

Internal Climate Migration in India

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Abstract

India is home to over 90 million poor who are at risk of internal climate migration from their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently thanks to a marked environmental disruption. In 2019 India had most number of individuals (5 million) displaced internally because of disasters as per Global Report on Internal Displacement. The bulk of those people live on ecologically fragile land and because of lack of institutional and financial capacity they are unable to shield against environment changes. Among them various people belong to tribal communities across the country. If climate migration because of natural factors isn't enough, then the so called development projects for mining, dams etc also result into huge internal displacement. This article is an effort through review of earlier studies and present context to review composition, trends & patterns of internal climate migration, need for a policy and suggest the policy measures for improvement in condition of migrants.

Keywords: Internal displacement, Climate Migration, Urbanization, Social inclusion

Introduction

It is complex to know thoroughly causes of migration and economic instability, but the more and more evidence of connection between climatic changes, migration, and conflict is sufficient reason for concern. Hence it's time to begin pondering new and comprehensive answers to multifaceted crisis scenarios as a result of global climatic changes. India is not in a position to soak up climate-induced internal migration pressures—never mind foreign climate migrants mostly from Bangladesh. In 2018, the World Bank estimated that three regions i.e. Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia to contribute 143 million more climate migrants by 2050. In 2017, 68.5 million people were forcibly displaced, the most at any point in human history. While it is difficult to estimate, approximately one-third of those (22.5 million to 24 million people) were forced to shift by “sudden onset” weather events—flooding, forest fires after droughts, and intensified storms. While the remaining two-thirds of

displacements are the results of other humanitarian crises, it is becoming obvious that climate change is contributing to so-called slow onset events like desertification, sea-level rise, ocean acidification, pollution, rain pattern shifts and loss of biodiversity. This deterioration will result into many humanitarian crises and will cause more people being on the move. In India over 5.1 million people are classified as internally displaced in 2019, many for climate change reasons. Extreme weather events like cyclones, droughts and tropical storms wreaking unimaginable havoc in disaster-prone regions and a major section of the population find their lives shattered and livelihoods destroyed. This can be becoming a norm instead of an exception. Forced to adapt, climate migrants move to big cities in search of more stable life. However, poor and untenable housing conditions, absence of social protection schemes like medical insurance and inadequate resource supplies leave these people equally at risk of nature's wrath within the city also (e.g. Mumbai Floods).

Composition of Climate Migrants in India

Within the Indian context, climate-induced migration is broadly divided into two parts. The primary one is migrants who are forced to shift from rural to urban areas as a result of an environmental disaster in form of sudden onset (e.g. Super cyclone Phoni, Amphan) or slow onset (Soil erosion, droughts), that may have destroyed their homes and farms. These migrants often move in mega-cities for number of opportunities available there. So as is the case of Mumbai, many of migrants from the South moved to town as a result of land degradation and desertification back home while migrants from the North have largely moved as a result of drought. As men abandon their farms and migrate to cities for work because of drought, women are forced to perform their husband's agricultural duties, while still engaged in household chores and other petty jobs. Absence of credit and capital makes women in rural India face significant barriers that are almost impossible to beat.

The second category of climate-induced migrants most relevant to India are migrants who move from Bangladesh in search of a good stable life in India. Bangladesh is one among the world's most natural disaster prone countries — a fourth of its land is simply five feet above sea water level while two-thirds is not even barely 15 feet above sea water level. The last three decades, saw 10 lakhs people being rendered homeless as a consequence of accelerating erosion within the Brahmaputra basin. India, being largest country in the Indian subcontinent, is preferred destination to

shift to for those displaced by these disasters. Floods, storm surges, saltwater intrusions and cyclones have pushed vast number of people from rural Bangladesh into India. Earthquakes and water-induced disasters in Nepal, droughts in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and also the rise in sea levels in Maldives are most likely to cause large-scale migration into India in near future.

