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# Migration as adaptation?
## A comparative analysis of policy frameworks on the environment and development in MECLEP countries

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## Introduction

With recent climatic and environmental changes occurring all across the globe, adaptation has been in the front line of development policies. The Fifth Assessment report of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines adaptation as "the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects" (Annex II, 2014a:1758). Although the term has been used mainly in connection with climate change, it also refers to the whole spectrum of human responses to environmental changes that aim to "avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities" (IPCC, 2014a:1758).

Historically, migration has been viewed as a negative adaptation strategy and has not received the adequate attention in recent adaptation and development policy frameworks as a long-term solution. Nevertheless, for households and communities, migration can be a coping strategy that saves lives, diversifies incomes and enhances capacities to deal with environmental and climatic changes. The Fifth Assessment report recognizes that expanding opportunities for mobility can reduce risks of most vulnerable populations, and changes in migration patterns can be responses to both extreme

weather events and longer term climate variability; migration being "an effective adaptation strategy […] in all regions of world" (IPCC, 2014b:20).

Building on the research of "migration as adaptation" (inter alia, Tacoli, 2009; McLeman and Hunter, 2010; Bardsley and Hugo, 2010; Bennett et al., 2011), this paper aims to discuss possible adaptation policies, and current climate change and development policy structures on human mobility. It presents available national policy channels for positive adaptation, as well as the ways in which proactively managed migration can be incorporated within these existing frameworks.

The brief is supported by key findings from the six assessment reports of the *Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Evidence for Policy (MECLEP)* project, funded by the European Union with the financial assistance of IOM's Development Fund and implemented by IOM in partnership with six universities. The overall aim of this project is to provide evidence for environmental migration and build a case for migration as an adaptation strategy to environmental change. This project sets out to achieve this by conducting empirical research and proposing a policy framework in six pilot countries: Dominican Republic, Haiti, Kenya, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam (see Map 1).

# Existing national and regional policy frameworks

Following the research theme of the MECLEP project, this brief views adaptation as an anticipatory human response and policy measure (Smit et al., 2000), an opportunity and challenge to "moderate potential damages or to benefit from opportunities associated" with climate change (IPCC, 2001:887). Adaptation policies and actions vary among countries as they face different environmental hazards due to climate and environmental changes. MECLEP pilot countries, such as Papua New Guinea and Haiti, are at risk of a wide range of natural hazards from floods, storms, earthquakes to sea-level rise, droughts and coastal erosion; whereas other pilot countries face less diverse sources of environmental hazards (Table 1).

The varying frequency and increased intensity of natural hazards predicted for the future will affect larger populations, displacing them more permanently rather than temporarily. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) 2015 report found that some people have been displaced for up to 26 years, which contradicts the common belief that displacement after natural disasters is temporary and short-term (2015:10). Adequate policy mechanisms, as well viable and durable solutions, can facilitate such displacement into well-managed human relocations fostering the resilience of individuals and communities.

