Climate Change and Migration in the South Pacific Region: Policy Perspectives

Philippe Boncour and Bruce Burson

Introduction

Climate Change and Migration in the South Pacific Region: Policy Perspectives Conference

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humanitarian issues raised by climate change globally. The conference also considered policies at the national level (for example, whether it is possible to achieve a holistic government approach on these matters) and international level (for example, why the humanitarian impact of climate change and, more specifically, environmentally induced migration, are not included in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)).

**Terms used in this chapter**

To begin, we first clarify our use in this chapter of the terms migration, displacement, human mobility, environmental migrants, and climate change-related migration.

*Migration* typically describes a process of population movement, across an international border or within a state and encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever the movement’s length, composition, and causes (for example, the migration of refugees, displaced people, uprooted people, and economic migrants’ (IOM, 2004, p 41; Kliot, 2004, p 76). Often migration is divided into categories of ‘forced’ or ‘voluntary’, but in the context of environmentally induced migration, the boundary between these groups becomes blurred. Instead, one can try to imagine a continuum from clear cases of forced migration to clear cases of voluntary migration, with a large ‘grey zone’ in between (IOM, 2009, p 5). Exceptional cases are those of movement for survival due to imminent or acute environmental disaster, for which the term *displacement* might be more appropriate.\(^2\) More generally, these and other phenomena related to the movement of people are subsumed under the larger concept of human mobility.

Importantly, no internationally accepted term exists for people moving for environmental reasons. In an effort to capture the complexity and breadth of the phenomenon, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) defines displacement as ‘[a] forced removal of a person from his/her home or country, often due to … armed conflict or natural disasters’.

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Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment that adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their homes or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.

The term climate change–related migration (as a subcategory of environmentally induced migration) is used in this chapter to describe this new, relatively uncharted territory of migration. The term recognises that climate change in a narrow sense is unlikely to generate population movements, but rather does so through associated events and processes that affect the relationship between societies and their environment.

Context of the conference

To outline the context in which the conference was set, we addressed three questions around which the different sessions of the conference were organised.

- What are the challenges in integrating migration in the climate change debate?
- Why now?
- Why the South Pacific region?

What are the challenges in integrating migration in the climate change debate?

Until comparatively recently, the impacts of climate change on migration had remained largely beneath the domestic and international policy radar. This is despite the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) noting in its First Assessment Report that, ‘the gravest

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difficult to engineer. Environmental factors have long had an impact on global migration flows. Environmental events and processes, both fast- and slow-onset, including cyclones, floods, desertification, soil erosion, and changing coast lines, can induce migration. Environmental factors, however, interact with numerous other conditions in places of origin and destination, including levels of development, human rights and conflict, politics, and governance, as well as factors at the individual and household levels such as age and gender. Climate change adds another layer to an already complex nexus between migration and the environment. This makes it difficult to establish clear-cut causal linkages between climate change and migration or to isolate environmental factors as exclusive drivers of any particular migration phenomenon. Given the ‘hard-evidence’ focused context in which climate change policy generally exists, the lack of reliable data, and the unambiguous causalities in this area may have driven a misperception that the possible human mobility and humanitarian consequences of climate change do not constitute a major policy problem. Linked to this is the fact the consequences of climate change for migration, although predictable in many cases, may not manifest themselves immediately. This may have fostered an impression that, if at all, climate change-related migration is a policy problem of the distant future.

Second, migration, and climate change-related migration even more so, is a truly cross-cutting phenomenon (Morton et al, 2008, p 5). This complexity means no one policy community can claim exclusive ownership and drive it up the policy agenda. Furthermore, climate change-related migration raises difficult policy issues related to immigration, development, the environment, and humanitarian assistance. Successful policy intervention in this area, therefore, requires policy co-ordination and a whole-of-government approach that can be difficult to engineer.

Climate Change and Migration: South Pacific Perspectives

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Third, with increased economic migration and a rise in the numbers of people claiming refugee status in the 1990s, migration has increasingly been discussed in security terms (Story, 2005, p 4; Volger, 2002, p 188). In the context of a general ‘securitisation trend’, the movement of people across borders too has increasingly been seen as a ‘security threat’. Similarly, climate change, through the potential of its consequences to cause violent conflict, has also been increasingly framed in security terms (see Barnett and Adger, 2007; Brown et al, 2007; Matthews, 2008; Schubert et al, 2008). This may mean the likelihood for migration to be constructed as a positive policy solution in the climate change context may become subordinate to the ‘high politics of security’ (Brown et al, 2007, p 1,154). In other words, migration is seen as part of the problem, not part of a solution. However, it is beyond any doubt that individuals, and sometime whole communities, have adopted migration as an adaptation strategy in the face of environmental degradation and climate change for millennia (Brown, 2008, p 21).

