

Submission to the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement

Internal Displacement in the Context of Climate Change

Oxfam

May 8th, 2020

Introduction and Framing

According to a recent Oxfam report on climate-related displacement, climate-fuelled disasters were the number one driver of internal displacement over the last decade. On average, over 20 million people a year were internally displaced by extreme weather disasters over the last 10 years – 87% of all people internally displaced by disasters during this period. Millions more have been driven from their homes by drought, rising sea levels and other 'slow-onset' climate-fuelled disasters.

Climate impacts, whether sudden or slow-onset, produce different types of movement. For example, seasonal migration to build resilience, permanent relocation as an adaptation measure or displacement with the intention to return. A vast majority of those who move in the context of climate change do so within national borders and are therefore considered Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who lack formal protections (with a few exceptions).

Recognizing that climate change is a primary driver of internal displacement and also increases the vulnerability of those who have been displaced, this submission focuses explicitly on internal displacement in the context of climate change.

1. The key issues, problems or imperative which, as you see it, should be prioritized by the Panel in its analysis of the crisis of internal displacement today and how prevention, response at large and solutions can be effectively advanced.

Key issue: internal displacement in the context of climate change

Climate change and internal displacement are both complex, dynamic challenges that interact in numerous ways. Although climate change alone is rarely the sole cause of internal displacement, it's impacts often exacerbate the conditions that trigger displacement, such as conflict, oppression, poverty, access to resources, food and water insecurity and/or disaster events. Poor and marginalized populations – particularly those living in low-income countries, women, children, indigenous groups, the elderly and those who are disabled – tend to be highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and, as a result, often find themselves internally displaced when climate-fuelled disasters destroy their homes or prolonged droughts constrain livelihoods and resources.

Climate change can also pose a challenge to those who have already been displaced (whether due to climate-related reasons or not). For example, IDP camps may be set up in geographic locations that are vulnerable to floods, droughts or tropical cyclones and those who are able to return home, may return to a community unprepared to cope with the impacts of climate change, which could lead to further displacement in the future. Additionally, those who are displaced often experience heightened levels of vulnerability for a number of other reasons –

they may face greater difficulty in accessing assistance, experience discrimination, frustration and anxiety and have limited access to capital, credit, land ownership, education and sufficient housing. Women and children are also particularly vulnerable to violence and abuse when displaced. These vulnerabilities make it more difficult to respond to climate-related shocks and, as a result, many IDPs may find themselves experiencing secondary, or repeat, displacement.

Additionally, these challenges may be exacerbated by the fact that internal displacement occurs over a broad spectrum and *internally displaced persons (IDP)* is not a well-defined term. Some people will be internally displaced for only brief periods of time, while others will be displaced permanently. Some will be forcibly displaced - in the event of a tropical cyclone, for example. Others will have more agency, such as when confronted by slow-onset events like sea level rise. Because climate change is rarely the only driver of internal displacement and there are often many other complex factors involved, addressing displacement in the context of climate change will require addressing the root of the problem – reducing vulnerabilities and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Prevention: address underlying drivers of climate change and vulnerability

Addressing underlying vulnerability will not only help reduce the impacts of climate change, but also help minimize future internal displacement. As a result, the following actions should be taken to address underlying vulnerabilities:

- Promote community-based solutions, achieved in partnership with local actors, that tackle sexual and gender-based violence, invest in sustainable development, fight corruption and impunity, increase access to justice and call for peace.
- Build the resiliency of local communities and groups – especially women, youth and other vulnerable groups – by providing them with the technical skills and education they need to thrive and adequately respond to the challenges they face.
- Strengthen internal economies by providing credit and technical support to rural producers for local markets.

