



ISSUE BRIEF

LAND TENURE AS A CRITICAL CONSIDERATION FOR CLIMATE CHANGE-RELATED DISPLACEMENT IN SLOW-ONSET DISASTER ZONES

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Landesa is an international non-governmental organization that fights poverty and provides opportunity and security for the rural poor through the power of land rights. The impacts of secure land rights cut across the spectrum of global development – from health to economic growth, from women’s empowerment to political stability – and Landesa is one of the few NGOs in the world dedicated to this work. Founded in Seattle, Landesa has helped secure land rights for more than 120 million families in over 50 countries. In 2015, Landesa was awarded the Hilton Humanitarian Prize, the largest humanitarian prize in the world, in recognition of Landesa’s extraordinary contributions to alleviating human suffering. Landesa currently has active projects in India, Myanmar, China, Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Tanzania, Malawi, and Mozambique.



BRAC creates opportunities for the world’s poor. It is a global leader in developing and implementing cost-effective, evidence-based programs to assist the most marginalized people in extremely poor, conflict-prone, and post-disaster settings. These include initiatives in education, healthcare, microfinance, girls’ empowerment, agriculture, human and legal rights, and more. Ranked the #1 NGO in the world, BRAC improved the lives of 130 million people in 11 countries.

Based in New York, BRAC USA is the North American affiliate of BRAC. Founded in 2006, BRAC USA plays a critical role, building awareness, mobilizing resources, and collaborating with international counterparts to design and implement poverty innovations worldwide. BRAC USA works to empower people and communities in situations of poverty, illiteracy, disease and social injustice, achieving large-scale positive changes that enable everyone to realize their potential.

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INTRODUCTION

As climate change impacts intensify, growing rates of natural disasters cause increasing damage to the lives of people across the globe. Climate change-related disasters include both rapid-onset disasters (such as hurricanes) and slow-onset disasters (such as long-term droughts). Given the urgency of rapid-onset disasters, it is unsurprising that governments, multi-lateral organizations, donors and others target a large percentage of resources towards rapid-onset events related to climate change.

Slow-onset disasters, however, have a significant and lasting impact on a host of development issues, from food security to fast-paced urbanization. Landscape degradation, worsened by desertification and drought caused by climate change, affects an estimated 1.5 billion people: 42 percent of those who are very poor, and 32 percent of those who are moderately poor (Agostini and Connor, 2017, p. 1). Moderate or severe impacts of drought alone affect a striking 52 percent of agricultural land (Ibid). Drought and other slow-onset disasters cause reductions in agricultural productivity, which in turn spurs displacement and migration among the world's rural people living in poverty.¹

Weak or non-existent land rights further constrain choices available to rural people and communities in the face of changing environmental conditions (Mitchell, 2011, pp. 16, 42 and throughout). In addition, slow-onset disasters can disrupt existing land use and tenure patterns. While slow-onset climate change is affecting all areas of the world, African countries bear a significant portion of the impact (Berman, Quinn and Paavola, 2013). This brief highlights Uganda as one of the countries where slow-onset disaster has taken a toll in recent years.

While the mitigation, adaptation, and prevention of slow-onset related displacement requires a holistic approach, this paper focuses on slow-onset climate change migration and displacement with a particular emphasis on land use, tenure, and rights related issues. Authors argue that when governments and the global development community better understand and address the interplay between land rights and slow-onset disaster, they will be better able to mitigate and address climate change impacts in coming years.

BACKGROUND AND CHALLENGES: MAKING THE LINKS

Anthropogenic, or human-caused, climate change causes slow-onset disasters

Growing global consensus indicates that human-linked climate change causes or exacerbates slow-onset disasters, and the international community has recognized “the need to strengthen international cooperation and expertise in order to understand and reduce loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including impacts related to extreme weather events and slow-onset events.”² The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) identifies climate

¹ As of March, 2017, severe drought in Northern Africa, caused primarily by climate change, posed an imminent threat to the lives of an estimated 20 million people; 1.4 million of these were children at risk of death from malnutrition (Falk, 2017).