**Map 1. The six pilot countries of MECLEP project**
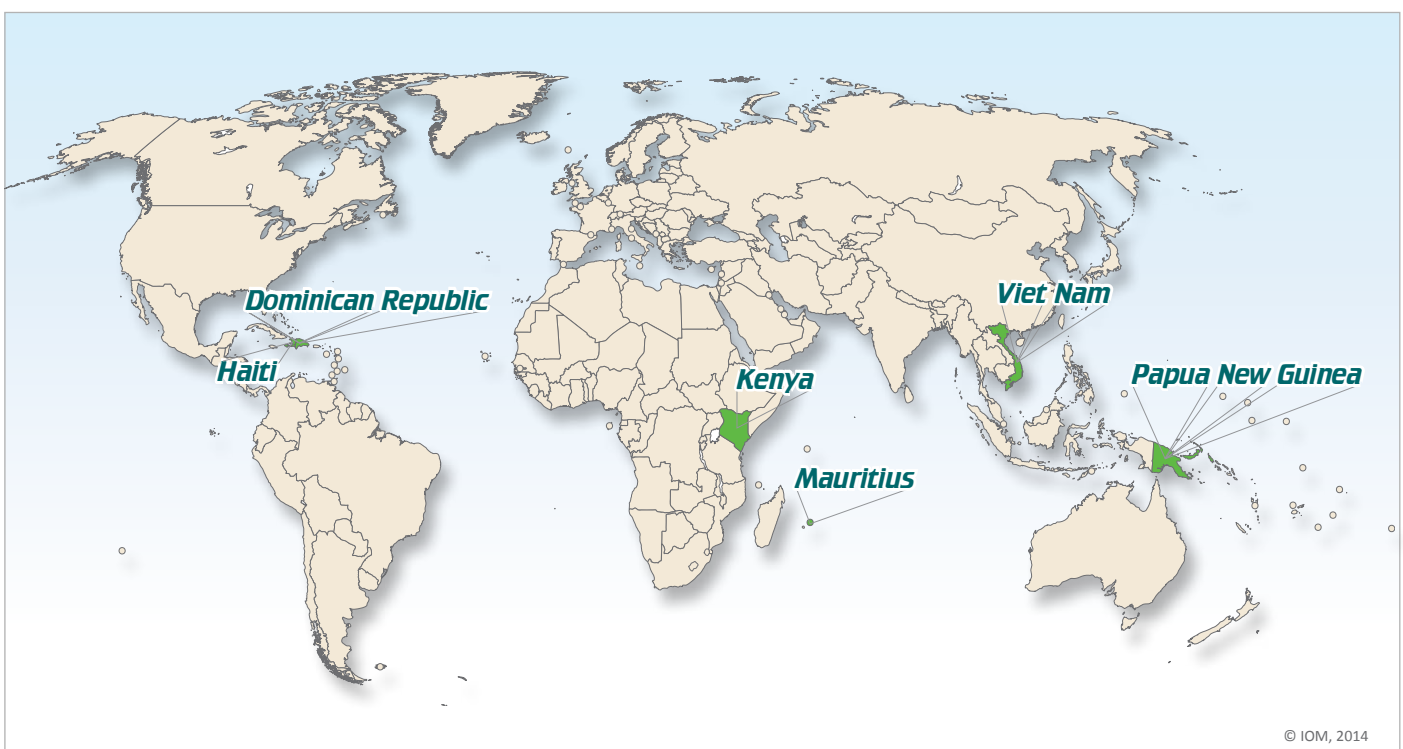


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**Table 1: Key environmental challenges in the six MECLEP pilot countries based on the MECLEP national assessments**

| Countries affected by different range of environmental challenges (in order from most (1) to least (6)) | Sudden-onset events | | | | | | Slow-onset events and processes | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Storm | Floods | Landslies | Wildfires | Earthquake | Volcanic eruption | Sea-level rise | Increasing temperature | Salinization | Drought / Desertification | Land and forest degradation | Loss of biodiversity | Glacial retreat | Coastal erosion |
| 1. Papua New Guinea | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● |
| 2. Haiti | ● | ● | ● | | ● | | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | | ● |
| 3. Kenya | | ● | ● | | | | ● | ● | | ● | | ● | | |
| 4. Dominican Republic | ● | ● | ● | ● | | | ● | ● | | | ● | ● | | ● |
| 5. Mauritius | ● | ● | ● | | | | ● | ● | ● | | ● | ● | | ● |
| 6. Viet Nam | ● | ● | | | | | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | | | ● |

*Source:* Naser, 2015; Pierre, forthcoming; Wooding and Morales, forthcoming; Sobhee, forthcoming; Nyaoro, Schade and Schmidt, forthcoming; and Dang, forthcoming.

The following section presents examples from the experiences of MECLEP pilot countries on how to include migration in national and regional adaptation, as well as development policy frameworks. The summary of highlighted existing policies is presented in Table 2.

