

UNEA-2 Symposium

“Environment and Displacement: *Root causes and implications*”

25 May 2016
(14:30 – 17:30 hrs)

Background

1. At the end of 2015 there were around 60 million refugees and internally displaced people across the globe.¹ Each year an average of 26.4 million people are displaced from their homes by disasters brought on by natural hazards. This is the equivalent to one person every second. Environmental change and mismanagement often plays a role in the root causes of displacement.
2. Environmental degradation – desertification, deforestation, land degradation, climate change, water scarcity and extreme weather events – can drive displacement by threatening lives over the short term and making livelihoods untenable over the long term. Meanwhile conflicts over the access to, and use of, natural resources can, indirectly, lead to further internal displacement and refugee flows.²
3. Displacement itself can have environmental impacts, causing environmental degradation. Rapid urbanization or poorly managed refugee camps can put pressure on scarce water, energy and food resources, and lead to uncontrolled waste disposal. However, migration can act as a ‘release valve’ by reducing environmental pressure in a fragile ecosystem.
4. The growing intensity of meteorological disasters due to climate change, coupled with the effects of environmental degradation, is likely to continue being a factor behind human displacement.³ The International Organization of Migration (IOM) predicts there will be **200 million environmentally-displaced people⁴ by the year 2050** with major effects on countries of origin, transit countries, as well as receiving countries.

Objectives of the Symposium

5. The aims of the event are threefold:
 - To focus attention of policy makers on various dimensions of environmental degradation and displacement, both at present and in the future under current projections of climate change and land degradation, in the context of the 2030 agenda and as ‘bridge’ between the humanitarian and development spheres;
 - To bring together leading thinkers, agencies, initiatives and governments concerned about the links between displacement and the environment for a discussion on shared priorities and concrete next steps; and,

¹ UNHCR (2015) www.unhcr.org – The numbers include 13 million refugees ‘of concern’ to UNHCR, 5.1 million registered refugees in 60 camps set up by UNRWA and 38 million IDPs.

² At the recent UNHCR Dialogue on root causes of displacement, it was clearly recognized that natural disasters and slow-onset disasters as well as competition over natural resources are important factors of forced displacement and conflict.

³ The terminology around environmentally induced displacement is complex and there are many different definitions. One commonly cited definition was used at the Ninety-fourth IOM Council Session: “*Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.*”

⁴ While estimates of the numbers of displaced people by 2050 varies from 25 million to 1 billion environmental migrants, 200 million is the most frequently cited number (IOM: Migration, Climate Change and the Environment. <https://www.iom.int/complex-nexus>, last access: 11.04.2016)

- To draw a link between the World Humanitarian Summit and UNEA and to discuss possible areas for increased collaboration between the environmental and humanitarian communities.

Context

6. This event links into several on-going international policy processes:
 - The Sustainable Development Goals make a commitment to migration and development through target 10.7 which aims at facilitating the “orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration [...] including through implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”.
 - The General Assembly Declaration of the 2013 High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development “Recognize[d] the need to consider the role that environmental factors may play in migration”.⁵
 - Loss and damage is included in the Paris Agreement, with the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism to establish a task force to develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change.
 - The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 serves as the global framework for reducing disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health, aiming to substantially reduce the number of affected people globally over the coming 15 years.
7. This UNEA event will be a contribution to this larger discussion. In addition, it will provide an opportunity for Environment Ministers to contribute to the UNGA September Summit on managing large-scale movements of migrants and refugees. Finally it links to the “Leave no-one behind” theme of the High Level Political Forum.
8. In terms of UNEA itself, the event links to the overall theme of “Healthy Environment, Healthy People” as displacement can be a visible symptom of environmental stress and forced migrants are particularly vulnerable to a wide variety of environmental and health risks. Projections of future climate change paint a picture of much higher levels of displacement in future. The event also links to the ‘Frontiers’ session of the Science-Policy Forum on Friday 20th May, where the 2016 Frontiers report will be launched. The Science Policy Forum event will also assess emerging science policy issues and will focus on the environmental links to displacement as one example of those.

Format and outcome of the event

9. The event will be three hours long and will consist of three main sections:
 - Opening: with comments from the UNEP Executive Director and the Deputy Secretary General, Mr. Jan Eliasson.
 - Panel 1: Displacement and the environment: understanding the root causes
 - Panel 2: Displacement and the environment: implications
10. Each moderated panel will be preceded by a 3 minute ‘curtain raiser’ video that will help to explain the general context for the panel discussion.

Panel 1: Displacement and the environment: understanding the root causes

⁵ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/L.5

While a solid foundation of research and the sharing of best practices in the fields of climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction have contributed to the development of more cohesive policy and comprehensive approaches to risk management, the explicit consideration of environmental factors is not yet sufficiently addressed. In addition to a better understanding of the environment-displacement nexus, more efforts need to be placed on the ground to incorporate environmental elements of resilience. Ensuring the latter will contribute to sustainable approaches to alleviate human suffering, and restore as well as maintain human livelihoods while at the same time protecting the environment. The identification and consideration of environmental root causes of displacement, i.e. the push and pull factors, will help develop appropriate mechanisms and venues for supporting livelihoods, improving health and contributing to sustainable development.

- What do we know about the links between displacement and the environment? What are the gaps in our knowledge?
- What things should be done on as a priority to prevent the environmental root causes of displacement and increase resilience?
- What role can the environmental community play in addressing the root causes of displacement? What sort of approaches, partnerships etc. will be needed?

Panel 2: Displacement and the environment: implications for the environmental community

Integrating environmental considerations into the disaster response phase and humanitarian programming may enhance sustainability of response and recovery efforts. The contribution of the environmental community to this debate is necessary in order to enhance technical understanding of this complex issue, and to ensure that policy decisions taken within the various policy fields, for example the development, humanitarian response and displacement fields, are coherent and complementary.

- What are the environmental implications of displacement, now and in the future?
- Should the humanitarian community be addressing the environmental footprint of life-saving action and relief work, and if so, how ?
- Should there be specific provisions in international law for people displaced as a result of environmental factors? Should the international community create formal protection regimes for people displaced for environmental reasons, along the lines of the UN Refugee Convention?
- How do we differentiate the different types of migration, and how can rural smallholder systems that depend on mobility and migration be supported?
- What is the role and responsibility of the global environmental community to address current and future displacement? How should the international community share the burden of addressing environmentally induced displacement?

Draft Agenda for Symposium
Environment and Displacement: *Root causes and implications*

United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-2), Nairobi, Kenya

25 May 2016
1430 – 1730 (Conference room 1)

Time	Session
1430 - 1500	Opening remarks
1500 - 1615	Displacement and the environment: root causes 3 min curtain raiser video Panel Discussion
1615 - 1720	Displacement and the environment: implications 3 min curtain raiser video Panel Discussion
1720-1730	Closing remarks