

Original Article

The Role of Local Elected Representatives in Addressing the Impact of Climate-Induced Migration

Sukhada Gole

St. Xavier's College, (Empowered Autonomous Institution), Mumbai

Email: sukhada.gole@xaviers.edu

Submitted: 18-Oct-2024 Revised: 26-Nov-2024 Accepted: 15-Dec-2024 Published: 31-Dec-2024

Quick Response Code:



Access this article online

Website: <https://ibrj.us>

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15016274

Manuscript ID:
IBMIRJ -2024-010304

Volume 1

Issue 3

December 2024

E-ISSN: 3065-7857

How to cite this article:

Gole, S. (2024). The Role of Local Elected Representatives in Addressing the Impact of Climate-Induced Migration. *InSight Bulletin: A Multidisciplinary Interlink International Research Journal*, 1(3), 20–24. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15016274>

Address for correspondence:

Ms. Sukhada Gole
St. Xavier's College,
(Empowered Autonomous
Institution), Mumbai
Email:
sukhada.gole@xaviers.edu

ABSTRACT:

People Migrate for multiple reasons. There are various theories associated with Migration. Nowadays, Climate change has emerged as one of the important aspects leading to the migration of people. The effects of climate change at global levels, for instance, a rise in sea level, increasing global temperature, frequent floods, droughts, and earthquakes are making places inhabitable resulting in the movement of individuals from one place to another. Numerous studies have projected that by 2050 around 216 million people across the globe will be displaced due to climate change. This is an alarming situation. Climate-induced migration causes severe impacts not only on the migrant communities but also on the overall development of a country. Various efforts have been made at the international and national levels to address this issue. However, local aspects have never been considered while mitigating climate-induced migration. Policies have been formulated at the intercontinental level to overcome the problem of climate-induced migration. However, the implementation of such policies remains ineffective due to the failure to consider local representation as far as policy formulation is concerned. Under such circumstances, the elected representatives, especially in local governments can play a significant role. They can contribute not just by providing humanitarian assistance to climate migrants, but also by sharing their knowledge about the local realities. Hence, this paper attempts to analyze the issue of climate-induced migration, its impact, and the contribution of local elected representatives to addressing this issue.

Keywords: Migration, Climate change, Climate-induced Migration, Elected Representatives, etc.

INTRODUCTION:

Migration may happen due to multiple factors. According to the theory of Migration propounded by Ravenstein, people move from highly dense areas to low-dense areas or from low-income areas to higher-income areas. He primarily gave an economic understanding of Migration by highlighting several Push and Pull factors of migration (Ravenstein, 1885). The Neoclassical Theory of Migration states that people migrate to a place that will accelerate their prosperity and well-being (Haas, 2008).

However, Climate change is also one of the important aspects leading to migration. Climate change involves many aspects, including the rise in global temperature, sea level rise, frequent floods and earthquakes, drought, and the like. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has defined the term "Climate Change" in Article 1 of its convention as "a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods" (UNFCCC, 1992).



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Climate change has transcended into becoming a global issue. Due to its severe impacts, it has led to the migration of local inhabitants. It is a major concern facing the world today. It has posed a major risk to humanity. Hence, we must understand the concept of "Climate-Induced Migration".

The International Organization for Migration has defined Climate migration as *"the movement of a person or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment due to climate change, are obliged to leave their habitual place of residence or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, within a state or across an international border"* (IOM, Environmental Migration, 2019). Climate-induced migration is a sub-type of environmental migration. Environmental Migration is a broad concept covering the migration of people due to overall changes in the environment that have affected their lives, whereas climate change migration primarily focuses on the environmental changes owing to the fluctuations in climate. It affects the livelihood of many people. Various studies have projected that by 2050 around 216 million people across the globe will be displaced as a result of climate change (IOM, World Migration Report, 2024). In Short, the issue of Climate-Induced Migration is truly becoming more and more severe.

