

Committee: Environment

Topic: The question of drought-related migration

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Summary:

Drought-related migration is a significant phenomenon where people are forced to move from their homes due to prolonged and severe drought conditions. Drought results from extended periods of insufficient rainfall, leading to water scarcity for essential needs like drinking, agriculture, and livestock. This often pushes individuals and communities to migrate, in order to seek new places to live.

The exact number of people affected by drought-related migration is challenging to quantify, because it depends on factors such as the severity and duration of the drought, the resilience of affected communities, and the capacity of governments and international organisations to respond effectively. However, tens of millions of people annually face severe drought and migrate elsewhere, either temporarily or permanently. Additionally, many cases of drought-related migration occur in developing countries where data collection and reporting may be limited.

Definition of Key Terms:

Drought: Drought is a prolonged period of abnormally low rainfall, leading to water scarcity. It can result in decreased water availability for agriculture, drinking water, and other essential needs.

Migration: Migration refers to the movement of people from one place to another, typically involving a change in their usual place of residence. It can be voluntary or forced, and temporary or permanent.

Displacement: Displacement occurs when people are forced to leave their homes due to factors beyond their control, such as conflict, natural disasters, or resource scarcity like drought. Displacement can be internal (within the same country) or international (across national borders).

Water Scarcity: Water scarcity is a condition where the demand for freshwater exceeds its availability. It can result from several factors, including drought, overuse of water resources, and pollution.

Conflict: Conflict can arise when there is competition over limited resources, including water, in the face of drought. Drought-related conflicts may involve disputes between communities or even nations over access to water sources. This can lead to severe violence and high numbers of deaths.

Refugee: A refugee is a person who has been forced to leave their home country due to persecution, conflict, or a well-founded fear of persecution, and has sought refuge or asylum in another country.

Internally Displaced Person (IDP): An internally displaced person is someone who has been forced to flee their home but remains within the borders of their own country. These people are often displaced due to factors like drought, conflict, or natural disasters.

Climate Change: Climate change refers to long-term changes in global or regional climate patterns, including shifts in temperature and precipitation. It can contribute to increased frequency and severity of droughts, which in turn may affect migration patterns.

Background Information

1. Environmental Context:

Drought Definition: Drought is an extended period of abnormally low rainfall, leading to water scarcity for various purposes, including drinking, agriculture, and industry. Droughts can vary in intensity, duration, and geographical scope.

Climate Change: Climate change exacerbates the frequency and severity of droughts in many regions due to altered precipitation patterns, rising temperatures, and increased evaporation rates.

Geographical Hotspots: Regions prone to drought-related migration include arid and semi-arid areas, such as parts of Africa, Asia, North America, and South America, where water resources are inherently limited.

2. Drivers of Drought-Related Migration:

Water Scarcity: Droughts lead to inadequate water supply, affecting agriculture, livestock, and access to clean drinking water, forcing people to migrate in search of these necessities.

Agricultural Impacts: Crop failures, food shortages, and income loss resulting from droughts often drive rural populations to migrate to urban areas or other regions with more favourable agricultural conditions.

Conflict and Resource Competition: Drought-induced resource scarcity can intensify competition over water and arable land, contributing to conflicts that displace communities.

Environmental Degradation: Droughts can trigger land degradation, soil erosion, and desertification, rendering regions less habitable and necessitating migration.

3. Vulnerable Populations:

Marginalized Communities: Vulnerable groups, including women, children, indigenous peoples, and those living in poverty, are disproportionately affected by drought-related migration.

Rural vs. Urban Migration: Drought-induced migration often involves the movement of rural populations to urban centres, leading to rapid urbanization and the challenges associated with it.

4. Humanitarian and Socioeconomic Impacts:

Food Insecurity: Drought-related migration can result in food shortages, malnutrition, and hunger, affecting both the displaced and host communities.

Health Risks: Inadequate access to clean water and sanitation in displacement settings can lead to waterborne diseases and health challenges.

Education and Livelihoods: Children's education and adults' livelihoods are disrupted when communities are forced to migrate, potentially continuing cycles of poverty.

5. Conflict and Security Implications:

Resource Conflicts: Competition for dwindling water and agricultural resources can escalate tensions and contribute to conflicts, displacing more people.

