

BROOKINGS-LSE Project on Internal Displacement

Roundtable on Climate Change and Human Mobility

Tuesday, April 3, 2012, 12:00 pm — 1:30 pm

The Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC

On April 3, 2012, the Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement organized its third roundtable for researchers and practitioners working on issues of climate change and human mobility.

This roundtable held at the Brookings Institution, part of a bi-annual series, focused on humanitarian and development approaches to climate change migration, displacement and resettlement, including discussions about the relevance and possible outcomes of this year's Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). In addition, participants' updated each other on current and planned research and activities in the field.

Moderated by Elizabeth Ferris, discussion at the roundtable was wide-ranging, including both reporting on research initiatives underway and suggestions on how to strengthen cooperation between the humanitarian, development and disaster risk reduction fields in terms of climate change and human mobility challenges.

To start off the discussion, three participants (David Payton, UNDP; Rod Snider, American Red Cross; Alice Thomas, Refugees International) gave brief overviews over some of the main aspects of their organizations' work in this area.

David Payton (UNDP) noted the centrality of climate change in the work of UNDP and emphasized the need for countries meeting at Rio + 20 to 'connect the dots' like they did 20 years ago, a task which is now more complicated than it was then. UNDP is promoting a low carbon development strategy and issues of migration have become core issues in UNDP's work to promote sustainable development. He noted that sustainable development needs to be people-centered development and was worried that UN member states might not draw the right lessons from the last 20 years. There is also a need for UNDP to 'walk the talk' in terms of putting humans in the center of planning for sustainable development. Finally, he pointed out that UNDP's Human Development reports are important contributions to the sustainable development debate and made particular reference to the 2009 Human Development Report "Overcoming Barriers: Human Mobility and Development."

Rod Snider (American Red Cross) noted that his agency sees the issues through a climate risk management perspective. Over the last 20 years the number of disasters has drastically increased – in fact, 91 percent of disasters in the last ten years are weather or climate-related. Population

growth and urbanization further exposes more people to natural hazards. Climate change has increased the threat of disasters, especially as disasters become more unpredictable and occur in societies that have little historical experience in dealing with certain types of natural hazards (as evidenced by tornadoes in Boston, hurricanes in Brazil and Argentina.) Three distinct groups -- those working on disaster risk reduction, environment and climate change -- need to talk more with each other. There is also a need to look at whole systems, as for example the Himalayas, as changes there influence the entire system of water resources in South Asia. There is a need for a paradigm shift — we can no longer look at development from the status quo, we need to look at it from a climate change lens, a disaster lens. He was optimistic, however, that increasing awareness of the needs for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation would begin to break down silos between humanitarian and development communities. Disaster management also faces the challenge to not only respond to large disasters which cause massive displacement, which are themselves occurring more frequently, but also to focus on the small and medium sized localized disasters which affect many communities around the world.

Alice Thomas (Refugees International) noted that climate-related events are having a larger impact on displacement and that Refugees International's goal is to put the human face on climate change. Therefore it was important to shift from focusing mostly on the scientific discussion on climate change to the human impacts of climate change. It is not a coincidence that a lot of extreme natural disasters are playing out in countries that are already insecure. She mentioned that her organization has both considered policy responses and looked at challenges on a micro-level (for example looking at the responses to the Colombian floods caused by 18 months of rain due to two consecutive La Nina 'seasons'.) In her opinion changing the international legal framework will not solve some of the crises that will affect the largest numbers of people and that there was a need to work with national governments. In many cases governments have different agencies dealing with natural disasters and displacement and there is a need to build local capacities especially promoting a rights based approach to natural disasters. There is also a need to fill the gap between the work of the humanitarian community and agencies focusing on prevention and/or development.

After the brief presentations the floor was opened for questions and discussions:

Beth Ferris (Brookings Institution) asked David Payton on UNDP's preferred outcomes for Rio + 20. David noted that he hoped that the conference would focus on the human dimension of sustainable development, contrary to the focus of the 1992 Earth Summit which focused on the environment as environmental questions could not be addressed without addressing poverty. He noted that the upcoming conference in Rio must be about the responsibility of all countries and expressed concern that too many countries would look at the issue solely through an environmental lens. Many countries had tasked environmental ministries to be in charge of their participation in the Rio + 20 conference, but in many countries environmental ministries were not sufficiently important to carry through a sustainable development agenda. He noted that in the debates taking place now about Rio + 20 and sustainable development, little attention has been devoted to migration issues.

