**Impact of climate change and the protection of the human rights of migrants**

**Contribution by Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women**

The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) is an international network of 100 NGOs in all regions of the world, which advocates for the rights of migrants and trafficked persons. Member organisations provide direct assistance to migrants, trafficked persons, sex workers, and other people in need of support, run information and awareness campaigns, conduct trainings, and engage in policy advocacy at the national and regional levels. The International Secretariat of GAATW is based in Bangkok, Thailand, and supports its members through research, international advocacy, capacity building, and information and knowledge exchange.

We thank the Special Rapporteur for the opportunity to contribute to his report to the 77th session of the UN General Assembly on the impact of climate change and the protection of the human rights of migrants.

The disastrous impact of climate change, such as unpredictable weather patterns, natural disasters, coastal erosion, increased water salinity, and others, on people’s homes and livelihoods is well documented. Faced with the inability to make a living due to climate change, many people migrate within their own country or abroad, as the only option of earning a living for themselves and their families. This distress migration makes people vulnerable to various rights violations, including exploitation, forced labour, and human trafficking.

GAATW has not conducted in-depth research into the links between climate change and the protection of the human rights of migrants. However, as these links become more obvious with the escalation of the climate crisis, we have recently taken some steps in this area. In February 2022, we invited our member and partner NGOs to collect stories of women local and migrant workers that they work with, and we published these in the publication “Women Workers and the Climate Crisis”.[[1]](#footnote-1) And in March, we held a webinar as part of the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women focused on the same topic.[[2]](#footnote-2) These materials are not based on systematic, large-scale exploration of the issue but “put a human face” to it and we invite the Special Rapporteur to review them.

In this contribution, we share some of the main points made in these materials.

Our partners shared devastating experiences of climate change, floods, droughts, typhoons, extreme temperatures, increased water salinity, coastal erosion, and other impacts of climate change that have led to famine, shortage of water, loss of land, income, and homes, and ultimately necessitated internal displacement and migration in a search for not simply better lives, but survival. Some people have been repeatedly exposed to the need to migrate from each one of their new homes due to climate change, never able to settle.

In Bangladesh, our member NGO Badabon Sangho said that “Violence can be seen as a cause and consequence of displacement. With loss of livelihood and escalation of poverty, people’s level of frustration goes up and many women become subjected to harassment by family members and communities”. Jannath from Bhola district in Bangladesh, now living and working in Jordan, said that “Loss of livelihood led me to migrate internally and then overseas” before recounting all the times her family was affected by natural disasters. She remembers that “whenever we tried to get back on our feet, we got knocked down by yet another disaster” and ends by asking, “why we poor people are always the first ones to be affected by the crises in the world?”

Also in Jordan, Chona, a Filipina member of the NGO Domestic Workers Solidarity Network (DWSN), spoke about the ways in which her family had tried to adapt to floods and droughts that destroyed their crops in Mindanao. Since the government does not provide sufficient assistance to affected families, she observed that “many people in our community who lost their homes during the flooding, have now migrated to Saudi Arabia … to help their families”. Another DWSN member, Jane, said that in Kenya, “land remains dry after the rainy season. As a result, many people are forced to leave their own country and look for opportunities elsewhere to support their families.”

In Sierra Leone, women from the Domestic Workers Advocacy Network (DOWAN) in Mabarie village shared that “70 percent of the young people are away from the village to look for better livelihood options” because high temperatures during the dry season and flooding during the rainy season destroy crops and cause water-borne diseases.

In Indonesia, the NGO SERUNI linked climate change and its consequences on people to globalisation, colonialism, and capitalism with the consequent inequality between states and regions. They said that “Today, the so-called forest in Java is a big wood plantation owned by PERHUTANI in an area of 2.4 million hectares. Millions of poor landless peasants are living around the concession of PERHUTANI. This area is the largest source of migrant workers to Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea.”

Our partners highlighted the links between climate change and other drivers of migration such as women’s lack of access to information and resources and the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women, especially single mothers or women with dependents, which includes the responsibility for fetching water and fuel, as well as seeking paid work. They also spoke of exacerbated gender-based violence (e.g. domestic violence, but also early marriage and abuses from landlords, and exposure to risks of sexual violence such as during night fishing). Others spoke of severe and deepening inequalities, internal wars, and armed conflicts, and blunt theft of property that people could do nothing against and the state offered no protection.