Displacement-Induced Conflicts: Crowded urban centres resulting from drought-related migration can strain resources and infrastructure, leading to potential conflicts.

6. International Response:

Humanitarian Aid: International organizations, including the United Nations and NGOs, provide humanitarian assistance, such as food, water, shelter, and medical care, to those affected by drought-related migration.

Climate Adaptation: Climate adaptation measures, such as sustainable water management, drought-resistant crop cultivation, and community resilience-building, are essential components of addressing this issue.

7. Policy and Governance Challenges:

Lack of Legal Frameworks: Legal frameworks addressing drought-related displacement at the international level are still evolving, presenting challenges in protecting the rights of migrants.

Data and Monitoring: Comprehensive data collection and monitoring systems are essential for understanding the scale and dynamics of drought-related migration, which can be hindered by limitations in data availability and reporting.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Major countries involved:

- 1) **United States:** In regions like Central America, drought-related migration has led to increased numbers of migrants seeking asylum or entering the United States. The U.S. government, as a major world power, plays a significant role in addressing the humanitarian aspects of this migration.
- 2) **Australia:** Australia has experienced its share of drought-related migration, particularly in rural areas. The Australian government is involved in managing the impacts of drought on agriculture and rural communities.
- 3) **India:** India faces recurrent droughts, especially in its arid and semi-arid regions. The Indian government works to address the impacts of drought on agricultural communities and has programs to support affected populations.
- 4) **Ethiopia:** Ethiopia, in the Horn of Africa, has faced drought-related migration, and the government collaborates with international organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to affected communities.
- 5) **Kenya:** Kenya is another country in East Africa that grapples with drought-induced displacement. It hosts refugee camps and collaborates with organizations like the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) to manage the influx of refugees.

Major international organisations involved:

- 1) **United Nations (UN):** Various UN agencies, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), are involved in aiding countries and populations affected by drought-related migration.
- 2) **International Organization for Migration (IOM):** IOM plays a key role in migration management, including monitoring and responding to the movement of people caused by drought and other environmental factors.
- 3) **World Food Programme (WFP):** WFP provides food assistance to communities affected by drought and related migration, addressing both short-term food security and longer-term resilience-building.

- 4) **The World Bank:** The World Bank offers financial support and expertise to help countries implement projects and policies aimed at mitigating the impacts of drought and supporting affected populations.

Regional Organizations: Regional bodies like the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), and the Organization of American States (OAS) often coordinate efforts to address drought and migration within their respective regions.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): Numerous NGOs, such as CARE, Oxfam, and Save the Children, are active in providing humanitarian aid and support to drought-affected populations and migrants.

Timeline of Events

Historical Migrations: Droughts have likely been influencing human migration for centuries, with evidence suggesting that ancient civilizations may have faced population movements due to prolonged dry periods.

Dust Bowl Migration (1930s, United States): Severe drought conditions in the Southern Plains led to the Dust Bowl phenomenon, forcing hundreds of thousands of people to migrate westward in search of better living conditions.

Sahel Drought (1968-1973): The Sahel region of West Africa experienced a series of droughts, leading to widespread famine and migration as communities sought more hospitable environments.

Syrian Conflict and Drought (2006-2011): Prolonged drought in Syria's eastern regions contributed to rural displacement, which, coupled with other factors, played a role in the Syrian civil war.

Horn of Africa Drought (2011): Severe drought in the Horn of Africa, including countries like Somalia and Ethiopia, resulted in widespread displacement and refugee movements.

North and East Africa Drought (2017-2019): Prolonged drought in regions such as Sudan and South Sudan led to displacement, food shortages, and humanitarian crises.

Central American Dry Corridor (Ongoing): Recurrent droughts in the Central American Dry Corridor, including Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, have contributed to rural-to-urban migration and migration toward the United States.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

International Organization for Migration (IOM): (Established in 1951.)

While not a treaty, the IOM plays a significant role in addressing migration challenges globally, including those related to environmental factors such as drought.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR): (Adopted in 1966.)

The ICESCR recognizes the right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food, water, and health, which are relevant to addressing socio-economic impacts of drought-related migration.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC): (Adopted in 1992.)

The UNFCCC provides the framework for addressing climate change, recognizing the potential impacts on vulnerable populations, including those affected by drought.

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement: (Issued in 1998.)

