

Africa's humanitarian action in migration policy: adjusting to environment and climate change

Summary and proposed policy actions for the first 1,000 days

Author: Eric Mwangi Njoroge, Institute of Resource Assessment/African Climate Change Fellowship Program (ACCFP), University of Dar es Salaam

Key pillar: Environment

Region: Africa

Introduction

Among researchers, a consensus has emerged that climate change, and in particular changes in frequency, intensity and location of weather events like storms, floods and droughts, is impacting on human mobility (IFRC, 2009; Adger et al., 2014; CPRD, 2015). Climate change affects migration flows through the intensification of natural disasters, increased warming and drought, sea-level rise and competition over natural resources, leading to conflict and displacement. In an effort to find alternative ways of living, affected people migrate to urban centres, across borders and increasingly across continents.

For many of the suddenly (and subsequently prolonged) displaced people, migration increases exposure to poverty through socio-economic deprivation; conflict occasioned by competition for resources, including jobs and basic commodities; civil unrest; and human rights abuses as a result of increased demands on public and social services.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda starts from the principle to leave no one behind including migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Since 2015, migration has been firmly on the agenda of the European Union (EU) Member States and yet, while the significance of climate change is now widely recognised, a majority of EU and African Union (AU) Member States have yet to fully acknowledge that climate change is a contributing factor of displacement and migration.

The research conducted for this paper examined the policies of governments in African countries' where climate change is contributing to displacement and migration and the policies of the African Union Commission (AUC) relating to (environmental) migration, development and humanitarian assistance policies and climate change. The study compared climate policies, the applicability of international legal frameworks for climate-related displacement, and the slow and ineffective response of the AUC to deal with the outflow of migrants wishing to enter Europe and other destinations from the continent as well as within the continent itself. The analysis focused on the link between environment and migration because understanding the implications of poorly managed climate induced displacement and migration as well as requisite corrective actions is critical and has recently received significant attention internationally.

Main research findings

The research showed that in the region, climate change is not the sole factor behind climate-induced migration. There are also other factors, such as natural disasters and often unaddressed political and socio-economic challenges. Reviewed literature indicates that environmentally-induced migration is mainly occurring within national borders, but weather events like storms, floods and drought have different impacts on international, regional or internal migration, depending on whether they happen gradually over a longer period of time or occur more suddenly.

Castles and Rajah (2010) highlighted that in the case of slow-paced events (like decline in rainfall or changes in crop fertility), the populations involved frequently have considerable time to develop adaptation strategies, such as planting new crops, developing irrigation systems, changing agricultural practices and diversifying income sources. In the case of fast-paced events (like cyclones or floods), forced migration may be the only option, and may happen under very poor conditions, and without time for preparation.

What has become evident is that, despite significant progress in the protection of refugees' rights in Africa, an alarming gap remains between policy making and policy implementation. This has serious implications for the realisation of refugees' rights (ICMPD, 2013). The reasons are many but chief among them is that many African governments lack the political will to translate agreements on paper into compliance in practice. Frequently, ratification of international and regional refugee treaties has not translated into national laws and for those that have been domesticated, enforcement of protection mechanisms is still a challenge going hand in hand with impunity for violators.

Other reasons hindering the realisation of refugees' rights are overlapping membership and limited coordination among regional economic communities (RECs) leading to conflicting and competing commitments. Lack of integrated programmes that address both social and economic hindrances faced by refugees as well as regional and national civil society structures working in similar areas may result in duplicated efforts and wasted resources.

Additionally, the findings illustrate that, while obstacles to return including lack of land and shelter, livelihoods and security are familiar and relatively well understood, the factors that inform decisions to return are less recognised. Further, there is less understanding of the impact these factors have on the return and reintegration process for returnees. Therefore, a key priority is to gain a better understanding of the pre- and post-return conditions and considerations taken into account by refugee returnees.

Taken together, these barriers to protection and human security associated with climate-induced displacement and migration can induce tensions and conflict between migrant and receiving communities. It is in light of these and other findings from the research that the following

priority actions are provided, with the aim of supporting emerging efforts to improve protection and human security, and strengthen the policy and governance frameworks.

