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Policy Briefing Note Nr. 4: Immobilities – What about those who stay in place?

 Networking Unit
 “Paradigm Shift”
 (NUPS)

 Working group 3
 “Climate change
 – impact on
 migration”


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Background

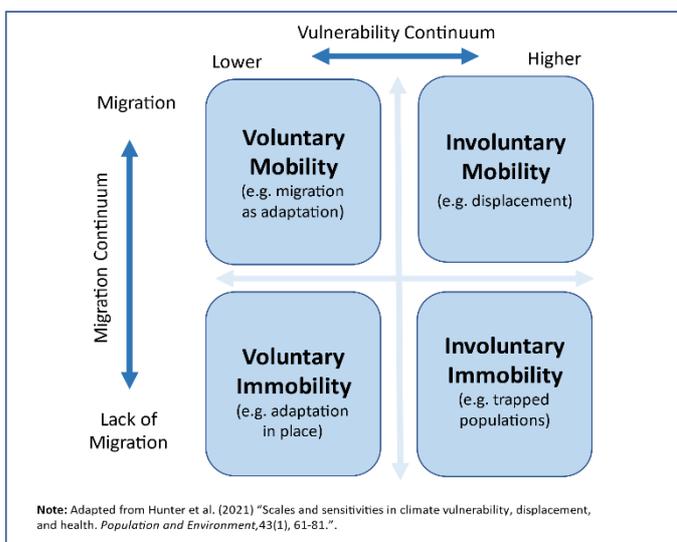
Migration in response to climate change receives substantial public, policy, and research attention. However, not everyone in harm’s way actually migrates. The **lack** of migration by vulnerable individuals is also of critical importance when it comes to developing policy to protect those most at-risk of climate change impacts.

Challenge

In Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, by 2050, nearly three percent of the population may be forced to move within their country due to climate change, according to the World Bank. Across the globe, the number may rise to over 200 million. While staggering, these calculations do not reflect those who may want to move but are unable because of poverty, discrimination, political situations, or other social and economic forces.

These trapped populations –“climate hostages” according to the World Bank – could number another 150 million by 2050.¹ As an example, in coastal Bangladesh, residents of typhoon-prone regions report wanting to stay in risky regions for many reasons. While some are economic, others are emotion including having experienced the psychological trauma of having lost a family member in prior storms.² Similarly, some West Africans whose livelihoods have been impacted by recurrent floods cannot move because of they lack the economic resources and social networks that help with migration.³ And

Figure 1: Dimensions of Mobility & Immobility



“trapping” processes unfold not only in the Global South, but in wealthier nations as well. Along the Gulf Coast in the southern United States, between 1970-2005, many whites, young adults, and people in nonpoor regions moved away following hurricanes. On the other hand, Blacks, older people, and residents of poor regions were less likely to leave.⁴

In addition to those held “hostage” by climate change in risky locales, others have chosen to voluntarily stay for reasons such as strong place attachment. In some coastal villages of Indonesia, for example, tidal floods and land subsidence already combine to require residents to raise their homes every 5 to 7 years. Even so, many stay due to a variety of factors such as familiarity and emotional attachment to the community, family obligations and other social connections, and job opportunities and commitments.⁵

In general, migration is an important adaptation to climate impacts and may, in some regions, be essential to maintain well-being. Yet to fully understand the impact of climate on well-being, given the large number of individuals at risk who stay, the dynamics underlying immobility must also be understood.

Responding to the Challenge

When developing strategies to protect those most at-risk of climate impacts, efforts must be made to provide support to the immobile, as well as the mobile populations. It is also important to recognize that there are many underlying reasons why individuals may not migrate. Policies in support of non-migrants must, therefore, encompass many facets of well-being including livelihood diversification and resources for those most marginalized – women, the very poor, children and the elderly.

In many climate-vulnerable areas of the Global South, policymakers do not typically incorporate issues of migration into climate change adaptation strategies. Consequently, although support of safe and orderly migration could potentially improve the well-being of nonmobile populations, in Africa for example, only a few National Adaptation Programs of Action (NAPAs) consider planned migration as a

responsive strategy.⁶ The consideration of mobility, as well as the reasons underlying immobility, would generate more informed policies and programs aimed at increasing climate resilience.

Researchers also have a significant role to play in ensuring that appropriate policies are developed to address climate-related (im)mobility. Migration features strongly in academic discourse on climate adaptation. Yet current understandings of climate-related immobility do not account for the diversity, complexity, dynamism, and unevenness of (im)mobilities and related decision-making.⁷ There is a need for a climate migration research agenda that enhances our understanding of the multiple drivers and intersecting social determinants of mobility and immobility.⁸ Given that the most appropriate policies and strategies will often be location-specific, researchers can provide evidence-based guidance to policymakers on the appropriate strategies for managing climate related mobility as well as supporting those that stay in risky locales. Such strategies will need to be context-specific and draw on multiple policy domains including economics, environmental, and public health.

Further Reading and References

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The views presented here express the opinion of the authors, responsible in the sense of the law is the Networking Unit Paradigm Shift at TU Berlin.