## Climate change policy frameworks

Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, hereafter the Convention), Parties to the Convention submit national reports on the implementation of the Convention, including but not limited to National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs), National Communications (NCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs). Herein, NAPAs, NCs, NAPs, INDCs and other development policies are reviewed based on how they include migration.

Through NAPAs, least developed countries (LCDs) identify their priority activities to address urgent and immediate needs for climate change adaptation, after which countries are able to apply for project funding under the Global Environment Facility's Least Developed Countries Fund (UNFCCC, n.d.). For example, Haiti's NAPA identified internal migration (rural–urban migration) as an urgent problem in the context of climate change and recognized environmental migration related to drought (Government of Haiti, 2006:16). The NAPA submitted by the Dominican Republic also indicated that drought causes migration and is an additional risk factor in the face of diseases (Government of the Dominican Republic, 2008:58, 61). Job generation was a proposed strategy to

mitigate migration to the large cities (Government of the Dominican Republic, 2008:58). The NAPAs for both countries viewed migration as a coping mechanism for vulnerable populations to respond to environmental change and recognized the importance of managed migration, with special focus on planned urbanization and livelihood generation.

Under the Convention, Parties are requested through National Communications (NC)[1] to report and review the progress they are making to implement the Convention. As the NCs are referred to as reporting documents, the countries are encouraged to communicate the use of policy frameworks, such as NAPAs (mid and long-term) and NAPs (immediate and urgent), as well as other plans and policies for developing and implementing adaptation strategies and actions (UNFCCC, 2007). All six researched countries have submitted NCs to UNFCCC, and five of them (Dominican Republic, Haiti, Kenya, Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam) identified the link between environmental changes and migration (UNFCCC, 2007:4).

Since 2001, Haiti has published two NCs on climate change (First National Communication (FNC), 2001a; Second National Communication (SNC), 2011). Following the NAPA, the FNC established the link between rural–urban migration (2001:31) and the SNC highlighted the relationship between environmental changes caused by climate change and its impact on migration (2011:167).

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1  Non-Annex I, developing country Parties, are required to submit First NC within three years of entering the Convention and then every four years afterwards (UNFCCC, n.d.).

**Table 2. National and regional policies and frameworks**

| Country | National or regional policies and frameworks | Types of mobility covered |
|---|---|---|
| **National Climate Change Policies and Plans** | | |
| Dominican Republic | NC to the UNFCCC (2003, 2009)<br>National Adaptation Plan for Action (2008)<br>Strategic Plan for Climate Change (PECC) 2011–2030 | Rural–urban |
| Haiti | NC to UNFCCC (2002, 2013)<br>National Adaptation Plan for Action (2006)<br>Strategic Program for Climate Resilience for Haiti (2013) | Rural–urban |
| Kenya | NC to UNFCCC (2002)<br>National Climate Change Response Strategy (2010)<br>National Climate Change Action Plan (2012) | Rural–urban |
| Mauritius | NC to UNFCCC (1999, 2011)<br>Climate Change Action Plan (1998)<br>Climate Change Division (2010) | – |
| Papua New Guinea | National Communication (NC) to UNFCCC (2000)<br>National Action Plan (2005)<br>Interim Action Plan for Climate-Compatible Development (2010)<br>Strategic Program for Climate Resilience (SPCR) (2012) | Relocation/ resettlement |
| Viet Nam | NC to UNFCCC (2003, 2010)<br>National Target Programme to Respond to Climate Change (2008)<br>National Climate Change Strategy (2011)<br>National Action Plan to Climate Change 2012–2020 (2012) | Relocation/ resettlement |
| **National Disaster Risk Reduction Policies** | | |
| Haiti | National Plan for Disaster Risk Management (2001) | Emergency evacuation |
| Kenya | The Prevention, Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons and Affected Communities Act (2012) | – |
| Papua New Guinea | The Disaster Management Act (1987)<br>Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management National Framework for Action 2005–2015 (2005) | Emergency evacuation |
| Viet Nam | The National Strategy for Natural Disaster Prevention, Response and Mitigation to 2020 (2007) | Emergency evacuation |
| **National Sustainable Development Plans** | | |
| Dominican Republic | Plan for Economic Development Compatible with the Climate Change (DECCC) 2011–2030 | – |
| Haiti | National Action Plan for the Environment (PAE, 1999) | – |
| Kenya | National Policy for the Sustainable Development of Arid and Semi-arid Lands, Vision 2030<br>National Environmental Policy (2013) | Rural–urban |
| Papua New Guinea | Medium Term Development Plan 2011–2015 (MTDP) | Resettlement/ relocation, rural–urban |
| **Regional Policies and Frameworks** | | |
| Haiti | Caribbean Regional Strategic Program for Climate Resilience (SPCR) (2013) | International migration |
| Kenya | East African Community Climate Change Policy (2009) | Rural–urban |
| Papua New Guinea | Pacific Regional Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Framework for Action 2005–2015 (Madang Framework)<br>Pacific Islands Framework for Action and Climate Change 2006–2015<br>Pacific Disaster Risk Management Partnership Network, Pacific Climate Change Finance Assessment Framework (2013) | – |