While climate change is not the sole cause of internal displacement, its impacts often exacerbate the underlying drivers of displacement; at the same time, it increases vulnerability – before, during and after internal displacement takes place. As a result, the following actions should be taken to address the climate crisis in an effort to prevent future internal displacement:

- Push countries to achieve deeper and more urgent emissions reductions to limit global heating to 1.5 C by updating their Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement and putting in place strategies for a swift and just transition away from fossil fuels.
- Advocate for more coordinated and scaled-up financial support, including grant-based assistance, for adaptation, loss and damage, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian assistance that is prioritized for the poorest and most vulnerable countries and includes enhanced transparency on the climate-specific spending in these areas.

Response: promoting rights, protection and dignity of those displaced

Responding to internal displacement in the context of climate change is complex. However, it is critical to ensure that any response promotes the rights, protection and dignity of those who are being displaced. As a result, the following points should guide response:

- Advocate for strengthening the rights and protections of those displaced and treat them with dignity, recognizing the vulnerability and capacity of people going through life-changing and distressing experiences.
- Provide adequate finance and resources, including through immediate humanitarian support and social safety nets, that allows for the equitable securement of land and resources necessary to sustain livelihoods disrupted by relocation, taking into account rights, protection, local culture and gender needs.
- Ensure that response efforts are based on best-practices for informed, participatory, inclusive, rights-based and culturally- and gender-sensitive decision making that supports displacement with the consent of those in harm's way.

Solutions: multiple approaches and extensive collaboration

As mentioned, both climate change and internal displacement are complex issues and addressing them will require multiple approaches and extensive collaboration between government agencies, relevant actors and local communities. Although solutions will be unique to every scenario, below are some key approaches to keep in mind when evaluating and implementing potential solutions:

- Focus on the fundamental rights of protection and security instead of categorizing who qualifies for support. In the context of climate change, not all those who are displaced will neatly fit into the defined IDP category. However, everyone experiencing extreme vulnerability deserves protections, regardless of whether or not they were displaced by climate change impacts or if their displacement was forced or voluntary. Additionally, making categories of qualifying people will likely fracture bureaucratic responsibility and breed animosity among local, needy populations who are excluded from support because they don't meet qualifications.
- Consider the impacts of climate change. Climate change impacts may have been a driver of internal displacement and mitigating future impacts is crucial in order to minimize future displacement. However, climate change impacts must also be considered while identifying and implementing solutions. Failure to evaluate how solutions may be impacted by climate change now or in the future, can lead to greater vulnerability of displaced populations and repeat displacement.
- Solutions must be participatory. Local communities must be included in the identification and implementation of solutions in a participatory, transparent, culturally sensitive and inclusive process. Governments should respect a community's decision-making process and help secure the necessary support (financial, technical, capacity-building, etc.). Participatory decision-making processes are crucial from a human and cultural rights perspective and often lead to better, more durable outcomes.

- Take a gender-sensitive approach that accounts for the unique ways in which women and men experience both climate change and internal displacement differently. Solutions should actively engage women in the decision-making process, seek implementation guidance from gender experts and allocate sufficient time, budget and resources to ensure that assistance is safe and gender sensitive.
- Consider psycho-social solutions, not just physical solutions. While physical solutions, such as food and shelter are crucial, often the psycho-social dimension of displacement is ignored. In many cases, displacement occurs as a result of a distressing event and being in a new, unfamiliar environment where you are unable to satisfy basic needs and are uncertain about the future can lead to constant worry, fear and frustration. Neglecting the psycho-social aspects of displacement can lead to further vulnerability.

2. Across the objectives of prevention, response and solutions, how can national political will, responsibility and capacity be catalyzed and cultivated.

There is a need for governments and relevant partners to catalyze and cultivate action on addressing urban internal displacement in the context of climate change. The impacts of climate change – such as extreme weather disasters, floods or droughts – cause internal displacement from rural to urban areas as people search for new livelihoods and opportunities. This influx of IDPs into already dense city settings puts a significant strain on an already fragile urban system and many of these urban IDPs face unique challenges and vulnerabilities. For example, IDPs tend to settle in urban slums, which can increase their vulnerability, and are often pushed towards low-paid jobs and the informal work sector because they are considered low-skill. Additionally, urban IDPs often disappear into the larger urban population and, as a result, governments may not feel responsible and these populations won't get the support they need.