² In 2009, the UN General Assembly passed resolution 64/162, acknowledging that natural disasters are exacerbated by slow-onset climate change. The quote is from 2010, when the Cancun Adaptation Framework was adopted by the 197 countries of the UNFCCC at COP16 (UNFCCC, 2012, p. 6). Subsequent resolutions by different

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change-related, slow-onset events to include sea level rise, increasing temperatures, ocean acidification, and glacial retreat, and acknowledges related impacts such as salinization, land and forest degradation, drought, loss of biodiversity, and desertification (UNFCCC, 2012, p. 4).

Slow-onset disasters related to climate change cause land fertility and productivity to decline, which in turn exacerbates migration and displacement

Individuals, families, and communities relocate in response to environmental changes disrupting their way of life (United Nations University, 2012; Liwenga et al., 2012, pp. 14-17; Quan and Dyer, 2008, p. 7). Displacement and migration disrupt patterns of land access, use and tenure that may have existed for generations. For rural people who depend on the land, slow onset disaster makes life increasingly untenable and often more dangerous, and renders land less productive.³ Variations in temperature, flooding, and rain predictability lead to a decrease in yields, challenges in storing the yields without risk of pests and other spoilage factors, and subsequently create food insecurity.⁴

In 1990, the first assessment by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)⁵ recognized that climate change may be the greatest cause of migration, and subsequent international resolutions have continued to acknowledge that natural disasters, exacerbated by slow-onset climate change, are a source of displacement (UN General Assembly Res. 64/162, 2010). Subsequently, authors of the UNFCCC's Cancun Adaptation Framework posited that planned relocation is an important adaptation effort and implored involved parties to better understand how climate change affects mobility (UNFCCC, Cancun Adaptation Framework, 2010).

UN and regional bodies have also acknowledged the link between climate change and slow-onset disasters (Ibid; Beyani, 2014).

³ See, e.g., Liwenga et al., 2012, pp. 14-18; IPCC, 2014, 51, 54 & 73; Quan and Dyer, 2008.

⁴ Ibid. Desertification, for example, is in itself a leading cause of migration, as it is associated with a decrease in arability and growing seasons, which in turn diminish the ability of families to survive on land that is no longer agriculturally viable and therefore economically infeasible. In recognition of the growing cost of land degradation, particularly on the world's poor, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) has advocated for the concept of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) (Bukuru, 2017). LDN is defined as a "[S]tate whereby the amount and quality of land resources necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security remains stable or increases within specified temporal and spatial scales and ecosystems." LDN can be achieved either by reductions in degradation, or through restoration of degraded land. Both approaches require a shift in many countries away from migration, and toward people staying to work on and restore their land: a change from "degrade-abandon-move" to "protect-sustain-restore." (Bukuru, 2017.)

⁵ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the leading international body for the assessment of climate change. It was established by the [United Nations Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#) and the [World Meteorological Organization \(WMO\)](#) in 1988 to provide the world with a clear scientific view on the current state of knowledge in climate change and its potential environmental and socio-economic impacts. The IPCC reviews and assesses the most recent scientific, technical and socio-economic information produced worldwide relevant to the understanding of climate change. Currently [195 countries](#) are Members of the IPCC. Verbatim from the IPCC web site, at <http://www.ipcc.ch/organization/organization.shtml>.

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Despite international recognition of the connection between slow-onset climate change and mobility, most national governments have been slow to respond. Ahead of the Paris Climate Conference in 2015,⁶ all state parties were asked to submit their domestic plans,⁷ for achieving the objectives laid out by the UNFCCC. Of the 162 plans submitted, only 34 included mention of human mobility. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reference the need for migration policy but do not directly connect it to climate change, including slow onset impacts (Wilkinson et al., 2016, p. 7).

The IPCC lists eight key risks of climate change, four of which are closely related to food security.⁸ In turn, food insecurity related effects on the agriculture sector can lead to migration and displacement. In some cases, economic adaptation strategies are behind a family's or individual's decision to migrate; in more extreme cases either climate conditions and/or the state may force displacement.

