



Policy Dialogue on Environmentally Induced Migration Brussels, 4 July 2008

Summary Report

Part 1 – Presentations

Introduction – François Gemenne, CEDEM, University of Liege

François Gemenne opened the dialogue and outlined the main goal of the dialogue, which was to exchange information about future policy and research directions on the topic of environmentally induced migration.

Dr. Hassan Bousetta, CEDEM, University of Liege

Dr. Bousetta spoke about CEDEM (Center for Ethnic and Migration Studies) and its main focus, in regards to environmentally induced migration.

Established in 1993, CEDEM works to address issues related to settlement and migration, including their consequences. CEDEM identified the relation between migration and the environment as a key area of concern to their work. Dr. Bousetta also identified the EACH-FOR (Environmental Change and Forced Migration Scenarios) Project as a forum that has allowed CEDEM to establish contacts internationally with researchers from countries working on migration issues (central Asia, Africa, the Pacific region), allowing them to have access to a larger pool of research.

The main issue that Dr. Bousetta identified, relating to environmentally induced migration, is the lack of willingness to do research on an issue that has an impact on everyday life.

Prof. Han Entzinger, Erasmus University Rotterdam

As former Scientific Director of the EACH-FOR Project, Prof. Han Entzinger followed up Dr. Bousetta's speech by providing further information on the Project itself.

The EACH-FOR project is funded by the European Commission, under the Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development. The research team is composed of both social science and environmental science experts, giving the project an interdisciplinary focus, as well as a strong policy connotation. The aim of the EACH-FOR project is to investigate links between migration and environmental change by looking at questions, such as what role does migration play in relation to environmental degradation and vice-versa. The project also seeks to learn what future developments can be expected from the effects of environmentally induced migration and how these effects will be relevant to Europe. One example of this is the question of what cases of environmental degradation

might lead to increased migration to Europe and how these cases will/should affect policy-making in Europe and elsewhere. Better understanding the various conditions that could lead to a number of different migratory situations is why the developing of scenarios is so important; it enables better understanding of the catalysts and results of environmentally induced migration.

In October 2008 the EFMSV (Environment, Forced Migration and Social Vulnerability) conference will be held in Bonn and will seek to share some of the findings of the project so far. The conference will aim to better define the term environmentally induced migration, as there is doubt within some circles as to whether it is a phenomenon on its own, or if it is connected to more traditional forms of migration (political, labour) and how the definition of environmentally induced migration indeed differs from these traditional definitions. The conference will also look at the findings of 22 case studies, which are currently being undertaken around the world. These case studies look at three manifestations of environmentally induced migration: rapid onset migration, caused by extreme events, such as flooding; slow onset migration, caused by gradual change, such as drought; and developmentally induced environmental change, which is migration triggered by developmental change, such as the construction of dams. Each of these case studies includes 15 expert interviews, as well as semi-structured interviews with migrants and a questionnaire: 30 with potential migrants and 30 with those who have already chosen to migrate. The goal of these case studies is to link their findings with previously developed environmental scenarios, which have never before been related to migration.

Prof. Entzinger then went on to share some of the preliminary findings of the project with the audience. Thus far, the research of the EACH-FOR project has indicated that there is a close connection with environmental change, migration and development and that environmental change does lead to migration, or at least to temporary relocation. The different case studies have observed different degrees of public planning and involvement by public authorities, which have an impact on the quality of the planning and relocation within each targeted region, however upcoming modeling and scenario exercises will allow for further conclusions to be drawn on this topic. They also found that most people are not likely to move, especially not far from their homes and that land tenure is an important influence on this decision – if someone does not hold land, they are more likely to relocate to another area. The preliminary findings also show that internal displacements (within a country) are most common, except in a location where international migration previously existed. However, these corridors are not common and are not quickly or easily established. The findings also indicate that the direct impact of environmentally induced migration for Europe is limited, except in the aforementioned situations where migrations pre-exist, such as Egypt, Senegal and likely Morocco. Prof. Entzinger concluded by noting that at the moment there is no immediate threat of large scale migration, but that in the long run, environmental change affects development and could affect the current north-south relationship.

Dr. Philippe Boncour, IOM

Dr. Philippe Boncour expressed the need to revisit the issue, but instead of looking at it from a perspective of forced migration, look at it from a climate change, environment and migration perspective. Only recently have migration and environment specialists begun to work together on finding a common solution to this problem and are only at the beginning.

