

Call for inputs: Submission from International-Lawyers.Org Association

Focus Region: West Africa

Internal displacement in the context of the slow-onset adverse effects of climate change

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons

Deadline: 17 June 2020

Topic: *The impact of climate change-related internal displacement on the enjoyment of human rights by specific groups, such as indigenous peoples, minorities, children, older persons and persons with disabilities.*

The assistance the United Nations can offer to nations suffering from the aftermath of a natural disaster can greatly influence the rebuilding process within the afflicted nation and stabilize nations that interact economically with that affected nation.

The slow-onset adverse effects of climate change result largely from the failure of a few states to respond adequately to the foreseeable threat climate change poses to the enjoyment of human rights. When these adverse effects occur, states must ensure that people who are affected still enjoy their fundamental human rights. When people travel to a new area because of the detrimental effects of climate change on their livelihood, their basic rights must be guaranteed at all possible stages of the displacement.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) must distribute funding to all nations in need fairly, based on equity. West African countries and other developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change merit special attention.

The United Nations has a history of coming to the aid of displaced persons in the aftermath of a war as well as in the aftermath of weather-related natural disasters. Each disaster needs to be weighed individually, and on a case-by-case basis, funding should be appropriated impartially. In West Africa, natural disaster affects all humans including indigenous peoples, minorities, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

Internal displacement in the context of the slow-onset adverse effects of climate change

Climate change represents a serious threat to all human rights, including the rights to movement, health, water, food, housing, self-determination, and sustainable development. Changing environments have led to water scarcity in some areas and flooding in others, which has reduced the amount of land available for farming and for meadows needed for pastoralists' activities.

Climate change has led to conflict over limited resources in West Africa, for example, between farmers and herders in Nigeria's middle belt. Clashes between the two groups have killed more than 4,000 people in the past two years, yet government officials have not been able to mediate the fighting between the two groups. Sayne notes that "A basic causal mechanism links climate change with violence in Nigeria. Under it, poor responses to climatic shifts create shortages of resources such as land and water. Shortages are followed by negative secondary impacts, such as more sickness, hunger, and joblessness. Poor responses to these, in turn, open the door to conflict" (Sayne, 2011). Nigeria's situation is not unique, as other countries in West Africa are experiencing conflict due to the effects of climate change. According to Jones-Casey and Knox (2011), "approximately 42% of land use conflicts in Mali are between herders and farmers¹. In most cases, these conflicts stem from disputed access to and control over land and water resources." The effect of climate change in Mali goes beyond this group. A study showed that "A continuous cycle of droughts and floods has had detrimental impacts on Malians. Since the 1960s, rainfall has diminished by 30%, destroying more than a third of livestock and leading to widespread food shortages. This, combined with a mean annual temperature increase of 0.8°C, has accelerated deforestation and put further pressure on land. Declining resource availability

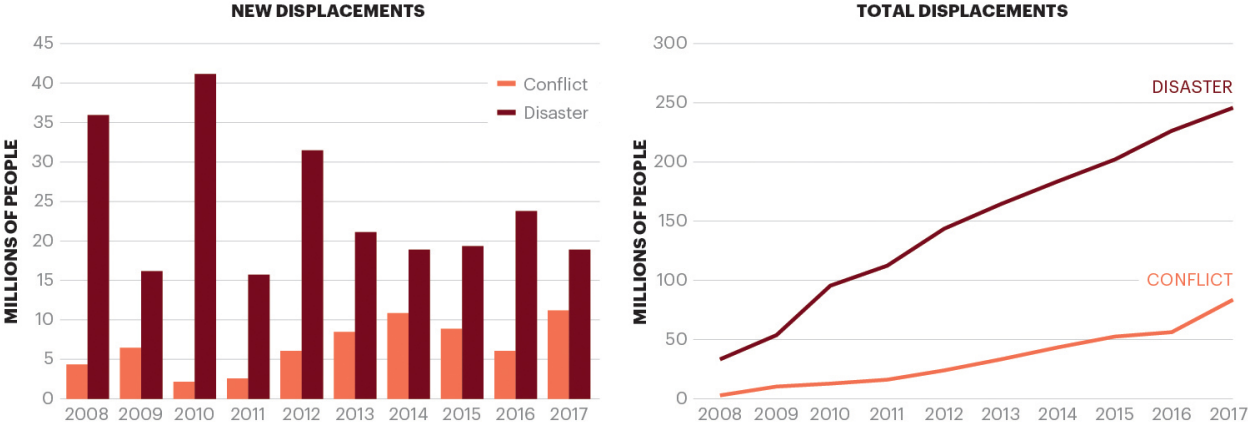
¹ "Insecurity and violence have led many populations to create self-defense forces and ethnic militias, who have engaged in further violence."