The SNC also recognized migration as a survival strategy in response to the impacts of climate change (2011:179). Thus, Haiti's NCs identified the important nexus between migration, environment and climate change along with the potential of migration as adaptation strategy. Similarly, Kenya, in its FNC, states that population displacement due to flooding and drought, as well as rural–urban migration, are significant problems that the country faces (Government of Kenya, 2002). This displacement is referred to as potentially becoming an important issue on local, regional and national levels. Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam have high-risk sea-level rise and flooding, and cite relocation and resettlement as potential strategies for facilitating migration in their NCs. It is noteworthy that the latter two countries do not depict migration as an unfavourable consequence of environmental change in their NCs.

NAPs, on the other hand, enable Parties to develop and implement strategies to address medium- to long-term needs, and are broader and cross-cutting (UNFCCC, 2014). The Plans facilitate planning by building on the existing adaptation activities and ensuring that the implementation of climate change adaptation is coordinated with the UNFCCC and national sustainable development objectives, policies and programmes (UNFCCC, 2015). According to the NAP guidelines, the pilot countries have developed their national climate change adaptation policies. In their plans, Dominican Republic, Kenya and Viet Nam include references to migration. Dominican Republic's Strategic Plan for Climate Change (PECC) 2011–2030 has a reference to migration in the section on Infrastructure and Population Dynamics that urges to "encourage the development of programmes to address migration and climate refugees" (2011:14).[2] Kenya's National Climate Change Response Strategy (NCCRS) (2010), serving as a basis for strengthening and focusing nationwide action for climate change adaptation and mitigation, mentions that population displacement and migration from climate disaster (drought and projected sea-level rise) prone areas are expected to increase. To facilitate mainly rural to urban movement, the NCCRS indicates provision of adequate services in poor urban neighbourhoods as one of the adaptation strategies (2010:41, 56). Migration to urban areas is also viewed as a potential strategy for pastoralist communities to deal with climate change effects on their livelihoods (Government of Kenya, 2010:51). In addition to migration to slum areas in urban areas, the slum dwellers move to semi-arid areas where farming activities lead to further environmental degradation (Nyaoro,

Schade and Schmidt, forthcoming). The increasing rural–urban migration is further discussed in Kenya's National Climate Change Action Plan (2013–2017). It lays out climate change actions supporting the country's development goals but without specifying the concrete strategies nor planned actions. The Plan indicates the necessity of capacity-building to manage climate risks in urban centres and at the places of origin and calls for more research on migration as a coping mechanism to successfully deal with climate variability (Government of Kenya, 2013:38). The above discussion portrays that climate change adaptation policies, in addition to its focus on supporting the livelihoods of the displaced, consider the impacts of migration on the environment that place additional stress on urban areas.