Humans alter land as a factor of production to meet the demands of a changing society, thereby affecting the entire global environment and, in some cases, intensifying climate change. Population growth and economic development cause drastic changes in land use in many parts of the world, and institutional arrangements need careful revisions to ensure sustainable management of the increasingly scarce land resources. However, even low population areas are threatened by extensive non-sustainable land use practices. Land degradation, conversion to non-agricultural uses, and slow onset disasters like sea level rise due to global warming all undermine the long-term productive capacity of these land resources.⁹

Without quick, intentional action, climate-related migration will continue to rise

“[A] nuanced understanding of how climate factors affect migration decisions can help shape both policies and adaptation investments that ensure that, whatever strategies households use, including migration, will contribute to increased resilience to climate change. If national and global policymakers and practitioners do not act quickly — both to mitigate global warming and support rural communities to adapt in situ — food insecurity and emigration from areas most negatively affected by climate change are likely to grow in the coming decades, with all the humanitarian, political and security consequences that entails.”
(Kevin Henry, Project Coordinator for Where the Rain Falls Project, as quoted in United Nations University, 2012.)

⁶ 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21).

⁷ These plans were in the form of Intended Nationally Determined Contributions, or INDCs.

⁸ Critical risks include loss of rural livelihoods and income, loss of marine and coastal ecosystems and livelihoods, loss of terrestrial and inland water ecosystems, and livelihoods, and food insecurity and breakdown of food systems (IPCC 2014).

⁹ Global Land Tool Network-Country level management for Uganda-2014.

Land Links: the Inter-relationship between Land Tenure Security and Slow-Onset Impacts from Climate Change

- 1) Climate change causes slow-onset disasters such as drought, reduced and sporadic rain fall, consistent flooding patterns, temperature changes.
- 2) Slow-onset disasters cause agricultural land to become less productive and/or uninhabitable.
- 3) As a result of losses in land fertility and habitability, slow onset disasters can cause (or exacerbate) displacement and migration.
- 4) Displacement and migration can cause land tenure issues/ insecurity.

What is the role of land tenure in this equation?

1. Where land rights are insecure, smallholder farmers lack resources and incentives to invest in adaptations that improve the productivity of their land in the face of changing climate conditions. Such mitigating agricultural techniques and investments can include soil conservation and augmentation, terracing, tree planting, and buffer zones. As the Chief of Office for the UN Convention to Combat Desertification recently summarized, “Land tenure policies are keys to address land degradation. When you don’t own,” he noted, “you don’t care.” (Bukuru, 2017, slide 11.)
2. Where land rights are insecure, people are less likely to leave the land when they need to for economic or security reasons, given changing climate conditions.¹⁰ Research shows that the poorest households are usually those that stay behind, as they lack the means to make even the most necessary of moves. Those who lack secure tenure may be reluctant to leave, even seasonally, because they have no assurances that they will be able to reclaim their land upon their return. While staying may not be inherently bad, it is important for climate-affected families to have the broadest range of choices possible for adapting to new climatic circumstances.
3. Women are more likely to remain put when family members migrate. This is especially true for mothers of young/ school-age children. However, women in many of the countries most affected by climate change have disproportionately insecure land rights within their household. Even if their household has secure rights to family land, for example, wives often lack the right to own or manage this family land without the approval of their husband. When husbands migrate, whether seasonally or more permanently, wives may be left without the authority to make meaningful adaptation and investment decisions concerning the land.
4. As arable land becomes increasingly scarce in climate-affected areas, land-related conflicts may rise. In this scenario, unclear and insecure land rights may contribute to and deepen conflicts.

¹⁰ Estimating the number of people with insecure land rights in the world is complex. The World Bank estimates that only 30 percent of the world’s land rights are documented. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/sustainabledevelopment/brief/land>. In rural Africa, the World Bank estimates that only 10 percent of all rights are registered. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/07/22/how-africa-can-transform-land-tenure-revolutionize-agriculture-end-poverty>.

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5. Where changing climate conditions/ slow-onset disaster pushes rural-to-rural or rural-to-urban migration, it can also be a driver of land rights insecurity and conflict. Relocation in rural areas is almost always to areas inhabited by others (who often do not themselves have secure land rights), and relocation to urban areas is often to informal settlements, where occupants lack secure rights to both land and housing. In either case, relocation is likely to increase insecurity among existing residents, and contribute to rising conflict with those who have been relocated.

Sources: FAO, 2016, at 26; Liwenga et al., 2012, pp. 14-18; IPCC, 2014, pp. 51, 54 & 73; Landesa, 2012; Landesa, 2015. For a thorough discussion of the linkages between land tenure and disaster risk management, including an emphasis on climate change-related slow onset disasters, see Mitchell, 2011, p. 16 and throughout.