Dr. Boncour continued by noting that we continue to have a problem with terminology. If the stakeholders concerned have not agreed on common wording, it will not be possible to work together easily on common issues. It is important to take stock of a list of commonly accepted terminology related to environmentally induced migration, which can be marketed and brought forward to the next stage of research and problem solving.

Additional to terminology, the accompanying research is also very important in influencing policy on environmentally induced migration. It is important to determine whether it is climate variability that places a definite role on environmentally induced migration and to identify the tipping point that separates environmental migrants from economic and other traditional migrants. It is also important to identify cases where people choose to move as a result of poor living conditions, as opposed to those who are forced to move. In this situation, the issue of protection assistance as a policy will likely arise. It is also crucial to refine current estimates of environmentally induced migration, as current numbers predict between 25 million and 1 billion incidences of environmental migration by 2050, which demonstrates a variation in estimates by a factor of 40.

Dr. Boncour stressed that a lack of reliable data is an obstacle to well informed policy-making and joint action in the field. Research is deeply needed to fill the holes in our current knowledge. He further stressed that we all need to support research (IOM (International Organization for Migration), UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), UNU-EHS (United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security), and the Munich Re Foundation have already commenced collaboration on this matter), as it is crucial that the data we have be improved to allow policymakers to make the proper decision.

Environmentally induced migration will largely remain internal, or limited to neighbouring countries. However, Dr. Boncour also pointed out that lasting migration from climate change could become a threat, as continued migration could cause conflict over scarce resources, which would lead to an increasing cycle of conflict and migration. This could have a strong influence on policy needs and that it is important to incorporate climate change and migration into conflict prevention models, as this phenomenon could lead to issues of national and regional security in the future.

With regards to the methodology of the required research, Dr. Boncour emphasised the importance of avoiding the 'hot spot' approach (focusing on areas that appear to be most likely to experience environmentally induced migration). Incidences of unforeseen extreme change, coupled slow change events, possibly caused by climate change, make it impossible to accurately identify certain future hot spots. For example, the WMO (World Meteorological Organization) predictions did not and could not predict the cyclone that recently devastated parts of Myanmar. Additionally, it is even more difficult to identify places with high risks of extreme events and gradual changes that simultaneously affect the lives of residents.

Dr. Boncour also wished to point out that not all incidences of environmentally induced migration should be viewed as negative. At all stages, migration can be a logical, legitimate and useful strategy. Migration can alleviate the burden on a system and diversify resources and risk. Migrants can often act to help their former homes in a number of ways. Income from their new location can be sent back in the form of remittances, which can be used to improve irrigation, diversify crops and improve agricultural practices in the region. It can also alleviate the stress placed on the region, which could improve conditions for those who were unable to, or chose to remain. In this way, migration can be used as an adaptation strategy, not only for the migrants, but for the area they left behind.

Dr. Boncour also pointed out that it is difficult to receive financial commitment over a long period of time. He stressed that the problem should be looked at as a continuum and that it is best to be proactive and start at the beginning and only end when migration is the only choice which remains. Dr. Boncour finally made a note of the upcoming UNFCCC COP (Conference of the Parties) meetings in Poznan, Poland and Copenhagen, Denmark, to which he posed the question of how the international community could discuss climate change in the context of communities without talking about people and how they are affected. He suggested that at the very least a side event be organised in tandem with these meetings to raise awareness on the issue of environmentally induced migration.

Prof. Roger Zetter, Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University

As the Director of the Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) at the University of Oxford, Prof. Zetter began by discussing the work of RSC. The Refugee Studies Centre has adopted a new research strategy incorporating a number of thematic areas under the umbrella title of Conflict, Forced, Displacement and Protection in a Changing World. This strategy engages the currently very active policy discourse on protection built around the 1951 Geneva Convention and Protocol, the 1998 Guiding Principles on IDPs, and the more recent International Commission 'R2P'. The research strategy aims to deliver policy relevant research supported by a funding agreement with the Department for International Development -UK.

