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Island and Archipelagic States' Policymaking for Human Mobility
in the Context of Climate Change

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Island and coastal regions belong to the most climate change-exposed habitats. Today, people living in island states experience the devastating effects of extreme tropical cyclones, rising sea levels, droughts and ocean acidification. In some cases, entire cultures are at risk of extinction because traditional livelihoods can no longer provide sufficient resources for survival while landmasses are submerged and salinized by high tides. Although there have been notable advances over the last decades, many island countries still struggle with issues like poverty, universal access to basic education, and healthcare. Recent development gains are at risk of reversal by the economic and human costs of climate change, which increases dependencies on external actors.

While economically and culturally different, archipelagic and island countries face common problems of scarcity

of arable land, remoteness, and the challenges to relief distribution in times of disaster. Some of their populations are vulnerable and have limited resources to adapt *in situ* to adversity. These compounding circumstances are push factors for migration and may become so strong that people feel they have no other option but to move out of harm's way in order to have the chance of a decent future. Island agriculturalists – like subsistence farmers, livestock herders, and fishermen – are at particular risk of involuntary displacement to places in which their skills give them no opportunities to earn a living. These nations and particularly vulnerable inhabitants have contributed little to nothing to global greenhouse gas emissions. Faced with this grave injustice, policymakers in archipelagic and island states are trying to understand potential future changes and their implications for their nations. Consequently, many have voiced demands for



Barbuda – Antigua and Barbuda (© Kira Vinke/PIK)



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halting global mean temperature increase at 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. On the achievement of this climate protection goal, they have little to no influence, but rely – some with their territorial existence – on the mitigation plans of the high emitters and the pressure of the international community.

Increasing climatic risks already prompted relocation of villages, and recent changes in the natural environment contributed to migration decisions and forced displacement. Non-governmental organisations are demanding more governmental support for affected communities. This reality has led policymakers in some countries to consider new mechanisms to influence mobility patterns and to guide displacement responses and planned relocation. Others have just started the dialogue on this topic. Their ability to act and come up with policy solutions to address human mobility in the context of climate change, though, is limited by strained financial resources, which are under additional pressures to adapt and reconstruct infrastructure after disasters. Moreover, it can be politically difficult to introduce this topic to the public discourse proactively, as many citizens rightly demand to

stay in their home areas. By developing different strategies to address human mobility in the context of climate change (HMCCC), governments can both enable people to stay and ensure they are able to move in good conditions, in order to minimize human suffering.

This report provides an overview of where human mobility in the context of climate change fits in the policy landscape of nine island and archipelagic countries: Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Dominica, and St. Lucia in the Eastern Caribbean; Fiji, Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu in the South Pacific; and the Philippines in the Western Pacific. All of these nations are heavily affected by climate impacts like sea level rise, ocean acidification, tropical cyclones and hydrological extremes. Different forms of human mobility are among the ways people adapt or respond to these changes, in complex ways. Moreover, the policy landscape is heterogeneous. Some of the countries have specifically addressed HMCCC in guidelines, adaptation plans or policies, like Dominica, Fiji, and Vanuatu. Others have just recently recognized the topic as an emerging policy action field. This report demonstrates that HMCCC is a cross-cutting issue that can potentially be

addressed by several ministries and governmental agencies, for example internal affairs, development, immigration, disaster relief, labour, social protection or health. However, without clear responsibilities for addressing the topic together with a strong coordination between different departments, it may not be adequately considered in planning processes. Moreover, the inclusion of civil society actors and non-governmental organizations in consultations is crucial for ensuring people-centred and rights-based policy development.

This report provides insights gained from 94 expert interviews. Prior to the interviews, regional literature reviews were conducted to understand the challenges and opportunities to address HMCCC in specific local contexts. This report shows the strength of regional approaches for improving migrants' rights and for increasing climate resilience. The findings are relevant to other island nations that face similar challenges and need to build capacity for future climate-related mobility dynamics. Moreover, they highlight the necessity of building a coherent multilateral framework on HMCCC to accommodate and support people who may have to move in the future.

Insights from the Eastern Caribbean: Anguilla, Antigua & Barbuda, Commonwealth of Dominica, and St. Lucia

The Caribbean has a long history of human mobility dating back from pre-Colombian times to the period of enslavement, indentureship and to the post-colonial period. Today, the impacts of climate change are becoming a push factor for migration and displacement. These changes materialize in different cultural, socio-economic, and demographic settings and therefore can have different outcomes for human mobility. The combined effects of sea level rise and high wind-speed tropical cyclones have led to the (temporary) displacement of people, mainly across the region. The relationship between slow-onset climate impacts and migration in the Caribbean are less observed, researched and understood.

