

ASSESSMENT REPORT LINKAGES BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION



SYNTHESIZED TAKEAWAYS

- Human migration is both an adaptive mechanism and a coping strategy.
- The type of the mobility is linked to nature and the type of the climate change impact.
- Decision for migration from their places of origin is taken at an individual level in households.
- In slow-onset and extreme climate events, usually the member/s who are the most economically active in the family moved to destination in search of better job opportunities.
- Mobility of individuals or households to less risky or more suitable environments can reduce exposure to climate hazards.
- Decision to migrate is greatly associated with the livelihood options – deep dive analysis of the research data shows that human mobility of one or more individuals can be part of a livelihood diversification and risk-reduction strategy, whereby remittances from household members in destination areas help to support the economic unit and smooth out household consumption during times of distress.
- Mobility patterns and the decision to move is affected and influenced by the vulnerabilities, social support systems and the perceived “gender norms.”
- The unplanned and unsupported migration decisions can negatively impact the households and families left behind because of increased vulnerabilities, reduced coping strategies, and exploitation due to lack of resources, support systems, and skills for jobs at destinations.
- Improved access to information will facilitate voluntary migration and their sense of responsibility based on their ability to take informed decisions.
- The diverse nature of human mobility in the context of adverse impacts of climate change needs to be acknowledged and addressed through sectoral policies and programme.

INTRODUCTION

Human mobility is both an adaptation strategy and a coping mechanism in response to climate-related hazards.

Climate change is increasingly being identified as one of the drivers of human mobility. More precisely, the adverse impacts of climate change shape and influence human mobility patterns.

However, the nexus between climate change and human mobility is complex. This complexity stems from many aspects. The literature on climate mobility agrees that climate factors contribute to migration (both voluntary and forced), but that their contribution operates through socioeconomic factors such as wage gaps, family reunification, and the quest for improved living standards.

Sri Lanka is highly vulnerable to impacts of climate change. Sri Lanka experiences the impacts of slow onset, sudden onset, and extreme climate events across the country at varying degree. These impacts are associated with livelihoods. Existing literature shows that climate change plays a role in peoples’ decision to move from rural settings to urban peripheries for better livelihood options.

HUMAN MOBILITY

Within the limits of the study, Human mobility is considered a continuum, where forced displacement and voluntary migration are the two extremes and where the combination of choice and coercion results in various types/categories/classifications of migrants in between.



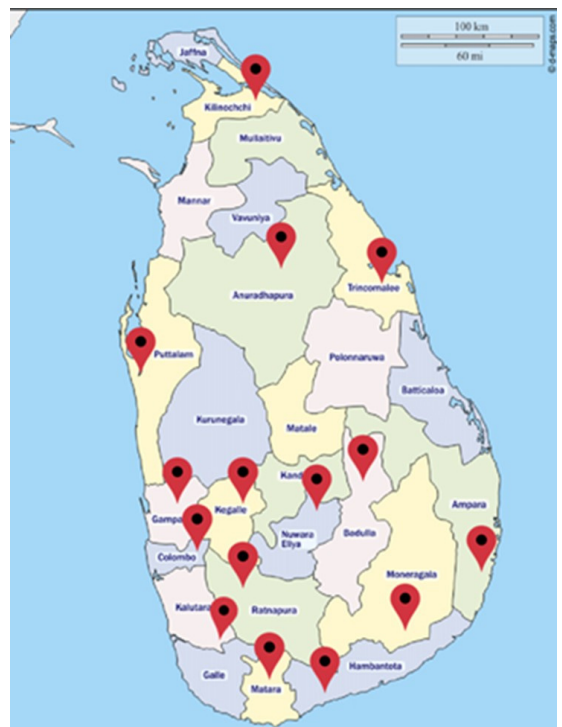
SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The research design, method and the assessment report were reviewed through a consultation process. The Climate Change Secretariat, a panel of peer reviewers, the Project Lead of IOM Sri Lanka and the IOM Regional Thematic Specialist for climate change and migration were part of the research review process.

The research aims to explore various mobility patterns to capture diverse demographic characteristics and the impact of diverse climate related challenges.

