

# E-Policy Brief Nr. 7:

## Climate Change & African Migration

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Africa-Europe Platform



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## Introduction

This is the seventh edition of a series of e-Policy Briefs published by the Africa-Europe Platform, a European-wide network of African diaspora organisations. The main purpose of these e-Policy Briefs is to enhance knowledge among diaspora organisations on key migration and development (M&D) policy issues as well as to raise policymakers' awareness on the views of African diaspora organisations on key M&D policy issues.

In this edition, attention will be paid to the topic of climate change and its linkages to migration and development. Climate change is an urgent and pressing phenomenon which is the subject of discussion in numerous scientific publications, newspapers, conferences, and so on. Despite the fact that climate change is the subject of many studies, scientists continue to disagree with each other on the causes and effects, short- and long-term, of this phenomenon.

Although climate change has been extensively studied and discussed, the nexus of climate change and migration is rarely debated. In this e-policy brief we will discuss the link between climate change and migration, with a special focus on Africa. We will examine its complexity when looking at the many layers it consists of, such as the various push/pull factors, its relation to conflict and instability, the linkages with poverty and food insecurity, etc. To conclude we will describe several policy recommendations on global level and on EU level in particular.

If you are interested in contributing to upcoming e-Policy Briefs or if you would like to share your ideas for future topics, please contact us by e-mail: [info@aeplatform.org](mailto:info@aeplatform.org).

## 2. Climate change: characteristics and their effects on human movement

There are various theories on how climate change is going to affect peoples' movements around the world in the future. These impacts may include rises in sea level causing flooding, more extreme weather events such as storms, an increase in temperatures and the disruption of water cycles causing insecurity in drinking water and food.<sup>1</sup>

### *Rise in Sea level*

Predictions show a sea level rise between 170 millimetres and 290 millimetres in the next 40 years due to global warming.<sup>2</sup> Some areas will be much more severely affected than others, such as Lamu and Pemba Island. Several high densely populated countries are at greatest risk with regard to flooding caused by rises in sea levels. These countries will see the majority of affected people migrate internally, or otherwise seek a safe home in neighboring countries. Africa is not the most exposed region in the world compared with East, South east and South Asia, but a rise in sea-level still poses a significant threat. With a large and growing population in the coastal zone and a low adaptive capacity due to low national wealth and other development indicators, most African countries appear to be highly vulnerable. Without adaptation, the

<sup>1</sup><http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Schools/Teaching+re+sources/Key+Stage+3+resources/The+geography+of+science/Climate+change+global+impacts.htm>.

Retrieved: 30-09-2013.

<sup>2</sup> IOM Research Series No. 31, International Organisation for Migration, Geneva, November 2008. [www.iisd.org/pdf/2008/migration\\_climate](http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2008/migration_climate).





physical, human and financial impacts will be significant.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Increasing temperatures*

Temperature rises are likely to seriously endanger agricultural production in a number of countries where many people already live a very precarious existence. This is because in large parts of the world the temperature for optimal crop production is already at its maximum. When it becomes warmer, crop production is likely to be reduced significantly.<sup>4</sup> African countries, particularly those of the Sahel, will be affected by this impact of climate change. It is possible that people will migrate internally from rural to urban areas because their livelihoods are not longer enough to sustain them. It is unlikely however that large-scale migration towards more productive areas in the global north would occur, since these areas have such a high productivity there are not many jobs available.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Hurricanes, Typhoons, Tornadoes and other storms*

Storms may be the most visible effect of climate change. For example, Hurricane Mitch killed more than 20.000 people and left about 2.7 million homeless. The relation between storms and other extreme weather events and

migration is obvious, but is related to temporal rather than permanent migration. Several factors determine the decision to migrate permanently, such as: effectiveness of emergency relief, destruction of income producing opportunities, and investments that have survived the storm (houses, places of business or equipment). In addition, wealthier people are less likely to migrate than those who are poorer, because they have more assets with which to stay and rebuild their lives.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Disruption of the hydrological cycle*

Climate change will have all sorts of effects on the hydrological cycle. For example, different patterns of rainfall can cause both droughts and floods, and glacial melting increases the amount of water flowing from rivers to the sea. An impact resulting from this is, again, reduced food security. Although one would expect that migration increases when living conditions are endangered by droughts and floods, this is not always the case.<sup>7</sup> However, long-term food insecurity, often associated with disruption of the hydrological cycle, is probably the most predictable factor behind migration associated with climate change. It is difficult to separate climate change from other factors that motivate people to migrate.