In slow-onset disaster areas, the economically and politically vulnerable, and specifically the poor, women, and children, are disproportionately affected by displacement, migration, and insecure land tenure. The effect of slow-onset disasters on men and women vary. When households decide to migrate, women often remain, often due to gendered responsibilities of care for the elderly and children. Males are usually the first to look for opportunity elsewhere (FAO, 2016; Liwenga et al., 2012, pp. 15-18). Women encounter added constraints specifically when it comes to land tenure (Ibid). Women often experience unequal rights to property¹¹ and are excluded from decision-making about land use. Formal and customary tenure practices are often sex discriminatory, and inheritance practices are often patrilineal.

Women, who in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia make up the bulk of agricultural workers, stand to lose most if their primary mode of livelihood and skills will be compromised due to climate change. Many lack the resources and access to opportunities to learn new skills to enable a swift shift to new sources of both income generation and subsistence. Combined with the lack of land tenure and social norms surrounding factors like access to credit and food markets, women have less opportunity for non-farm jobs, a significant impediment as changing careers is often an important adaptation strategy in areas where slow-onset climate change is effecting crop production. Women may also have a more difficult time accessing agricultural extension support and important data like weather and climate information (Lambrou and Nelson, 2010, p. 41 et al.).

Children are also more intensely affected by land tenure and land use issues related to slow-onset displacement. As land use shifts and resources become scarcer, vulnerable families encounter increased pressure to migrate. Families that migrate to makeshift camps, or relocate to new areas, face difficulties such as launching new livelihood strategies without adequate capital and land tenure (UNICEF 2015). Children are the most susceptible to poverty and food insecurity in these circumstances (Ibid).

¹¹ FAO states that in developing countries, women account for only 10-20% of landholders (FAO 2016). See also Landesa, 2012; and Landesa, 2015.

IMPACTS OF SLOW-ONSET CLIMATE CHANGE DISASTERS IN AFRICA

Globally, climate change related slow-onset disasters have a significant impact. But in Africa, impacts from pervasive drought, in particular, are widespread and deadly. In 2016, the UN warned that the worst drought for decades would cause hunger for 36 million people in southern and eastern Africa (Lamble and Graham-Harrison, 2016). In 2017, the number of people at risk has risen to 38 million (Anyadike, 2017). While the immediate cause of the drought is related to record breaking El Niño events, experts note that human-caused increased carbon emissions are likely to cause longer-term changes in weather patterns in Africa, include increasingly severe El Niño cycles that are predicted to disrupt food production and human settlement (Ibid; Brown 2016). The drought has affected farmers first and foremost, with massive crop failure, as well as pastoralists, but these losses spread quickly to consumers throughout the region through food price spikes (Brown, 2016; Anyadike, 2017; Lamble and Graham-Harrison, 2016). Other effects of drought include reduced school enrollment, as young children join the work force to help their families survive, and early marriage of girls (Brown, 2016).

The Ugandan population relies heavily on agriculture for its livelihood, in a context of severe and worsening land degradation, drought and desertification (Mubiru 2010, p. 1). The UN's Joint Action Framework on Climate Change in Uganda notes that "[C]limate change threatens to reverse the hard-won development gains and jeopardizes the country's economic development and poverty eradication goals." (Mubiru 2010, p. 1.)

Historically, events like drought and flooding have had major impacts on crop failure, food security, and land degradation (Hepworth 2008). While

more research is needed on the impact of slow-onset climate change in Uganda,¹² there is consensus on IPCC figures showing continued disruption in weather patterns, including in mean annual rainfall and temperature increases (Berman, Quinn, Paavola 2013). The greatest impacts fall on the poorest communities, those dependent on the land and climate stability, and women are the most severely affected (Mubiri, p. 2; and Shaw, pp. 4-5). In Uganda, one of the impacts of slow-onset climate change is migration, a process that is projected to exacerbate poverty (Berman, Quinn, Paavola, 2013).¹³

Though legislation on land in Uganda is generally regarded as strong, current implementation of the land governance systems may not be sufficiently robust or widespread enough to protect the security of tenure of the urban and rural poor and small-holder farmers in the context of slow-onset climate change effects.¹⁴

BRAC in Uganda

Starting from a modest launch in 2006, Uganda is the site of BRAC's largest and fastest scale-up in Africa. BRAC Uganda currently operates programs in microfinance, small enterprise, agriculture, poultry and livestock, health, education, youth empowerment, adolescent livelihood, emergency response, and the Karamoja Initiative.

