

# Preparing for a Warmer World

## Towards a Global Governance System to Protect Climate Refugees



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# Whom we are talking about – concepts and definitions

- Climate “refugees”?
- (Voluntary) “migrants” (or “emigrants”)?
- “Environmentally displaced persons”?



# A working definition....

Climate refugees are....

*.... People who have to leave their habitat, immediately or in the near future, because of sudden or gradual alterations in their natural environment related to at least one of three impacts of climate change:  
sea-level rise,  
extreme weather events, and  
drought and water scarcity.*

# How many to expect – predictions and presumptions

- 50 million in 2010 according to UN climate secretariat
- 200-250 million by 2050 according to Myers
- “Hundreds of millions” according to Stern Report “even though not tested”
- 300 million flooded each year by 3-4 degree temp incr.
- 1 billion according to Christian Aid
- 12 million from Egypt by 2050
- 250 million at high risk in Ganges Brahmapu
- Etc.



# Refugees and Reality – Problems with current research

- All studies build on longterm scenarios and modelling
- Most studies use broad concepts of (climate) refugees
- Most studies build on generalised assumptions about human behaviour, often overestimating migration
- Some studies do not account for adaptation, from dikes to long-term relocation of population centres
- Most studies do not account for multi-causality
- By and large, this favours a pessimistic bias

# Nonetheless....

- It is highly likely that populations of small island and low-lying coastal areas will be faced with sealevel rise and increased severity of extreme events
- Water scarcity and drought will increase
- Many places will become uninhabitable
  
- There are no sufficient political response mechanisms to this emerging crisis
- In short: *How can we ensure that the people of the Maldives do not end up in the slums of Mumbai?*

# Political Solutions: Towards a Global Governance System to Protect Climate Refugees



# Characteristics of Climate Refugees

## Climate refugees ...

- ... are unable to return to their homelands.
- ... are likely to migrate in large numbers and collectively
- ... are predictable within limits
- ... differ from political and war refugees through the moral and legal embedding of their situation.



# The Current System – the UNHCR

- The 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees – and the UNHCR – protect individual refugees who flee their country because of state-led persecution.
- .... not per se climate refugees
- Shall the Geneva Convention be amended?
  - Political feasibility uncertain
  - Effectiveness doubtful given character of UNHCR
  - Impact on existing political refugees possibly negative

# Governing the Future Climate Refugee Crisis

Three questions need to be addressed:

1. What are the core governance principles?
2. What is the best institutional and organisational setting?
3. Who will pay the bill?



# What are the core principles?

1. Principle of planned relocation and resettlement
2. Principle of resettlement instead of temporary asylum
3. Principle of collective rights for local populations
4. Principle of international assistance for domestic measures
5. Principle of international burden-sharing

# What is the best institutional and organisational setting?

- Best option: Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change: **Protocol on Recognition, Protection, and Resettlement of Climate Refugees**
- The Protocol would provide for:
  - Decision-making procedure on determination of local populations affected by severe climate change damages (e.g., islands, low-lying regions)
  - Decision-making procedure on international cooperation, including funding
  - Respect of national sovereignty

# Who will pay the bill?

- Principle of full incremental cost reimbursement for sea-level rise refugees
- Principle of additional funding for other climate refugees
- Integration into funding mechanisms of climate regime
- Automatic financial mechanisms, e.g. levies on air transportation?
- Insurance schemes?

# What are the loop-holes?

- What if ...
  - ... China reclaims financial support for the “planned resettlement” of Three-Gorges Dam “*climate refugees*”
  - ... Sudan, or Niger, claim that half of their population is threatened by becoming climate refugees – with the need of (international) resettlement and funding
  - ... neighbouring countries do not/cannot accept climate refugees (e.g., will India accept millions of Bangladeshi, and at what cost?)
- But what else ... to protect the coastal villages in Bangladesh and the nation of Tuvalu?

# Research Results

- Are published in
  - *Environment* (2008) [short version]
  - *Global Environmental Politics* (2010) [full version]
- New book on *Global Climate Governance beyond 2012* with Cambridge University Press (2010)
- Climate Refugee Policy Forum, under [www.glogov.org](http://www.glogov.org)

More information, and full paper, at

[www.adamproject.eu](http://www.adamproject.eu)

[www.glogov.org](http://www.glogov.org)

[www.earthsystemgovernance.org](http://www.earthsystemgovernance.org)

*Thank you!*