Beth then asked Michele Klein Solomon (IOM) if humanitarians needed to be paying attention to Rio + 20. Michele answered that two issues to be discussed at Rio would have important implications for humanitarian actors: managing resilient cities and disaster risk reduction. The

original zero draft for the conference outcome statement was 14 pages long and didn't have a word about migration but after comments from governments the document was now about 150 pages long and included several references to migration, especially in relation to population growth and urbanization. Mexico had proposed a stand-alone section on migration focused on migration as a potentially positive force for human and sustainable development and highlighting the need to protect the human rights of all migrants but this faced some governmental opposition and reservations, and questions remained about whether it would become part of the outcome document. The Rio + 20 outcome document is important as it will set the tone of the debate for the next 20 years.

Ed Carr (USAID) asked what implementing agencies were doing in terms of climate change and human mobility and what they needed to do their work effectively.

Rob Snider noted that they are not doing much work on human mobility issues as many mobility issues are very sensitive and the responsibility of governments; rather the Red Cross was assisting governments if needed. He noted that a big challenge for humanitarian actors was to improve work in urban areas as the model for humanitarian work model has been centered on rural areas and consequently humanitarian actors do not have much experience in working in urban areas.

Joel Charny (InterAction) is struck at collective inability to address this issue. Many agencies, Oxfam America, for example, were both effective as disaster response agencies and development agencies, but were not looking holistically at this problem. A good example was the Horn of Africa crisis which was quintessentially based on the intersection of climate change, conflict and large-scale migration but humanitarian actors were looking at it only as a humanitarian/refugee crisis rather than considering longer-term resilience issues (although USAID is increasingly emphasizing resilience). In his opinion it is hard to be optimistic about donors' ability to develop a holistic response if our own organizations don't make the link between humanitarian and development issues more effectively. He noted that InterAction's disaster risk reduction working group was a good attempt in making that link but noted the problem that environmental organizations were completely outside of InterAction's framework. Overall, it should be theoretically simple to identify the most vulnerable areas affected by natural disasters and start working at DRR and creating resilience (for example in places like Bangladesh or Vietnam which have strong institutions (either governmental or non-governmental).

Rob Snider noted that DRR was housed in the humanitarian section but was looking at environmental issues and therefore a development issue. As part of the humanitarian sector, it was subject to the short funding cycles for humanitarian aid. And yet, DRR would be a good starting point to break down barriers between the humanitarian and development silos.

Andrea Berringer (LSU) asked about what outreach had been done to encourage donors to be the impetus to break down silos?

Ed Carr (University of South Carolina/AAAS Fellow at USAID) noted that the response side and development side are effectively different agencies within USAID, having different legal mandates and streams of funding that cannot be put together easily. DRR funding comes from the same pot of money as funding for disaster response, meaning that if a major crisis happens at

the beginning of the year, such as the earthquake in Haiti, there is often little money for DRR initiatives for the rest of the year as the budgets have been used for emergency response. He noted that it was difficult to change structures but that there were attempts internally to improve cooperation between different offices and Bureaus. If efforts are successful on the ground they could be the starting point for positive synergies.

Rod Snider (ARC) added that the humanitarian-development divide is not just an issue for donors. For example the 2004 tsunami was the first time when NGOs received large amounts of unrestricted funding and had the opportunity to do things differently, but they did not and reverted back to old silos.

Jane McAdam (UNSW) brought up the question of whether, with respect to donor priorities, there is a need to create a whole new paradigm or should the emphasis be on trying to engage in greater dialogue between existing policy silos.

David Payton (UNDP) noted that UNDP knows that it isn't working as well as it should be and could do a lot better. He was hoping that the Rio process will give fairly clear directions about how civil society could be working more effectively. He pointed out that one of the key issues will be to make sure that there is enough of a hook to say that what isn't addressed in Rio can be done two years at major international conference. For example, there could be a major international conference dealing with migration issues (just as the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development was itself a follow up to the 1992 Rio Earth Summit).

Following the discussion, participants shared information about ongoing projects regarding climate change and human mobility.

Sanjula Weerasinghe (ISIM, Georgetown University) reported about the Institute's three-year project on Crisis Migration, which will look at human mobility associated with acute and slow-onset crises (including natural disasters, environmental degradation, nuclear accidents, pandemics, and violence) and will develop guiding principles and identify effective practices for addressing crisis-related movement. For the first year's program the institute has commissioned 18 different experts to write on a range of pertinent issues. Many of these papers will be brought together in an edited volume on Crisis Migration.

