

State of Climate Induced Displacement in South Asia: Rationale for Policy Intervention

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Background:

According to the Sixth IPCC Report 2022¹, Climate Displacement is defined as the incident of involuntary migration when people have very few or no options except to move in the face of extreme climate events. Extreme weather events and related climate conditions have often been the causal drivers of migration and displacement in South Asia and more so due to its geographical location. Resultantly, this has intensified existing vulnerabilities of people who are living in precarious conditions in ecologically sensitive regions. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), between 2010 and 2021, a total of 61.4 million were displaced within South Asia alone (Figure 1)². Climate extremes often makes its presence known in the region by extreme events like river floods, Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF), extreme precipitation, and extreme tropical storms. People are forced to leave homes for temporary or indefinite periods, which typically occurs because of sudden extreme events, which starts with seemingly temporary evacuation. Additionally, already vulnerable populations are being displaced due to slow-onset processes like sea level rise, salinity, droughts and so on.

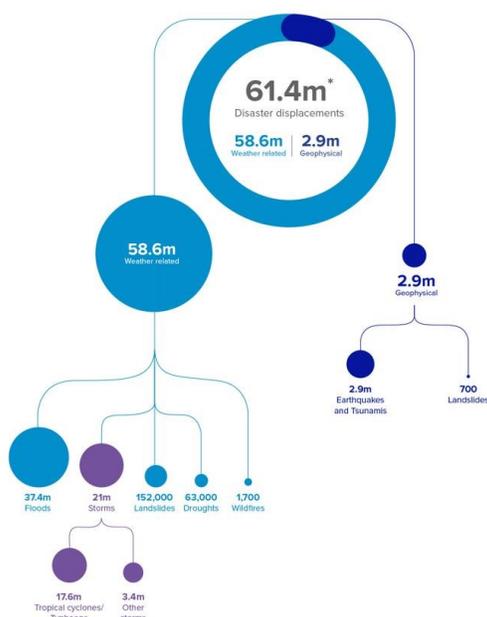


Figure 1: Disaster Displacement in South Asia. Breakdown by hazards

Key Messages:

1. A separate comprehensive set of policies are needed to address climate induced displacement, one that will consider the many vulnerabilities of people being displaced and the losses and damages suffered due to displacement.
2. Mainstreaming Gender and gender responsive budgeting into National displacement policies to address the needs of women displaced.
3. A bottom-up decentralized approach to collecting disaggregated data on displacement in the countries.
4. Countries in South Asia should proactively plan for planned relocation.
5. More transboundary collaboration is needed between governments of South Asia.
6. More collaboration between the CSOs and NGOs from neighboring countries in South Asia at regional and international climate talks.

People inhabiting the vulnerable parts like low-lying lands and coastal regions in South Asia, often are the people who are forced to move at the time of climate related disasters. As a result, a large number of people often become landless and homeless without any food, drinking water, sanitation, and electricity. Consequently, they are deprived of their livelihoods, community, access to basic necessities like healthcare and financial inclusivity and support mechanisms. The economic and non-economic loss and damage is often greater for those who experience displacement.

This policy brief is the culmination of the knowledge and experiences from the ground, shared during the panel discussion on Climate displacement in South Asia held during the [5th CSD Annual Conference 2022](#) (13-15 October) at the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), Dhaka. The panelists who contributed to the discussion were from various fields - policymakers, NGO, academia, and social scientists bringing a plethora of perspectives on climate displacement in South Asia.

Key discussion and Recommendations: What needs to happen to address Displacement from Climate Extremes

1. Current DRR Policies addressing displacement: Countries in South Asia have a well-established policy set up to address internal displacement stemming from disasters (*see Table 1*). DRR policies established over the last two decades not only recognize internal displacement as a critical concern within the narrative on climate change and human immobility, but have evolved over time in its response, recovery, and preparedness to mitigate the severe impacts of disasters. The DRM strategies include hazard identification, monitoring, utilizing, and implementing early warning systems to prepare and respond to disasters. Governments across South Asia are continuously endeavouring to mainstream DRR policies into other policies to address displacement in a holistic manner involving all relevant stakeholder across all sectors.

However, the capacities and capacity building efforts of the DRR institutions across all South Asian countries differs. Though governments have made significant improvements in reducing the loss of human lives lost from disasters, yet, access to shelters for displaced people have remained limited in many countries, and misses the long-term rehabilitation of people post disasters. There is also a considerable disconnect between national level policies and displacement scenarios at the local levels such as in countries like India and Pakistan. Making shelters more accessible and safer for women and girls to move into, during disasters have remained a challenge in South Asian countries. DRR policies in South Asia additionally have not encompassed the extent of losses and damages from the impacts of climate change. Hence, it fails to consider the magnitude of displacement expected from supercharged climate events.