<sup>3</sup> Sea-Level Rise and Impacts in Africa, 2000 to 2100. April 2011.

<http://www.unep.org/climatechange/adaptation/Portals/133/documents/AdaptCost/9%20Sea%20Level%20Rise%20Report%20Jan%202010.pdf>.

Retrieved 30-09-2013.

<sup>4</sup> [www.cgdev.org/files/14425\\_file\\_CGD\\_Global\\_War\\_ming\\_Final.pdf](http://www.cgdev.org/files/14425_file_CGD_Global_War_ming_Final.pdf).

CGD Brief September 2007. Retrieved 27-09-2013

<sup>5</sup> MPI. Climate Change and Migration Dynamics. Newland. September 2011.

<sup>6</sup> MPI. Climate Change and Migration Dynamics. Newland. September 2011.

<sup>7</sup> [www.springerlink.com/content/u5564mt67rn28220](http://www.springerlink.com/content/u5564mt67rn28220).

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.0361-3666.2005.00298.x/abstract>





### 3. Climate change in Africa

Development all over the world is likely to be threatened by climate change. In particular, Africa is vulnerable to the negative impact of climate change for a number of reasons. For example, Africa depends greatly on natural resources. Also, poor infrastructure and a lack of institutional capacity to respond and mitigate environmental disasters make Africa more vulnerable to these. The effects of climate change in Africa have largely been manifested in changes in rainfall, accelerated deforestation and desertification. In 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicted for example an estimated 10 percent decrease in annual rainfall in the Sahel by 2050.<sup>8</sup> Most people in this area depend greatly on rain for their agriculture and cattle.

An aggravating factor is land degradation. The negative impact of land degradation in Africa is very visible when looking at the stagnation of food production leading to increasing levels of poverty. Though degradation is largely a consequence of direct human intervention, severe patterns of weather such as recurring droughts have had a dramatic effect on the speed of land degradation.<sup>9</sup> UNEP has even estimated that more than a quarter of the African continent is in danger of becoming useless for cultivation due to degradation.<sup>10</sup> This is alarming since agriculture is the backbone of most African economies,

accounting on average for more than a third of GDP and more than three-quarters of employment.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to this, massive deforestation and desertification, which are considered one of the world's most troubling environmental problems, can be seen across Africa. The deforestation process claims a lot of farming land and is therefore also a considerable push factor for migration of farmers from the countryside to cities in different African countries. Desertification, also causes huge problems in Africa as two-thirds of the continent is desert or drylands, and 74 per cent of its agricultural drylands are already seriously or moderately degraded.

In the African context, climate change remains a key development challenge. The reason for this is that poverty and the high number of people in Africa living under the poverty line makes people especially vulnerable to environmental changes. The effects of climate change will have a negative impact on millions of poor people in Africa. It could also undermine and reverse much of the progress that has been achieved in the last two decades. And this could result in slowing development and pushing more people below the poverty line. Rapid population growth is one of the biggest obstacles in fighting extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, as the health and educational system as well as the food situation already are under considerable strain.

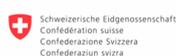
Climate change will have negative consequences for livelihoods, public health,

<sup>8</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2007. Climate Change 2007. Impact, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Working Group II Contribution to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report. Geneva: IPCC.

<sup>9</sup> [www.fao.org/docrep/x5318e/x5318e02.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/x5318e/x5318e02.htm).