In the Eastern Caribbean, intra-island mobility is facilitated through the framework of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States Commission (OECS), which grants its member states' citizens freedom of movement and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which provides freedom of movement for certain types of



Soufriere & Scotts Head – Dominica (© Dr. Horst Vogel / GIZ)

skilled labour under the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). Dominica has developed a strategy to move people away from hazard-exposed areas. Besides this strategy, no explicit policies or guidelines exist that address HMCCC on a national or regional level.

The extreme cyclone season of 2017 led to unprecedented numbers of displacements in the region. In general, intra-regional collaboration served to accommodate displaced populations and the solidarity between the countries was highlighted as positive by policymakers. However, interviews with regional and national level actors indicated that capacities of involved agencies were hard-pressed resulting frequently in insufficient care for displaced persons, high stress for agency employees, who themselves were sometimes affected, and missed opportunities for data collection. Displacements after disasters have led to negative psychological health effects and these are insufficiently addressed in response frameworks.

Insights from the South Pacific: Fiji, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Vanuatu

The adverse effects of climate change are already having an impact on livelihoods in the Pacific and projections for

impacts like sea level rise, droughts and ocean acidification show mounting risks. Rising sea levels might threaten the very existence of low-lying Pacific islands like Kiribati or Tuvalu. With limited land available for relocation within national boundaries, cross-border migration – within the region or even to far-off destinations – may become a necessity.

Although migration has been part of cultures across the Pacific Ocean throughout centuries, climate change may lead to abrupt and involuntary displacement of communities deeply connected to their land. Climate change is therefore increasingly acknowledged as a driver of human mobility among policymakers in the South Pacific. This has prompted civil society movements, like the Pacific Climate Warriors to demand more ambitious climate protection internationally, in order for communities to be able to remain in their homeland. At the same time, policymakers carry the responsibility to take precautionary action and help people move out of hazardous areas.

In 2018, Fiji launched Planned Relocation Guidelines, though the standard operating procedures are yet to be developed. In addition, Vanuatu launched its National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement in 2018. Despite this growing aware-



Vunidogola – Fiji (© GIZ)

ness, experts have indicated that HMCCC is not sufficiently addressed in policy documents across the region. Increased awareness among policymakers is a precondition for achieving this. Regional actors like the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) or the Pacific Community (SPC) play an important role in giving a voice to Pacific island states in international policy negotiations on climate change. Regional actors like the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) are also active in managing or responding to displacement and relocation in the region. The Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS), another important regional actor, has elevated results from the Technical Working Group on HMCCC to regional policy work in the Pacific. Several respondents referred to good cooperation practices, for instance after tropical cyclones. Referring to national levels, experts rather expressed doubt in capacities to address HMCCC. Several experts also mentioned the need to improve communication and/or coordination mechanisms between stakeholders in this cross-cutting topic.

Insights from the Philippines

A significant number of Filipino lives are uprooted every year by extreme weather and climate events, a highly visible and well-recorded phenomenon in the Philippines. There is also growing evidence of links between gradual environmental degradation, climate change, and internal human mobility patterns. Growing understanding and policy actor interest in HMCCC is timely, as climate projections portend an increase in risks to Filipino livelihoods, in particular, from heat, rainfall variability and extremes, water scarcity, increased intensity and frequency of storms, sea warming, and rising sea levels.

These changes impact the mobility of both rural and urban populations. In the case of the latter, people in poverty and/or informal housing are particularly at risk of further hazards. Rural populations are apparently migrating to nearby urban areas, nearby farms, and agricultural areas, a trend particularly reported in the larger islands of the archipelago. Internal migration from resource stressed areas towards larger cities is most likely to involve working-age males with middle-to-high socioeconomic status. Availability of social networks is particularly important for rural-urban movements, and education is a limiting factor for cities to become springboards for destinations overseas.



Lake Sebu – Philippines (© Jorge S. Ebay)

While no legislation exists specifically referencing HMCCC, two national agencies were created to coordinate, centralize and scale-up work on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, two issues typically addressed separately: the Climate Change Commission (CCC) and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC). Both of these coordinating bodies have the strength of a legal basis, through Republic Act 9729 and Republic Act 10121, respectively. The currently fragmented approaches and multiplicity of actors can be improved by converging the strategies of the two agencies. A good step towards more effective integration of population movements in CCC and NDRRMC activities would be better inclusion of the Philippine Commission on Population (POPCOM), the central body mandated to manage population programmes including internal migration.

Efforts to improve data and research on internal migration will add to the groundwork for efforts to address HMCCC, particularly in the context of environmental degradation and slow-onset hazards. Significantly, the 2018 Philippine National Migration Survey (NMS) builds knowledge on internal migration and provides a baseline for deeper research.

5 Steps Forward: Key Recommendations

Establishing effective policies to manage migration, planned relocation and displacement is essential to minimize potential challenges of human mobility and to deliver on the positive potential of migration for development. To support effective policymaking, several steps can be taken by national and regional actors.

