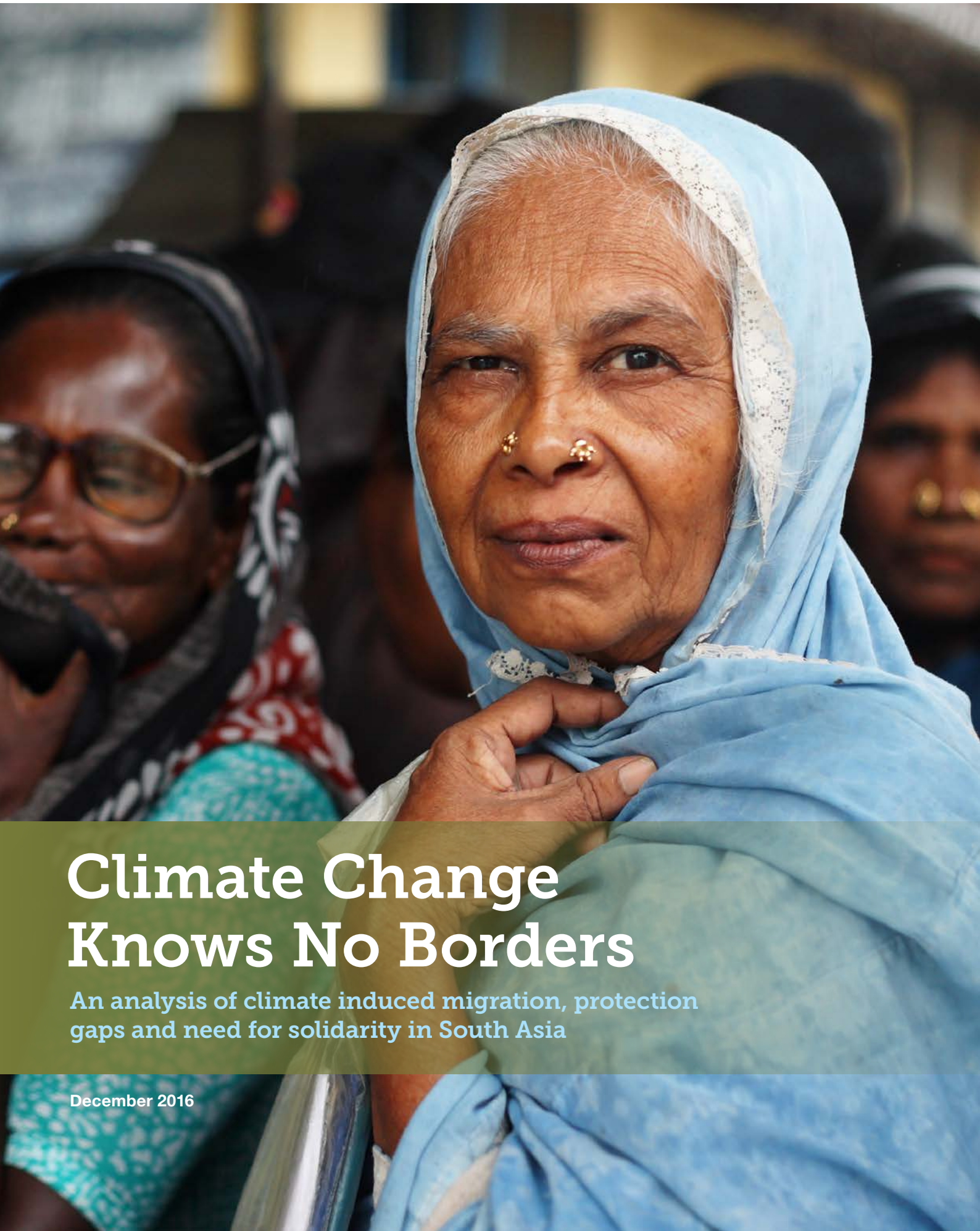

Climate Change Knows No Borders

An analysis of climate induced migration, protection gaps and need for solidarity in South Asia

December 2016

Ashkay Pradan stands in his paddy field in Odisha, India, August 2015. A heatwave earlier this year destroyed much of the harvest in the area. Now the monsoon has arrived, but it has not yet brought enough rain for his crops to grow. PHOTO: FLORIAN LANG / ACTIONAID

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COVER PHOTO: An elderly woman affected by 2015 floods in Tamil Nadu state of India, waiting to collect subsidised food grains from a government shop. PHOTO: SRIKANTH KOLARI / ACTIONAID

Acronyms

CANSA	Climate Action Network – South Asia
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GLOFs	Glacial Lake Outburst Floods
ICMW	UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IPCC AR5	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report
PDD	Platform on Disaster Displacement
SAARC	South Asian Alliance for Regional Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SFDRR	Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction
UN	United Nations
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WIM	Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage
WMO	World Meteorological Organisation

Contents

Executive Summary

Climate change is having devastating impacts on communities' lives, livelihoods and food security across South Asia. Its consequences are so severe that it is increasingly contributing to migration, and this incidence is likely to escalate much more in the years to come as climate change impacts become more serious.

Migration has always taken place in South Asia, for long before climate change became an issue. "Push factors" include conflict, poverty, land access and ethnicity, while there are also many "pull factors" such as development, livelihoods, seasonal labour, kinship and access to health or services. However because of this background of migration, South Asian countries are slow to recognise the role of climate change as an additional push factor, and the level to which it is driving migration. Climate change is thus still largely invisible in the migration discourse in South Asia.

This study looks at climate change and its impacts on migration in South Asia, and particularly in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. The South Asia region is particularly vulnerable to climate change events. Droughts, heat waves, cyclones, rising sea levels, heavy rainfall, landslides and floods strike, are often felt by two or more neighbouring countries in the region, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Fifth Assessment Report (IPCC AR5) anticipates that these are likely to be felt more severely in future. Unfortunately, in the face of climate change, political issues governing trans-boundary rivers such as the Ganga, Brahmaputra and the Indus, creates regional tensions over who controls the water, and further exacerbates downstream communities' vulnerability to drought or flood.

Migration is taking place as a result of crop failure, rising sea levels and flooding all caused by climate change. Sudden events such as cyclones and flooding can lead to temporary displacement. However if these events happen repeatedly, people lose their savings and assets, and may eventually be forced to move to cities or abroad to find work. Slow onset events such as salinization from rising sea levels, loss of land to erosion, as well as increasing difficulty in making a living from agriculture due to changing weather patterns, are also driving migration.

Migration patterns in South Asia are complex and take several forms. Temporary migration can take place to find seasonal work, or in response to disasters as a coping mechanism. Internal migration usually takes place from rural areas to the city within the same country. External migration, usually to the Gulf states, is also a growing phenomenon. Significant numbers are also undertaking trans-boundary migration, usually from Bangladesh or Nepal to India. Rising intolerance towards Bangladeshi migrants in India's Assam and West Bengal is also stoking tensions in the region.

The impacts of climate-induced migration on women are not being monitored by government agencies in South Asia, and this is a gap that must be addressed. Young females who migrate to India are vulnerable to abuse and trafficking, as they often use so-called "agents" to help them find work. These can turn out to be traffickers, who once they arrive in the city, force them to work in brothels.

It is more common, however, for men to migrate, leaving millions of women-headed households across the region. In Nepal, there are villages with few or no men of working age. This is creating additional burden of work for women, and driving the feminisation of agriculture. Not only must the women take care of the household and child-rearing responsibilities, but they must also take on their husbands' role in agriculture. Women are thus reporting exhaustion, poverty and hunger, and fields are being left uncultivated as they struggle to cope alone.

In some communities in Bangladesh, women face social pressure not to leave the house, making life incredibly difficult if their husbands have left to find work. In other areas, women report much higher exposure to assault and violence. When disasters happen, such as the recent earthquake in Nepal, the lack of men in the village can put communities in further danger.

Policies are currently failing to understand the scale and impact of migration on women, and are failing to address emerging issues. Promotion of women's empowerment, as well as women-led planning and disaster response, must be part of the solution.

Climate change is still largely invisible in South Asian migration discourse, but it is likely to drive migration in far greater numbers in future. Clearer definitions are needed for climate migration and displacement, and these need to provide the basis for clear information and data collection on the contribution of climate change towards migration. The invisibility of those forced away from their homes as a result of climate change means that they are falling through gaps in policy, and they may not be granted the same protections and rights granted to internally displaced persons or refugees. New frameworks are therefore required to ensure their rights are protected.

Poor and vulnerable people are leaving their lands as a result of a climate problem that they did not cause. They need greater support for adaptation and resilience, and they need protection and systems of safe migration for when they are forced to move.