<sup>10</sup> [www.unep.org/dewa/africa/publications/aeo.../174.ht](http://www.unep.org/dewa/africa/publications/aeo.../174.ht)

<sup>11</sup> ADPC & GermanWatch. Paper on: 'Development, climate change and African migration: an African diaspora perspective', 24 July 2013.





food security, and water availability. This in turn will have an impact on human mobility. A lot of discussion is going on regarding these potential patterns of migration. However, Africa is not alone in this regard as climate change-induced migration is likely to become one of the key challenges of the 21st century, which must be addressed to ensure human security and sustainable development. Changing environmental conditions are therefore likely to add another layer of complexity to many challenges that Africa is already grappling with. For instance, it is predicted that extreme weather events such as droughts and floods will increase the number of humanitarian crises in certain parts of the continent that are least able to cope, such as those already affected by poverty or prone to conflict.<sup>12</sup>

Another layer in this complex process is the fact that climate change and the migration that is expected to result from this can also cause conflict or worsen existing instability in certain conflict-prone areas of the continent. In short, the nexus between migration and conflict can be seen as another layer of complexity in this regard that can aggravate social stability in different parts of Africa if the effects of climate change are not effectively addressed.<sup>13</sup>

It can be concluded that the effects of climate change in Africa, as in the past and in the future, are complex as they are manifested in

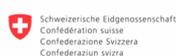
different challenges, and can be difficult to predict. Effectively addressing such multiple challenges will not be easy due to the limited capacity of the continent to adapt and mitigate crises like these.

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<sup>12</sup> Climate change, rainfall, and social conflict in Africa. C. Hendrix. Journal of Peace Research. January 2012.

<http://jpr.sagepub.com/content/49/1/35.short>

<sup>13</sup> ADPC & GermanWatch. Paper on: 'Development, climate change and African migration: an African diaspora perspective', 24 July 2013.