¹² Uganda's National Adaptation Programmes of Action has released figures, but there is insufficient information.

¹³ The decision to migrate is often multi-faceted, including a household's motivation to diversify income streams (Berman, Quinn, Paavola 2013).

¹⁴ Global Land Tenure Network, n.d., provides a good discussion of land tenure issues and challenges in Uganda. See also GLTN and UN-Habitat, 2014, pp. 11-12.

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Land tenure systems in Uganda include customary, freehold, mailo and leasehold (GLTN, n.d., p. 11). A customary land system is predominant, encompassing 75-80 percent of the land (Ibid). These lands are also more prone to climate change, but under community land classification they currently lack direct, effective oversight (BRAC Uganda country team, 2017). This has often led to drastic environmental destruction in resource sharing communities, and poses a significant challenge leading to conflicts and wars (UN-Habitat, 2010).

Initial research shows that increasing land rights security in Uganda could create important incentives for environmental stewardship and climate change adaptation. For example, two studies have shown that those with stronger individual land rights to agricultural land are more likely to plant trees; those with full land ownership are more than five times as likely to increase tree planting (Deininger and Ali, 2008; Place and Otsuka 2002). Those with secure individual rights are also more likely to conserve soil and to use fallowing, according to a World Bank study (Deininger and Ali, 2008). Clear land tenure rights over forest land are also critical for climate change adaptation and mitigation. Authors of a 2014 review of Uganda’s national climate change programmes argue that “the lack of clearly defined and enforceable property rights in most of the country’s forests has created a *de facto* open access situation, which is one of the main causes of deforestation. This is especially common where forests are found on customary land in areas where the traditional governance structure has broken down.” (Banana et al., 2014.)

Several factors have exacerbated tenure insecurity in Uganda, however, including the Lords’ Resistance Army (LRA) war in Northern Uganda, which caused massive displacement, followed by the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Other challenges include the discovery of natural resources, such as the recent discovery of oil fields, leading to investors demanding for exploration, further dwindling an already scarce, and conflict-ridden—land supply. (BRAC Uganda country team, 2017.)

In addition, Uganda hosts a large number of refugees who are placed in settlements where each family is given a piece of land alongside the host communities.

Uganda, like many countries, has produced a National Climate Change Policy (Republic of Uganda, 2012). It does not focus on land tenure or mobility, however, except to acknowledge that in Uganda rural climate change issues may force families into urban settings. Uganda does have a policy related to displacement called the Ugandan National Policy for IDPs (2004). It takes its foundation from the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. It protects against arbitrary displacement, guarantees rights during displacement, and promotes long term durable solutions, such as facilitating voluntary return, resettlement, integration and re-integration. Like most countries, Uganda has yet to adopt any national resettlement policy.

Impediments to Women’s Land Rights in Uganda

In a 2015 “Info Note” for CGIAR (Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security), authors argue that gender aspects of climate change programming in Uganda have failed to address the underlying reasons for women’s heightened vulnerability to climate change. These include access to and control over key resources, such as land. The authors describe the causes of gender discrimination in Ugandan land tenure as follows:

“Even though the country has a thorough land policy (2013) by which women and men are granted equal rights to own (and co-own) land, numbers show that as much as 61.3 % of women do not possess ownership of land (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2011) and are only given access to it through their male counterparts and other male family members. Indeed, most of the land in Uganda is effectively maintained under customary arrangements which restrict land ownership by women, ranging from social and cultural constraints to outright prohibitions. The fact that women do not have effective ownership of land implies that they might not be willing to make long-term investment in land that they do not own. Even if they were, they might be denied access to financial services since they lack official land titles as collateral. Worse still, even when women have been granted access to the land through their marriage, they are at risk of losing this should they divorce or become widows.”

Acosta et al., 2015.