Adopt National level Policies addressing Climate induced Displacement: Owing to the nature of vulnerability and the number of people expected to be displaced, Bangladesh has developed a draft National Strategy (NSMDCIID) to address Climate Induced Displaced Persons (CIIDP) in a comprehensive manner. The strategy taking a Rights Based Approach, was developed to implement the Sendai Framework and to ensure displacement is addressed in a sustainable manner.

2. Mainstreaming Gender into National level displacement policies to address the needs of women displaced: Women are disproportionately affected by displacement from climate extremes.

When displaced, often times the male members of the family leave for cities to seek employment. Women are often left behind leading to feminization of the countryside. This leaves the women overburdened with responsibilities as they take over the responsibilities of the male members of the household. Increasingly climate extremes are forcing many women to move to the cities and look for employment, in particular odd jobs with poor pay and inhumane working conditions that impact their physical and mental health.

Women are also facing increased incidences of domestic violence due to displacement not only in shelters but also on account of being forcefully displaced to a new location often far away from the family structures. Moreover, human trafficking of women and girls are also on the rise in most countries, where young girls and women are forced to work as sex workers and domestic help.



Makher Char, Pirojpur, Bangladesh, 2017. Photo by Istiaq Ahmed

3. A bottom-up decentralized approach to collecting disaggregated data on displacement in the countries: South Asian countries collect data on disasters and people affected by displacement. There is however a need for disaggregated data at different spatial and temporal scales. Quantitative data alone is not adequate as it does not allow us to understand the lived experiences of people who are displaced by natural disasters and affected by climate change vulnerabilities.

Both qualitative and quantitative data is therefore needed to better allocate the state resources and to formulate strategies and effective policies. In regard to that, the relevant government agencies should strengthen the national statistics offices' effort to collect the data on the climate-displaced population. To understand the social and economic impact of climate displacement and to better design the social welfare schemes, enhanced data collection and data analysis efforts are vital. Additionally, more innovative ways of looking at gathering data e.g., using digital diaries and photo voices from the field to really communicate with the interlocutors and field responders. The process of data gathering can also have hegemonic impacts. Often data sourced from the field can have unequal outcomes, particularly when state mechanisms tend to create policies advantageous to certain groups and less favourable to certain other. Such practices can further widen the social and economic gaps and create wider inequities within a country.

Loss and Damage of Climate Induced Internal Displaced Person

Extreme events are forcing people to be displaced and these are often due to economic and non-economic loss and damages that are a direct result of the climate extremes. The UNFCCC has categorized economic and non-economic loss and damage. Communities displaced by extreme events and slow onset processes often do so due to the loss or destruction of their homes, loss of livelihoods, loss of income, and other material losses. These losses described as economic losses and damages are therefore **losses and damages that can be traded in the market and can be economically valued**. The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) puts the estimate of economic loss and damage in developing countries somewhere between the figures of \$290- \$580 Billion by 2030³. The biblical floods in Pakistan this year is a case in point. Conservative estimates put the cost of floods this year in Pakistan at USD 10 billion.



Figure 2: UNFCCC Non-Economic Loss and Damage Categories⁴

The loss of cultural identity due to loss of property, loss of one's ancestral land/home to extreme events, breakdown of traditional family structures and getting displaced as result can result in mental trauma and these are intangible losses and damages. NELDs can also be highly contextual in terms of culture, class, gender, and community to which the displaced person belongs to. Loss of social cohesion in a community due to displacement, loss of school days among children and hence the increased dropout rates among children, breakdown of family ties due to moving to different locations, loss of cultural heritage or artefacts, loss of language and the way of life in indigenous communities are all intricately linked with displaced communities and the people who are left behind from extreme events.

4. Countries in South Asia should be cognizant of the need for planned relocation in communities where displacement is already a reality. An example here is the case of relocation and migrant friendly towns in Mongla, Bangladesh. With the assistance of, NGOs, CSOs and research organizations, local governments have been working to provide alternatives to displaced people from neighboring coastal areas⁵. The mayor has actively been working to creating the infrastructure for displaced people and improving the work skills of the displaced population. These planned relocation schemes need the financial support of the international community.

5. Financing displacement/relocation: Currently South Asia is ill-equipped financially to address the displacement and the losses and damages incurred by the displaced communities. According to the World Bank, 80% of the population living in South Asia live on USD 5.50 a day⁶. Displaced populations are largely paying the price for their own displacement⁷.