In preparation for creating a new international climate agreement at the Twenty-first Conference of Parties of the UNFCCC in Paris in December 2015, countries are submitting Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) that outline their post-2020 climate actions, including adaptation measures, which they aim to take under the new international agreement. All six MECLEP countries have submitted their INDCs to communicate internationally the local realities of climate change and their proposed measures to reduce climate risk. Based on previous references to human mobility mentioned in NAPs, NAPAs and NCs, Haiti, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam featured migration under adaptation steps. On the one hand, the INDCs of Haiti and Viet Nam view migration as a probable adaptation strategy, which can be managed through planned relocation and resettlement (Government of Viet Nam, 2015:10), as well as planned urban development in order to reduce disaster risk (Government of Haiti, 2015:10). On the other hand, INDCs of Mauritius and Papua New Guinea regard migration as a possible "hazard area" (Government of Papua New Guinea, 2015:7) and an undesired outcome of failed adaptation (Government of Mauritius, 2015:3). Although several references have been made about climate-induced migration in previous communications to the UNFCCC, migration has only been moderately recognized as a positive adaptation strategy.

## Disaster risk reduction policies

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) policies aim to reduce the impact and damage brought by natural disasters on the environment and society. As MECLEP countries face a wide range of environmental hazards that frequently result in displacement and movement of the populations, DRR policies are relevant for prevention, response and mitigation of risks these vulnerable communities face. DRR policies have been developed among others by Haiti, Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam. Haiti's National Plan for Disaster Risk Management (Plan national de réponse

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2   The term has no legal basis in international refugee law. Under the 1951 Refugee Convention, the environmental factors cannot be used as grounds that cause the movements across international borders (CCEMA, 2010).

aux urgences), completed in 2001, aimed to strengthen the response capacity of the poor and thus the most vulnerable to natural disasters, mentioning human mobility linked to forced evacuations (Government of Haiti, 2001b:29). Viet Nam's National Strategy for Natural Disaster Prevention, Response and Mitigation to 2020 (2007), which laid out the strategy to address sudden-onset events, set an aim to "complete the relocation, arrangement and stabilization of the life for people in disaster prone areas", but without identifying discrete actions (UN Viet Nam, 2014). Papua New Guinea – facing a significant risk of population displacement caused by environmental and climate change similar to Viet Nam – has not mentioned migration, displacement, relocation or resettlement in the Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management National Framework for Action 2005–2015, nor in Climate Compatible Development Strategy. Emergency evacuations were the only reference to human mobility (Naser, 2015:59).

## National development policies and strategic plans

Development policies outline the strategies for national economic development and investment, which can provide effective facilitation of anticipated migration, planned relocation and resettlement. UNFCCC reports that many countries indicate integration of climate change adaptation into their national development frameworks (UNFCCC, 2015:7).

Kenya's National Policy for Sustainable Development of Northern Kenya and Other Arid Lands mentions that the Government "recognizes that mobility is a rational and sophisticated response to environmental conditions" in arid and semi-arid lands and calls to support the existing pastoralist lifestyle as "pastoralism contributes to the food security, environmental stewardship, and economic growth" (Government of Kenya, 2015:8, 45). Papua New Guinea recognizes the risks that coastal communities face from environmental hazards incorporated human mobility and resettlement in their development plans and strategies. The Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2011–2015, providing a clear, accountable plan for investment, mentions initiatives or programmes in urban areas to address rural–urban migration and job creation in receiving communities (Government of Papua New Guinea, 2010a). Facilitation of internal migration, including relocation and resettlement of affected communities, is stressed in Papua New Guinea's Development Strategic Plan (2010–2030). Additionally, development of rural areas is listed as a strategy to decrease rural–urban migration (Government of Papua New Guinea, 2010b:84, 110). On the other hand, the Strategic Programme for Climate Resilience (SPCR) (2012) stresses the studies more on viable adaptation

measures (relocation, land reclamation, viable defenses) for vulnerable coastal communities inhabiting low-lying islands and atolls (Government of Papua New Guinea, 2012:30). The Papua New Guinea development strategies and plans focus on two areas – the origin and the destination – to help the communities to adapt at their home coastal areas, if feasible, and in the urban areas.