Given that climate change is a common problem for the South Asian region, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) must play an important role in fostering regional efforts and solidarity, for example through strengthening early warning systems and regional food banks, improving water relations, and addressing trans-boundary migration with a climate lens. However the recent cancellation of the SAARC summit due to political tensions between countries signals that there is more need than ever for solidarity, cooperation and a sense of common cause in the region.

International processes such as the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) on Loss and Damage are now beginning to recognise that migration and displacement are resulting from climate-induced loss and damage, and are in the process of developing recommendations for implementation. The Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD), the successor to the Nansen Initiative, may also offer scope to move the discussion forward.

Civil society groups, particularly those in South Asia, have an important role to play in strengthening solidarity between citizens of different countries, opening up collaborative conversations, providing a platform for those who are vulnerable, and strengthening regional solutions that can work for all.

The home of Shumona, 9, and her grandmother in Patuakhali, Southern Bangladesh, has been destroyed by storms four times in the last five years.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID/ MAP/ MAHMUD

Section 1 Climate change in South Asia

South Asian countries are blessed with a huge diversity of ecosystems. These include the world's highest mountains in the Himalayas, the great river systems that flow through the continent, and the vast coastlines and deltas along the Bay of Bengal. These ecosystems provide the cultural and economic backbone of the continent, are host to high population densities, and are particularly key to agriculture and fisheries. These ecosystems, however, are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, due to their geographic and environmental characteristics.[1]

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report (IPCC AR5) of 2014[2] confirms that climate impacts, including an overall warming trend and increasing weather extremes, have been clearly observed across most of the Asian region. Impacts on water, food security, livelihoods and health are expected to become more severe for the region, with climate change compounding stresses such as urbanisation and industrialisation. Regional political processes such as the management of trans-boundary water systems can also exacerbate vulnerability to climate impacts in the region.

Regional climate events

Extreme weather as well as slow-onset events can often impact several countries in the region at the same time. Often communities can face multiple extreme events within the same year, for example experiencing droughts followed by floods, eroding their coping mechanisms and their ability to anticipate.

The failed monsoon of 2015, for example, caused by a combination of climate change and El Nino[3] has led to an extended period through 2015-16 with little or no rainfall in the region, leading to **drought** across South Asia. In these countries, which are heavily dependent on agriculture as the

1. Leal Filho, W. (2014). Handbook of climate change adaptation. Springer-Verlag, Berlin http://www.springer.com/la/book/9783642386695
2. IPCC 5th Assessment report (AR5) Working Group 2, Chapter 24 (Asia) https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg2/WGIIAR5-Chap24_FINAL.pdf
3. ActionAid "Hotter planet, Humanitarian Crisis" November 2016

backbone of their economies and food security, widespread crop failure and hunger have been reported as a result. In Nepal, where there was no rain for eight months,[4] farmers have reported that this is the first time this has happened within their memory.[5] Drought used to be rare in Bangladesh, but in the Northern part of the country, rain was not felt for 6 months this year,[6] leading to unprecedented water shortages. Sri Lanka has also experienced an unprecedented drought due to lack of rainfall this year, affecting nine provinces[7] some of whom have suffered for more than 10 months.[8] And in India, the government has reported that 330 million people have been affected by drought.

The incidence of extreme **heat waves** has also increased noticeably in the region in recent years. In April 2016 a deadly heat wave across Asia brought record-breaking temperatures across the region, including in India where Rajasthan recorded an unprecedented temperature of 51°C. This event came just a year after a 2015 heat wave in which 3,000 people died in Pakistan and India.[9] The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) has confirmed that heat waves have become more frequent in the region, and their frequency and intensity are likely to continue to increase.[10]

Cyclones can develop in the Bay of Bengal, and these can either move westwards to Sri Lanka and India, north to Bangladesh, or east to Myanmar. Cyclone Roanu, which hit the region in May 2016, passed along the coasts of Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh causing torrential rains, flooding, landslides and storm surges. Nearly 125,000 homes and structures were destroyed, with reconstruction costs estimated at $1.7bn[11] and hundreds of thousands of people in the region displaced. Scientists believe that higher surface temperatures in the Indian Ocean caused by climate change is causing cyclones to increase their frequency and intensity.[12] Major cyclones can cause devastating coastal damage and death, in part from huge storm surges, heavy rainfall and strong winds.

With large coastlines, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka are extremely vulnerable to **rising sea levels** caused by climate change. Sea levels in South Asia are thought to be rising at a rate between 1 and 3mm per year, which is slightly more than the global average, and this has accelerated compared to the long-term average.[13] As a low-lying country Bangladesh is already experiencing rapid erosion and loss of coastal land to the sea, as well as widespread salinization of agricultural fields and water sources. India and Sri Lanka may face similar consequences in the future. According to the United Nations' Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6) report of May 2016, up to 40 million Indians (over 3% of the population) will be at risk from rising sea levels and 25 million (approximately 16% of the population) in Bangladesh.

With large coastal populations dependent on fisheries, these countries are also vulnerable to **ocean acidification** caused by rising carbon dioxide (CO2) levels in the atmosphere. Ocean acidification weakens the shells of shellfish, and bleaches the coral ecosystems that provide the habitat and food source for so many coastal fish species. It is likely to reduce fish yields and incomes for fishing communities in South Asia.[14]

4. http://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/prolonged-drought-takes-toll-crops/
5. ActionAid focus group discussion with farmers in Rasuwa district, Nepal, July 2016
6. http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Drought-in-northwestern-Bangladesh-has-left-locals-without-drinking-water-for-the-past-six-months-36924.html
7. Sri Lanka Disaster Management Centre situation update, (as read on 31 October 2016) https://www.dropbox.com/s/018hzk4p6f7x7wc/Current-Situation.pdf
8. http://newsfirst.lk/english/2014/08/drought-affected-farmers-face-difficulties-due-debt/51500
9. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-33288311
10. http://public.wmo.int/en/media/news/climate-and-health-experts-south-asia-act-heatwaves
11. Terms & Conditions (industry insurance blog) "Global insured disaster losses in May" 10 July 2016 http://www.iii.org/insuranceindustryblog/?cat=4&paged=2
12. World Bank Development Research Group Environment & Energy Team, Vulnerability of Bangladesh to Cyclones in a Changing Climate, April 2010 (Dasgupta et al)
13. Sivakumar et al, Chapter 2, Climate change and food security in South Asia, 2011
14. IUCN, Hilmi et al, "Bridging the gap between ocean acidification impacts and economic valuation" 2015, https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2015-011.pdf

Monsoon and rainfall patterns in South Asia are becoming increasingly erratic and prone to extremes. While in some years low or late rainfall can lead to drought, in other years **heavy rainfall** can affect the whole region, causing **floods and landslides**. Heavy rain in the Himalayas and the upper reaches of the South Asian river systems can swell rivers, causing floods and devastation downstream whether in-country or transboundary. The Kedarnath tragedy, in which more than 5,700 people died as a result of flooding and landslides caused by a multi-day cloudburst in Uttarakhand province in Northern India, is one example. Lakes caused by melting glaciers in the Himalayas are also bursting their banks, leading to glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) in which huge flash floods sweep downhill without warning, destroying communities and lives in the process, and potentially crossing borders.

Trans-boundary water issues - increasing vulnerability to climate impacts

Trans-boundary water issues, which result in part from political processes and are highly complex, can also exacerbate communities' vulnerability to climate change.

The great Ganges, Brahmaputra and Indus rivers all start in the Himalayas or the Trans-Himalayan Tibetan region, passing through two or more countries. These rivers provide crucial water, irrigation, livelihood, food security and culture to hundreds of millions of people along their routes.

But in times of drought or flooding the question of which country has control over the rivers' flow, and how much they can keep, becomes politically tense.[15] India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and China attempt to navigate these trans-boundary water flows through a series of treaties and on-going negotiations. However power dynamics between countries mean that implementation is regularly contested, and new dam or hydropower developments constantly bring new dimensions to the debate.

India's Farakka Barrage, for example, allows them to control the flow of the Ganges. Farming and fishing communities downstream in India and Bangladesh complain that this means that much of the water is kept for use upstream, and that in times of low rainfall, this deprives them from having the water that they also need in times of water stress. The same communities claim that when heavy rainfall upstream in the Himalayas swells the river, the opening of the Farakka Barrage leads to floods, waterlogging and river erosion downstream in both countries. India's Barrage on the Teesta river has also led to silting of the river downstream in Bangladesh, increasing their exposure to flooding. Communities affected by these developments have been displaced, sometimes across borders, however current policies offer them little protection.[16]

The complex political processes surrounding trans-boundary water management in South Asia are therefore intertwined with climate change issues, and should be taken into account when looking at climate change vulnerabilities and responses in the region.

All of these examples illustrate that climate change impacts are rarely localised. The impacts they bring are frequently felt by more than one country in the region. South Asian countries face the same climate change problems. They could and should be working together to cooperate, and to share equitable and common solutions.