Responding to the current needs of urban IDPs and preventing additional strain on cities as a result of displacement will require changes that reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience to the impacts of climate change. For example governments, relevant actors and local communities should work collaboratively to address issues such as urban planning, sanitation, housing, transportation, health care, violence, crime and safe and secure work, which will not only protect IDPs, but also improve the lives of those already living in these urban areas as well as help mitigate further climate change impacts.

3. The relevance and role of humanitarian, development, peace, climate change and disaster reduction action and how a more integrated approach in these respects can be fostered. Submissions can in these respects also address the role of the Private Sector, Regional or International Financial Institutions and other development partners and actors.

Both climate change and internal displacement are complex, dynamic problems that require a range of actors, including humanitarian, development, peace, climate change and disaster reduction agencies working collaboratively with government officials across all levels as well as the private sector.

Humanitarian agencies are crucial in the aftermath of a climate-fuelled disaster in order to provide life-saving aid to those who have been displaced. However, once the immediate threat has been addressed, there will be a need for development agencies to engage in recovery efforts to help internally displaced populations rebuild in a sustainable way. Climate change and disaster risk reduction agencies should be actively engaged in the recovery process as well to ensure that community development takes into consideration disaster risks and climate change impacts in an effort to reduce future displacement. Additionally, peace actors are also essential, particularly in situations where climate-related disasters strike a region in conflict. However, peace actors also play an important role in ensuring that the impacts of climate change – such as food and water insecurity, for example – don't exacerbate conflict, which, in turn, could lead to internal displacement.

The private sector should also play a role in addressing internal displacement in the context of climate change. By leveraging technological solutions, such as early warning systems, the private sector can contribute to preventing internal displacement by building resilience reducing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Additionally, the private sector can also contribute to employment opportunities for people at risk of displacement. This would allow alternate livelihood options for people dependent on natural resources, severely impacted by climate change, for sustaining their livelihoods.

Collaboration between so many actors will require a coordinated approach across levels that is both rights-based, needs-based. Relevant actors and the private sector will need to ensure that they are collaborating not only with national-level offices, but also local-level offices and local community members in order to ensure meaningful participation and local ownership throughout the internal displacement process. Governments should also engage with actors and the private sector in order to improve humanitarian response, disaster management, sustainable development and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Staffing, resources and long-term plans need to be best utilized in situations where all actors are collaborating and sharing expertise and lessons learned. Additionally, flexible funding will be crucial in order to ensure such collaboration can occur and create effective results.

4. Focusing on solutions, your perspectives on what has led to many situations of internal displacement remaining stalled for many years and how effective solutions can be catalyzed, driven forward and supported.

Failure to adequately address climate change

Climate change is one reason why situations of internal displacement can stall. For example, many regions of the world most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change are also the regions that host the majority of the world's IDPs. As a result, IDPs experience higher levels of vulnerability and could face secondary or repeat displacement due to the impacts of climate change, such as floods, droughts or tropical storms. Additionally, climate change impacts will entrench poverty, limiting the possibility of vulnerable populations to become self-sustaining and therefore make protracted displacement even more challenging.

Action to address climate change continues to fall short of meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement, which aims to keep temperature increase below 2°C in order to minimize the

impacts of climate change, including displacement. Governments need to increase the ambition of their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement and redouble efforts to international climate-related finance for adaptation, mitigation, loss and damage, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian assistance in order to avoid the most devastating consequences of climate change and future internal displacement.