BRAC works in refugee areas, mainly with the host communities across the poverty continuum – in the fields of agriculture, livestock, financial management, education, health, and empowerment to ensure food security, reduce inequity, and incentivize sustainable development. BRAC has observed that the dependency of vulnerable refugees on the limited natural resources in the areas where they have been placed to live has led to land degradation. Climate change impacts are also vividly visible with increasing aridity leading to low productivity. This low productivity, coupled with vast deforestation, has exponential negative effects. In drought-prone Karamoja, BRAC is working with the communities to build food security through agriculture and livestock programs.

Despite these initial efforts, by BRAC and other organizations, greater integration of disaster risk reduction, research, policy and rights to national activities is paramount to averting slow onset land tenure challenges, disasters, and climate change.

FRAMEWORKS AND POLICIES TO ADDRESS SLOW-ONSET DISASTERS RELATED TO CLIMATE CHANGE

While no international legal or policy framework on slow-onset disaster exists *per se*, there are international standards on displacement and resettlement, including more recently-developed instruments addressing climate change-related mobility. The UN’s Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998) provide the framework for international standards on displacement and resettlement, and form the basis for many subsequent documents. Importantly, the Principles describe both rights and durable solutions. Building from the Principles, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee

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(IASC) provided the Framework for Durable Solutions in 2010, which clarified current issues and provided guidance on achieving long term sustainable solutions for displaced populations.

The two most recent international instruments connecting mobility and climate change are the Peninsula Principles on Climate Displacement within States (2013) and the Nansen Principles (2015).¹⁵ Previous efforts like the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement focused on displacement in and of itself, not as a specific issue related to climate change.¹⁶ The Cancun Adaptation Framework and Peninsula Principles are important recent advances in climate change related mobility and show that globally, there is an effort in creating best practices. The Cancun Adaptation Framework specifically has affirmed that migration caused by climate change adaptation must be addressed with the same level of priority as mitigation.

The UN and various international organizations have provided rights-based underpinnings for climate change mobility, though without distinguishing between disaster types.¹⁷ Related studies highlight the need to connect climate change impacts with specific human rights associated with vulnerable groups, displacement, and conflict (Beyani 2014).

Globally, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) efforts have increased in recent years, as reflected in the UN's Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. This framework promotes anticipatory action to prevent and mitigate both fast-onset and slow-onset disasters but does not, however, include mention of land rights or land tenure. Others, such as the FAO, however, have underscored the centrality of secure land tenure to effective Disaster Response Management (see Mitchell, 2012, throughout).

In Africa, The Kampala Convention (African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa¹⁸) is a legally binding treaty, ratified by nearly half of AU member states,¹⁹ that protects the rights of people forced to flee because of human related disasters, including those related to climate change.

¹⁵ These instruments were not formally adopted, but were rather endorsed by 109 nations. The Peninsula Principles contain eighteen principles related to general state obligations, climate displacement preparation and planning, displacement, and post-displacement matters. The Nansen Principles followed from the Nansen Conference on Climate Change and Displacement in the 21st Century, and provide recommendations “to guide responses to some of the urgent and complex challenges raised by displacement in the context of climate change and other environmental hazards (Gahre, 2011, p. 5; Kälin, 2012).

¹⁶ The Peninsula Principles formed from the need for a coordinated climate change displacement response. This document drew from the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

¹⁷ The UN Human Rights Council's report to the General Assembly (10/61, 2009) and Report of the Special Rapporteur (HRC 31/52, 2016) discuss the impact climate change has on human rights and the obligations of states under international human rights law. The Brookings Institute in conjunction with the London School of Economics has produced a piece on climate change and internal displacement (Beyani, 2014) that also describes a rights-based approach to the issue.

¹⁸ Entered into force in 2012.

¹⁹ Twenty-five of the 54 African Union member states have ratified the Convention. It has been signed by 40 AU members.

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Finally, in a policy field closely related to slow-onset climate change impacts, the UNCCD has organized a global effort to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). (See note 3, above, for background on the UNCCD and LDN.) This effort was furthered by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 15.3, which states: “By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world” (Samaris, no date). Over 100 countries are taking part in the UNCCD’s Target Setting Programme for LDN, and will receive technical expertise, monitoring and evaluation, and other support toward designing and implementing the targets (Ibid).

CONCLUSION

Slow-onset climate change impacts will increasingly disrupt the lives of rural people in the global south. Those most impacted will most likely be the poor, women, and children.