One of the thematic priorities of the research strategy is to explore environmentally induced forced displacement and specifically issues of protection and human security. Currently, principles of protection of displaced people are already established under the 1951 Geneva Convention and 1967 Protocol; but Professor Zetter argued that calls to extend the Convention to incorporate 'environmental refugees' were deeply problematic. However this highlighted the significant gap in the protection norms and instruments for those who are environmentally displaced and the challenge of linking protection principles to those displaced in this new context. If one starts at this point, there are a number of questions that need to be addressed:

- Is there a case for developing the capacity for a domestic and international apparatus for legal and human rights? The answer to this question is yes, but it is still problematic, specifically related to the legal framework and current political willingness.
- To what extent can these frameworks be applied to these scenarios?
- What about the rights of those who either choose to stay behind or do not migrate? Are they protected to the same extent as those who do choose to migrate?

Taking these questions into consideration, there are a number of challenges and opportunities that must be addressed if protection and human security norms and instruments are to be extended to those displaced by climate induced environmental factors:

- The multi-causality of environmental displacement – only in extreme situations is environment involved.
- How can we protect people if there is not a clear cause of displacement, as the concept is predicated under definable cause for protection.
- Can we say ecosystem and extreme weather events are a violation of human rights?
- How can we establish the protection machinery for permanent resettlement?

In the case of environmentally-induced displacement, there are two long term scenarios; For those who migrate displacement will be caused by extreme events or by incremental ecosystem degradation. Some may return 'home', but the majority will permanently resettle. The latter will likely be on a regional scale, as large scale international environmental migration is expected to be a small part of the process. But substantial numbers will stay and find ways to adapt. This may be a positive strategy to coping with this change, as it can initiate a new development dynamic for those who are left behind. Protection machinery must be developed not just for those who are forced to migrate – the obvious case – but also for those who stay behind.

The 1951 Refugee Convention established the basis for the protection of refugees, but is inappropriate for these new forms of migration and displacement. Instead Professor Zetter

suggested the 1998 Guiding Principles on IDPs offered a better model of protection for environmentally displaced peoples. Professor Zetter outlined a range of international conventions and instruments which afforded rights-based norms which could provide a baseline for international and domestic protection laws and instruments essential to protect vulnerable populations, both those that migrate and stay.

Prof. Zetter also looked at the potential for policymaking on the international stage, stressing that inter-agency co-ordination mechanisms are crucial in developing these proposals. This will help to locate environmentally induced migration within a wider discourse relating to human security and governance structures whilst recognising the multi-causal processes of environmental displacement. Such an approach also provides a base line to support capacity building of civil society organisations and the development of advocacy tools to protect the rights of those impacted by climate induced environmental processes.

Whilst accepting the reluctance of many governments to adopt new protection norms, still less new legal instruments, he advocated that the European Commission should play a strong role in promoting debate on the growing problem of environmental displacement. Prof. Zetter added that even without an inter-governmental dialogue, there is a role for affected countries themselves to develop their own mechanisms. In one way, this would be beneficial, as it would allow them to develop country specific community focused needs.

Prof. Janos Bogardi, UNU-EHS

As Director of the UNU-EHS, Prof. Janos Bogardi provided an overview of UNU-EHS. UNU-EHS was established 5 years ago in Bonn and aims to explore the issue of human security within an environmental context, where the stressor is not a verified political aggressor but the condition of the environmental system of a region. It also looks at the possibility that incidences of environmentally induced migration may be exacerbated as a result of human error. It also looks at the push factors that play a role in the decision to, or not to migrate. They also seek to filter out the environmental signal, as it is still not easy to confidently identify environmentally induced migration. Finally, UNU-EHS would like to better the terminology for environmentally induced migration.

To help address these problems, UNU-EHS established 8 questions to look at, including 4 core questions:

- Who is migrating? Men, women, all communities? If only men are migrating, is the reasoning positive? What is the anthropology to appoint a young male to migrate to Europe?
- From where are they migrating? This can not be easily guessed as it is difficult to foresee the push factors that lead to environmentally induced migration.
- To where are they migrating? What are the pull factors? Peace? Economics?
- How many are migrating? Within their own countries or to another? These figures are difficult to accurately estimate, because this process can be heavily criminalised, such as in the case of human trafficking.

Prof. Bogardi stressed that we need to find immediate answers to these questions to provide a better case to policymakers. The topic of environmentally induced migration is currently facing policy discrimination, because European policymakers are namely interested in international migration and how to limit the number of migrants, not how to deal with the root cause. Overall, there is a negative view of migration, which has to be addressed, especially as it should be noted that many migrants would ultimately like to return to their home country or region and that migration is not only one way, but cyclical.

Prof. Bogardi also mentioned that it was mainly men that come to the Mediterranean and mostly for political reasons, and that women come because of issues with violence. This

could be a point of triggering new reasons of those who migrate, so it is important to be cognisant of how to approach this issue.