5. New or creative financing solutions which can be built up or better utilized in enabling more effective responses to displacement and the achievement of durable solutions

Enhance climate-related financing

Preventing and responding to internal displacement in the context of climate change will require increasing the coordination, scale and accessibility of international finance for adaptation, mitigation, loss and damage, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian assistance. Developed countries, in particular, must increase international climate-related finance and prioritize simplified access to funding for climate-vulnerable communities that often face considerable challenges in accessing international finance and support due to the complex and bureaucratic nature of funding arrangements.

This climate-related finance should go beyond existing commitments to Official Development Assistance (ODA) and include a significant increase in grant-based assistance as well as enhanced transparency. This financing should focus on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable communities, supporting disaster risk reduction measures, enabling strong and inclusive adaptation planning at the national and local levels and ensuring that women have a full and equal role in decision making. Additionally, climate-related finance providers should prioritize simplified access to funding for climate-vulnerable communities, supporting local capacity to access and manage funds and enhancing the engagement of women and vulnerable groups in the design and implementation of programmes.

Support local and national actors with more direct funding that is timely and flexible

Local and national organizations are an essential part of addressing displacement and implementing durable solutions. These actors have a deep understanding of local languages, cultures, geography, and political realities that allow them to readily grasp the needs of local communities and formulate solutions tailored to each context. However, the current systems for channeling international funding for addressing displacement tends to prioritize large international actors over others.

Donors and funders must make concerted efforts to ensure that funding reaches local and national actors directly, including through contributing directly to local and national NGOs, supporting funding mechanisms based on community-led response models, and providing financial support to pooled funds including Country-Based Pooled Funds. Donors and international intermediaries must channel this funding with flexibility to allow local partners to design and deliver the responses most suited to their communities right now.

6. Critical issues or questions as you see them in respect to data and evidence in the response to internal displacement including gaps, shortcomings and challenges in approaches or implementation and how these can be addressed.

Unreliable and misunderstood data and evidence for climate-related internal displacement

In general, numbers on climate-related displacement are not very reliable. Estimating the number of people moving in response to climate change (now or in the future) is extremely difficult for a number of reasons, including the many complex factors that influence displacement, the challenges of collecting data on displaced people and the difficulties of attributing climate change to any specific event. As a result of these data challenges, internal displacement can be difficult to manage and is often stalled for prolonged periods of time.

Although the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) has become the most robust data source for climate-related displacement, its methodology still faces data challenges¹. The most significant issue is tracking the impact of disasters (which may or may not be caused by climate change) and relying on proxies for displacement, such as houses damaged or destroyed, the number of people in shelters or evacuation data. It is important to understand that these numbers are describing people whose homes were destroyed or who were evacuated temporarily and labeling them as *'displaced'*. While some people who were evacuated in advance of a tropical cyclone or whose homes were destroyed will face protracted displacement, many of those included in this data will only be displaced for a short period of time as a result of adhering to evacuation orders or repairing their home. If not used carefully, these numbers can be very misleading because the discourse of displacement holds far more power in a way that destroyed housing or evacuation does not.

While data for disaster-related displacement is poor in general, it is even worse for slow onset events, such as sea level rise and land degradation. This is because displacement associated with these events is often due to a combination of complex factors and can be difficult to identify. As a result, the number of those who are displaced due to slow-onset climate impacts may be underreported.

Lack of inclusion of local and national actors in data collection and use

Local and national actors often have access to the most vulnerable populations that international groups cannot reach and it is important that their on-the-ground knowledge and expertise be included in the gathering and use of data. In particular, engaging community leadership contributes to providing credible and trusted information that is essential to responding to displacement of all types. This requires partnerships that allow local and national groups to have a voice in all forums related to action addressing displacement, to lead in all phases of programming, and that build local and national groups' capacity to continue to operate.

There must be more equitable, collaborative partnerships between international and local responders—partnerships in which international groups consistently promote and support responsible local and national leadership and participation. International organizations must collaborate and coordinate with local and national partners and use their influence to ensure local voices are heard and local information is incorporated and properly protected.