The amount of empirical research devoted to understanding the impact of slow-onset climate change in general is thin. Additional resources must be allocated to slow-onset disaster research specifically as it relates to mobility.²⁰ Further ground work on the links between climate change mobility and land tenure, with a focus on land-related strategies for prevention, mitigation, and adaptation, is needed.

Efforts to produce climate change strategies for displacement and mobility due to slow-onset disaster have fallen short thus far. Nationally, countries facing the effects of slow-onset climate change have been slow to react. While these governments are often aware that efforts are needed to combat slow-onset climate change, as reflected in their national climate change strategies, few have created a plan for slow-onset climate change mobility.

Any approach to addressing and mitigating the impacts of slow-onset disaster will need to be holistic in nature, and take into account a broad range of stakeholder interests, responsibilities and capacities. Actions could include the following:

NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS:

By taking steps to strengthen land rights of rural people dependent on the land for survival, including both women and men smallholder farmers, national governments can take one important step toward improving individual, household and community resiliency toward changing climatic conditions. FAO’s 2011 training manual on land tenure and disaster risk management provides excellent guidance for steps governments can take to secure land tenure for the purpose of reducing and responding to disasters, including slow-onset disasters linked to climate change (Mitchell, 2011). Empowering those who occupy and work on the land with secure rights to it will help to foster flexible adaptation strategies, and incentivize investments that are likely to sustain production. As governments revise and update their national climate change adaptation and mitigation programs and plans, it would be

²⁰ This is admittedly a challenging task, as “climate change-related displacement takes place in complex contexts and it is difficult to draw direct causal relationships.” Nonetheless, as Chaloka Beyani the United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons acknowledges, more research is needed with regards to the scale of displacement and specifically on how displacement is impacted by slow-onset disasters. (Beyani 2014.)

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forward-looking, innovative and effective to include greater emphasis on structural underpinnings of climate change resilience, such as secure land tenure in rural areas. Governments might also prioritize the adoption of resettlement policies based on international best practices, in order to reduce conflict related to climate change displacement.

MULTI-NATIONAL, BI-LATERAL INSTITUTIONS AND INTERNATIONAL NGOS:

In designing and implementing climate change programs, heightened attention should be paid to the structural issues and inequities underlying climate change vulnerability. Security of land tenure rights for rural people is foremost among these critical structural factors. Climate change programs could include, e.g., greater assessment and focus on improving land tenure security for small farmers, and especially for women, as a way to improve community-based resilience to slow-onset disasters related to climate change. It is also important for such organizations, in designing any climate change-related program, to do adequate research and analysis of land tenure issues to ensure that, as a minimum, interventions are not further harming those who may already have compromised rights.

Projects like BRAC's women's support groups, which identify vulnerable women in need of resources, will be important in better understanding the impact slow-onset climate change is having on mobility and also the best mitigation and adaptation strategies. These groups have been refined over decades of working to integrate gender justice across programming and eliminate gender injustice in society. The women's groups bring together diverse stakeholders from across communities, from leaders to the ultra-poor, to promote awareness raising, agency, and problem solving capacity-building.

RESEARCHERS:

We know enough to be aware that land tenure and slow-onset climate change disasters are closely linked, but more high quality empirical research is critical to informing policy decisions at every level. Without this, it is possible that the global approach to climate change will continue to focus on Band-Aid solutions, rather than addressing the underlying factors that can fortify climate change-affected peoples the most, helping to provide a maximum range of tools in mitigation approaches, and breadth in adaptation responses.

DONORS:

Donors interested in climate change and global development may consider increased funding to research and pilot projects related to the role of land tenure and community resilience to slow-onset disasters. Donors might also provide support to NGOs and national governments in designing a distinct land tenure component to updated national climate change strategy documents. Funding for integrated approaches, which aim to tackle these entrenched, intertwined challenges should be considered, versus the traditional approaches which silo interventions in just one or two programmatic areas. Financial support for partnerships that optimize the differing, yet complementary, strengths of organizations should be encouraged for the betterment of the communities being served and empowered. Donors should consider offering mechanisms that allow for both short-term, high-impact support, ideally within the first 48 – 72 hours of climate and man-made disasters, as well as long-term funding towards holistic programming, whose long-term impacts are initially difficult to measure and may not be available until five – ten years later.

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