Prof. Bogardi suggested a 5 pronged approach to solving the problem, founded on science, awareness, legislation, humanitarian aid and institutions:

- *Science*: There is a need to put in place programmes to allow a better understanding of the cause-effect mechanisms between environmental degradation and forced migration. In addition, there is a need to develop proper definitions of environmentally motivated and/or forced migration, environmental migrants/refugees.
- *Awareness*: It is important to raise public and political awareness of the issue and its environmental, social, economic and political dimensions. This step is particularly timely and important as the debate on migration is high on the agenda of many countries.
- *Legislation*: There is a need for a framework of recognition of environmentally induced migrants, displaced persons, environmental migrants/refugees such as in a separate Convention or in parts of Intergovernmental Environmental Treaties. It is not suggested that the 1951 Convention on refugees be amended. Adding a new category of refugees to that convention could weaken the case of categories of refugees already covered by it.
- *Humanitarian Aid*: There is a need to empower the relevant entities in the United Nations system and other major humanitarian assistance organisations to provide aid to environmentally displaced persons, environmental migrants/refugees, particularly when considering the displacement of entire communities. This can best be achieved if there is an international mechanism in place recognising this category of individuals.
- *Institutions*: Concepts need to be devised and institutions reinforced or created in order to be able to assist the flux of forced environmental migrants, both at the international and national levels.

On a positive note, Prof. Bogardi stated that help does occur in affected areas without being recognised and that the political component of any research and assistance should be drained, so as to be able to monitor better, from a more human perspective. Prof. Bogardi reassured that the idea is not to create a new scientific discipline and that the objective of the recent working group in April was to inject the concept of environment into the ongoing migration dialogue and debates, and vice-versa.

Prof. Bogardi ended by posing a question regarding the upcoming EFMSV conference in October – how can we move from this point further?

Part 2 – Discussion Session

Introduction

Dr. Angela Liberatore, European Commission, Directorate General Research

To open the policy dialogue, Dr. Liberatore spoke briefly on the current position of the Directorate General of Research for the European Commission in relation to environmentally induced migration. At the present time, they are partly anticipating recommendations on the topic and are trying to foster relationships between researchers working on environmental change and climate change, with those working on conflict prevention and human rights. They are also considering the importance of the regional dimension of the issue, as well as, or on top of the global dimension.

Further, Dr. Liberatore added some of her own personal reflections on the issue of environmentally induced migration. Dr. Liberatore referenced the recent paper from the European Commission, linking climate change and security issues and its indication that climate change acts as a key environmental factor in the lead up to incidences of environmentally induced migration. The linking of climate change and migration with security is an extremely important and sensitive issue, namely in the definition of security. A number of questions spring from this issue:

- What type of security?
- Who's security?
- Human security?
- International security?
- How high are the stakes?
- Whose stakes are at stake?

Dr. Liberatore concluded that we need more analysis in terms of concepts, evidence, data, methodologies and terminologies. We should also be careful to avoid manipulation, such as using the issue to strengthen security within a country possibly targeted for migration. We need to better understand the whys, hows and whos of the issue. We also need to determine how to devise options for tackling these issues. Finally, she noted that environmentally induced migration is not a completely forgotten issue when we discuss other topics, such as adaptation strategies.

Discussion Points Raised Amongst Policy Dialogue Participants:

- It is important to make a clear distinction between migration caused by climate change (mostly migration within a country) compared to rapid environmental change. This would help to better orient political response, as disaster risk reduction strategies differ entirely from adaptation strategies.
- Not all catastrophes are induced by climate change. It is also important to be careful in treating environmental migration as a refugee status, as that is mixing up concepts. It is important to be careful that conventions protecting refugees do not get watered down in the process.
- There is a false division between human security and other security because within foreign policy there is no real understanding of what human security is (outside of the UNDP definition). There are many possible approaches to human security, so it is important to take this lack of common understanding into account when addressing the issue of environmentally induced migration.
- Risk prevention, risk assessment and risk management are definitely linked to the issue of environmentally induced migration. We should also focus on helping

countries to diversify their economies, so that climate change does not have as negative an effect.