15. ActionAid "Blues Beyond Boundaries" 2015, http://actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/blues_beyond_boundaries_report-24-7.pdf
16. ActionAid "Blues Beyond Boundaries" 2015, http://actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/blues_beyond_boundaries_report-24-7.pdf

Climate-induced migration and forced displacement

Natural disasters are one of the key causes of forced displacement and migration in South Asia. This is one of the regions in the world that is most vulnerable to natural disasters, and climate change is increasing the frequency of extreme weather events. During 2010-11, Asia and the Pacific saw more than 42 million people displaced by extreme weather events.[17] By 2050, 15 million people in Bangladesh alone could be displaced by climate change.[18] Climate-induced migration and displacement is therefore becoming a key emerging area in climate discourse.

The huge urban slums of Mumbai, Kolkata, Dhaka and Karachi are largely populated by those that have arrived through either internal or transboundary migration. Depending on circumstances and need, people may migrate from rural areas to their nearest town, or they may go to the large cities to find work. They may cross boundaries to neighbouring countries, or leave the region altogether. In recent years numbers of South Asians migrating to the Gulf States have also increased significantly.

Migration takes place against a background and history within and between South Asian countries going back decades and centuries.[19] "Push factors" of conflict, poverty, land access, ethnicity, as well as "pull factors" of development, livelihood, seasonal labour, kinship and access to health or education services are present in all four countries.[20] Against these pre-existing "push" and "pull" factors, the addition of climate change as a driver may initially be invisible.

Migration processes are diverse and complicated. Often men will be the first to migrate. Sometimes they will return to rural areas, in other cases the rest of the family will follow once the means to live have been established. Planned migration, where people can exercise choice in why and where they go, and what they will do when they get there, is easier for people with more wealth and resources.

Seasonal migration, where rural people move to find work during the agricultural lean season but move back to the village in time, has been taking place for decades. Research in Bangladesh suggests that this form of migration is becoming more permanent, as a result of climate-induced disasters that damage infrastructure and erode income opportunities and alternative coping mechanisms.[21] Protracted crises or repeated disasters mean that eventually people's assets such as savings, land, cattle or tools will be lost or sold off, and migration to find alternative work becomes the only option.

Sudden-onset events such as cyclones, flooding or landslides may cause people to lose their land, home or possessions and be forced to move away. While many will eventually move back, those whose homes and livelihoods (particularly agriculture) have been permanently lost or damaged, may find themselves forced to move permanently to new areas, usually urban areas, in search of work in order to survive.

Slow onset events can also be a significant driver of forced migration. Severe drought events can drive people to cities in search of work, water and food. While some may return, many may not. Along coastlines and riverbanks, land is increasingly being lost to erosion, rising sea levels and salinization, forcing those who depend on it for their livelihoods and food security to migrate elsewhere in search of options.

Climate change is increasing the incidence of these extreme weather events and chronic slow-onset disasters, and these are increasingly forcing people to migrate in search of safety and/or livelihoods.[22]

17. UNEP, Geo Assessment report 6 South Asia,, 2016, http://uneplive.unep.org/media/docs/assessments/GEO_ASSESSMENT_REPORT_ASIA_Wam.pdf
18. https://www.iucn.org/content/climate-change-induced-migration-bangladesh
19. Brot fuer die Welt, Climate Refugees in Bangladesh: Understanding the migration process at the local level, 2012, http://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/fileadmin/mediapool/2_Downloads/Fachinformationen/Analyse/analyse_30_englisch_climate_refugees_in_Bangladesh.pdf
20. Key Informant Interviews
21. http://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/fileadmin/mediapool/2_Downloads/Fachinformationen/Analyse/analyse_30_englisch_climate_refugees_in_Bangladesh.pdf
22. http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/displacement_and_migration....pdf

There is, however, a lack of data mapping the role of climate change in overall migration trends in South Asia, and its contribution is not yet clearly understood by policy makers. Even though climate change is clearly leading to ever-greater migration in the region, the lack of clear data and policy analysis means that the issue is still largely invisible in migration discourse and response.

Country analysis

Bangladesh

Hundreds of rivers pass through the low-lying country of Bangladesh, leaving inland areas exposed to river floods and embankment erosion from increasingly heavy monsoon rains[23] originating upstream, and coastal areas exposed to rising sea levels, salination and cyclones.[24]

The IPCC Fifth Assessment report[25] predicts that climate change is likely to bring even more climate extremes such as too much rain during monsoons, too little water during droughts, changes in cyclone behaviours, increased salinity inland and massive erosion in sea-facing areas. Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable to these impacts.

Studies[26] suggest that climate induced displacement and migration are a regular and increasing phenomenon in Bangladesh. This has been confirmed by a 2014 study by the Ministry of Disaster and Relief[27] that looked at how different types of disasters (floods, waterlogging, riverbank erosion and salinity intrusion) are driving migration patterns. In one study area vulnerable to river erosion, for example, only one per cent of households interviewed had no experience of displacement. Assessments carried out two years after Cyclone Aila in 2009 found large numbers of people had been forced to migrate, particularly to urban areas.[28]

In addition to rural-urban migration, and migration out of the region to the Gulf states, increasing numbers of people are migrating, many illegally, across the border to India to seek employment. The illegal status of much of this migration makes accurate estimates difficult to gauge. Estimated numbers vary massively, between the thousands and millions every year, depending on the source and their perspective or agenda.[29]

Satkhira district has suffered from long-term water logging and severe river erosion.[30] Reports suggest that climate change impacts such as these are driving high levels of migration to Dhaka,[31] as well as across the river to India's West Bengal.[32]

Climate induced displacement is rarely planned, which means that migrants can face difficult conditions. The above Ministry study thus found that forced displacement can have a significant negative impact on education, health, occupation, income, assets, access to social amenities, and incidence of disease.

23. Islam T and Neelim N. 2010. Climate Change in Bangladesh: A Closer Look into Temperature and Rainfall Data. The University Press Limited, Dhaka.
24. CPRD & ActionAid 2011 "Displacement and Migration from the Climate Hot-Spots: Causes and Consequences" https://unfccc.int/files/adaptation/groups_committees/loss_and_damage_executive_committee/application/pdf/displacement_and_migration_from_the_hot_spots_in_bangladesh_causes_and_consequences.pdf
25. IPCC 5th Assessment report (AR5) Working Group 2, Chapter 24 (Asia) https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg2/WGIIAR5-Chap24_FINAL.pdf
26. Bread for the World, 2012, "Climate Refugees in Bangladesh: Understanding the migration process at the local level" https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/fileadmin/mediapool/2_Downloads/Fachinformationen/Analyse/analyse_30_englisch_climate_refugees_in_Bangladesh.pdf
27. "Trend and Impact Analysis of Internal Displacement due to the Impacts of Disaster and Climate Change", Study Report, CDMP Phase 2, Ministry of Disaster and Relief, Bangladesh, June 2014, http://displacementsolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/CDMP-Internal-Displacement-Bangladesh-Analysis.pdf.
28. http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/displacement_and_migration....pdf
29. Institute for Social Studies, 2013, j. Joseph, V. Narandran, "Neither Here Nor There: An overview of South-South migration from both sides of the India-Bangladesh migration corridor" https://www.iss.nl/fileadmin/ASSETS/iss/Documents/Research_and_projects/IDRC-MGSJ/Rajan-Joseph-Narendran_South_Asia_S-S_migration_lit_review_bibly_June2013.pdf
30. http://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordOId=3807138&fileOId=3814921
31. Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Vot 58(2), 2013, Shahadat Hossain, http://www.asiaticsociety.org.bd/journal/10ShahadatHossain.pdf
32. http://www.ipsnews.net/2016/05/a-precarious-fate-for-climate-migrants-in-india/

Case Study 1: Floods on the river Jamuna[33]

In July 2011, the River Jamuna forced Karimon Bibi to migrate from Hat Gorjan Char to Bhat Dighulia of Jaijuri Union, leaving her only assets of a tiny piece of land and an even tinier house. But this was not the first time she had been displaced. River bank erosion had forced her to migrate several times from char (island) to char until 2004 when she finally settled on Hat Gorjan Char.

In 2007 her husband died, and a year later the char was devastated by floods, forcing her and her children to temporarily take shelter on an adjacent char. On returning to Hat Gorjan, she discovered her home in ruins. She had no savings, and local livelihood opportunities did not pay enough to help her feed her family.

Against all the odds she and her children started to rebuild their homes and look for work. But just when the pieces of their lives were falling into order, the rage of the River Jamuna wrecked everything again in 2011.

"Disaster, migration and increased suffering is all that is left in my life," she says, wiping away her tears.