¹ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2019. *Methodological Index*. Available at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/2019-GRID-methodology.pdf>

7. What steps could be taken to strengthen the effectiveness of response management, coordination and accountability at all levels in contexts of internal displacement?

Improve the structure of risk governance systems

From Oxfam's experience working with national governments, more attention should be paid to how risk governance systems are structured. These systems are crucial in responding to crises and largely determine how internal displacement is managed. Managing displacement in a national context requires a multi-level governance response that includes the involvement of many different government departments (i.e. Home Affairs, Disaster Management, Social Departments, Climate/Environment, etc.) collaborating horizontally at the national level as well as vertically, across levels, from national to local.

However, the ways in which these departments interact and operate is often not clear. Many times, departments do not know who is responsible for what or what department, at which level (i.e. national, state or local), is fully responsible for managing displacement and keeping others accountable. A solution to this would be to ensure that clear operating procedures, outlining who is responsible and accountable for what, are established in disaster management legislation. Additionally, these operating procedures should be considered in the context of climate change in order to ensure that disaster response and associated internal displacement are managed in a way that is sustainable and reduces vulnerability to future impacts of climate change.

Additionally, in the context of climate change, these risk governance systems need to consider the possibility of managing internal displacement in the midst of compounding crises. For example, during the ongoing COVID-19 emergency, governments and actors are faced with managing internal displacement resulting from climate-fuelled disasters during a global pandemic. In the context of restricted movement and social distancing, evacuation – although often a necessary, life-saving measure – will be even more challenging and could potentially contribute to the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, those who have been displaced may not be welcomed by host communities who fear the further spread of the virus, which could result in social tensions and conflict.

Engage local and national actors as leaders in all elements of response to displacement and support their ability to learn, grow, and create sustainable organizations and responses

As climate change intensifies disasters around the world, leading to more internal displacement, humanitarian needs are pushing international humanitarian aid agencies to their limits. To meet the growing needs, it is essential that local and national humanitarian organizations and responsible governments are engaged and mobilized to the fullest. These organizations should not only lead responses, but also take leading roles in disaster preparedness and risk reduction.

International humanitarian organizations can and must do more to strengthen local and national capacity to lead the response to displacement and implement solutions. This includes strengthening technical capacity, such as ensuring access to water, sanitation, and shelter, as well as organizational capacity, including building strong financial systems, raising funds, creating effective strategies, and managing human resources. It also includes the capacity to collaborate with other key humanitarian actors in international coordination and funding mechanisms, and to participate in global forums on learning, information-sharing, and

influencing policy. Every action international actors engage in should leave local and national organizations stronger, more independent, and more confident that they can handle—or avert—the climate-related disasters they are facing.

Sources:

This document was prepared by drawing from Oxfam’s collective humanitarian, research, international, financial institutions, field, and climate policy expertise. Below are publicly available Oxfam reports used to inform this submission.

Oxfam, 2012. Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons: Challenges in Eastern Chad. Available at: <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/263832/bp-durable-solutions-idp-eastern-chad-010312-en.pdf?sequence=1>

Oxfam, 2017. *Uprooted by Climate Change: Responding to the growing risk of displacement*. Available at: https://oi-files-d8-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-uprooted-climate-change-displacement-021117-en.pdf

Oxfam, 2018. *Drought, Displacement and Livelihoods in Somalia/Somaliland: Time for gender-sensitive and protection-focused approaches*. Available at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/drought-displacement-and-livelihoods-in-somaliasomaliland-time-for-gender-sensi-620503>

Oxfam, 2019. *Forced from home: climate-fuelled displacement*. Available at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/forced-home-climate-fuelled-displacement>

Oxfam, 2020. Perspectives sur les solutions durables au Tchad. Available at: https://www.oxfamintermon.org/es/publicacion/Perspectivas_sobre_Soluciones_duraderas_en_Chad?hsLang=es