## Regional policy frameworks

Regional policy frameworks are essential in creating a platform for regional cooperation, capacity-building and joint programme implementation. First, the East African Community (EAC) Climate Change Policy stresses that impacts of climate-related disasters are likely to be devastating for the economies and livelihood assets, resulting in displacement of populations and "increasing rural urban migration, giving rise to sprawling slums" (EAC, 2009:27). Second, the Caribbean Regional Strategic Programme for Climate Resilience (SPCR) (2013) mentions that the land-use challenges people face are exacerbated by climate change. Therefore, there is a need for regional strategies and programmes to sustain a favour environment on the islands in order to prevent migration (Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, 2013:36). Both frameworks indicate that climate and environmental changes will contribute to increased human mobility, which is seen as adverse coping strategy. The change in perception that migration can be a positive strategy to deal with environmental changes can bring a fresh look and greater input in including the strategies for the receiving communities to cope with the influx of migrants.

## Constraints in data availability

The initial national assessments in six MECLEP project countries indicated either lacking or deficient data on internal human mobility. For example, in Papua New Guinea, the main challenge on migration is the lack of comprehensive and concrete data on internal migration (Esteves, 2013:5). In Kenya, the data on internally displaced persons (IDPs) is not grouped by the causes of their displacement, thus, the exact number for each group is unknown (Nyaoro, Schade and Schmidt, forthcoming). Due to such constraints and gaps in available data, policymakers are not informed adequately on mobility trends and needs of vulnerable communities facing environmental and climate change related risks. Thus, as can be seen from previous discussion, the climate change adaptation, DRR and development policies do not emphasize nor give an appropriate attention to forced displacement or strategies and actions to facilitate such displacement. The policies are non-comprehensive, mostly viewing migration as a negative outcome rather than a positive coping strategy.

## Conclusions

Drawing on the MECLEP project, this article identified different approaches how migration has been perceived and incorporated into climate change and development policies. The paper presented existing policy measures adopted to anticipate and deal with migration due to environmental and climatic changes.

Thus far, in the six pilot countries, migration has been perceived as a negative rather than a positive strategy to cope with climatic change. Rural–urban migration is recognized as predominant in Dominican Republic, Haiti and Kenya, whereas in Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam, resettlement and relocation dominate the policy reference to migration (Table 2). Rural–urban migration is also emphasized in the National Sustainable Development Plans of Kenya and Papua New Guinea. The countries are yet to explore migration as a strategy for DRR. In regional policies and frameworks, rural–urban migration has a weak presence or has not been considered at all. This analysis indicates that even though the policies in pilot countries mention migration, in particular rural–urban, they lack the indication of concrete strategies and actions to address such migration due to environmental changes.

Based on the findings, the following general recommendations can be made:

- Migration is a pivotal part of sustainable policy design. Public policies, inter alia development plans, DRR frameworks and climate change action plans are to be synchronized to incorporate human mobility and all its facets in the context of environmental and climate changes to reach long-term resilience.

- As adaptation strategy, migration helps to diversify livelihoods. Thus, researching on the economic and environmental aspects of human settlements in the context of climate and environmental change can help identify anticipatory measures to adjust to potential environmental stresses.

- Appropriate and accurate data on internal migration patterns serves as guidance for policymakers to formulate and geographically focus national adaptation and development policies. Through research, governments can identify the impacts of migration and causes of migration within their national boundaries in the context of climate and environmental change and the context specific ways to address them.

An open, cross-sectoral dialogue between national and local authorities can maximize the benefits from migration. Policies, manifesting themselves through different local power structures, need to consider local realities on the ground and the changing necessities of environmental migrants.

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