India

India, as a large country, spreads across several different climatological and ecological zones, and is thus vulnerable to many different types of climate impacts, particularly droughts, heat waves, flooding, rising sea levels and cyclones. 67% of India's population[34] of 1.3 billion people[35] live in rural areas and depend on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry for their livelihoods.

Although the country is becoming a powerful emerging economy, 58% earn less than $3.10 per day.[36] Poor and marginalised people are often most affected by climate change and climate variability.[37]

While India's vulnerability is well-recognised by the government, the extent to which migration is being driven by climate change, is not yet part of any policy debate.[38] Although the National Disaster Management Authority does map disasters and their consequences, official migration statistics resulting from those disasters are not tracked.

Interviews carried out for this report with policy leaders on climate, disaster and migration issues, confirm this gap.[39]

The recent severe drought of 2015-16, in which 330 million people were reported to have been affected, has provoked a growing awareness of this trend, with reports of mass migration to India's cities,[40] and media reports of rural villages left empty.[41]

Harsh Mander, a social worker and the Special Commissioner to India's Supreme Court on a case regarding the right to food, claims that the recent 2015-16 drought, in which 330 million people are reported to have been affected, is significantly driving migration numbers up. According to Mander, migration from affected districts has increased two to three times, as people suffering due to drought are leaving their habitations for survival.[42]

"So far, climate migration hasn't been high on India's policy agenda due to more pressing

33. http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/displacement_and_migration....pdf
34. http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=IN
35. http://countrymeters.info/en/India
36. http://povertydata.worldbank.org/poverty/country/IND
37. Adaptation to Climate Change with a Focus on Rural Areas and India, GIZ and MOEF, GoI
38. http://www.ipsnews.net/2016/07/climate-migrants-lead-mass-migration-to-indias-cities/
39. Key Informant Interview.
40. http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/indian-humanitarian-paper-230516.pdf
41. Key Informant Interview http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/empty-locked-houses-a-common-sight-at-this-drought-hit-village-1238490 , http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/india-drought-bundelkhand_us_5769a229e4b0c0252e778b9a
42. http://thewire.in/43386/states-have-ignored-sc-orders-on-drought-say-activists/

challenges like poverty, population growth, and urbanisation," adds Shashank Shekhar, an assistant professor from the Department of Geology at the University of Delhi. "But given the current protracted agrarian crisis, a cohesive reconstruction and rehabilitation policy for migrants becomes imperative."[43]

Radha Sahariya of Lalitpur Disrict of Uttar Pradesh state of India had a poor wheat harvest this year due to lack of rain. She is worried that her husband and son, who migrate to the nearby state to work at the brick kiln may have to work longer to make enough money to buy grains as well as seed for the next season.
PHOTO: SRIKANTH KOLARI / ACTIONAID

43. http://www.irinnews.org/news/2016/06/27/drought-migrants-flee-india's-cities

Case Study 2: 2016 – Drought in Odisha[44]

Bhangirathai is 17 years old, originally from Nuamunda village, Bolangir District.

"Our family possesses approximately 3 acres of agricultural land. The main crops we cultivate are paddy, cotton and green gram. This year the drought has hit very badly, significantly affecting our food production and ways of living. We lost all these crops due to crippling shortage of water and rainfall," explains Bhangirathai.

As a result of the harsh drought that hit India earlier this year, 3 ponds in the village dried up, and the bore well stopped functioning properly. People were obliged to travel 2km to fetch water, while the farmlands were completely dependent on rainwater for irrigation. Bhagirathi was forced to give up his studies, and moved to Kerala to look for income to survive and support his family.

"Due to this drought, I went to Kerala for the first time. I would not have migrated if we had not faced crop losses. Like me there are many youths who are choosing migration as an alternative option to survive."

Nepal

Even without climate change, migration levels in Nepal would already be high. Civil war in the 2000's drove high levels of displacement and migration, while many have also left the hills and plains seeking opportunities for livelihoods, education or healthcare. Migration to the Gulf states, particularly to work in construction, is also on the rise. However the contribution of climate change to the lack of rural opportunity is not well mapped or understood.

Nepal is highly disaster prone, particularly to floods, landslides, hailstorms and GLOFs.[45] A significant part of the population in rural areas is dependent on rainfed agriculture, in which the monsoon brings the rain that is so critical for their livelihoods and food security. However monsoon and rainfall patterns have become increasingly erratic. Irregular rains, droughts, rising temperatures and increase in pests are all impacting on agriculture and crop yields.

This combination of factors may be adding to people's motivation to migrate. But it appears that authorities are not yet measuring the role of climate change in migration.

Men in Kawre district of Nepal often migrate to cities in India and Middle East to escape poverty exacerbated by disasters, leaving their wives and young children behind.
PHOTO: SHAILENDRA YASHWANT / CANSA

44. http://actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/drought2015-16_report_ebook.pdf
45. http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/NPL/INT_CCPR_NGO_NPL_14610_E.pdf

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is considered by some to be at a greater advantage when it comes to climate resilience, compared to some of its South Asian neighbours. With relatively high levels of development and education, high levels of forest cover, as well as an ancient water reservoir system that captures a significant amount of the country's rainfall for agricultural use, the country could be perceived as more resilient than some of its neighbours. According to the Sri Lanka Civil Society Climate Action Plan (2015) there is "currently zero political interest on the subject."

However a succession of climate disasters in the last two years have shown that the country is indeed extremely exposed to climate extremes. Cyclone Roanu in 2015 was followed by heavy floods and landslides in some parts of the country in May 2016, while other parts have recently experienced 11 months of drought.[46] The drought has been so severe that many of the nation's valued reservoirs have dried up, leading to serious water shortages that have reportedly affected over 200,000 people.[47]

As an island nation, rising sea levels could have a significant impact on the country, particularly its coastal cities.[48]

"Most local communities in Sri Lanka do not yet link the natural calamities to climate change," the Civil Society Action Plan continues. "Yet they all complain that the climate has changed over the last two decades making their life harder."

As a country highly dependent on agriculture for its economy, the impacts of high temperatures and lack of rain can be quite severe. Hotter night temperatures are affecting potato crop yields in the cooler hilly areas of the country, while unseasonal downpours wiped out the country's principle rambutan fruit crop this February.[49] This year's drought is thought to have brought down national rice yield by 20% compared to the previous year, and overall crop production down by 42%.[50]

While the lure of the nation's garment industry in the capital Colombo, as well as work in the Gulf states is thought to be the main "pull" for migration in the country, and with women making up a high proportion of these numbers,[51] there is a lack of data or analysis on whether climate change is in fact exerting a "push" factor on these developments. Migration has not much been linked to climate change in national discourse. This means that the lack of official efforts to track impacts means that the real extent of the link between the two issues remains unknown.

Sea level rise, frequent cyclones and dropping fish catch are forcing small fishermen in Sri Lanka to abandon fishing and join the urban workforce.
PHOTO: SHAILENDRA YASHWANT / CANSA

46. http://www.asiansun.lk/drought-drives-42-percent-crash-in-crop-production-in-sri-lanka/
47. http://roar.lk/reports/sri-lanka-experiencing-drought-—-know-far/
48. http://indi.ca/2015/09/sri-lankas-rising-sea-level-with-maps/
49. Key informant interview
50. http://www.asiansun.lk/drought-drives-42-percent-crash-in-crop-production-in-sri-lanka/
51. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_179642.pdf

Risks and challenges associated with migration and displacement

While migration may be used as a survival strategy in the face of climate change impacts, it can bring its own risks and challenges. People who are forced to migrate are usually already vulnerable and have limited options or powers to negotiate. They may have already lost their assets and savings as a result of climate disasters, and may have to accept whatever meagre options are on offer just to survive. This means they are frequently compromising on their own quality of life. They may be paid little or treated poorly at work.

This desperation may be increasing the incidence of bonded labour, in which people in debt are forced to work, often in extremely poor conditions, for very little pay in repayment for loans. Violence and coercion are often reported as part of bonded labour, and this phenomenon is becoming known as a modern form of slavery.

There are no official figures for this trend, but the Indian Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Kailash Satyarthi of Bachpan Bachao Andolan (Save the Childhood Movement) claims that he has "witnessed many incidents where children became the worst victims of environmental disasters caused by climate change." Citing floods in Uttarakhand and Bihar states, he states that "It has resulted in displacement of the parents, and eventually the children are compelled to become child labourers, or even child prostitutes or child slaves, because they lose their traditional livelihood."[52] It is important to note that rural-urban migrants often meet an important employment gap in cities, in such roles as drivers, vendors, laundry men and street sweepers.[53] However increasing urbanisation is leading to the rapid expansion of slums, often through encroachments where people build illegally without complying with planning rules or safety regulations. They may build on unsafe land, which may even be particularly exposed to further climate hazards such as flooding or landslides, such as on Delhi's Yamuna River, which must be vacated every monsoon. In such conditions, there are are no basic services such as water or waste management, leading to high rates of health hazards and dangerous conditions. Even in such poor conditions, rents may still be high.