- Environmentally induced migration is not a new phenomenon, although we do have more intense and frequent impacts of climate change. To what extent do we draw on instances of the past? What is new?
- Migration has always had an environmental component, but even in comparison to the past, there are some substantial differences. The scale is now much larger. There are now many more people involved and in the most vulnerable countries population pressure has increased significantly.
- The world is now, more so than 30 years ago, a rapidly changing economic environment, in which these migrants are moving. We're seeing a more rapidly changing environment on a global level. This could be the tipping point. The EACH-FOR project is working on summing up the research on a global level.
- It would be prudent to avoid spending too much effort on defining terminology for environmentally induced migration and figure out what should be done with/for these migratory populations. Are areas being prepared where displaced people can be received and furthermore, is a country morally obliged to receive them?
- The problem is that there are so few international arrangements that can be used for the situation of environmentally induced migration, only ones for economic migration, which are very weak because they are strongly influenced by countries which often receive the migrants. There are also human rights agreements, but they are general political agreements. Environmentally induced migration is composed of political and human rights factors.
- The current list of relevant existing norms and instruments could be completed with EU instruments. EU instruments could at least partly be used to offer protection to those experiencing this issue.
- Some of the instruments needed to cope with the issue are available, but not enough. It took 14 years for a treaty on the rights of labour migrants to be implemented, but no EU members have ratified the agreement.
- It is not apparent that there is currently any agreement in any part of the world which foresees this issue and welcomes people from a culturally similar, regional area, in the case of environmentally induced migration. For the time being, it does not seem as though there is much political will to make a precedent by enacting such an agreement, so professional researchers are restricted by the lack of willingness to move forward.
- People with past experience with environmentally induced migration should be used as a resource when coming up with solutions.
- There is currently a window of high policy attention to this group of issues and it is important to better link previously done research and target future research to guide this policy.
- For environmentally induced migration, a very large policy response across the board is not necessary. Research should be focused in such a targeted way as well by finding new issues and questions to research. We have to be clear what is new and what we are not yet dealing with and how to have a better response to fragile states and making sure that they can cater to their own population.
- There is still some need for research, but it is very targeted research that is required. Research needs to focus on what is new (risk locations, magnitude), and what are specific identifiers of environmentally induced migration.

- More comparative research is needed to better understand common drivers of migration or issues as they may arise.
- It is crucial to increase effort being put into scenario development. Only when we integrate these environmental scenarios can we understand the various paths the global environment might take, then we can start working on strategy and policy. An integrated approach within research and policy development is needed.
- It is important to distinguish a diversity of situations, from short term to 2050, although more pressing issues are generally of stronger importance to governments, compared to something that future generations will have to deal with.
- Researchers need feedback from policymakers regarding what specific information they need, as it is very easy for researchers to get into too great detail on a topic.
- If pre-established migration channels might facilitate environmentally induced migration – what does this mean in terms of regional co-operation?
- Environmentally induced migration is not directly linked with European employment and social policy, as it is more of a development issue, but more focus on emergency and longer term environmental degradation processes is needed in this area, as we need to understand how this phenomenon will affect the employment and social situation within the EU. This might encourage governments to be more generous in their policies.
- In terms of developing policy about environmentally induced migration, rapid and gradual environmental changes are quite different scenarios and would be better addressed separately.
- It is important to inform ourselves [within the EU] about environmentally induced migration, but it is far more important to inform the people in affected countries, so that their policymakers can also develop policy around these issues.
- UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) and the IOM are developing an alliance on development and migration, which is designed to develop and disseminate a broad understanding about the nexus on environmentally induced migration and to try and apply this understanding in an integrated manner into international policies and action plans.
- Greece will take chairmanship of OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) next year and they have indicated that migration will be the main topic in the economic and environmental dimension of the OSCE's work, although to what degree the environment will play a role has yet to be decided. This follows the Spanish Chairmanship, where 56 member states signed a document recognising, in part, that migration is a security issue that can be caused by environmental degradation.

UNU-EHS is responsible for the content of this report.

Environmental Migration, Social Vulnerability and
Adaptation Section
United Nations University Institute for Environment and
Human Security (UNU-EHS)
UN Campus
Hermann-Ehlers-Str. 10
53113 Bonn
Germany
info@ehs.unu.edu
<http://www.ehs.unu.edu>

Center for Ethnic and Migration Studies
Institut des Sciences humaines et sociales
Université de Liège
Bâtiment 31 - Boîte 45 - 7
Boulevard du Rectorat
4000 Liege
Belgium
<http://www.cedem.ulg.ac.be>