

**High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges:  
Understanding and addressing root causes of displacement**  
16-17 December 2015, Palais des Nations, Geneva

*Thematic session 2:  
Addressing 'new' root causes: urbanization, food insecurity,  
water scarcity, natural hazards and climate change*

Co-Chairs:

Ms. Professor Walter Kälin, Envoy of the Chairmanship of the Nansen Initiative

Ms. Kelly Clements, Deputy High Commissioner, UNHCR

Co-Chairs' Summary

***Background***

According to the International Displacement Monitoring Centre, one person per second is displaced globally by disasters triggered by sudden onset natural hazards. It was noted that while many affected people can go back after a short period of displacement, others remain displaced for extended periods, as their former places of residence become uninhabitable or remain under protracted recovery and reconstruction efforts.

***Political will to lead change***

The participants noted the global recognition of a solid scientific evidential basis of the human influence on climate change and the **need for States to display their political will and leadership** to act quickly to avoid increasing destructive outcomes.

***Need for evidence base***

Participants recognized the **importance of data collection and analysis** to understand the multiple drivers behind displacement due to natural hazards. It was suggested that analysis of data is an entry point for action to mobilize political support (and relevant actors) for action which aims to prevent natural hazards from becoming disasters.

***Addressing and mitigating factors of climate change related displacement***

Climate change induced displacement can be brought on by sudden onset natural hazards such as flooding or windstorms as well as by slow onset disasters like drought, desertification or sea level rise and environmental degradation, deforestation, or water scarcity. Participants also discussed some of the ways of **mitigating consequences of displacement** triggered by climate change, which should build on the **preparedness and enhancing resilience** of vulnerable populations.

***Increasing urbanization, competition for resources and risk of conflict***

It was noted that the majority of the forcibly displaced worldwide reside in climate hotspots and food insecure areas. **Competition for energy resources and increasing urbanization** were noted key new factors in climate change-related forced displacement. **Tensions resulting from increasing competition for resources** (such as **water, energy and food**) between host and displaced populations were also noted as a persistent challenge.

It was noted that conflicts over resources are often at the core of displacement. **Lack of access to natural resources are expected to be a growing driver** of displacement with large segments of populations expected to live in **situations of severe water stress or depleted agricultural productivity** in the future. Post-conflict situations often have persistent high food insecurity levels with an associated high **risk of relapse** into conflict.

### *Displacement continuum*

Climate induced displacement should be seen on a **continuum starting with internal displacement becoming cross-border movements** in some cases. National responses need to look at such movements through a migration prism to prevent displacement, prepare for disasters, and enhance resilience. Cross border movement engages **different responsibilities** compared with internal displacement invoking the principles of international law and responsibility sharing.

### *Planned relocation*

Participants discussed planned relocation in anticipation of or in response to disasters. The **complexity of such a process** (including the need for resources and coordination) and the **extensive consultation with the affected host and moving communities** were highlighted. It was emphasized that it has to be used as a measure of last resort when there is robust evidence of a lack of alternatives and that it has to be accomplished within a **rights-based framework**.

### *Role of communities in displacement*

Positive examples of community involvement in resilience building were noted. Communities have diverse protection needs that have to be identified on a case-by-case basis. In working with hazard-prone communities, it was noted that it is essential both to rely on their existing resources and **involve them from the onset** of prevention and response planning. Inclusiveness can help **prevent further exacerbation of vulnerabilities and impoverishment**.

### *Partnerships*

**Adequate responses require moving beyond humanitarian action.** It was noted that most actions related to climate change fall into the realm of sustainable development. Participants noted that tackling climate change induced displacement requires **broad-based partnerships**, in particular those that bridge the gap **between humanitarian and development action**. The positive contribution of the corporate sector participation was also noted as in need of further exploration.

Participants highlighted **institutional blockages and silos at national and international level which need to be overcome**, in particular national environment authorities not seeing migration as part of their portfolio. Some examples of **national institutional collaboration and cross-sectoral dialogue** were highlighted as positive practice. The need for further resources and commitments from the international community to support disaster-prone States was noted (including development of effective loss and damage reparation procedures).

### *Existing legal practices and avenues to address displacement*

Participants discussed some of the **legal avenues for addressing displacement** due to disasters and responding to climate change-induced migration. There is evidence of State practice of admitting disaster-displaced persons through free movement protocols (e.g. ECOWAS), humanitarian visas, invoking temporary protection, preferential immigration considerations based on family ties, education and labour migration schemes, and by the application of regional refugee law instruments (i.e. under the OAU Convention).

It was agreed that while legal gaps exist, the absence of a dedicated legal regime should not be an impediment to action.

### *Upcoming opportunities to address climate change and disaster induced displacement*

There was an acknowledgment of the work done by the **Nansen Initiative** on Disaster-Induced Cross-Border Displacement including the adoption of the **Agenda for the Protection** of the Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change in 2015, and the roadmap that it provides for action.

There was also broad consensus amongst participants that the recently concluded **Paris Agreement is a milestone** in terms of global commitment to move from enhancing knowledge on climate-related displacement to taking action to avert, mitigate and address such displacement. It was highlighted that the Paris Agreement (paragraph 50) refers to a **Taskforce** which will develop recommendations on averting, mitigating and addressing displacement. The Agreement was also noted as an **opportunity to bring migration into the discussion and to feed into national plans**.

Looking forward, participants noted amongst other things, the opportunity to build on the **inclusion of human mobility in national adaptation planning**.

The commitment made in the 2015-2030 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction to address issues related to **displacement, migration and planned relocation and to boost the resilience** of societies to natural and man-made hazards was also underlined as an opportunity to further the necessary action at the national and regional levels.

**Further opportunities to bring displacement into the development discussions**, include the follow up to the Sustainable Development Goals and the World Humanitarian Summit, Habitat III Conference and UN efforts on responsibility sharing in relation to displacement issues.

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