

Migration as an adaptation strategy to climate change in deltas

An escape from environmental determinism

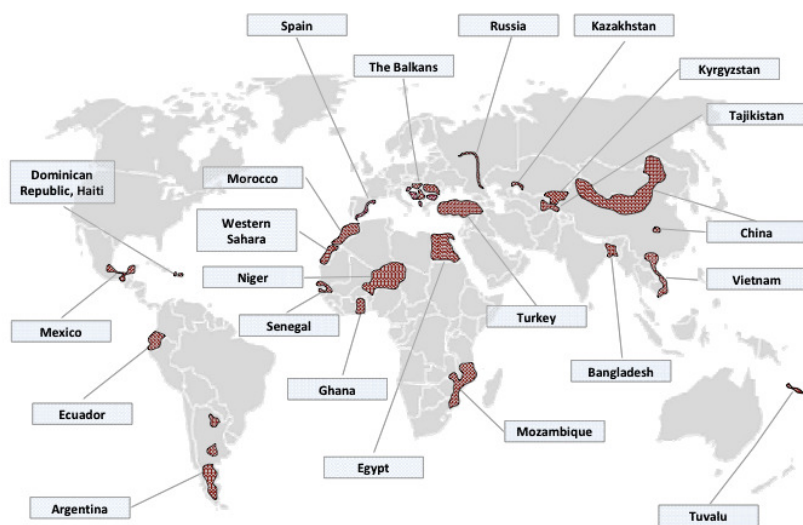
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The EACH-FOR project



Case-study 1: The Mekong Delta



Envisat image of the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, 6 February 2007
(Source: ESA 2007)

- Flooding in inland areas of the upper delta (rice growing area).
- Saline intrusion in coastal areas (mangrove and shrimp farming regions)
- Acid-sulfate soils
- High level of pesticide use
- Water pollution and water shortage



Vietnamese Migrants in Phnom Penh

“Flooding occurs every year at my former living place. I could not grow and harvest crops. Life therefore was very miserable. Besides my family did not know what else we could do other than growing rice and fishing. Flooding sometimes threatened our lives. So we came here to find another livelihood.”

“My family had crop fields but in recent years, floods occurred very often so the crop was not stable. In addition, the price of fertiliser increased very fast, the diseases of the rice plant are too much so the crop yield was nothing. Even sometimes the yield was not enough to cover the amount required for living.”



Linkages between floods and migration

- » During the flooding season, people undertake seasonal labor migration and movement towards urban centers to bolster livelihoods.
- » That for those directly dependent on agriculture for their livelihood (usually rice farmers), successive flooding events leading to destruction of crops on more than one occasion can drive people to migrate elsewhere in search of an alternative livelihood.
- » As an extreme coping mechanism, anecdotal indicators point to human trafficking into neighboring areas as one strategy adopted by families who have suffered from water-related stressors.
- » The government as part of a flood management and environmental sanitation strategy is currently undertaking planned resettlement of people living in vulnerable zones along river banks



Case-study 2: Ganges Delta

- North West
 - Chilmari
 - Gaibandha
 - Chars on the Jamuna River
- South West
 - Satkhira
 - Khulna
 - Mongla
- Dhaka
 - 6 different slums (old and new, illegal and legal)



Environmental changes

▶ In the North:

- ▶ Glaciers melting from the Himalaya
- ▶ Riverbank erosion
- ▶ Chars lands
- ▶ Desertification



▶ In the South:

- ▶ Cyclones
- ▶ Floods
- ▶ Sea-level rise
- ▶ Dam on the Ganges in India
- ▶ Contamination of freshwater sources by seawater



Migration patterns

- ▶ Migration extremely common, almost all individuals moved at some point during their life, sometimes very often.

▶ In the North

- ▶ Migration from *char* to *char*
- ▶ Illegal migration to India



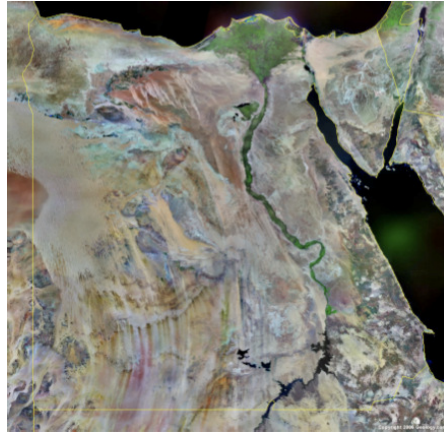
▶ In the South

- ▶ Migration to urban centres



Caste-study 3: Nile Delta

- ▶ 40% of the population of Egypt live in the coastal region.
- ▶ 97% of the country is desert, only 5% of the land is occupied
- ▶ Population density can be really high along the Nile