A less visible but important challenge for those leaving their villages for cities can be the loss of social capital and key support systems. Neighbours who do not know or trust each other are unlikely to provide support in times of difficulty, for example by loaning money in case of emergency.[54]

The illegal status of migration between Bangladesh and India forces many to rely on trafficking to find work.[55] There may also be a higher risk of other illegal activities in such circumstances, for example greater use of corruption as people attempt to establish their status in the country,[56] or if people without legal job opportunities are forced to turn to illegal ways of making money. In such circumstances, youth may be at particularly high risk of being drawn into crime. Such activities are not formally documented or evidenced, and these issues are highly sensitive. However this report highlights these risks to underline the additional vulnerabilities that may be faced by those who are forced to migrate.

Migration rates to the Gulf states are also high. Remittances sent back from these countries contribute significantly to national foreign

52. http://in.reuters.com/article/india-children-climatechange-idINL4N0VF5JC20150205
53. Key Informant Interview
54. Key informant interview
55. P.Datta, Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies 2011, Vol 18 Issue 1 "Female Trafficking and Illegal Migration from Bangladesh to India" http://web.a.ebscohost.com/abstract?direct=true&profile=ehost&scope=site&authtype=crawler&jrnl=10241256&AN=63580799&h=CtlfNCCohy%2b0P6%2f2Ji%2bASyVP0gYNqVZaKQ5VsX1XTReiwmNpnF8mxL%2bzvYybyCh5NE8WGY8PnBOaf38P8rxkUA%3d%3d&crl=c&resultNs=AdminWebAuth&resultLocal=ErrCrlNotAuth&crlhashurl=login.aspx%3fdirect%3dtrue%26profile%3dehost%26scope%3dsite%26authtype%3dcrawler%26jrnl%3d10241256%26AN%3d63580799
56. https://www.iss.nl/fileadmin/ASSETS/iss/Documents/Research_and_projects/IDRC-MGSJ/Rajan-Joseph-Narendran_South_Asia_S-S_migration_lit_review_bibly_June2013.pdf

exchange earnings.[57] Men often go to work in hard physical labour conditions such as construction, while women go to work in domestic service. However working conditions can be terrible. In addition to reports of effective slavery and abuse, South Asian migrants are reported to die from heatstroke and exhaustion almost every day.[58] As livelihood options at home reduce in the face of climate change, many more people may feel obliged to put themselves through such hardship in order to earn a living.

Impacts on Women

The impacts of climate-induced migration on women and girls are not being monitored by government agencies in South Asia, and this may be a serious gap that needs to be addressed.

Young females migrating alone across borders can be vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Nepali and Bangladeshi women and girls seeking work in India can often seek help from "agents" who promise to arrange employment, for example as housemaids.[59] But in many cases, these agents are in fact traffickers. Once they arrive in cities they may be forced to work in brothels against their will. While this phenomenon has been taking place for years and is widely recognised, the extent to which climate change is contributing to this, and further threatening girls' safety is not yet understood.

It is more common, however, for men to migrate in search of employment, so that they can provide an income to support their families in the rural areas. Leaving their wives and children behind, millions of households across South Asia are now headed by women. According to the World Bank 12.5% of households in Bangladesh, 14% in India, and 28% in Nepal have a female head,[60] and many of these are as a result of male migration.

This is creating additional burdens and challenges for women, and driving the rapid feminisation of agriculture. Women must often take care of all household and child-related responsibilities alone, and are also expected to undertake their husbands' roles in agriculture in addition to their own. Women report exhaustion, poverty and hunger as a result.[61] The shortage of available labour can leave fields left uncultivated during the planting season.[62]

In more conservative communities in Bangladesh, communities will disapprove of a woman leaving the house alone without her husband to accompany her. Thus finding work, or basic activities such as the weekly trip to market to buy food, or visits to the doctor for a medical emergency can make the women a target for negative social pressure, impacting on their poverty, hunger and health.[63]

A 2015 UN Women study on the impacts of climate-induced migration on women in Bangladesh found that "in most cases, migrated male family members were unable or simply unwilling to send money back to their households, leaving the women to find other means of survival during these periods of migration."[64] A growing trend has also been noted of men who have migrated to cities abandoning their families and not returning.[65] In the absence of their husbands, the UN Women study finds that women from some Bangladeshi

57. International Labour Organisation (ILO) 2004 ""Migrant workers and human rights: out migration from South Asia" http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---sro-new_delhi/documents/publication/wcms_124657.pdf
58. http://edition.cnn.com/2015/03/09/asia/qatar-nepali-migrant-workers-deaths/
59. http://www.caritas.org/2012/04/faqs-on-human-trafficking-in-nepal/
60. http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.HOU.FEMA.ZS?locations=BD, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.HOU.FEMA.ZS?locations=IN, http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.HOU.FEMA.ZS?locations=NP
61. http://www2.unwomen.org/~/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2016/01/climate%20change%20%20migration%20in%20bangladesh%20a%20gender%20perspective.pdf?v=1&d=20160112T034849
62. Key Informant Interview
63. http://www2.unwomen.org/~/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2016/01/climate%20change%20%20migration%20in%20bangladesh%20a%20gender%20perspective.pdf?v=1&d=20160112T034849
64. http://www2.unwomen.org/~/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2016/01/climate%20change%20%20migration%20in%20bangladesh%20a%20gender%20perspective.pdf?v=1&d=20160112T034849
65. Several interviews (Ram, Sajid, Prof Menon)

communities report high levels of harassment, including sexual and violent assault.

When disasters occur, high levels of male migration mean that fewer men may be available for the recovery and rescue process. The impact of this trend was visible during the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, when some communities had to rely on women, children and the elderly to try to dig survivors free.[66]

The challenges facing women left behind by male migration poses risks. However it also provides an important opportunity for their empowerment. Women are discovering their role as decision makers, and that that they can cope in adversity. Strategies that encourage women to realise their potential and not allow themselves to be inhibited by negative social pressures may be key to their survival when they are left behind by migration. These efforts are particularly important in the face of increased risk of climate-induced disasters. The empowerment and training of women in disaster preparedness strategies, including early warning systems, search and rescue, emergency response and relief distribution may be key to their own and their communities' survival in the face of disasters.

Case Study 3: **The family left behind**

Taslima, a 35 year-old mother of five, lives in a makeshift tin hut on a tiny strip of river embankment in Southern Bangladesh. She moved here in 2013, when floods destroyed her previous home in the village, and her husband moved to Dhaka.

"He comes back here now and again, gives me a new baby, then goes away."

Taslima fears he may have abandoned her.

"When my children say they are hungry, it stings my heart," she says. *"I try to console them. I say 'OK, sit for a while, I will get food. Sometimes I get a loan of rice from the neighbours."*

"If my husband was around the children could say 'Dad, we're hungry' and he would get them food. But he's not here."

Taslima's seven-year old daughter, Ritie, doesn't go to school. Instead she drags a heavy net through water to catch fish for the family to eat.

"If she catches something we eat; if she doesn't we don't," says Taslima. *"She sometimes complains her shoulders feel sore (from pulling the net). So then I do it."*

The embankment where their hut is built was the only piece of land available to move to. Rising sea levels have left the embankment soil too saline to grow vegetables, and it is crumbling from the river. During high tide, water from the river laps dangerously close to their walls. Last year, the hut was blown over in a storm, and Taslima had to salvage the rusting sheets out of the water and move to another part of the embankment.

"Last year when the storm broke our house, we picked up the tin pieces and moved here, and built it again. I feel so bad when we have to keep rebuilding."

66. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/05/world/asia/nepal-already-stripped-of-young-men-faces-a-darker-problem.html?_r=0

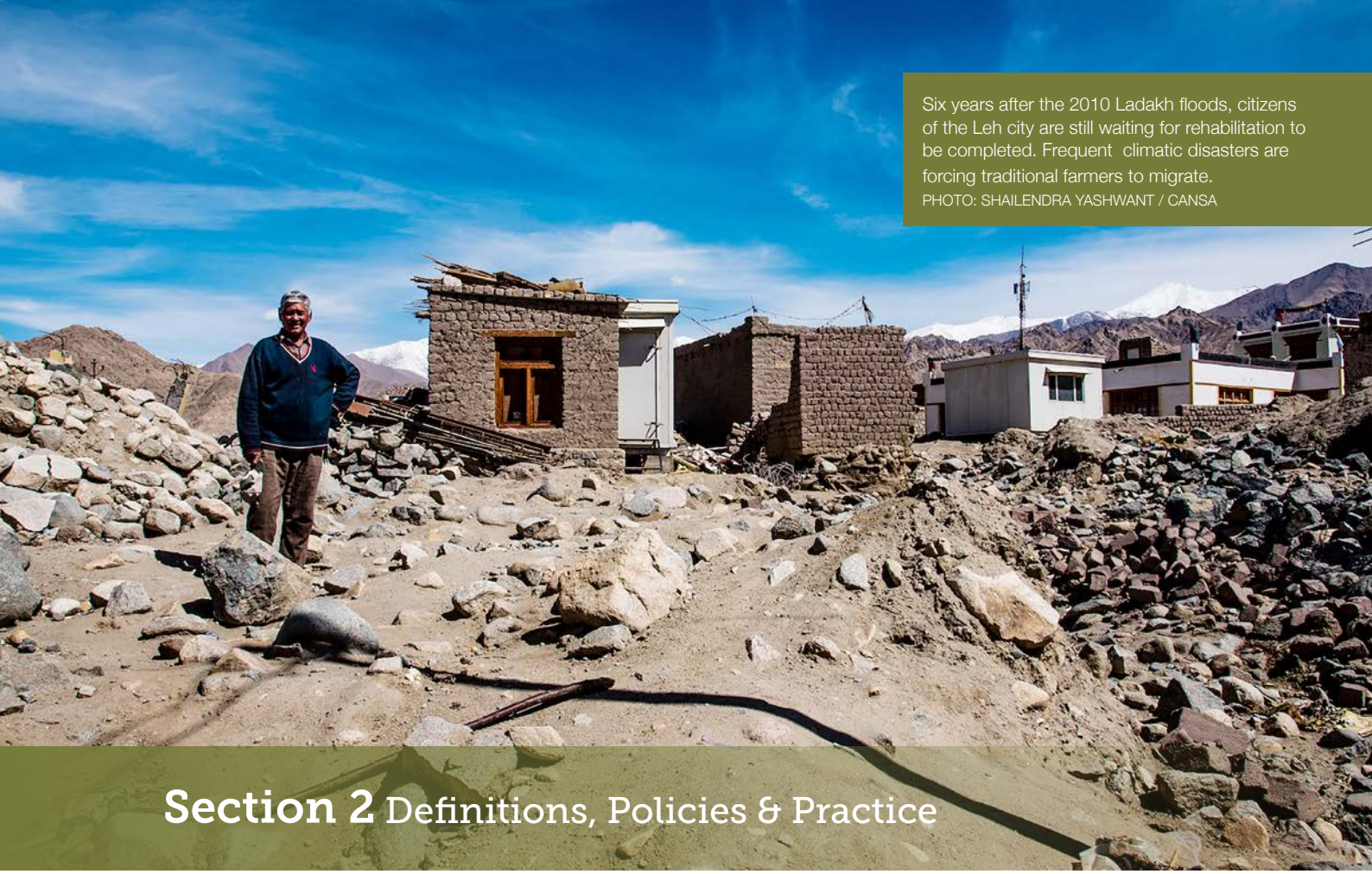
Patuakhali, Bangladesh. Taslima's husband moved to Dhaka after their home was destroyed by a storm. She fears he may have abandoned her.
PHOTO: ACTIONAID/ MAP/ MAHMUD

Risk of Rising Tensions and Intolerance

Climate-induced migration may be increasing tensions and intolerance in the region, particularly in India. Many Bangladeshi communities exposed to disasters migrate to India to seek new work and life opportunities. In many cases, their exposure to drought or flood has been exacerbated by the transboundary water sharing deals in which India's Farakka or Teesta Barrages hold back or release large amounts of water, and this may be adding to the impetus for migration.[67]

While some move West across the border to India's West Bengal, many move across the Northeast border to Assam, to find work and build a new life. However tensions have been brewing for some time between Bangladeshi migrants and the ethnic Bodo group in Assam who have felt that their land, resources, rights and identity are threatened by growing numbers of Bangladeshis. While some politicians in the area have apparently welcomed migrants (particularly their votes), others have built their own political platforms based on growing resent to Bangladeshi settlers. Past decades of anger and growing rhetoric have witnessed violence against Bengali-speaking Muslim villages, retaliations and riots between the different groups. In recent elections in Assam, proposals for Bangladeshi immigration and deportation became a highly contentious issue at the centre of the political debate.

67. Water Scarcity, Migration and Regional Security in South Asia, 30 June 2016, http://www.futuredirections.org.au/publication/water-scarcity-migration-regional-security-south-asia/



Six years after the 2010 Ladakh floods, citizens of the Leh city are still waiting for rehabilitation to be completed. Frequent climatic disasters are forcing traditional farmers to migrate.
PHOTO: SHAILENDRA YASHWANT / CANSA

Section 2 Definitions, Policies & Practice

Definitions

As issues of migration and displacement increasingly come to the fore in the face of climate change impacts, different stakeholders may be using different terminologies, leading to some confusion and exposing policy gaps.

Climate migrants & displaced people

While there is abundant evidence of the link between climate change and forced displacement or migration, there are as yet no official definitions of climate-induced migration or displacement, neither at national level in South Asian countries, nor at international level under either the UN High Commission on Refugees or the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The lack of recognition, definition or status of climate migrants presents a number of gaps and challenges that policy makers must address.

While South Asian citizens are clearly exposed to migration and forced displacement resulting from climate change, most national policies do not yet sufficiently recognise the phenomena or provide sufficient protections and rights to those affected. Neither those that stay within their national boundaries, nor those move across borders are sufficiently protected.

Currently people who are leaving rural areas due to challenges such as crop failure, water shortages or flooding must go to seek new lives and livelihoods in order to survive. Statistics largely record these as “economic migrants,” focusing on the pull factor of jobs elsewhere instead of the push factor of climate change.

Disaster management authorities do not currently include migration data in their analysis. Authorities may record numbers of people temporarily displaced by rapid-onset events such as landslides, cyclones or floods, however they do not currently record the extent to which these numbers translate into permanent migration. Nor do they record the impact on migration of slow-onset events such as drought or changes in seasonal rainfall or temperature patterns, which can lead to steady yield decline and eventually drive people to give up on agriculture and move to urban areas.

Data on the contribution of climate change towards migration is therefore not being gathered effectively. But without an accurate understanding of the "push factor" of climate change, the role and scale of climate change in driving migration cannot be not fully understood.

As a result, there are significant policy gaps in addressing the impact of migration on women, and protecting the rights of those who are forced by climate change to migrate, but who did little to cause the problem in the first place. Without a clear understanding of the role of climate change in driving economic migration, countries may also be failing to realise the potential value and importance of ensuring effective resilience and adaptation to climate change.

Refugees

The 1951 UN Convention on Refugees is an international legally-binding legal framework to which all signatory countries must comply. It defines the term "refugee" as a person who has a:

*"Well-founded **fear of being persecuted** for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, **is outside the country of his nationality and is unable** or, owing to such fear, is unwilling **to avail himself of the protection of that country**; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."*[68]

What this means, is that only those who have left their country for reasons of persecution (such as conflict) can be officially recognised as "refugees".

Those who have been displaced by climate change - even if their land has disappeared underwater, their water and crops dried up in the face of drought, or their homes crushed by landslides - cannot be officially described as "refugees". The term "climate refugee", while giving an indication of the challenges, trauma and desperation experienced by those affected, is therefore not legally precise according to the UN definition.

Under the current framework, those displaced by climate change are not legally granted the same rights and protections that are granted to those with refugee status, either in their country of origin or in a new country.

As a senior official at India's Ministry of External Affairs has acknowledged, "Despite being forced to leave their home countries, these migrants cannot apply for refugee status. They are bereft of legal protection under the U.N. Convention for refugees and can be deported at any time without question."[69]

Jamuna Sheshadri, associate professor of sociology and Delhi University confirms the challenge. "Everyone knows that climate change is displacing people, but no government is willing to acknowledge this for fear of having to recognise these people as refugees and be responsible for their welfare".[70]

In recognising the current protection gaps in the 1951 UN Convention definition of refugees, some analysts have investigated the option of opening up the Convention for discussion, so as to include emerging elements such as climate change. However the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) warn against this, due to the risk that opening up the convention may lead to the loss of current international legal protections for refugees.[71]

68. http://www.unhcr.org/uk/3b66c2aa10
69. http://www.ipsnews.net/2016/05/a-precarious-fate-for-climate-migrants-in-india/
70. http://www.ipsnews.net/2016/05/a-precarious-fate-for-climate-migrants-in-india/
71. International Bar Association, 2009 "'Climate Refugees'? Addressing the international legal gaps." http://www.ibanet.org/Article/Detail.aspx?ArticleUid=B51C02C1-3C27-4AE3-B4C4-7E350EB0F442

Internally displaced persons

Unlike the UN Convention on Refugees, the UNCHR's guiding principles on Internal Displacement are considered to be international "soft law" that countries are encouraged but not legally bound to apply. The guiding principles define Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as:

"Persons or groups ***of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence****, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or* ***natural or human-made disasters****, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border."*

India,[72] Nepal[73] and Sri Lanka[74] have taken some of these principles and partially – but not fully - applied them in their national policies on IDPs. Thus those who have been affected by conflict, the 2004 tsunami, and in some cases those displaced by large-scale developments such as the Narmada Dam, are supposed to have their rights to safety, land or livelihoods, met by the government. Governments are unclear, however, on whether they consider that these policies oblige them to ensure the rights of those displaced by climate change.[75] Bangladesh currently has no policies on IDPs.