threatens both food security and livelihood security. If not addressed, the predicted losses in livelihoods could mean an overall loss of welfare ranging from US \$70 to \$142 million. That would increase those at risk of hunger from 44% to over 70% of the population.” (Kalkavan, 2019).

Climate change-related conflict can also exacerbate ethnoreligious hostilities, for example between Muslims and Christians and groups of different ethnicities. Insecurity and violence have led many populations to create self-defense forces and ethnic militias, who have engaged in further violence. These situations push people to move across or within borders, which leads to people being displaced. According to Vision of Humanity (see graph below), “The number of people migrating due to climate change is expected to rise substantially in the coming years. The World Bank estimates that climate change will create up to 86 million additional migrants in sub-Saharan Africa, 40 million in South Asia and 17 million in Latin America as agricultural conditions and water availability deteriorate across these regions, reaching a total figure of 143 million climate migrants by 2050” (Ragazzi, 2019).

Displacements due to conflict and natural disasters, 2008–2017

New disaster displacements reached 18.8 million in 2017, while conflict and violence accounted for 11.7 million new displacements.



Source: IDMC

Given the gravity of the situation worldwide, and the disproportionate effect of climate change on poor countries, the impacts of climate change, both chronic and catastrophic, such as more frequent and intense droughts or floods, have the potential to continue to destabilize people's livelihoods. In order to survive these types of impact on their livelihood, people without food or water will move toward where they can find food or water. These climate-related needs will continue to create displaced people if they are not addressed rapidly.

Recommendations:

Some efforts to address these latent environmental challenges have been made at national and local levels. Since 1992, countries have been involved in various actions and programs to address their changing climates and environmental impacts, many of which have been financed by the European Union, USAID, and other governmental, intergovernmental, and international agencies. Furthermore, community activity led by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and donors have been underway in Africa to decrease these effects on the community, but these are not enough. It is time for the international community, governments, international and local institutions to find a sustainable solution to climate-related challenges, including internally displaced people. Serious actions and changes in policies are needed to protect vulnerable populations against the impact of climate change before it is too late.

Actions Needed

Acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples,

local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity,

Recall article 15 of the Paris Accord that reiterates its call to developed country Parties, the operating entities of the Financial Mechanism and any other organizations in a position to do so to provide support for the preparation and communication of the intended nationally determined contributions of Parties that may need such support;

We call on the United Nations to encourage research in order to:

Identify which tools and approaches for environmental protection and natural resource and land management are the most effective when building peace between conflicting parties and increasing resilience in communities affected by conflict;

Emphasize the fact that Climate displacement may be considered a form of loss and damage resulting from developed States' failure to comply with their international obligations;

Recall that while all States have human rights obligations to assist climate displaced persons, those States that are most responsible for climate change have a distinct obligation to assist developing States in providing this assistance;

Identify what role grassroots community organizations can play in preventing environment-related violent conflict, and how the international community can best support and amplify these voices; and

Recognize potential natural resource and land management, governance, and dispute resolution approaches to mitigate the direct and indirect effects of climate change, minimize its potential

contributions to violence, and prevent a compounding cycle of fragility that affect people and force them to move.

Bibliography

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