Current Scenario

Internal Migrants in India constitute a sizable part of population of 309 million internal migrants or 30% of the population (Census of India 2001). By 2019 it rose to 37%. States like Uttarakhand, Bihar, Rajasthan, Odisha, Jharkhand, with laggard economies and a surplus of labour, are the significant suppliers of labour. At the opposite end, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab and Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala known for robust and flourishing local economies, attract large numbers of workers. The rise in urban poor on account of climate changes impact, though is not accurately measured but studies point out that urbanization did not have the expected effect on rural-urban migration. The Census 2011 shows that mere 20 per cent of India's increase was because of rural-urban migration. The 64th round of NSSO, in 2007-08, titled "Migration in India" identified natural disasters including floods and droughts as most influential reasons for migration, but the figures were as low as 13 per 1,000 migrant households reporting natural disasters as a cause for migration. In India, evidence about climate migration is very little although the quantity of climate migrants might be high, given the recent events of frequent floods and droughts, cyclones.

Need for a Policy

There is 'strong evidence' that increased rainfall unpredictability and warming temperatures will make seasonal and long-term migration necessary for livelihood sustainability in many countries, including India.

The need to develop a policy for climate migration is may be more significant for India than other countries for 2 important reasons. First, the sheer size of the country and levels of poverty provide a compelling enough reason. India has 270 million who live below the poverty line. A major part of the country's poor people are in rural areas who are most vulnerable to climate-driven shocks because of their low adaptive capacity. Second, the recognition of internal migration as a livelihood strategy is already on upward movement. Nearly 100 million people within

the country remain on the move for livelihoods in any given year as endorsed by the Economic Survey 2016-17. Rising rural distress and urban industry centric nature of economic process means migration is increasingly from rural to urban areas. Global climate change will further push more people to shift to cities. Even a marginal rise in climate migrants to cities might be an urban development challenge. Hence the requirement to reply to the current climate crisis through a realistic mixture of climate action and more inclusive development policies. India's commitment to the Paris Agreement and even its action to act as a leader in Global Solar Alliance show promising signs on climate action. But these are just token steps. On the inclusive development front, our response should consider the various vulnerabilities these migrants and equally of the ones who stay, in both rural urban makeshift settlement.

Policy Measures Needed

Climate migrants often lack representation, residential rights or social entitlements and hence find themselves pushed into the category of illegitimate immigrants, with little or no effort made by the authorities to discern their motivation for migration. In rural areas, this would comprise of supporting the livelihoods of masses and strengthening social support systems, particularly for women, children and Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe populations. We have already got an intensive net of Social Security measures, including the PDS, NREGA and also ICDS, which cater to different population segments. While they suffer from problems of maladministration and pilferage, if strengthened, they will provide important means for the agricultural poor to address to certain extent the climate shocks. The report of the working group on migration released by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation in 2017 makes strong recommendations on better Social Security, living conditions, education, and access to health-care, skills improvement and financial inclusion for migrants.

The following measures in short and medium term would go in long way to improve the miserable condition of the migrants.

- a) Support the science to enhance our understanding of specific circumstances like desertification, rainfall variability, disaster occurrence, and coastal erosion, and their relevance to human migration and conflict
- b) Identify regions most prone to climate-induced migration, both forced and voluntary, so as to focus on aid, information, and contingency-planning capabilities

- c) View migration as a proactive adaptation strategy for local populations fraught with danger on account of increased environmental changes
- d) Creating migrant facilitation centers
- e) Organizing vocational skill training and placement services
- f) Legal protection for workers and providing platforms for asserting collective strength
- g) Enabling financial inclusion and linkages with Social Security schemes
- h) Access to essential services at the destination
- i) Enabling access to education for kids of migrants
- j) Enabling portability of entitlements (Food security)

Conclusion

Migration has to be facilitated through a correct development strategy and a coherent policy. A growth strategy which transfers large costs of subsistence to the poorer migrants themselves will ultimately defeat the objectives of both growth and development. The overview of internal migration in India indicates to the current harsh reality. Government policies should not hinder but should seek to facilitate internal migration. It should form the central concern in urban planning, and city-development agenda should seek to incorporate and integrate migrants politically, economically, socially, culturally and spatially. Policy documents like the Budget, JNNURM, and City Development Plans should recognize the need of migration in very explicit terms and address migrants' concerns and their rights unequivocally. A rights-based approach to city development would begin a brand new era of freedom and human development; it must begin within the city, and must begin with migrants. Although the long run solution lies in sustainable development policies in accordance with ecological balance and bio-diversity preservation, if we wish to cut back climate migration.

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