In such circumstances, the local Elected Representatives have a significant role in addressing the impact of Climate-Induced Migration. They can use their expertise in policy initiatives and implementation to reduce the effects of Climate-Induced Migration. Hence, this paper is a sincere attempt to understand the risks involved in Climate-Induced Migration and its major impact on various communities. The paper also aims to highlight the role played by the elected representatives at local levels of the government in addressing the effects of climate-induced migration.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

- 1) To understand the concept of Climate-Induced Migration and its impact
- 2) To assess the role of Elected Representatives in addressing the impact of Climate-Induced Migration

DATA AND METHODOLOGY:

The study relies purely on secondary data sources. The data is collected from books and journals, research papers, and articles published in newspapers and magazines. Various study reports and websites dealing with Climate change, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, International Organization for

Migration, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and others, have also been referred to.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

Impact of Climate-Induced Migration

The stressors of climate change such as frequent floods, increasing the level of sea, and rising temperatures have affected the people living across the seven continents of the world. It has severely impacted millions of people leading to either internal migration within a country or transboundary migration (Abdulaziz I. Almulhim, 2024). They are often called a "Trapped Population". A few scholars such as Dun and Gemenne opined that "Climate Migrants" is a term that can be used to describe the people affected by climate (Reazul Ahsan, 2014). Climate-induced migration impacts not only the migrants but also the development of the country (in the case of internal migration) and the host country (in the case of transboundary movement).

a) Impact on Climate Migrants:

The most direct effect of climate change is the resultant displacement of severely affected people. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change detected that agricultural disruptions, coastal flooding, and erosion of shorelines have led to the displacement of thousands of people. For instance, the USA was majorly affected by Hurricane Katrina leading to the displacement of millions of people in 2005 (Brown, 2008). Recently, 8 million people were displaced in Pakistan in 2022. Initially, it was an internal movement of people. But Pakistan was already on the verge of economic collapse. Higher rates of inflation made the matter even worse. So, many Pakistanis started migrating to European countries. Bangladesh also recorded a displacement of around 1 million population due to a cyclone (Huang, 2023). Moreover, in 2022 Somalia faced severe drought leading to the relocation of more than one million people (Huang, 2023).

Climate-induced migration affects the livelihood of migrants. The lack of basic amenities such as safe drinking water, nutritious food, and basic sanitation and healthcare facilities is a major concern faced by climate migrants. Such kind of unsustainable living standards are exposing the migrants to a greater health risk. Also, no proper housing facilities and no job security are a few other most concerning issues that are pushing the migrants into an ever-lasting cycle of poverty. Moreover, children are considered to be the most vulnerable among them. They lack access to basic education which may have a detrimental impact on their entire lives. Also, women and children are particularly considered more vulnerable to human trafficking (IOM, Migration, Climate Change and

Environment, 2009). The violation of their human rights at every step is yet again a serious challenge.

International protection is absent for climate migrants. Because there exists a dilemma of whether the people affected by environmental or climate factors to be called migrants or refugees. The United Nations Refugee Convention of 1951 does not include environmental migrants in its definition. There are many challenges involved in incorporating climate migrants in the convention as it might jeopardize the protection given to the already existing refugees (Huang, 2023). Ultimately, climate migrants are suffering due to a lack of attention to their grievances.

b) Impact on development:

The migrants affected by climate change mostly relocate to the urban centers of the country. This may hinder the development of a country by creating pressure on the urban sector and allied services as cities are considered to be the driving force of economic development of a nation. The authorities are finding it difficult to provide facilities to the migrants due to the limited availability of resources. Such circumstances undermine the economic growth of a country (Ilina, 2021). Moreover, there is a high risk of conflict between the migrants and the locals. The constant tussle between them may undermine the social fabric of a country and eventually hamper the overall development of a nation.

c) Impact on the Host Country:

The recent observations suggest that climate-induced migrants are moving to fragile cities as far as developing countries are concerned. It means that they are moving to places that are characterized by poor administration and low capacity to facilitate the services to the people (Chawla, 2017). If the host country is not capable of providing them with enough facilities, then the migrants may turn towards illegal and corrupt practices that can pose a challenge to the country's stability and internal security. In this way, climate migrants can act as a burden on such countries.

The Role of Local Elected Representatives in addressing the impact of Climate-induced Migration:

We have analyzed the grave problems associated with climate-induced migration and how it may have a lasting impact on the world. We also noted that by 2050 around 216 million people across the globe will be displaced as a result of climate change. However, the World Bank has predicted that this number could drop to 44 million which is a nearly 80% reduction provided the governments mitigate the pace of climate change and adapt to its impacts. Under such circumstances, the elected

representatives and their role become very significant. Andreas Nick, the vice-president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has stated "To beat the climate crisis, as elected representatives, we must deliver" (PACE, 2021).