Jane McAdam (UNSW) is working on a four-year project looking at past forms of relocation of whole communities in the Pacific. Understanding those historical movements and their long-term ramifications should feed into current discussions on relocations in the region. Another aspect of her research focuses on the slow-onset impacts of climate change, which seem to have dropped off the international agenda. Other researchers in the region were also doing work on climate change and human mobility issues, such as Jon Barnett (researching security and displacement issues in the Pacific) and John Campbell (working on climate change and relocation issues).

Christopher Molitoris (Center for Global Development) reported on the Center's work on US migration policies for persons displaced by natural disasters. The Center used Haiti as a case study, realizing that following the earthquake in Haiti there was no legal means by which US

could admit affected Haitians into the US. The working paper then explored options that could be applied to assist people who seek refuge in the US because of natural disasters, including solutions that would require legislative change such as widening the refugee definition or opening refugee funds to persons displaced by natural disasters would need changes in legislature.

Michele Klein Solomon (IOM) commenting on CDG's work, suggested that a closer look be taken at how the US could use temporary protected status more effectively, widely, and consistently. She also noted that refugee resettlement could potentially be an avenue down the road for population resettlement due to climate change, likely only in very limited circumstances. She then talked about IOM's work on climate change and mobility, noting that a lot of work had been done on environmental displacement over the years although not always relating it directly to climate change. For example, a review in a 2008 study found that IOM at that time had more than 500 active projects related to environmental displacement. IOM's work in this field has been carried out on three levels—research, policy/dialogue, and operational work; much of this work focuses on disaster risk reduction as well as assistance and protection for affected populations.

Andrea Berringer (LSU) who had just finished her dissertation talked about her current research priorities, one of which was to look structural and political factors which limit necessary collaboration to take on questions of climate change and human mobility. She was also doing a paper on communication between diaspora communities and their communities of origins in situations of natural disaster with a particular focus on remittance flows. She is also involved with another research project which looks at issues like salinization which are faced by both small and larger islands, such as Caribbean Islands.

Ed Carr (University of South Carolina/AAAS Fellow at USAID) noted that migration issues are not a focus area at USAID, but that there may be public statements coming out that addresses climate change, migration and conflict. His posting with USAID will finish soon and he will go back to the academia where he plans to look at migration decision making of drought-affected populations in Somalia and on a large project in Mali working on getting climate services to farmers.

Beth Ferris (Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement) talked about the project's work on natural disasters and climate change. In May, the project will hold a regional workshop on protection issues in natural disasters for Central Asia and the Caucasus region in Kyrgyzstan. Later this year, the project will hold its first week-long course on internal displacement and protection in natural disasters for government officials in Sanremo, Italy. The project is also doing work on regional organizations' cooperation on disaster response with a particular focus on the Caribbean and the Pacific and has also started research on climate change and displacement in the Arctic. Beth is also planning to finish her book on natural disasters in 2012. Rod Snider (ARC) reported that the American Red Cross was developing a toolkit for stakeholders' dialogue in urban areas. The organization was also working on participatory game design as way to do experimental learning with communities to learn about natural disasters and climate change. The ARC was also building a global disaster preparedness center, which would focus on operational research, technical assistance, etc.

Faith Chamberlain (Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement) talked about her research analyzing how the whole US government functioned in a major emergency, by considering its response in Somalia. The research will also consider the implications of US policies on the work of US INGOs in Somalia.

Alice Thomas (Refugees International) just finished a follow-up initiative on their research on flood-response in Colombia. Alice noted that four out of ten people affected by flooding in Colombia were IDPs and noted that the Colombian government had developed several big national initiatives in response to the floods.

Michele Klein Solomon (IOM) reported that IOM's International Dialogue on Migration this year would focus on migration in crisis situations (at the request of participating governments). She also noted that there was talk of possibly developing Guiding Principles or Operational Guidelines on that issue.

Josh Glasser (Harvard University) mentioned that the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative was currently working on issues related to rapid urbanization, which is particularly relevant as migrants seem to be moving towards urban areas that are both affected by climate change and prone to disaster hazards rather than leaving from hazardous areas. The Initiative is planning its Climate Summit at Harvard for the spring of 2013 when it hopes to address specific issues about climate change and humanitarian vulnerability, migration and mitigation with working groups on specific topics. It is also planning research projects to map urban climate vulnerability.

Elizabeth Ferris closed the roundtable by pointing out the existence of a new online platform for researchers and practitioners working on climate change and human mobility issues developed by the Project on Internal Displacement and the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and by thanking all participants for their participation. The next installment of the roundtable is planned for autumn 2012.