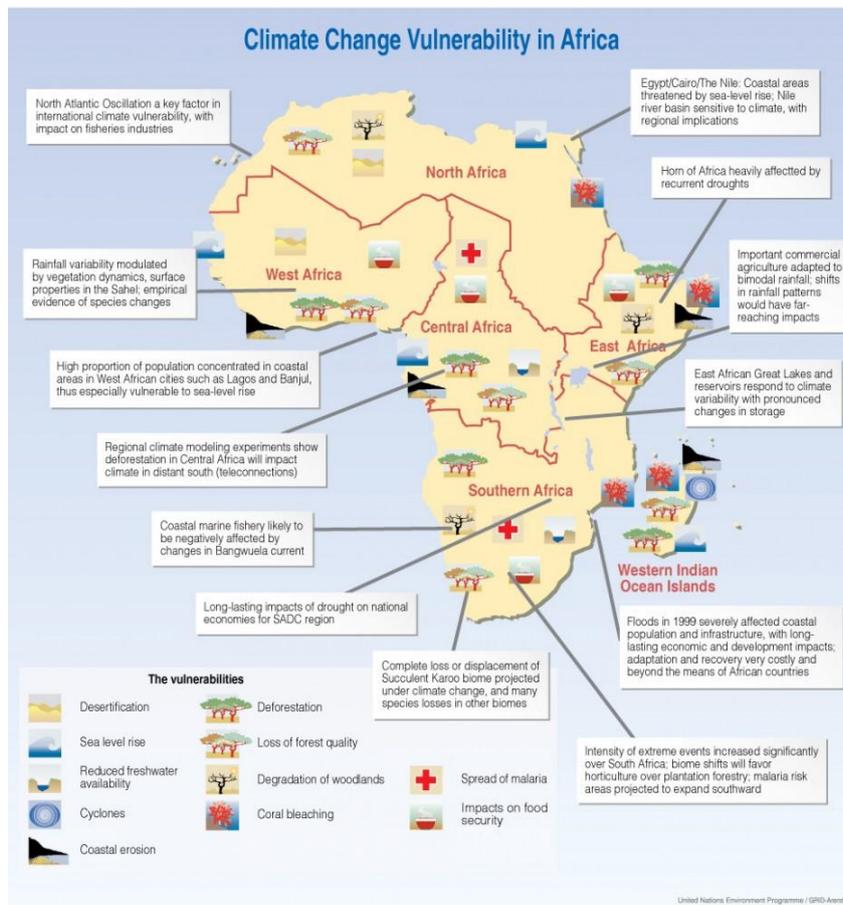


Fig. 1: Climate Change Vulnerability in Africa

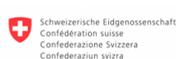
Source: UNEP GRIDA

#### 4. Climate change and migration

Given the complexity of the relationship between climate change and migration, it is very difficult to make a precise assessment of the different causes and effects. Amongst policy makers there is a consensus that action has to be taken in order to address changes in climate that can cause problems all over the world, and that something has to be done. However, there is much less agreement on what kind of action is required, where, with whom and when. This also as a result of the fact that hard evidence on the causes and effects

of climate change on migration is difficult to come by. One commonly expressed fear is that climate change will trigger mass migration to safer places. Estimates of how many people would migrate have come from Norman Myers, who predicted a possible 25 million 'environmental refugees' in the 1990s, and even suggests a number as large as 200 million in 2050<sup>14</sup>. However, several experts

<sup>14</sup> Norman Myers, 'Environmental Refugees', Population and the Environment 19 (1997): 167-82.





have criticized these figures and consider them inaccurate<sup>15</sup>.

As noted above, recent research shows that a relatively direct link between migration and environmental change cannot be made easily. Evidence shows that the nexus between migration and environmental change is complex and multi-causal<sup>16</sup>. For example, migration resulting from environmental change will be largely concentrated in areas outside of Europe. Contrary to popular opinion, increased migration to Europe as a direct result of environmental change is very unlikely.

Other push factors, such as economic inequality, are likely to go hand in hand with environmental change to make people migrate. People will therefore be more likely to move within regions to urban areas, than between different regions. This results in an unfavourable migration flow *towards* environmental hazards instead of *away* from it. For example, people are pulled by economic reasons to coastal cities – where there is enough work, but these coastal places are considered high risk areas for environmental change.

## 5. Contemporary discourse on climate change and migration

Current debates on climate change and migration are rarely conducted together, but more as separate issues. The climate change agenda is to a large extent led by certain governments in collaboration with multilateral

institutions such as the World Bank.<sup>17</sup> Again, also here, the linkages between climate change, migration and development issues are not part of the agenda.

In this regard, it is important that constituencies at grassroots levels as well as internationally are becoming increasingly active about these linkages between climate change, development and migration. It is also crucial to facilitate the creation of inclusive multi-stakeholder discussions at the national and international levels, involving key civil society institutions, research centres, NGOs, the private sector and local and municipal authorities. The promotion of inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogues at national and sub-national levels will effectively contribute to the debate on climate change, development and migration from different perspectives. It will help to raise public awareness and inform both policy and practice regarding the growing concerns about the impact of climate change on the economic livelihood and the well-being of society.<sup>18</sup>

The same kind of efforts need to be undertaken in Europe and in Africa in order to build a critical constituency that transcends the borders of one continent. This can also help build strategic alliances for lobbying, campaigning and advocacy purposes in both continents, geared at increasing policy and broader public awareness for the hazards of climate change on development and migration in Africa.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-23899195>

<sup>16</sup> MPI Europe Policy Brief Series Issue no. 2, Migration and environmental change: assessing the developing European approach. May 2013.

<sup>17</sup> See the World Bank publication on Making Development Climate Resilient in Sub-Saharan Africa (2009).

<sup>18</sup> ADPC & GermanWatch. Paper on: 'Development, climate change and African migration: an African diaspora perspective', 24 July 2013.