1. Set a Strategic Direction

Setting a clear, strategic, and objective-driven direction for policy development and implementation of climate migration policy is an important component to effective public policy and governance both on the regional and national levels. For example, mapping and integrating existing policies for migration, disaster risk reduction (DRR) and to climate change adaptation (CCA) can strengthen the effectiveness of both policy areas, as these currently often translate to separate institutional structures and operational frameworks. Forming a specific direction of action involves ensuring sustained commitment at key levels of leadership; engaging in regional and/or international dialogues and thereby in cross-country coordination; establishing targeted legal and policy instruments; building institutional structures and capacities for effective implementation of policies and programmes; ensuring the full participation of affected communities, with particular attention to vulnerable or marginalized groups; and executing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

2. Execute Abating Actions for Climate Risks

Policies and programmes to undercut the root causes of displacement, and distress migration, and specifically targeting people already affected by climate change impacts, are key. One instrument that increases the capability of addressing climate change is the diversification of income. Especially farmers, fishers, or the tourism industry could thereby decrease their exposure to hazards. Moreover, safety net mechanisms for losses and damage in the context of extreme weather, such as cash for work programmes and insurance schemes are needed. Community consultation mechanisms will be necessary for many government activities to succeed, for example: to relocate at-risks people, distribute relief equitably, or to establish thresholds at which areas are designated as unsafe or unfit for human habitation.

3. Improve Data and Strengthen Research

The collection of migration and displacement data is important for the implementation, follow-up and review of any migration or displacement management policy, as well as for identifying and assisting groups with specific vulnerabilities. In all regions studied, limitations in data availability, data access, and data management on HMCCC exist. More funding and personnel should be allocated for data collection, knowledge management, and data analysis. Longitudinal or panel data, as well as qualitative case studies, are needed. Gender and human rights should be mainstreamed into these efforts. Disaggregation of data by sex, age, and migration status is necessary and in line with agreed indicators for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In addition, most countries would benefit from systems to better integrate, share, and harmonize existing data on both international and internal migration; targeted analysis on HMCCC; integration of relevant indicators or questions in existing national tools; and trainings on migration and displacement data in general.

Partially due to the lack of data, research on HMCCC is very limited for some regions, like the Caribbean. In other areas, some substantial research exists but is often carried out by external institutions and researchers. Local research capacities and education need strengthening in order to assess HMCCC nationally. Greater consideration is needed for migration and displacement in the context of slow-onset impacts of climate change, in order to maximize the potential for migration to contribute to human development and to minimize possible challenges. Further, more in-depth and qualitative research is needed to understand how climate change affects people's physical and mental health. Several experts approached for this study explicitly mentioned the need to investigate long-term effects of post-disaster trauma and stress.

4. Foster Effective Policy Implementation and Decision Making

Some existing policies, which could be applied to HMCCC, are not effectively implemented. Policy implementation can be strengthened through participatory, community-based approaches as well as by paying special attention to groups with specific needs. In the case of the latter, the dearth of disaggregated data is a challenge to evidence-based policy development. Mechanisms to include the meaningful participation of affected communities should be strengthened. Key barriers to the inclusion of displaced persons in disaster recovery include the dearth of registration and tracking mechanisms post-displacement, for both cross-border and internal displacement; the invisibility of internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in urban areas, in informal settlements, and with temporary hosts; and the reality that many people who migrate following disasters do not self-identify as an IDP. Moreover, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and increased institutional capacities can help to ensure sustainable implementation. Regional entities like the OECS Commission or CARICOM in the Caribbean and Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) agencies in the Pacific could support coordination of knowledge or capacities. The objective of regional coordination must be the integration of strategies, policies and actions between ministries or departments, across different governance levels, and always integrating local communities, who will themselves be the source of solutions. On a national level inter-ministerial working groups could be established for coordination and to ensure greater mainstreaming of human mobility into overall development planning.

5. Widen and Deepen the Stakeholder Network

Effective policy formulation and implementation need a strong actor network. The first step to this is an improved awareness of climate change and human mobility linkages – and scientific literacy of both issues – among policy actors and practitioners. This requires good science-policy communication, accessible to local governments and their constituents. To achieve this, governments should consider fostering partnerships with universities as independent knowledge brokers.

Moreover, national governments could invite constituted bodies under the UNFCCC regime (e.g. the Executive Committee of Warsaw International Mechanism, the Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG), the Paris Committee on Capacity Building (PCCB), and the Climate Technology Centre and Network (CTCN)) to develop guidance related to risk retention and related capacity building and technology needs – for example through a ‘toolkit’ such as those that exist for planned relocations. Likewise, donor governments should support the development of such guidance/toolkits and the implementation of recommendations therein, with a view to improving consistency and coherence across countries and regions as well as within them, to enhance coordination and complementarity of different actions at various levels of government.

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