

**ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs**  
**1 – 3 JULY 2015 - International Conference Center Geneva**

**THEMATIC SESSION**

***BACKGROUND PAPER***

**Session Title:** Climate Change, Disasters and Displacement: Addressing Protection Gaps, Identifying Solutions

**Date:** Thursday 2 July 2015

**Time/Room:** 09h00 – 10h45, Room 4

**Session overview**

The goal of this session is to increase understanding of the relationship between extreme weather and other climate change-related effects and displacement. It will also explore whether existing institutional and operational approaches are sufficient to protect vulnerable populations of concern to UNHCR and its partners. Finally, the session will raise awareness of the state of progress of the Nansen Initiative on Disasters and Cross-border Displacement and work to develop guidance for States on Planned Relocation as a means to move populations out of harm's way and settle them permanently in a safe location. Panelists will share experiences of responding to climate-related displacement from different parts of the globe, including the Pacific, Africa, and Asia, as well as efforts to be better prepared. Questions posed to the panel and participants will include:

- Building on experiences gained so far, which approaches to such displacement are/are not working?
- What are the challenges to finding solutions for people displaced in the context of climate change, as opposed to those displaced by conflict or human rights abuses?
- What are the main similarities and differences that we need to take into account in our work with these populations?

- How do we best approach identifying and moving towards solutions for people displaced by circumstances related to climate change?

## **Background**

Around the world, more extreme weather and other climate change-related effects are playing an increasing role in driving both migration and displacement. IDMC estimates that between 2008 and 2013, 23 million people per year on average were newly displaced by acute, sudden-onset natural hazards, primarily floods and storms.<sup>1</sup> Many others are forced from their homes by slowly unfolding or recurrent hazards like prolonged drought and seasonal flooding. According to the latest findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the increasing incidence and intensity of extreme weather events will result in higher levels of displacement over the course of this century.<sup>2</sup> Other factors and trends, including poor land-use planning, rapid urbanization and the expansion of human settlements will increasingly exacerbate disaster displacement.<sup>3</sup>

It is well recognized that the risk of displacement is closely tied to pre-existing social, economic, demographic, political, and cultural factors – such as poverty, gender, age, disability, and indigenous or minority status.<sup>4</sup> Such groups often face additional challenges in accessing humanitarian assistance during emergencies and in recovering following disasters. For example, there are well-documented gender differences in displacement owing to disasters, especially when women lose their social networks or their social capital. Women are also often affected by adverse mental health outcomes in situations of displacement.<sup>5</sup> Studies further show that the vast majority of people displaced by disasters do return home as soon as practicable. But structural, economic causes of social vulnerability, as well as poorly conceived or executed response strategies, may in many cases prolong displacement or lead to permanent displacement.

As the full effects of climate change continue to unfold, other direct and indirect impacts, such as decreased agricultural output and increased water stress, are likely to compel people to abandon their homes in search of new livelihoods. Sub-Saharan Africa and other regions are particularly vulnerable, given the high dependency of their populations on climate-sensitive resources to survive.<sup>6</sup> While migration has long been a strategy to mitigate livelihood risks, recent studies

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<sup>1</sup> IDMC 2013 Global Estimates: People Displaced by Disasters.

<sup>2</sup> IPCC Special Report on Managing the Risk of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation (SREX) at p. \_\_\_.

<sup>3</sup> RI Pakistan report.

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Council, Resolution 10/4 on human rights and climate change (March 2009).

<sup>5</sup> AR5, Chapter 12.

<sup>6</sup> OHCHR report at \_\_\_.

have shown that migration is costly, disruptive, and due to attachment to 'home', often undesirable and used only as a last resort.<sup>7</sup> In these instances, migration can *increase* overall levels of household vulnerability – both for those migrating and for those who remain behind, thereby becoming a 'negative coping strategy' to climate stress.<sup>8</sup>

While there is limited evidence directly linking climate variability with armed conflict, in resource-dependent economies such as pastoral societies in Africa, changes in rainfall enhance the risk of localized violent conflict especially in the absence of dispute-resolution mechanisms, as was the case in Darfur.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, where violent conflict is present, the capacity of affected populations to adapt – and of governments to prepare for and respond to natural disasters and climate change – is substantially reduced.<sup>10</sup> The drought and famine in Somalia in 2011 is a tragic example of the propensity of climate change-related crises to rapidly deteriorate into major humanitarian crises in fragile and conflict ridden states.

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<sup>7</sup> AR5 at 767.

<sup>8</sup> CARE, UNU Where the Rain Falls Study.

<sup>9</sup> Id.

<sup>10</sup> AR5 at 774 - 775.