The stories we collected suggest that where national or regional solutions are available, they do not reach the most vulnerable people. Jane from DWSN, Jordan, said **“**Most of the time people rely on themselves and their families because the governments tend not to do anything during a calamity. Sometimes the support from governments does not meet the needs of people. Sadly, many times the development plans of our governments destroy the environment and create climate crisis”. The women of Surabhi Women’s Group, India, said: “we [...] know that many government schemes to help in agriculture operations do not reach women farmers, as many women belong to scheduled caste communities and live far away from the mainland. Without the help of CSO volunteers or staff, no information and schemes will ever reach working class and lower caste women”.

Our colleagues shared some examples of initiatives they undertake to support women affected by climate change so they don’t feel forced to migrate.

Noting the link between gender-based violence and economic justice, Badabon Sangho, Bangladesh, tries to ensure that women have control over their income and resources. Their members receive some income from their land and water bodies. If any member decides to sell their land, Badabon Sangho supports them to obtain the right price for it. Having property and income may not stop violence; fundamental attitudinal changes are needed. But at least if women have some assets in their own name and some source of income that they have control over, they will not put up with violence. Land and assets also give them some decision-making power within the family.

The Surabhi women farmers groups, India, are now trying to retrace the old ways of natural farming. They have adopted sustainable ways of life to reverse the climate crisis as well as save themselves from the debt trap. After much collective effort, they have been successful in converting 30-40 percent of their members to switch over to agro-ecological practices. Women who have access to bio manure have been able to do that more easily.

Women’s Initiatives, India, has organised trainings for women farmers on sustainable agriculture, including on rain harvesting structures; farm ponds to rejuvenate water springs; use of sprinklers and drip irrigation; planting of trees, especially when it is felled for road widening; intercropping in mango gardens, and promoting millets for crop diversity in place of monocrops/cash crops. These steps have proven beneficial for the women and have helped them to have food and nutrition security especially during hard times.

Some of our colleagues also shared recommendations made by the women in their communities:

**DOWAN, Sierra Leone:**

* There should be proper sensitisation in both rural and urban communities to minimise the use of cars and motorbikes to reduce the release of carbon-monoxide.
* By-laws should be adopted in the different communities to stop indiscriminate bush burning.
* Deforestation should be restricted and the people should be encouraged to plant fast-growing trees in their communities.
* The government must create jobs for people and support them to take care of their lives and livelihoods as well as the environment.

**OKUP, Bangladesh:**

* Assist and support women’s organisations for movement building. Assist to develop women’s leadership capacity to ensure accountable governance. Fund long-term feminist climate justice efforts. Continue support for provision of prevention of gender-based violence. Ensure gender mainstreaming across climate policies. Policies on safe workplaces in both formal and informal sectors.
* The government must strengthen skills/vocational training and career counselling on a priority basis for climate change-affected communities to increase their resilience and livelihood adaptation strategies. The government should improve skills/vocational training quality, building knowledge, and aligning training with domestic and international market needs to mitigate precarious migration from occurring in the short/long term.
* The government should create employment opportunities for migrants affected by climate change by undertaking advocacy efforts with countries of destinations, including carbon emitting countries for setting up bilateral agreements (MoU/BLA) and in line with the Global Compact on Migration objectives, create legal pathways for people migrating as a result of climate change.
* The government needs to develop effective and realistic action plans to reduce climate change-induced vulnerabilities and internal migration. The government should also launch social safety net programmes and support mechanisms directed at climate migrants and disaster-affected people.
* The government should invest in advanced research on habitability, livelihoods, and resettlement and comprehensive risk management approaches. Based on such research, there should be a proper action plan to develop the knowledge and capacities of coastal community members.

Bangkok, 14 April 2022

1. Available here: <https://www.gaatw.org/publications/OWOL_Issue7.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A recording of the webinar is available here: <https://fb.watch/cntalYLQPA/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)