, responding to, managing and addressing displacement in disasters, and can greatly reduce risks and vulnerabilities. A key priority should be building strategic and operational partnerships among NDMAs – and between NDMAs and humanitarian actors – to strengthen their capacities before, during and after disasters.

Most countries have disaster response plans but approaches and experiences differ greatly. Partnerships between NDMAs from different parts of the world enable the exchange of experiences, tools and methods that cover all aspects of disaster risk management. International actors' global mandates and partnerships help bring together NDMAs as peers across the world. In addition, international humanitarian

May 2015



IOM/Billy Jamisolanin

actors contribute to planning for and managing displacement by promoting impartiality in assisting and protecting affected populations.

An example of how partnerships can be used to this end is the Comprehensive Guide for Planning Mass Evacuations in Natural Disasters (MEND Guide), published in 2014.<sup>3</sup> Experience showed that there was a lack of relevant tools to guide NDMAs and humanitarian actors in planning mass evacuations. To address this shortcoming, 11 countries and a number of international organisations and academic experts collaborated under IOM's leadership to produce the MEND Guide, which contains a template to use and adapt in developing national evacuation plans.

The growth in the number of migrants around the world emphasises the need to include migrants and mobility in humanitarian response mechanisms. Labour migrants from Latin America, for example, were disproportionately affected by Hurricane Sandy in New York in 2012, and were less likely than non-migrants to be entitled to and able to access relief and recovery assistance. In the 2011 floods that affected Bangkok and one fifth of Thailand, at least 600,000 migrant workers from Myanmar were trapped in affected areas and faced challenges in accessing information and assistance. Assisting these migrant populations required concerted action from the authorities. The state-led Migrants in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) initiative, launched in 2014, aims to develop guiding principles and effective practices to improve the ability of states and other actors to be prepared to alleviate the suffering and protect the dignity and rights of migrants caught in countries during acute crises, whether due to conflict or natural disasters.<sup>4</sup>

### Coherence in policy and practice

Coordination efforts are well underway at the operational, research and policy levels

but to remove obstacles to this coordination, human mobility concerns must be included in strategic frameworks at the international, national and community levels.

At the international level, the Hyogo Framework for Action II, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Sustainable Development Goals and the World Humanitarian Summit all provide opportunities to advance and share knowledge. At the regional level, the Regional Consultative Processes (RCP) on migration offer a privileged space for informal and non-binding state-led discussions on migration. Progress in dialogue and in cooperation initiatives on migration and displacement linked to environmental degradation and climate change are largely the result of RCPs and their consensus-building nature.<sup>5</sup> At the national level, National Adaptation Plans, the UN Development Assistance Framework and local development plans should include migration concerns to support making internal and international migration a positive and safe choice, reducing displacement and drivers of 'desperation migration', and increasing resilience.

It is clear that we need to integrate migration concerns, including displacement, in climate change, disaster risk reduction and development policies at all levels. This is necessary for coherent and comprehensive responses to the changes and crises we all face.

**William Lacy Swing** [ODG@iom.int](mailto:ODG@iom.int) is Director General of the International Organization for Migration. [www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int)

1. IDMC (2014) *Global Estimates 2014: People Displaced by Disasters*. <http://tinyurl.com/IDMC-2014GlobalEstimates>
2. Dominican Republic, Haiti, Kenya, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea and Vietnam. [www.environmentalmigration.iom.int](http://www.environmentalmigration.iom.int)
3. [www.globalccmcluster.org/system/files/publications/MEND\\_download.pdf](http://www.globalccmcluster.org/system/files/publications/MEND_download.pdf)
4. <http://tinyurl.com/IOM-MICIC>
5. IOM (2013) *Regional Inter-State Consultation Mechanisms on Migration: Approaches, Recent Activities and Implications for Global Governance of Migration*, Migration Research Series No 45. <http://tinyurl.com/IOM-ResearchSeries45>