Early actions for the first 1,000 days

Priority actions for environmentally induced migrants and refugees are very similar to those needed for other categories of refugees but include vulnerability to environmental hazards and climate change. For migrants, refugees and IDPs, not being left behind means having the ability to return to their homes and resume normal lives; being better integrated into their host communities if return is impossible; or being settled elsewhere if needed. Advancing the leave no one behind agenda in the implementation of SDGs means the difference between a protracted life of aid dependency through humanitarian assistance and the chance of a better life with dignity and self-reliance through a development response.

To better respond to the protection needs of human rights of displaced communities and prevent the violation of human rights, governments and civil society actors need to work together to improve access to quality support services; to reduce gender-based violence (GBV) by engaging youth, women and men; and to ensure the implementation of refugee protection laws and policies in Africa.

Key measures to advocate for in the immediate, mid and longer term to better protect Africa's (environmental) refugees and vulnerable host communities will occur across three levels.

- At the micro level through a development response, refugee and host communities should be empowered to be more 'resilient' to shocks, hazards and conflict, and steps should be taken to ensure they are able to identify, plan, and carry out actions to respond to events so that their rights are protected.
- At the meso level, civil society actors and national governments should forge genuine, inclusive partnerships in offering assistance and protection that is responsive to refugees' needs.
- At the macro level, regional economic communities, and the AU must take ownership and responsibility for refugees' protection by being more accountable, equitable and responsive to their needs.

When considering these three levels, it is important to note that priority actions build on other ongoing actions, are interlinked and frequently will occur across these levels of actors. Of course the relevance will vary by country and context, including the vulnerability to environmental hazards and climate change.

Immediate actions

These actions can be carried out by groups or organisations belonging to the formal or traditional humanitarian sector (UN agencies, INGOs) and local groups:

- Design a media campaign to raise both public awareness of the refugee crisis and policy-makers' awareness of existing and reforming legislation related to refugees.
- Provide shelter, including communal residing areas in transit centres and reception centres.
- Support refugees' primary health care needs by providing water, sanitation and medicines.
- Assist with food security and income diversification through distribution of food vouchers and training on improving agricultural productivity.
- Provide safe water and hygiene practices by rehabilitating and constructing water points alongside training of local engineers to maintain the facilities.
- Construct latrines and promote safe hygiene in camp and non-camp environments.

Mid-term actions

These actions can be carried out by the AU, regional economic communities (RECs), UN agencies and IOM, national governments and local/provincial governments:

- States should actively promote responsibility-sharing and strengthening support to host countries and communities.
- Provide protection for refugees, including child-friendly spaces and prevention and support services for gender-based violence (GBV).
- Protect living environments through provision of sustainable energy for heating, cooking and lighting.

Long-term actions

These actions can be undertaken by international organisations dealing with the issue at hand including UN agencies, IOM, RECs, national governments:

- Offer sustainable return and reintegration for those refugees wishing to return, or who have already done so.
- Strengthen weak migration policy and governance frameworks to anticipate and manage the potential impacts of climate change

References

Adger, W. N., Pulhin, J. M., Barnett, J., Dabelko, G. D., Hovelsrud, G. K., Levy, M., Oswald Spring, Ú., and Vogel, C. H. (2014) 'Human Security'. In *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press: pp. 755-791. Viewed 27 November 2015

(http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg2/WGIIAR5-Chap12_FINAL.pdf).

Castles, S. and Rajah, C. (2010) *Environmental Degradation, Climate Change, Migration & Development*. Viewed 11 December 2015

(<http://www.nnirr.org/~nnirrorg/drupal/sites/default/files/pga-paper-on-environment-and-migration-by-castlesrajah.pdf>).

Center for Participatory Research and Development (CPRD) (2015) *Climate-Induced Displacement and Migration: Policy Gaps and Policy Alternative*. Viewed 27 November 2015 (<http://cprdbd.org/papers/BriefingPaperClimateInducedDisplacementAndMigration.pdf>).

International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) (2013) *MME on the Move: A Stocktaking of Migration, Mobility, Employment and Higher Education in Six African Regional Economic Communities*. Viewed 14 December 2015 (http://www.icmpd.org/fileadmin/ICMPD-Website/ICMPD_General/Publications/MME_REC_Report-Web_en.pdf).

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) (2009). *Climate Change and Human Mobility A Humanitarian Point of View*. Viewed 08 September 2015 (http://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/disasters/climate%20change/climate_change_and_human_mobility-en.pdf).