**Why now?**

Scientific consensus is crystallising around a realisation that climate change, more specifically, anthropogenic climate change, is real and constitutes a near-term threat. Furthermore, there is a growing recognition that climate change and variability will exacerbate both the sudden and gradual environmental events and processes driving current patterns of migration and displacement.

In 2009, the challenges before the international community came firmly into the political and public consciousness, as the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2009 in Copenhagen drew ever nearer. This conference represented a critical milestone in the efforts to deal with the dangers posed by climate change at national, regional, and international levels.

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However, neither the human mobility implications of climate change nor its broader humanitarian consequences are acknowledged by the UNFCCC or its Kyoto Protocol. This omission is of great concern to the humanitarian community, because the international community cannot systematically consider and properly address migration and displacement triggered by climate change unless they are duly acknowledged within the UNFCCC process.

Although the text of the UNFCCC speaks to the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, the idea that migration represents a potential adaptation strategy has not prominently featured in the context of the UNFCCC. Where adaptation is linked to a particular context, it typically relates to ecological adaptation or planning for adaptation. There are also few instances in the climate change literature of migration discussed as a potential adaptation strategy.

Overall, an explicit recognition of the human mobility and humanitarian consequences of climate change is needed in the successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol. Leaving stark implications of climate change for human mobility, affecting millions of people all over the world, out of the document that will be shaping and guiding the international response to climate change for the years to come would be a major gap. A window of opportunity exists to place the human mobility and humanitarian consequences of climate change at the heart of the UNFCCC process.

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of the international policy debate on climate change. We hope the peoples of the South Pacific can be part of shaping this discussion.

Why the South Pacific region?
The South Pacific is not alone in facing climate change. It will affect all countries in some way at some time. But given the low elevation of many South Pacific states and their exposure to changing ocean weather patterns, it is likely this region will feel the effects of climate change before many others. In 2008 alone, the region experienced natural disasters of a kind likely to be exacerbated by climate change. For example, a devastating tropical cyclone (Gene) resulted in substantial damage to agriculture, infrastructure, and utilities in Fiji and required the Fijian government to provide F$3.1 million worth of food rations (ReliefWeb, 2008). Unusually high sea levels and swells have resulted in the displacement of people in Kiribati, the Solomon Islands, the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia (OCHA, 2008). Salt water intrusion into fields and crops and the contamination of freshwater aquifers have been reported in the Solomon Islands (Webb, 2008, p 3). Low-lying atoll states such as Kiribati and Tuvalu in the region are projected, at a certain threshold level of climate change, to face the risk of being completely overcome by the sea or otherwise rendered uninhabitable.

Some states that see their territory threatened by climate change and consequent sea level rise are exploring the possibility of purchasing land in other states as a potential long-term solution for their populations. With regard to migration, some countries in the region are likely to produce some demand for migration to New Zealand. Indeed, we can already see examples within the region of communities migrating internally to avoid complete inundation by rising sea levels, such as the relocation of 2,600 islanders from the low-lying Carteret Islands to Bougainville, Papua New Guinea (Perry, 2006). These and other population movements in the Federated States of Micronesia and Vanuatu all point towards a future where migration may be an unavoidable response to climate change for households, communities, and even entire nations.
The South Pacific region, therefore, is in the vanguard of regions already having to grapple with the human mobility consequences of adverse events and processes that, if not already caused by climate change, are likely to be exacerbated by climate change in the coming years. The IPCC illustrates this in its Fourth Assessment Report (IPCC, 2007). Importantly, this cannot be simply dismissed as ‘bad luck’ due to the accident of one’s geographical location. Given the significant anthropogenic nature of current climate change and the inequities in carbon emissions that are at the root of this change, a moral obligation exists on part of the international community to face up to these challenges. We believe, therefore, that the time has come to firmly put the issue of migration and displacement at the heart of the debate around the policy responses to climate change. As a region, the South Pacific, therefore, provides a suitable lens through which to examine wider policy issues raised by migration in the context of climate change.