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- ▶ Other factors than environmental ones, such as poverty or unemployment, impact upon the migration decision. These factors, however, are often related to environmental changes.
 - ▶ There are also considerable 'pull' factors that support the migration decision.
 - ▶ Migration is only possible for those who have the financial means, which is often not the case, since environmental degradation has a negative impact on the income.
 - ▶ Ownership of the land is an extremely important factor that influences the migration decision
 - ▶ The Egyptian state does not seem to consider environmental migration as a serious issue.
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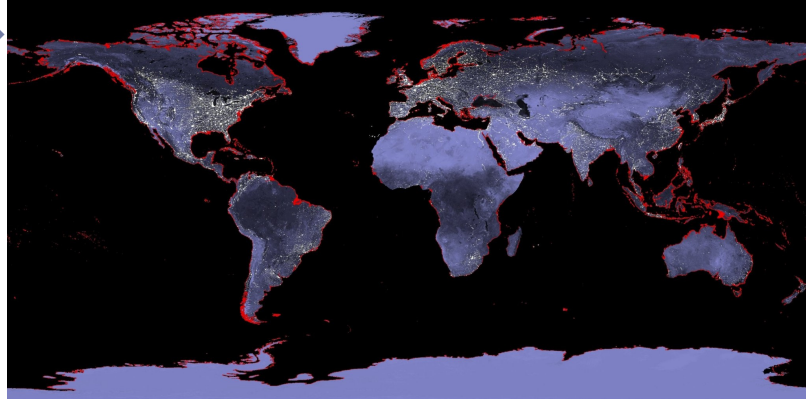


Key empirical conclusions

- ▶ Most of migration movements associated with environmental degradation are internal movements, either on (very) short distance or from rural to urban areas.
 - ▶ International migration is the exception, not the rule.
 - ▶ Environmental drivers are mixed with other drivers, but represent an additional constraint to migrate.
 - ▶ Migration is often used by the migrants as a coping strategy.
 - ▶ Those that are the most vulnerable are often unable to migrate, and can fall victims of trafficking
 - ▶ Migration requires both economic and social capital.
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Yet the dominant discourse on the topic is disconnected from these observations

- ▶ Migrants are seen as expiatory, resourceless victims of climate change.
 - ▶ Many of them don't consider themselves as victims, or don't want to be considered as such.
 - ▶ Migrants are resourceful agents – they are not the most vulnerable
 - ▶ Migration is perceived as an adaptation failure
 - ▶ We assume a direct, causal relationship between climate change and migration.
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- ▶ « A sea-level rise of 1cm would put 1M people at risk of displacement »
- ▶ « It is likely that 150 M people will be displaced by 2050 » - Stern

- ▶ We expect that these displacements will be forced and international.
- ▶ We assume that the nature and extent of the migration flows will depend upon the impacts of climate change.
- ▶ Climate-induced migration often perceived as a threat to security.
 - ▶ In many cases, it can actually improve human security.

This discourse remains rooted in environmental determinism and promotes a security agenda

Adaptation as a key factor

- ▶ Though migration is often presented as a failure of adaptation to environmental change, many migrants used migration itself as an adaptation strategy.
- ▶ Migrants are not resourceless in the face of environmental change, and portraying them as such might do some harm:
 - ▶ On the conceptual level
 - ▶ With regard to assistance and protection
 - ▶ With regard to development policies
- ▶ Two key policy challenges
 - ▶ Enabling the right to leave
 - ▶ Enabling the right to choose



Enabling the right to leave

- ▶ The right to leave is the key condition of asylum, originating after the Peace of Westphalia.
- ▶ This right is currently jeopardised by environmental change.
- ▶ The most vulnerable often find themselves unable to leave
 - ▶ Because they don't have the resources to do so
 - ▶ Because of barriers to migration
- ▶ Their life, health and livelihood are directly exposed to danger
 - ▶ *Migration as a risk-reduction strategy*
 - ▶ *Issue of pro-active population displacements*



Enabling the right to choose

- ▶ Many of the migrants are forced migrants, and many of the stayers are forced stayers.
- ▶ Adaptation needs
 - ▶ In the origin region, adaptation will reduce the environmental constraints to migration.
 - ▶ Adaptation will also be needed in the destination regions.
 - ▶ In many cases, a sensible adaptation policy would be to promote and facilitate migration: migration can be a key tool to improve human security.
- ▶ Adaptation and migration policies need to be consistent with each other.

