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The UN Migration Agency

Sri Lanka Rapid Assessment of the Climate Change and Migration Nexus



IOM Sri Lanka, along with WFP and FAO, carries out a pilot test in Kalutara district prior to a rapid assessment on migration, environment and climate change © IOM 2018

IOM, FAO and WFP are conducting a joint rapid assessment in Sri Lanka to address data and knowledge gaps on the linkages between climate change, environmental degradation and migration.

Climate variability and extreme weather events are becoming increasingly common in Sri Lanka. The two monsoons and two inter-monsoon periods have become more unpredictable in terms of timing and expected levels of precipitation, while temperature rise has constantly been observed. Droughts, floods and landslides occur in quick succession and alternate within the same districts. Hazard risks are combined with numerous environmental issues including post-conflict landscapes (i.e. damages to agricultural infrastructure) and land degradation and deforestation, as well as scarcity of water, resource extraction and coastal and river bank erosion. Multiple disasters and climate change in Sri Lanka contribute to low livelihood resilience, seasonal food shortages, declining agriculture productivity and outbreak of tropical diseases. Vulnerable communities who have minimal resources to cope with these rapid as well as slow-onset events are at higher risk of displacement emphasizing the urgency of addressing climate migration.



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However, the links between the effects of climate change and migration patterns in Sri Lanka have not been fully researched. Disaster management authorities in Sri Lanka do not currently include migration data in their analysis of disaster-induced displacement trends. While authorities record the numbers of people temporarily displaced by rapid-onset events, they do not currently record permanent environmental migration or migration trends related to slow-onset events.

The Rapid Assessment targets six districts across the country. It investigates whether people migrate, within or outside the country, as the result of, and/or as an adaptation strategy to, the impacts of climate change, natural disasters and environmental degradation. This is done through focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs) and in-depth individual interviews (IDIIs). FGDs will bring together approx. 600 community members through 24 sessions in targeted areas and will be used to learn from communities about their experience, knowledge and perceptions on the research subject. The information gathered through FGDs will be cross-examined with that produced through interviews with approximately 90 key informants in target districts. A small sample of 50-75 departing migrant workers registered at the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment will provide quantitative data to complement the survey.

The research team conducted a pilot testing of the above research tools at Bulathsinhala, Kaluthara, Western Sri Lanka. The selected village has been severely affected by extreme weather patterns for decades and was one of the worst affected community during the southwest monsoon took place May 2017. At these initial interviews community members expressed that they experience a change in frequency and severity of rainfall and temperature over the years and those have impacted in their traditional livelihoods, employment opportunities and access to resources.