Key policy challenges
The key policy challenges include:
- understanding the potential scale and patterns of climate change-related migration
- understanding the complexity and multi-causality of climate change-related migration
- managing climate change-related migration
- finding workable definitions and solutions under international law.

Understanding the potential scale and patterns of climate change-related migration
The number of people predicted to be at risk of being displaced due to climate change-related environmental events and processes is something of a wild-card in this area. Quite simply, there is no scientifically verified estimate of projected population flows. ‘Guestimates’ range from 50 million to 1 billion people. The most commonly cited figure is that of around 200 million people displaced by climate change-related migration. The number of people predicted to be at risk of being displaced due to climate change-related environmental events and processes is something of a wild-card in this area. Quite simply, there is no scientifically verified estimate of projected population flows. ‘Guestimates’ range from 50 million to 1 billion people. The most commonly cited figure is that of around 200 million people displaced by climate change-related environmental events and processes.

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Climate change by 2050 (Brown, 2008, p.11). To put this figure in perspective, it equates to what the IOM estimates to be the total number of migrants worldwide (IOM, no date). Some estimates have, like much of climate change debate, a sensationalist element to them that can have negative effects on public and political opinion. This dearth of accurate statistical and substantive information on the possible migratory consequences of climate change impedes our ability to adequately prepare for and comprehensively respond to the humanitarian and protection needs of environmental migrants. The extent to which migration occurs in the coming decades, in large measure, will depend on which of the IPCC’s emission scenarios comes to pass (IPCC, 2000).

We need, as a first step, to obtain an accurate picture of the potential scale and patterns of climate change–related migration. It is likely that mass displacement will occur in many parts of the world as a result of sudden-onset events (for example, storms, cyclones, and flooding) more intense or more frequent or both as a result of climate change. However, an even greater number of people are likely to migrate by reason of slow-onset processes, both at early and more advanced stages of environmental degradation (for example, sea-level rise, coastal erosion, desertification, and declining soil fertility). At early stages of environmental degradation, individuals and households may engage in temporary or circular forms of migration, such as seasonal rural–urban migration. Where environmental degradation is more severe or irreversible or both, affected populations may need to relocate internally or to another country and may become permanent in that new location. Climate change–related migration may take place internally, regionally, or internationally. Most empirical research, however, suggests internal migration, mainly as rural–urban migration or cross-border movement between neighbouring countries, is likely to be the predominant pattern.  

8 Citing Myers (1993).
Key issues in this context include the following:

- How many people will migrate and where?
- What migration patterns and volumes emerge in response to different environmental stressors?
- How can migration and environment data sets be enhanced and/or harmonised?
- How can household surveys be better utilised?

Understanding the complexity and multi-causality of climate change–related migration

As outlined above, migration decisions are influenced by social, economic, and political factors as well as individual characteristics such as age, gender, education, skills, risk-taking capacity, capacity to face new situations, and the like. The extent to which environmental factors determine migration depend on the underlying adaptive capacities of individuals, communities, and countries. A need exists to better understand how people cope with the ‘shocks and stresses’ of climate change and climate variability and, in particular, the extent to which migration forms part of the adaptation strategy (Kniveton et al, 2008, p 37).

In this regard, it is important to note there is a lack of contemporary empirical studies as to how perceptions of climate change have influenced migration decisions made by individuals, households, and communities (Kniveton et al, 2008, p 33). It is clear, however, that not everyone can use migration as an adaptation strategy; it depends on resources, information, and other social and personal factors. Often, it is precisely the most vulnerable and most severely affected who are not in a position to migrate.

More specifically, differentiated gender impacts must be expressly factored into the policy-making process. In general, women are expected to be particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change as a result of existing gender inequalities that limit their access to information and decision-making power. This increased vulnerability is also a function of women’s frequently insecure property rights and access to resources, of women’s frequently insecure property rights and access to resources, of women’s frequently insecure property rights and access to resources,

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as well as of their reduced mobility in situations of environmental stress, because of their childcare and eldercare responsibilities.\textsuperscript{10}

Additionally, there are regionally specific gender implications (UNDP, 2008). In some Pacific communities (for example, among the Carterets in Papua New Guinea and in some outer islands in Yap in the Federated States of Micronesia\textsuperscript{11}), systems of land management and/or holding are matrilineal. Furthermore, women in the Pacific have traditionally collected seafood from inshore areas. As a result, coastal erosion may affect women differently than it affects men, who are traditionally engaged in deep-sea fishing. In each case, loss of land would have a potentially significant impact on families and communities as a whole and on gender relations within these communities. It is, however, important not to see Pacific women as only victims of climate change. Women have significant roles in traditional methods of disaster risk reduction and may possess valuable knowledge about changes to their physical environment (Campbell, 2006).