A strong legal basis needs to be created to provide people with a basic right to a clean and safe environment. To achieve this objective, all elected representatives across the globe need to develop 'Green Policies' in response to climate-induced migration. The response action to mitigate the climate change crisis should involve governments at all levels, from the International and National to the State and local levels.

There is a growing trend of climate-induced migration towards urban centers across the globe. Hence, addressing the impact of Climate-induced migration involves a local dimension to it. Local governments, especially the city governments need to be strengthened to deal with this crisis. The problem that we are facing today is that the policies are made at an international level. However, implementation of the same is ineffective as the local circumstances do not get considered in policy formulations. To improve the effectiveness of green policies, local and regional elected representatives should be involved in the entire process of policy formulation (PACE, 2021).

Let's understand how local and regional elected representatives can contribute to reducing the impact of the climate crisis:

- a) Local authorities have proximity to the region as compared to the national and international leaders. Many times, it has been observed that the indigenous knowledge gets ignored. Hence, their involvement in policymaking can help reduce the issues of climate migrants, their vulnerabilities, and associated security threats (Chawla, 2017).
- b) Elected Representatives have a better understanding of the land use planning that can be utilized while formulating green policies.
- c) Elected Representatives can create inclusive policy frameworks to incorporate the needs of climate migrants.
- d) Elected Representatives can map the human mobility in their region and the causes behind it.
- e) Elected Representatives can assess the local climate and the needs of the local communities.
- f) Elected Representatives can also provide significant help in providing humanitarian assistance to climate-induced migrants.
- g) Elected representatives can help restore disrupted local services such as water supply, electricity, housing structures, etc.

- h) Elected Representatives can help change people's attitudes towards regional production and consumption and revitalize the local economy, which is essential for economic growth.
- i) Local Elected Representatives are the first point of contact for the citizens. Hence, they have better connectivity with them. This gives them an advantage that can be utilized for taking local initiatives along with the citizens' participation to lessen the effects of climate change in general.
- j) Local Elected Representatives can help people to understand the problem of climate change through conducting some awareness campaigns.
- k) Local authorities can conduct policy debates with the citizens through the ward committee meetings. Such collective deliberations will be fruitful in achieving concrete solutions to addressing the climate crisis. The state of France has already started such a democratic experience in the form of the 'Citizen's Convention of Climate Change'.

One major limitation of local elected representatives is their lack of sufficient knowledge to formulate green policies. Such a gap can be reduced if they tie up with international think tanks in the subject field. This will enable them to formulate better policies about climate migrants and their challenges. Also, proper training modules on disaster management and mitigation need to be devised to build the capacity of all the elected representatives to deal with such crises efficiently. Moreover, we need to provide more autonomy to the local elected representatives in financial and administrative aspects as far as the environmental matters are concerned (PACE, 2021).

CONCLUSION:

To sum up, the phenomenon of climate change is not a recent development. Rather the intensity of climate change is increasing day by day. There are various after-effects of climate change, for instance- rising sea levels, frequent floods and droughts, increasing global temperature, and the like. All such issues are making climate-vulnerable places inhabitable, so people have to relocate to different places in search of better livelihoods. Such kind of Climate-induced migration is a serious challenge facing the world today. It has posed major risks to various communities across the globe. It has threatened their livelihood and well-being, pushing them into abject poverty and lowering their overall standard of living.

Various efforts have been taken at international and national levels to mitigate the

crisis. However, there still exists a gap. Policies have been majorly formulated at the international level; failing to consider local realities. In such circumstances, the elected representatives can play a significant role in addressing the impact of climate-induced migration. Elected Representatives also face many limitations. Those limitations can be overcome by formulating capacity-building programs for them in areas of disaster management and mitigation of climate change crisis.

Acknowledgments

I am Sukhada Gole, grateful to Dr. Mrudul Nile, Professor at the Department of Civics and Politics, and Dr. Pratiba Naitthani, the Head of the Department of Political Science, at St. Xavier's College (Empowered Autonomous Institute) Mumbai, for their constant support and guidance. I also acknowledge the contribution of my peers who provided insightful suggestions to enrich this study.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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