extremely difficult. The complex inter-relationship of vulnerability, exposure and capacity means it will not be possible to accurately predict migration flows likely as a result of climate change, any more than we can accurately ‘predict’ wars. Increased drought in an area of very low population density will not have the same impact as drought in a populated area. Less water may be manageable in a richer area but may lead to the depopulation of a poorer community. The needs of different affected populations will be extremely diverse. It will be important, therefore, to place trend analysis at least within broad timeframes and to differentiate between the humanitarian short-term migration impacts and those that are perhaps more extreme but essentially longer-term in nature.

It is also essential to recognise that it is not, and will not, be possible to isolate climate change as a cause of either migration or displacement. Rather climate change may contribute to environmental and social trends that make it difficult for vulnerable people to survive where they are. Reliable attribution that can link a particular hazard event first to climate change, and then to migration, would be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

We must be careful in considering new categories of ‘environmental migrants’ and ‘climate change migrants’ not to undermine existing rights. There has been an increasing body of work to link international human rights law and customary legal norms on internal displacement to situations of disasters associated with natural hazards. The IASC Guidelines on Human Rights in Natural Disasters are an example of this. Creating new, perhaps overlapping, categories should not undermine hard-won gains in these areas.

Voluntary migration should also not be confused with forced displacement. And, particularly in the context of disasters, short-term migration should not be confused with long-term displacement. It was precisely Bangladesh’s capacity to help three million people to voluntarily move out of harm’s way in the wake of Cyclone Sidr that saved thousands of lives in November 2007. In the context of rapid-onset disasters, even short-term forced displacement is legally sanctioned under certain conditions, as it is precisely the ability to move that saves lives. The vast majority of those displaced return home, and can and should be supported to rebuild in a risk-appropriate manner. These disaster-affected people should probably not be included in calculations of ‘environmentally induced migrants’.

Conclusions
We are currently at a critical moment in time. We know enough to be able to prevent significant migration related to climate change – if we can harness the vision and action that can bring about actual change.

However, policymakers should recognise that over the next two decades one of the major impacts of climate change will be an increase

Asking the right questions

David Stone

What does climate change mean for potential returnees to, for example, South Sudan – a land from which many had fled several decades ago? Will people who have lived in camps for the intervening years be able to resume a productive agricultural livelihood, should they even wish to? Will the crops that they may have traditionally grown still be productive in an area that may now be drier and hotter than before? Has anyone assessed the groundwater availability and recharge capacity? Are the varieties of trees that aid and

development agencies are planting to rehabilitate the environment in former refugee- or IDP-hosting areas the most appropriate for what may be a changing climate? Answers to such questions are largely unknown, not necessarily because people cannot work out the consequences but because – by and large – the planners and managers of relief and development operations are not asking these questions.

More proactive, focused and appropriate assistance is urgently needed for returnee situations, for example where people who are finally leaving camps or camp-like situations are able to return to their former homes and attempt to re-establish their lives and their
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**Conclusions**

We are currently at a critical moment in time. We know enough to be able to prevent significant migration related to climate change – if we can harness the vision and action that can bring about actual change.

However, policymakers should recognise that over the next two decades one of the major impacts of climate change will be an increase in movement of people in response to the effects of climate change.

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Returning Sudanese refugees load trucks at the Bafar transit camp near Yumbe, Uganda, December 2007.
early warning and preparedness for response as key priorities. Current disaster preparedness and response mechanisms will need to be adapted to conflict settings and to address issues such as migration, protection and conflict prevention.

Proactive analysis of the probable costs of increased disaster response activities for international humanitarian actors is also necessary. According to the UN’s humanitarian Financial Tracking Service, funding for natural disaster responses currently accounts for roughly $804 million – 10% of overall humanitarian funding of approximately $7.7 billion. The 2007 UNDP Human Development Report estimates that, as a result of climate change, an additional US$2 billion will be needed annually to strengthen disaster response by 2015 (although this figure is subject to considerable debate). Solutions to key questions such as whether increased funding will be expected to come from humanitarian, development or climate change adaptation funding ‘pots’ are basic but as yet unresolved issues that may have a huge impact on emerging systems to meet increasing need.

While some improvements may be possible, the complexity of both climate modelling and social systems means that clear reliable projections of future trends in key areas such as migration, conflict, urbanisation and financial cost are impossible. We must act on a sound analysis of past trends – and on best guesses. Without improved multi-disciplinary analysis, legal definitions to try to capture the impact of climate change on human lives will be meaningless.

David Stone (david.stone@proactnetwork.org) is Director of ProAct Network, an NGO concerned with the environmental ramifications of human displacement (http://proactnetwork.org).

As agencies scramble to catch up with this issue and be seen to be ‘responsible’, there is a risk that some basic requirements will be overlooked or deliberately set aside. Amidst the flurry of international discussion and activity, the people who are likely to have to bear the brunt of the consequences of climate change hardly figure. They are rarely being consulted as to their situation, their needs or possible options which may well shape their future wellbeing. They are not being enabled or encouraged to enter the global debate. Without improved multi-disciplinary analysis, legal definitions to try to capture the impact of climate change on human lives will be meaningless.

In most situations of this type, people are provided with only the most meagre levels of support – on a one-off basis. Families trying to rebuild their lives and livelihoods are often unable to make ends meet and may have no option but to turn to environmental exploitation as a source of revenue and income.

Many communities in northern Uganda are currently in this situation, being unable to afford fuel and food prices, and with restricted access to safe drinking water. While waiting for their first harvest to mature, people are turning to illegal charcoal making as a means of income, exporting it to South Sudan where market prices are five to six times the local cost in Uganda. The consequences of wholesale land clearance for charcoal making and agriculture must be expected to have longer-term negative consequences for such regions, for the people who may once again live there as well as for the environment.