Furthermore, the impact of climate change is also likely to be particularly acute for many indigenous communities. Indigenous communities are also particularly vulnerable, because as well as often having limited access to information and decision-making power, they often inhabit marginal land and rely on the ecosystem and ecosystem services, which are susceptible to climate change. Systems of traditional knowledge may also be disrupted. For example, in some parts of the Solomon Islands livelihoods are already beginning to be affected by changes to wind patterns, which are disrupting traditional sources of knowledge about crop planting (IFRC, 2008). Indigenous communities’ displacement from traditional places of settlement may involve significant heritage and cultural loss, creating a profound sense of alienation and trauma.

\textsuperscript{10} See generally IUCN (2008, p 57), OHCHR (2009), and UNIFEM (2008).
\textsuperscript{11} Cited by Dr Cheryl Anderson in UNDP (2008, p 22).
Key issues in this context include the following.

- What are the causal links between migration, environmental events and processes, and climate change? To what extent is the environment the primary driver?
- How do climatic and environmental drivers interact with social, political, and economic motivations for migration?
- What are the gendered impacts of climate change and how do they affect migration?
- What might be the impact of climate change on indigenous people and communities?

Managing climate change-related migration

In view of the varied and complex challenges at hand, migration management responses to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on migration and displacement must operate on several tracks.

First, given the environmental scenarios expected to arise with climate change, the effectiveness of humanitarian response mechanisms to displacement and its negative impacts needs to be reinforced as much as possible. In addition, proactive approaches, in terms of preparedness and disaster risk reduction, must be prioritised.

Second, although migration is still predominantly seen as a worst-case scenario, and there are indubitably cases where this holds true, migration should also be recognised as an adaptation strategy. In fact, attempts to stem migration at all cost might increase rather than decrease people’s vulnerability to the environmental pressures acting on them. If it is accepted that at least some people or communities will adopt migration as a possible coping strategy in the face of environmental degradation, then it is, in our view, open to debate whether migration, in the context of climate change, should be characterised as solely a failure of adaptation. Whether this is so, depends largely on the point at which migration takes place in relation to the underlying environmental event or process, and the other non-migratory options (if any) available. Regardless, room exists to increase the adaptive capacities of people’s vulnerability to the environmental pressures acting on them.

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Managing climate change-related migration

In view of the varied and complex challenges at hand, migration management responses to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on migration and displacement must operate on several tracks.

First, given the environmental scenarios expected to arise with climate change, the effectiveness of humanitarian response mechanisms to displacement and its negative impacts needs to be reinforced as much as possible. In addition, proactive approaches, in terms of preparedness and disaster risk reduction, must be prioritised.

Second, although migration is still predominantly seen as a worst-case scenario, and there are indubitably cases where this holds true, migration should also be recognised as an adaptation strategy. In fact, attempts to stem migration at all cost might increase rather than decrease people’s vulnerability to the environmental pressures acting on them. If it is accepted that at least some people or communities will adopt migration as a possible coping strategy in the face of environmental degradation, then it is, in our view, open to debate whether migration, in the context of climate change, should be characterised as solely a failure of adaptation. Whether this is so, depends largely on the point at which migration takes place in relation to the underlying environmental event or process, and the other non-migratory options (if any) available. Regardless, room exists to increase the adaptive capacities of people’s vulnerability to the environmental pressures acting on them.
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individuals, households, and communities. Appropriate policies are needed to facilitate migration as an adaptation in and of itself, while simultaneously trying to limit forced migration.

The role of sustainable development is crucial in this equation. The developmental basis of communities and countries is decisive for any national or regional policies on adaptation to climate change (including the National Adaptation Programme of Action created within the UNFCCC process) and on migration. Migration itself can be mobilised as an adaptation or development strategy; for example, where migrant remittances contribute to income diversification for households otherwise relying on diminishing ecosystem services.

More globally, other questions that arise in this context include whether potential risk linked to climate change becomes a factor in national-level migration policy making. If so, what weight should it be given? Can seasonal or other time-bound policies be implemented? Would these policies be effective considering the long time-frame needed to reverse climatic processes such as desertification and sea-level rise?