This is not only unfair but unjust. Historically, South Asia has contributed to less than 5% of the global emissions responsible for climate crisis despite a population of more than 1.8 billion, a fourth of the world population⁸. Since the fossil fuel companies have contributed the most to the climate crisis, it is only fair that the polluters should be the ones to pay for the millions expected to be displaced and need relocation. Climate-induced displacement is already a reality in South Asia. Urgent action is needed to finance the resettlement/relocation of the people displaced and the losses and damages incurred by them.

6. More transboundary collaboration is needed between governments of South Asia. Currently very limited data is shared when it comes to transboundary extreme events between country governments. More inter-ministerial communication is needed between the administrations of

neighbouring countries to minimize the extent of the effect an extreme event to a locality in a neighbouring country.

Grassroot efforts should be more connected: CSOs working with displaced population in addressing CIIDPs at grassroots are fragmented and often disconnected. More local, regional, and international collaboration and coordinated effort is needed between CSOs to make the work more effective. Grassroot organization together with national and INGOs can collaborate to strengthen CSO movements, co-develop strategies on displacement, can carry out scoping studies on Displacement, L&D in CIIDPs in collaboration with other CSOs, research institutions, universities etc.

Conclusion: The risk of people displaced is expected to rise in this region due to sea level rise and other weather associated hazards. A holistic approach is needed to reduce the scale of displacement to minimize the scale of losses and damages suffered by vulnerable communities but also to have a progressive action in place to allow people to relocate. Hence it is important to address the circumstances, realities, and the needs of the affected people, through informed, goal-oriented, and evidence-based policy and development strategy. It is imperative to adjust and recalibrate the policy focus and update the national policy and strategy, strengthening the response capacity of the institutions to ensure no one affected and displaced by the climate is left behind.

Table 1: Overview of the state of displacement and policies in existence to address displacement in South Asia

	Bangladesh	India	Pakistan	Nepal	Sri Lanka	Maldives	Afghanistan	Bhutan
Causes of displacement	Floods, cyclones, river erosion, droughts, SLR, heatwaves	Floods, cyclones, heatwaves, droughts, SLR, GLOFs	Floods, heatwaves, droughts, SLR, GLOFs, cyclones	GLOFs, droughts, landslides, forest fires, heatwaves	Floods, cyclones, SLR, droughts	SLR, Cyclones, heatwaves	Droughts, heatwaves, landslides, floods, avalanches	Droughts, GLOFs, heatwaves, floods
Population displaced between 2010-2021 ^a	14,116,000	41,449,000	16,411,000	3,386,000	2,460,000	Not available	788,845	23,665
Estimated Population expected to be displaced by 2030 if 1.5°C Global Warming is exceeded ^b	2,025,159	27,485,098	1,275,718	470,551	3,414,329	Not available	Not available	Not available
DRR policy addressing displaced population	NPDM 2010-2015 ^c , SOD 2019 ^d	NDMP 2019 ^e	NDRMFP 2007 ^f	NPDRR 2018 ^g	NDMP 2013-2017 ^h	CBDRR 2014 ⁱ	Not accessible	NDRMF 2006 ^j
DRR Policies focused on displaced children, women, ethnic minorities etc.	Focuses on gender, children in displaced from extreme events but not from slow onset events	Focus on gender, children and minorities is extensive from extreme events but not from slow onset events	Makes no mention of displaced women, children, or ethnic minorities	Focuses on gender, children etc. but the focus on displaced is only in passing without much detail	Limited focus on women and children.	Provides no detail of gender, children or how they should be addressed	Not available	Only mentions women in terms of trauma after disasters
National/regional Plans for relocation at National/ local level	At local level in a Migrant friendly city – Mongla. NGO Brac has identified 20 cities for displaced migrants to settle in ^k .	No definite plan for resettlement or relocation	No definite plan for resettlement or relocation	No definite plan for resettlement or relocation	No definite plan for resettlement or relocation	No definite plan available or found	No definite plan for resettlement or relocation was found	No definite plan for resettlement or relocation was found

a. Source: Data obtained from <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries> b. Source: Data obtained from CANSAs. (2020). Costs of Climate Inaction: Displacement and Distress Migration. <https://cansouthasia.net/costs-of-climate-inaction-displacement-and-distress-migration/> c. National Policy for Disaster Management 2010-2015 d. Standing Order on Disasters 2019 e. National Disaster Management Plan 2019 f. National Disaster Risk Management Framework Pakistan 2007 g. National Policy on Disaster Risk Reduction 2018 h. Sri Lanka National Disaster Management Plan 2013-2017 i. Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction 2014 j. National Disaster Risk Management Framework 2006 k. Khan, M. R., Huq, S., Risha, A. N., & Alam, S. S. (2021). High-density population and displacement in Bangladesh. *Science*, 372(6548), 1290-1293

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