## 6. Policy responses and recommendations

### European Union

In line with the general lack of debate on the nexus between climate change and migration, there has also been little discussion in the European Union on this subject and also very limited policy development. In 2007 the EC made its first remarks on the nexus of climate change and migration in a 'green paper'. In 2008, High Representative Javier Solana submitted a paper titled, 'Climate Change and International Security'. In this paper the focus is placed on migration as a result of climate change, which in turn is associated with increasing instability and even war.<sup>19</sup> As part of the Stockholm Programme (2010-2015) the EC is due to produce a paper on climate change and migration, but this work was subsumed into the broader 'Global Approach on Migration and Mobility' (GAMM), with a risk of paying it insufficient attention as a result.

With regard to the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership and Action Plan (JAES) that were adopted in Lisbon in 2007, climate change and migration are one of eight themes.<sup>20</sup> In JAES, climate change and migration are again not discussed together but as separate topics.

<sup>19</sup> EC. Climate Change and International Security.

<sup>20</sup> This partnership, which is often referred to as a 'people-centred partnership', was launched with the purpose of scaling up political dialogue between the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) in the interest of building a solid and sustainable continent-to-continent partnership based on shared values, interests, and strategic objectives. The goal of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership is to reinvigorate and elevate cooperation between Africa and Europe in the fight against poverty, injustice, human rights violations, lawlessness, insecurity, and political and social instability.

Nevertheless, JAES recognises climate change as an important phenomenon that requires specific policy attention within the Africa-EU cooperation framework in the near future. One of the key activities to translate this policy commitment into practical action is to set up national/regional adaptation plans for climate change, and support the implementation of ClimDev Africa.<sup>21</sup>

### Global responses

African countries account for only approximately 5% of world emissions, suggesting that climate variations due to human activity are nearly exclusively driven by the developed world. This externality thus imposed on African countries requires international attention based on criteria of equity and fairness.<sup>22</sup> Several policy responses have been raised at a global level:

- The most important response is the **strengthening of adaptive capacity of affected populations**, including agricultural diversification and investment in disaster risk reduction and early-warning systems, including speedy and efficient humanitarian responses.
- The **removal of barriers to internal mobility** could play a role in facilitating the diversification of rural livelihoods.
- Attention needs to be paid to **urban planning, service provision and human**

<sup>21</sup> [www.europafrica.org](http://www.europafrica.org)

<sup>22</sup> The Impact of Climate Variations on Migration in sub-Saharan Africa. Marchiori, Maystadt & Schumacher. January 2011. <https://www.gwu.edu/~iiep/adaptation/docs/Maystadt,%20the%20Impact%20of%20Climate%20Variations%20on%20Migration%20in%20sub-Saharan%20Africa.pdf>. Retrieved 20-09-2013





**security** in areas where people are already migrating – especially in slum areas of major coastal cities where population growth is likely to accelerate.

- Support could be provided to initiatives to **harness tensions and encourage peaceful cohabitation** of both internal and intra-regional migrants and local populations.
- There is a need for further **discussion on the responsibility to protect those who may be forced to leave their homes**, and especially their countries, due to climate changes.
- There is a need for **further research evidence** on the role of migration in adapting to climate change in particular national and regional contexts, and on the impact of climate change on “pull” factors of migration in destination areas.<sup>23</sup>
- Another priority is the **building of strategic partnerships** at different societal and policy levels.
- It is important to **incorporate migration and climate change** into crisis-coordination policy frameworks at regional and international levels and into key development strategies (such as Poverty Reduction Strategies, GAMM, MDGs, etc.)<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Demographics and climate change: future trends and their policy implications for Migration. Sussex Centre for Migration Research, January 2008.

[http://www.unitar.org/ny/sites/unitar.org.ny/files/Dfid%20report\\_summary%2013%20Jan.pdf](http://www.unitar.org/ny/sites/unitar.org.ny/files/Dfid%20report_summary%2013%20Jan.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> MPI Europe Policy Brief Series Issue no. 2, Migration and environmental change: assessing the developing European approach. May 2013.