Key issues in this context include the following.

• What policies and initiatives (from prevention and mitigation to return and reintegration) currently exist to address internal and international migration?
• What lessons can be learned from existing government responses?
• How can we reduce vulnerability to disaster-induced displacement?
• How can migration be used as part of adaptation strategies?
• How can capacity be built to implement such policies?

Finding workable definitions and solutions under international law

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, people migrating for environmental reasons do not fall squarely within any one particular category of ‘forced’ or ‘voluntary’ migration. Therefore, they do not fit neatly into the categories provided by the existing international legal framework.

17
framework. Terms such as ‘environmental refugee’ or ‘climate change refugee’ have gained much popular currency, but do not have any legal basis in international refugee law. Moreover, concerned agencies (including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) agree these terms are to be avoided, because they are misleading and could undermine the international legal regime for the protection of persons falling within the ambit of the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951 (IOM, 2009, pp 4-5; UNHCR, 2008, p 7). It is largely for this reason that the IOM proposes the working definition of ‘environmental migrants’ that we quoted in the introduction to this chapter.

Definitions matter because they determine entitlement to rights and establish the threshold for accessing any protection regime (Dun and Gemenne, 2008, p 11). Should protection be limited to situations of forced migration or displacement? But given the complexity of the task of deciding, hard and fast, what constitutes ‘forced migration’ in the context of climate change, is this realistic and practicable or will it inevitably leave many without rights and protection?

The situation of those migrating or displaced due to environmental factors raises significant and complex issues of international law.

12 The term came to prominence following a UNEP report (see EI-Hinnawi, 1985, p 4).

13 Note, however, that there may be exceptional cases in which environmental factors combine with discriminatory modes of governance and constitute persecution. See Burson (2008).

14 Furthermore, regional instruments such as the 1969 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees have expanded refugee definitions to cover ‘events seriously disturbing public order’. Although these instruments were not intended to cover displacement as a result of natural disasters per se (see, for example, Espiell et al, 1990, p 96; Cuellar et al, 1991, p 493; Muzenda 1995, p 51), they may provide some impetus for further progressive regional interpretation of the refugee definition.

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Particular challenges arise in the context of shrinking or disappearing states – a phenomenon predicted under some scenarios to manifest in the South Pacific.

The following are but a few examples of the existing international legal concepts and instruments and some associated problems that may provide guidance to policymakers.

**Human rights:** There is little doubt that climate change events and processes will impact on human rights in different ways (International Council on Human Rights Policy, 2008; OHCHR, 2009). Respect for human rights must be an integral part of any policy response to deal with the migration and displacement consequences of climate change, no matter how the motivations for movement are defined.

The work of treaty-monitoring bodies has meant the content of the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights recognised under binding multilateral treaties is better understood and an expanded set of standards has been developed to guide rights-sensitive policy making.

**Statelessness:** The international law regime on statelessness is designed to deal with issues of deprivation of nationality following state succession or conflict of nationality law. The law has not been designed to deal with questions arising where no successor state exists and the predecessor state has disappeared, as may occur in relation to some small island states. In the context of climate change, does the law provide guidance to policymakers.

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15 The primary international instruments are the 1950 Hague Convention, the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The principles underlying these instruments are supported by other treaties such as the 1957 Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. See also the 1997 European Convention on Nationality.
require that all or just the habitable parts of the territory disappear. If these states are declared to continue to exist in some legal sense, their populations will not be, by law, stateless, to which the international regime largely responds. These populations’ lack of an effective nationality means they may well be considered de facto stateless people, for whom the protection regime is weaker.

Self-determination: Complete loss of territory will have a significant impact on the rights of affected peoples to self-determination, which has internal and external aspects (Joseph et al, 2004, p 146; Nowak, 1993, p 22). Internal aspects relate to people’s freedom to pursue economic, social, and cultural development, including participation in political processes. External aspects relate to people’s freedom from foreign domination and the right to freely determine their political status and place in the international community.

Some aspects of internal self-determination can be accommodated through the democratic process of the host country and its existing obligations under international human rights law. But how will these rights survive in full with the complete loss of territory without sovereignty being established over other territory. Similarly, how can displaced peoples exercise their right to freely dispose of their natural resources, including maritime resources. Finally, cultural identity is

16 The best known formulation of the basic criteria for ‘statehood’ includes criteria such as the existence of a defined territory and a permanent population. See Crawford (1979, p 36) and Grant (1999, p 5).