RESEARCH FOCUS

The in-depth research focused on understanding the linkages between migration and climate change in Sri Lanka in the context of four pre-identified climate change events: floods, drought, sea-level rise[1] and landslides.



DISPLACEMENT



Defined as the sudden removal of a person from his or her home due to a climate event.

TEMPORARY MIGRATION



A short relocation to a destination and subsequent return to the area of origin.

PERMANENT MIGRATION



Defined as relocating with no intention to return.

SEASONAL MIGRATION



A periodic movement of a person from one region to another in accordance with the cycle of weather/temperature changes or agricultural practices to combine activity at several places according to seasonal labour requirements.

Based on the limits of the study, the primary focus of the research was to find the linkages between climate change and internal migration in Sri Lanka.

The study employed stratified random sampling - quantitative and qualitative data were collected from households (HH) from 15 districts exposed to the four climate hazards in concern. Quantitative data were collected from a sample of 1501 HHs involving 5724 individuals. The qualitative data were collected via 32 Key Informant Interviews, 3 Focus Group Discussions and 6 Case Studies. In the sample, while all respondent HHs were exposed to at least one of the climate disasters listed above, were included HHs with or without exposure to mobility. It involved retrospective data about exposure to climate events and migration and their dynamics during the past ten years (2012 to 2022) at the household level. A household is identified as a migrant household if the household has at least one member living away from the household as a migrant.

[1] Sea-level rise encompasses a continuum of related events felt and observed as sea-erosion, ground water salination and saltwater inundation in lowland areas and waterbodies.

CASE STUDY: RESILIENCE OF A CLIMATE VULNERABLE WOMAN LEFT BEHIND MIGRATION

Shiromi is a migrant from Colombo District who now lives in Horowpathana Divisional Secretariat Division of Anuradhapura District. She moved to Horowpathana after her marriage. She is a mother to five children. Shiromi and her husband were small-scale subsistence farmers. They had been borrowing loans and selling assets to continue their farming activities. It prevented them from making considerable dividends. Moreover, the prolonged dry spells over the years have destroyed most of their harvests, deepening their indebtedness. In their economic distress, Shiromi's husband moved to the Middle East for a job. However, due to lack of savings they borrowed more money for this movement. It also meant a change in Shiromi's role in the family. Now, she is the head of the household and is also in charge of her farms. She is now a woman left behind of migration. Her husband supported her initially to repay loans and free up some of the pawned assets: their paddy land. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, he could not financially support them. Struggling to make ends meet, and to keep her land she had to look for multiple jobs: informal daily paid job, her farm and a self-employed business making bags.



Noting that paying hired workers is difficult, she partakes in “attam” activities, where the community shares each other's labour to work the fields.

However, she could survive and feed her children with the home-grown vegetables and paddy produced on her land. She further stated that she no longer sells her paddy harvest. Moreover, she said, “if needed, I'll even get a loan and repay. Because if i have rice, at least we will eat. Now even if we have money, we cannot find good quality of rice. So, when I have the rice, I can somehow feed them [children].”

Further to the direct impacts of extreme climate events like drought, the wild animal attacks are frequent in these areas. Because of the loss of habitats, food and water, wild animals invade villages, worsening the conditions for these communities. For example, Shiromi's village is frequently attacked by wild elephants. “Yes, they [elephants] come in and destroy our crops and harvest. They also attack villagers. Once they came when the children were there. It was scary.” said Shiromi.

Despite the odds, Shiromi denies being defeated by her economic difficulties aggravated by the adverse impacts of climate change. Shiromi is determined to improve her condition. She volunteers in several community-led organisations and even holds a position in a farmer's organisation. She intends to somehow feed and educate all her five children. She said, “We do anything to send them [children] to school”.

Shiromi's story is not different to other farmers in the area. They all face the direct and indirect negative impacts of climate change. However, only a few find the courage and resilience to withstand and adapt to the situation like the ones Shiromi faces.



FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

MOBILITY IS ASSOCIATED WITH GREATER LIVELIHOOD OPTIONS

- The proportion of males among the mobile persons is higher than females. While the proportion of left-behind males is less than that of females due to male sorting in planned mobility.
- The mobile populations have a relatively higher share of employed persons. There is no difference in average individual monthly income among those who moved and did not move. However, in favour of the former, a difference can be seen in the average HH monthly income between HHs with and without mobile persons.
- The ownership of agricultural land is closely linked with households not having a migrant from the households.
- Economic push factors found in the study include unreliable harvest/ lack of food security in origin.

RESPONSE TO DIFFERENT CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

- In response to slow onset events such as the sea-level rise and extreme events such as drought, women and other vulnerable groups tend to stay behind, while men migrate internally seeking alternative livelihoods due to implications caused at their places of origin.
- Slow onset and extreme events cause people to migrate seasonally and temporarily.
- Rapid onset events such as floods and landslides push people to move as households.
- Displacement and permanent migration do not allow a selection process but necessitate all household members, including those with disabilities to move.

MOBILITY IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE TYPE OF CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT

- Displacement, which has a clear correlation with sudden onset climate events, shows near equal shares of women and men.
- Permanent migration or relocation reflects a clear correlation with exposure to rapid onset climate events and the sample includes cases of migrants who were forced to migrate as well as ones who migrated willingly.
- Modern technology, such as social media or early warning alarm systems, is helpful in rapidly alerting a large group of people.

MOBILITY IS ASSOCIATED WITH PERCEIVED GENDER-RELATED SOCIAL NORMS

- For vulnerable groups such as children, youth, women and persons with disabilities, mobility is more likely to occur with the rest of the HH due to rapid onset events, thus less likely to experience temporary or seasonal migration.
- Variation in migration across different vulnerable groups and the coping strategies adopted by vulnerable groups among those who are left behind.

COPING MECHANISMS

- Most of the families left behind tend to sell and pawn household assets, borrowing money (microfinance institutions or relatives) and using previous savings.
- Lack of social safety mechanisms and means to address mental health and psychosocial well-being of left behind families and people who do not move in the face of slow onset and extreme climate events.



RECOMMENDED POLICY AND PROGRAMME CONSIDERATIONS



Develop a roadmap/ guideline to advocate integrating human mobility dimensions and their associated socio- economic impacts into climate change-related and other development policies, programmes, and frameworks.



Build resilience and coping strategies for the affected communities through improved disaster risk reduction and preparedness programming targeting the communities in climate- vulnerable areas.



Introduce programmes through policy provisions for communities at risk of being pushed to migrate because of climate-induced reasons to make informed decisions about their mobility decisions.



Enhance the social welfare and social protection coordination mechanisms through improved policy provisions.



Develop a bottom-up approach towards more systematic community, regional and national level coping mechanisms.



Leverage innovative financial mechanisms for resilience and building back better.

The recommendations of the report are formulated as informed by the synthesis of the analysis and findings. They are context specific to the limits of the study.

The six-overarching policy and programmatic recommendations highlight the importance of resilience building through improved coping strategies and the ability to isolate climate change from other push factors for migration within affected populations. The goal is that the adaptation and coping strategies are incorporated into their aligning sector policies through necessary policy and programme frameworks. A Roadmap to advocate and guide the integration of human mobility dimensions in sectoral policies and programmes will enable the policymakers and the other stakeholders to approach these interventions holistically. The roadmap will take a cross-section of priorities from the national level to the community level as informed by the ground-level data.

Further, recommendations focused on knowledge building regarding safe migration behaviours and proper management of remittances via information and experience-sharing at the community levels in affected areas as well as areas receiving migrant communities. There is greater scope and need for community-level awareness and capacity building enabling people to take informed decisions. The recommendations also highlight the importance of network building and the existence of support communities to enhance the psychological and social well-being of affected communities and strengthen the existing nodes and networks through a bottom-up approach to build the resilience of affected populations.

The recommended policy-level actions require engagement from the National Physical Planning Department to state and provincial level line ministries. The specific implementable actions derived from these recommendations require all responsible development sectors and subject expertise ministries, departments, development partners, and academia to coordinate and communicate in planning, designing, implementing, monitoring, and reporting the actions integrating human migration induced by adverse impacts of climate.



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