Rights

Climate change means that people are increasingly being forced to migrate as a result of extreme events, slow onset disasters, threats to their safety, or reduced food, water and livelihood security. Not only are their rights threatened by climate change itself, but migration can also put people in vulnerable situations in which their rights are at risk. Amid rising climate migration, people's rights must be protected.

Human rights

Although human rights are applicable to all, and are not subject to borders or nations, these rights are being compromised by climate change and migration patterns. The basic human rights to food, livelihood, social security, life and safety under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights[76] can all be threatened under circumstances of climate change and migration.

In order to ensure peoples' human rights in the face of climate change, a range of measures including clear definitions, accurate data collection and targeted policies are required.

Labour rights

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) and Human Rights Watch have drawn attention to the poor treatment, vulnerability and abuses faced by South Asian migrants. In spite of active implementation of mechanisms to facilitate outmigration, such as providing training and bilateral labour MOUs, no South Asian country has ratified the ILO conventions on migrant workers, which aim to protect migrants' rights, and in particular their human rights. Only Sri Lanka has ratified the 1990 UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICMW).[77]

72. http://www.dolr.nic.in/nrrp2007.pdf
73. http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CCPR/Shared%20Documents/NPL/INT_CCPR_NGO_NPL_14610_E.pdf
74. http://www.ijac.org.uk/images/frontImages/gallery/Vol._2_No._5/11.pdf
75. Angela Williams, Law & Policy Vol 30, No 4, 2008, http://archives.cerium.ca/IMG/pdf/Turning_the_Tide-_Recognizing_Climate_Change_Refugees_in_International_Law.pdf
76. http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html
77. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_179642.pdf

Regional and International policy processes

With climate change affecting people in every country, regional and international processes must take the opportunity to proactively address emerging challenges and ensure protection for climate migrants.

SAARC

Climate change is impacting on South Asia as a whole, and the region is one of the most vulnerable in the world to climate-induced disasters. The impacts of climate events can be felt in several countries at once, and there can be trans-boundary consequences to its effects. Thus all countries in the region could benefit significantly through regional cooperation in implementing climate solutions.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is the regional intergovernmental organisation, which aims to promote regional and economic integration.

SAARC has already recognised that climate change has huge economic and social consequences for the region. In 2007 SAARC made a declaration on climate change, and in 2008 a climate change action plan was adopted, including climate adaptation strategies, mitigation action to reduce greenhouse gases, a financing and investment mechanism, technology transfer, monitoring, assessment and management of climate risks, training and awareness, and developing a regional position for international climate negotiations. The 2008 Dhaka declaration was followed by the 2010 Thimpu statement on climate change and the 2011 SAARC agreement on rapid response to natural disasters. Such South-South cooperation has the potential to facilitate important joint activities such as shared early warning systems that could identify incoming disasters and allow countries to warn and prepare their citizens.

In 1987, countries agreed to establish a joint SAARC food security reserve in Dhaka, and in 2008 re-asserted their commitment to implementing this agreement. A regional food reserve could ensure available food and stabilise food prices, proving vital for countries facing food crises in times of climate disasters.

However in spite of these promising declarations, agreements and action plans, little implementation has been carried out so far. While SAARC has significant potential to bring regional action together, questions remain whether it is in shape to deliver the solutions needed. With political relations between SAARC countries currently at a low point over regional security issues, the 2016 ministerial summit was cancelled.

In response, in November 2016, South Asian civil society groups met in Islamabad to call on SAARC to incorporate the voices of the most vulnerable in their policy-making processes, and for countries to use the platform to join hands and work effectively to find regional solutions for climate change.[78]

Platform on Disaster Displacement (formerly the Nansen initiative)

In 2012 the Nansen Initiative was launched in response to growing calls to address gaps in protection for those displaced by disasters and climate change. The initiative aimed to bring multiple states together, to build consensus and identify effective practices “on key principles and elements regarding the protection of people displaced across international borders in the context of disasters, including those linked to the effect of climate change”.[79]

The outcome of discussions has been to agree 3 key areas for enhanced action: Collecting data and enhancing knowledge; Enhancing the use of humanitarian protection measures; and Strengthening management of disaster displacement risk in the country of origin, all under the “Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change,” which has been endorsed by 114 countries.

78. http://pakobserver.net/speakers-call-for-trans-boundary-solution-to-impending-climate-threat/
79. Brende, B. and D. Burkhalter. 2015. Forward. Forced Migration Review 49, special issue on Disasters and displacement in a changing climate.

These 3 areas of work can provide a useful "tool box" towards helping those displaced by disasters. However some criticise the Nansen Initiative and its follow-up initiative the Platform for Disaster Displacement (PDD) for failing to take on the most important issues. Given the current gaps in international frameworks and support for those affected by disasters, many believe rather that the real issues to be addressed are legal, institutional, operational and on funding. However none of these key issues are part of the work going forward, and it is unclear whether countries feel they are legally obliged to help those who are affected.[80]

The governments of Bangladesh and Germany are now chairing the PDD and working to implement its recommendations. A work plan is currently being developed, and interfaces with other relevant frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), and UNFCCC policies on climate change and loss & damage are also being explored.

Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM)

The Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM) was set up under the UNFCCC COP19 climate negotiations in 2013, in response to growing pressure to recognise and address "loss and damage" resulting from climate change. Countries agreed that the scope of the WIM's work includes looking at climate-induced displacement and migration

In 2015, at COP21 negotiations in Paris, a task force was set up to find ways to "avert, minimise and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change". In the year immediately following this decision, a technical meeting was hosted by the WIM Executive Committee and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in which experts shared views and a draft set of recommendations were developed.[81]

These initial recommendations provide a useful basis for highlighting key issues, and for the task force to take forward into negotiations. However there are key areas to address or strengthen in subsequent drafts, including: the means to protect the rights of those displaced by climate change; the means of identifying and generating the scale of resources required; a definition of climate displacement that can enable more effective data gathering and policies; new and emerging cross-border issues and strategies to address them; gaps in terms of relevant policies, agreements and institutions; economic and non-economic dimensions of displacement; knowledge, capacity and resource gaps across countries and regions; and the development of displacement scenarios based on warming levels (with a special focus on slow-onset events.)

International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations High Commisioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

The international Organisation for Migration (IOM) has begun the work of looking at the role of climate change, a welcome move. Its potential useful role in providing migration services may become increasingly important if planned migration efforts are supported as being preferable to forced migration. However it is important to note that the IOM has no mandate to ensure legal protection.

The United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) has a clearer role in ensuring protection. However the scope of its work is currently limited to the 1951 definition of refugees, which does not include those affected by climate change.

80. https://www.refugeesinternational.org/blog/2015/10/22/how-to-protect-people-fleeing-climate-change-governments-agree-on-a-way-forward
81. Report of the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts, October 2016

Other ways forward

Resilience

Climate change is clearly increasing migration rates in South Asia, forcing people to leave their lands and livelihoods in search of safety, food security or job opportunities. But with migration and displacement threatening people's human rights, increasing tensions and intolerance in the regions, and leading to rapid and unsafe urbanisation, many migrants would prefer to stay in their original homes if given the chance.

With climate change certain to bring increasingly erratic and extreme weather in the years to come, South Asian countries and communities have little choice but to strengthen their own resilience to what is coming. While efforts in disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change are underway, in most cases these efforts are still in their early stages of learning and implementation, and much more needs to be done. For example, most countries have yet to develop their National Adaptation Plans, which were mandated under the UNFCCC in 2010.

Although developed countries are largely responsible for causing climate change, they have provided relatively little international climate finance to support adaptation so far. Now that the Green Climate Fund (GCF) is set up and poised to distribute more funds for adaptation, South Asian countries urgently need to take advantage of the opportunity and develop effective proposals that meet the needs of their citizens most affected by climate change.