These principles provide a framework for the protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs), including those displaced due to environmental factors such as drought. They emphasize the rights and needs of IDPs.

Paris Agreement: (Adopted in 2015.)

The Paris Agreement builds on the UNFCCC and focuses on mitigating climate change and enhancing adaptive capacity, acknowledging the importance of addressing the impacts of climate change, including those related to drought.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue:

Drought Early Warning Systems (DEWS): Implementing DEWS helps in forecasting and monitoring drought conditions, providing timely information to communities and decision-makers. This allows for proactive measures to be taken, reducing the severity of drought impacts and potential migration.

Sustainable Water Management Practices: Implementing sustainable water management practices involves improving water conservation, promoting efficient irrigation methods, and developing water storage infrastructure. These measures aim to ensure water availability for agriculture and other needs, reducing the pressure that drought exerts on communities.

Climate-Resilient Agriculture: Promoting climate-resilient agricultural practices helps communities withstand the impacts of drought on crops and livestock. This includes introducing drought-resistant crop varieties, promoting agroforestry, and implementing soil conservation techniques.

Community-Based Adaptation Programs: Engaging communities in the development and implementation of adaptation strategies enhances their resilience to drought. This involves capacity-

building, providing resources, and empowering local communities to take ownership of sustainable practices.

Livelihood Diversification: Supporting livelihood diversification allows communities to reduce their dependence on single economic activities that may be vulnerable to drought. This could involve training in alternative income-generating activities or supporting the development of non-agricultural sectors.

International Cooperation and Aid: International organizations and donor countries often provide humanitarian aid and financial support to regions affected by drought-related migration. This assistance aims to address immediate needs, such as food and water, and support long-term resilience-building initiatives.

Policy Integration: Integrating climate change and migration considerations into national policies helps address the root causes of drought-related migration. This involves coordination between environmental, agricultural, and migration policies.

Early Action and Preparedness Plans: Developing and implementing early action and preparedness plans allows governments and communities to respond rapidly to emerging drought conditions. This includes pre-positioning resources, setting up emergency shelters, and organizing evacuation plans if necessary.

Research and Data Collection: Enhancing research and data collection efforts helps improve understanding of the causes and impacts of drought-related migration. This knowledge is crucial for evidence-based policy development and effective resource allocation.

Possible Solutions:

Drought Preparedness and Early Warning Systems: Develop and enhance early warning systems to provide timely information about impending droughts, allowing communities to prepare and take preventive measures.

Climate-Resilient Agriculture: Promote the adoption of climate-resilient agricultural practices, such as drought-resistant crop varieties, efficient irrigation methods, and sustainable land management techniques.

Water Management and Conservation: Implement water conservation measures, including efficient irrigation systems, rainwater harvesting, and sustainable water resource management, to ensure water availability during dry periods.

Livelihood Diversification: Support diversification of livelihoods to reduce dependence on agriculture alone. This can include training in alternative income-generating activities and promoting the development of non-agricultural sectors.

Community-Based Adaptation: Engage local communities in the design and implementation of adaptation strategies. This involves building their capacity to cope with drought impacts and empowering them to take ownership of sustainable practices.

Social Safety Nets: Establish social safety nets to provide support to vulnerable populations during periods of drought. This could include targeted cash transfers, food assistance programs, and access to healthcare.

Infrastructure Development: Invest in infrastructure development, including water storage facilities, irrigation systems, and resilient housing, to enhance community resilience to drought and reduce the need for migration.

Land-Use Planning and Sustainable Development: Implement land-use planning that considers environmental sustainability and prevents over-exploitation of natural resources. Promote sustainable development practices that balance economic activities with ecological preservation.

International Cooperation: Encourage international collaboration to share knowledge, resources, and technology. Joint initiatives can support regions facing drought-related migration and foster global resilience against the impacts of climate change.

Education and Capacity-Building: Provide education and training programs to enhance the capacity of communities to adapt to changing environmental conditions. This includes agricultural training, disaster preparedness, and sustainable resource management.

Policy Integration: Integrate climate change, environmental, and migration considerations into national policies. This involves coordination across various sectors to address the root causes of drought-related migration comprehensively.

Research and Data Collection: Support research and data collection efforts to better understand the causes and impacts of drought-related migration. Informed decision-making requires a solid foundation of data on environmental conditions, migration patterns, and community vulnerabilities.

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