17 Article 1(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), ‘all peoples have the right to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development’.

18 In particular, the ICCPR and ICESCR.

19 See Article 1(2) of the ICCPR and the ICESCR. As Paskal (2007, p 5) asks, ‘Does this require Tuvalu, for example, to tether a boat to its former island and keep a few people there to continue to claim these rights?’.
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Intimately bound with particular territory, the loss of which is likely to pose a challenge for the protection of cultural development.

**Internal displacement:** The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 21 although technically non-binding, soft law, have been influential in shaping how states respond to the predicament of the internally displaced. Importantly, the guiding principles have been one source of inspiration behind the African Union Kampala Convention on Internally Displaced Persons. This Convention shows how soft-law instruments can, in time, solidify harden into hard-law instruments. 22

Hard-law policy instruments may not be attractive to states, particularly when the potential scale of the obligations assumed is unknown. A ‘soft-law track’, following a ‘framework’ and ‘protocol’ approach, may be a more workable route to ensure the rights and protection of those migrating or displaced due to environmental factors.

Key issues in this context include the following.

- What rights do environmental migrants have? How can those people migrating or displaced for environmental reasons be best protected?
- What definitions and concepts are needed? Do they already exist under international law?
- What are the strengths and limitations of existing definitions under international law? How can these definitions be improved?

20 [(I]nternally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border’ (UNCHR, 1998). This definition could foreseeably cover all those forcibly displaced within their country due to the effects of climate change.

21 Similarly, the Cartagena Declaration was the product of a colloquium attended by experts and representatives from 10 Central American governments. Although strictly non-binding, this declaration has been influential in setting policy in the region.

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Does calling the people displaced in this context ‘refugees’ weaken the term’s currency or does a failure to do so weaken the case for their legitimate claims for protection?

What is the role of hard-law compared with soft-law instruments in this debate?

Conclusion
Having embarked on a review of some of the critical issues, how best, then, to ensure effective and equitable responsibility sharing in respect of climate change–related migration? One of the most significant obstacles that had to be overcome to secure the UNFCCC involved reconciling divergent state interests (Bodansky, 1993, pp 475–477). It seems clear from this experience that trying to create a global binding agreement may not be the best, or at the very least, the most feasible course. It seems clear from this experience that trying to create a global binding agreement may not be the best or, at the very least, the most feasible course. It also must be open to debate whether a regional approach is the best approach in terms of reaching international agreement on climate change–related migration. What, we ask, does ‘region’ mean in this context, and how might different actors within a region share responsibility for the issue? More fundamentally, given the truly global nature of climate change and historical provenance of current greenhouse gas emissions, is it appropriate or fair to take a regional approach? At the same time, it may be possible to draw on existing regionally situated arrangements of inter-communal and inter-island co-operation in the wake of natural disasters (Campbell, 2006, p 23).

A fundamental issue to consider is whether it is desirable to frame this issue in such zero-sum terms. Would a hybrid model involving global, regional, and, importantly, bilateral features perhaps be better suited? The most effective burden-sharing arrangements are likely to occur at the regional level, but the fact all states will, to some extent, be affected by climate change means, ideally, the agreement should also contain an element of global management. Also, the South Pacific states

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are not individually or collectively responsible for the current build-up of dangerous atmospheric levels of greenhouse gas emissions.

To conclude, it is, in our view, vitally important that in seeking to find policy solutions to an issue of global importance the bilateral dimension is not overlooked. At the end of the day, it is individual states that, in the exercise of their own sovereign rights and taking into account historical, cultural, and other ties, will have to decide the contours of their policy response to climate change-related migration. Bilateral state co-operation is an important feature of contemporary global migration management and must be enhanced in this particular context. Nevertheless, to be truly effective and equitable, such bilateral arrangements must be informed and guided by relevant regional and global arrangements and processes. In particular, they must be guided by the UNFCCC and a successor agreement to the Kyoto Protocol, in which we hope to see the human mobility implications and humanitarian consequences of climate change expressly acknowledged and that together will guide the overarching political approach and mechanisms for practical implementation of relevant programmes to assist the affected populations.

We believe that by disaggregating the issues of ‘who goes where and when?’ and ‘who pays?’ while aligning them in an interconnected and mutually reinforcing series of global, regional, and bilateral responses under the umbrella of the UNFCCC, it is possible to envisage responsibility-sharing arrangements with variable but broadly balanced commitments and responsibilities.

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