Solidarity and the role of civil society

Political relations between South Asian states can often be difficult, and citizens' attitudes towards their neighbouring countries – whether friendly or hostile - frequently reflect the relationships between their governments. Even though countries in the region share cultures, ecosystems and climate impacts, citizens may lack sufficient empathy and understanding towards each others' nations.

But with climate impacts frequently striking two or three countries at a time, greater solidarity between South Asian nations is both a moral necessity and a practical tool for working together to find common solutions that work for all. It can be an important means of strengthening communities' resilience to reduce pressure on forced migration, as well as responding humanely and effectively to the forced migration that must still take place.

Civil society has an important role to play in facilitating robust and sustained relationships between countries that do not depend on changing governments. Organisations can reach out to the public to help them better understand the climate impacts that force others to migrate, generating a new conversation about South Asian solidarity, and acting as channels of communication between countries.

Organisations in different countries can work together across issues, as evidenced by "the People's SAARC" in which civil society groups work together to identify joint issues on which to lobby the regional body. Farmers' organisations from Bangladesh and India who share a common understanding of their agricultural needs can share platforms on trans-boundary water issues.[82] And organisations such as Climate Action Network-South Asia (CANSA), with its membership from across the region, can bring practitioners and information together, reaching out to the public and policy makers in all countries. Where governments fail to talk to each other, as often happens, civil society can continue to interact and create other channels for progress, including so-called "Track 2" avenues for unofficial diplomacy, dialogue and conflict resolution.

82. Key Informant Interview

Case Study 3: Coming home to resilience in Nepal

Set high up on a steep and remote Himalayan hillside in Eastern Nepal, with no road leading to the village, life is tough in Marse village. Rice has always been a key crop in this area, grown on the narrow terraced fields carved into the steep hillside. But over the last years, the monsoon has brought less and less rain, and later every year. Often when the rains did eventually come, they were so heavy that they damaged the crops, and damaging hailstorms began to become increasingly common.

"Last year there was no rain for 8 months in a row, which we have never seen before. Normally we would be harvesting our maize by now, but you can see that because of the changes in rainfall patterns, the crop is still growing and the harvest is delayed," points out Narmaiya Bisenke, as she stands on one of the terrace fields on the steep hills surrounding the village.

With agriculture so difficult in the village, many of the men in the community have left to find alternative work. Over the years, many have gone to work in the Gulf states.

Together with ActionAid Nepal, the villagers developed a plan to reclaim their livelihoods and resilience. By using a specifically-tailored plan for their village that included using agro-ecological techniques to preserve water and nutrients in the soil, shifting towards growing organic vegetables that raise more income, using plastic poly-tunnel sheeting to protect the crops from heavy rain, hailstones and wild animals, planting fruit trees along the terraces, building sheds for livestock to collect manure, and digging water ponds to capture and store water for irrigation in the dry months, they have transformed their agriculture and their yields.

"Before the project we didn't know that multi-cropping was an option. The project has taught us many things. Now we are growing tomatoes, cauliflower, beans, chillis and many other organic vegetables," says Narmaiya.

"With the training we received from the project, we can take better care of our crops. When we were using chemical fertiliser, the plants would grow very quickly at first, but then they would die. Now we are using manure and compost the plants stay healthy. The plants used to need more water, but now using these organic techniques the water lasts longer. We get a much better income from growing vegetables and fruit, and it is better for our diet too as we are eating many more vegetables," she adds. *"We have noticed that our health has got better since we began growing and eating more vegetables, and you can see that our children are thriving."*

Narmaiya's brother-in-law Jit Bisenke was one of the men in the village who had left for the Gulf to work in construction.

But when his wife Uma took the training and transformed her farming methods, she could quickly see the potential for the family to make a better life. Her organic vegetable growing became so successful that Jit decided to come home to join her in farming again. He is thrilled that the project has transformed their lives so much that he no longer needs to migrate to the Gulf for work. Through their new techniques, they saved enough to buy 200 chickens, which then in time allowed them to earn enough for Jit to invest in a butcher's shop in the local town.

"We have not only changed the way we farm, but also the way we think about making a living," says Uma.

Marse village, Nepal. Lalmaiya Mundel and Narmaiya Bisenke have used agroecological practices to make their agriculture much more resilient to climate change. PHOTO: TERESA ANDERSON / ACTIONAID

Balchour Village, Uttar Pradesh, India. Mana Devi collects water delivered by ActionAid after their village wells failed in the drought this year. Her husband and two older sons have migrated to Delhi to work in the construction sector.
PHOTO: SRIKANTH KOLARI / ACTIONAID

Section 3 Conclusion & Recommendations

Conclusions

Climate change is clearly impacting on South Asian communities' livelihoods and safety, and increasingly forcing them to migrate. While the contribution of climate change towards overall migration levels are unknown at the moment, it is certain to be a significant and growing factor in the years to come. There can be clear benefits to migration for both migrant and destination communities. However the rights of migrants and their families are being threatened by unsafe migration, which is often driven by desperation and a lack of options caused by climate disasters. The impacts of migration on women, both those migrating and those left behind, is also not yet adequately understood or addressed by national or international policies.

Ensuring communities' resilience in the face of climate change is therefore of key importance in protecting rights, and reducing forced migration. Support for effective adaptation and disaster risk reduction, and protection of those who are displaced by climate events, must be a high priority for governments. Adaptation efforts will be necessary, but they will not be sufficient to address all the threats posed by climate change. In the face of extreme events, climate-induced migration will be unavoidable.

There are clear gaps in ensuring the protection of climate migrants, and regional and international processes can play a key role in addressing these gaps. Planned migration is far more preferable for both citizens and governments, to protect migrants' rights, and to avoid overwhelming infrastructure and services. Data and policies that recognise this, create collaboration between countries, and seek to ensure peoples' human rights are guaranteed, must be the way forward.

Above all, policies and practices must seek to illuminate the extent to which climate change is contributing to migration, in order to develop more targeted policies that strengthen resilience of communities and protection of migrants in the face of climate change. By facing the common challenges of climate change and climate-induced migration together, South Asian countries can pave the way towards consensus on regional policies and action for a resilient society.

Recommendations

Climate migration discourse and data mapping

- Clear definitions of climate migration and displacement must be developed by policy makers.
- National governments should use these definitions to gather and analyse data on the role of climate change in migration, and develop appropriate policies accordingly.
- More discussion and linkages between migration and climate authorities and thinking must be facilitated.

Women-focused data and gender sensitive policies

- Data and research should examine the impacts of high levels of migration on women and communities left behind.
- Targeted policies, support and action responding to the challenges faced by women as a result of migration, must be developed.

Resilience

- Efforts to enhance resilience to climate change, particularly of human safety, livelihoods and food security, must be increased.
- Development, adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies should be integrated for more effective resilience.

Safe migration

- Policy makers must recognise that in the face of climate change, migration levels are likely to increase, and that they have a responsibility to ensure people's protection and human rights for example to safety and livelihoods.
- Policies for planned and safe migration can enable processes to be more successful and effective for migrants as well as authorities. This can help to avoid the overwhelming of services and infrastructure, while also meeting the rights of those who have been displaced.

Role of civil society in South Asia

- Civil society has important role to play in creating a sense of solidarity across South Asia towards those impacted by climate change. By identifying stories that help people to better understand the role of climate change in forcing migration, civil society can reach out to the public, for example through using social media.
- Civil society can create platforms and consultations to push for protection gaps to be addressed, to facilitate discussions, share learning and develop common solutions that can apply to the region.
- Even if governments fail to talk to each other, civil society can create alternative channels to develop co-operative approaches between countries.

Regional efforts

- South Asian countries must recognise that they share common ecosystems and vulnerabilities, and face common challenges from climate change. Nations should respond to each others' challenges with a spirit of solidarity, shared understanding and support.
- South Asian solidarity should become the basis for common equitable approaches and solutions to challenges in the region.
- South Asian solidarity can enhance cooperation and learning in strengthening resilience, for example through shared initiatives such as regional early warning systems, food banks, and equitable approaches to trans-boundary water governance.
- Regional solidarity can also improve attitudes, reduce intolerance and facilitate interventions that ensure the rights of those who are forced to migrate due to climate change impacts.

International efforts

- The Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (WIM) under the UNFCCC must work to ensure legal protection and fulfilment of human rights of those that are forced to migrate or displaced by climate change.

- WIM should develop displacement scenarios based on warming levels (with a special focus on slow-onset events) and relevant measures required, also drawing from the work of Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD).
- It should also address technical, policy, intitutional and resource gaps, including related to cross-border issues, at international and regional levels to avert, minimise and address displacement.

Flooding in Gaibandha, Bangladesh. Land surrounding the Brahmaputra-Jamuna, Ganges-Padma and Surma-Kushiara river systems was submerged in July 2016, across 10 districts.
PHOTO: AMIRUZZAMAN / ACTIONAID

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ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

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