

Climate Migration

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Climate Migration : A Livelihood Crisis in Motion

Context:

South Asia is increasingly witnessing migration driven by **climate-related disasters**. In India's **Bundelkhand region**, recurring droughts have pushed farmers to abandon their land, while **river erosion in Bangladesh** is displacing entire communities. These patterns underscore the growing phenomenon of **climate-induced migration**, which threatens livelihoods, food security, and socio-economic stability across the region.

What is Climate Migration?

- **Climate migration** refers to the **forced movement of people** due to sudden or slow-onset climate events like:
 - **Floods, droughts, cyclones**
 - **Sea-level rise, desertification, heatwaves**
- As per the **International Refugee Assistance Project (2022)**, nearly **20 million people** are displaced **every year** due to climate-related disasters.
- Migration may be:
 - **Seasonal**
 - **Cyclical**
 - **Permanent**
- Poor and rural households are **most vulnerable** due to lack of adaptive resources.

Case Examples and Climate Data

- **Bundelkhand (India):**

- Experienced **8-9 major droughts** between **1998 and 2009**.
- **Temperature projected to rise by 2-3.5°C** by 2100. (Source: IMD)

- **Charpauli (Bangladesh):**

- In **2022**, **500+ houses** were washed away in **just one week** due to Jamuna River erosion.
- The riverbank is eroding at a rate of **12-52 meters annually**.

- **Vidarbha-Marathwada (India):**

- Sugarcane workers walk **hundreds of kilometres** amid **50°C+ heat** and erratic monsoon patterns.

Key Drivers of Climate Migration

- **Drought and Rainfall Variability:**

- Failure of monsoon in **Bundelkhand and Marathwada** collapsed agricultural activity.

- **Flooding and River Erosion:**

- Villages like **Charpauli** lose homes annually due to swelling rivers and glacial melt.

- **Extreme Heat and Water Scarcity:**

- **Maharashtra's sugarcane belt** sees rising temperatures and falling groundwater levels.

- **Indebtedness and Income Collapse:**

- Crop failure pushes families into **bonded seasonal labour**, accepting **₹50,000-₹5 lakh advances** from sugar factories.

- **Loss of Livelihood Assets:**

- **Soil degradation**, land erosion, and rising input costs further stress farming communities.
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Impacts of Climate Migration

- **Rural Displacement:**

- Entire families are leaving villages, changing **demographics** and **land-use patterns**.

- **Urban Informality:**

- Migrants settle in **urban slums** without access to sanitation, housing, or welfare (e.g., Bundelkhand migrants in Delhi).

- **Gendered Vulnerability:**

- Women left behind face **sexual violence**, **financial burden**, and **higher school dropout rates** among children.

- **Labour Exploitation:**

- **Contract-bound workers** (e.g., sugarcane cutters) are denied exit options—leading to **modern debt bondage**.

- **Social Disintegration:**

- Long-term migration weakens **rural community ties** and **cooperative farming structures**.

Challenges in Addressing Climate Migration

- **No Legal Recognition:**

- India does not legally recognize *climate migrants*, excluding them from disaster relief or migration policy.

- **Lack of Social Security Portability:**

- Migrants lose access to **ration cards, pensions, and MGNREGA** benefits after relocation.

- **Poor Living Conditions:**

- Many migrants live in **temporary shelters or plastic tents** with no access to clean water, electricity, or toilets.

- **Debt Cycles:**

- Earnings linked to harvest yields often push families into **multi-year cycles of debt**.

- **Data Deficit:**

- There is **no centralized system** to track climate migration, leading to slow and under-informed policymaking.

Way Forward: Policy and Planning

- **Legal Recognition:**

- Include climate migrants under existing laws like the **NDMA Act** and internal migration policies.

- **Portability of Welfare Schemes:**

- Ensure seamless access to benefits through **One Nation One Ration Card** and **eShram** platforms.
 - **Climate-Resilient Employment:**
 - Expand **MGNREGA** to include **water conservation, drought-proofing, and agroforestry**.
 - **Skill Development for Migrants:**
 - Provide **mobile skill training** and **seasonal job matching** for migrating workers (e.g., sugarcane couples).
 - **Climate Migration Index:**
 - Create a **district-level vulnerability mapping system** using data from **IMD, Census, SECC**, to enable timely policy response.
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Conclusion

Climate migration is not a future threat—it is a present reality, particularly for India's rural poor. Without **adaptive policy frameworks** and **resilient social protection**, such migration will remain **forced and exploitative**. India's development approach must now factor in **mobility, dignity, and resilience** in the era of climate change.

