



ASIA REGIONAL MEETING ON CLIMATE DISPLACEMENT


The Peninsula Principles on Climate Displacement Within States - the Peninsula Principles - were adopted by a group of international experts and legal scholars in 2013. This standard is the world's first policy framework designed to assist governments worldwide to secure the rights of people displaced internally by climate change. These principles provide a comprehensive normative framework, based on principles of international law, human rights obligations and good practice, within which the rights of climate displaced persons can be addressed.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Peninsula Principles.

They remain more relevant than ever for climate displaced persons everywhere.

KEY POINTS

- » **4 out of 5 people** who will be displaced by climate change are in Asia.
- » **Tens of thousands of kilometres** of Asia's coastlines are currently under threat from sea level rise.
- » Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, is being **relocated** in part due to climate change.
- » Most climate-displaced people are **internally displaced** within their own country, despite the popular perception that displacement occurs from the Global South to the Global North.
- » People are relocating **from one risk to another** – from drought prone areas inland to flood prone areas in urban settings.
- » Conservative estimates indicate climate change could displace **216 million people** across six world regions to move within their countries by 2050. Others predict hundreds of millions more.
- » Climate displacement itself needs to be avoided as displacement itself has a carbon footprint.
- » There are over **40,000 people** working at the United Nations and other international organisations focussed on refugees, IDPs, migration and displacement, yet **far less than 0.5%** of these people are working on climate change or displacement.



On 16 August 2023 Displacement Solutions held the second of eight regional meetings to mark the 10-year anniversary of the Peninsula Principles and to explore innovative approaches to climate displacement around the world.

This report is a brief summary of the robust and multi-dimensional presentations made during the webinar by some of Asia's leading thinkers on how to better address climate displacement challenges. Indicative of the scale of the problem, one participant proactively captured the essence of the problem by noting that "[e]very system will be disrupted" by the effects of climate change.

Asia's Impending Climate Displacement Crisis

DS Director **Scott Leckie** commenced the discussion by highlighting the staggering prediction that 80% of the global population who are threatened by climate change displacement live in Asia. A critical challenge lies in devising strategies to avoid the default position adopted by most governments towards climate-displaced individuals where their only option is to relocate to urban slums which often lack tenure security, face constant threats of forced eviction and are poorly serviced by public infrastructure.

With figures projected to be much higher than previously imagined, this crisis demands immediate and creative attention.

Climate Displacement Denial

"We have to first accept that there will be massive displacement. Currently we are in deep denial at all levels, local to international." - Aromar Revi

The Director of the Indian Institute of Human Settlements, **Aromar Revi**, highlighted the lack of global recognition of the extent of mass climate-induced displacement that is already taking place. This failure is apparent at local, governmental and intergovernmental levels. The systems required to address the scale of the problem in Asia are decades behind, including legal frameworks. India and Asia more generally have unique population pressures, compounded by land rights conflicts and looming water and food security crises which will be dramatically worsened by climate change. While the situation in Europe this summer has drawn more global attention to the human impacts, the situation facing India and Asia will be dramatically and massively worse, particularly for the most marginalised. The world is not prepared for the scale of global climate displacement that will occur.

Around 30% of India's land area is forested, serving as a habitat for diverse communities including indigenous populations. As the effects of climate change on forests intensify, the government is taking steps to preserve them as a means to sequester carbon. This will lead to increased conflicts in relation to land ownership and access to water and will paradoxically contribute to further climate displacement.



Gaps

Chandni Singh, also of IHS and a contributing/lead author of various IPCC report chapters, highlighted the growing disparity between current adaptation measures and actual requirements in relation to climate displacement. There is a lack of a systemic understanding of adaptation across sectors, with a more holistic and evidence-based approach required.

Some of the current information gaps include:

- » Insufficient data or focus on slow onset events such as desertification and drought.
- » Should relocation of populations threatened with climate displacement be considered an adaptation strategy? What are the enablers of successful relocation? What are the national and international policy and financial levers?
- » What are the limits to when people can stay and when they have to be moved?
- » Loss and damage – how to build institutional and financial data? The need to think about how to build systems based on data.

Relocation Realities: Challenges and Opportunities

Planned relocation of communities threatened with climate displacement should always be the last resort given decades of evidence of serious problems with relocation in various displacement contexts.

There is often a misguided emphasis on planned relocations as a risk reduction strategy, while in other contexts they are extremely politically sensitive. In all situations it is clear that communities themselves need to play a central role in decision-making. In some situations this might involve communities deciding to remain despite the climate risks, potentially with the support of technological solutions such as floating villages or stilts, although it was acknowledged that some of these solutions could only be temporary and planned relocation would be inevitable in many situations. It was emphasised that notwithstanding when and if relocation occurs, all human rights of those impacted must form the baseline of any such efforts.

Chandni Singh shared a case study from Tamil Nadu on India's southeastern coast that illustrated many of the negative aspects of relocation, where fishing communities were relocated inland from coastal areas to poorly constructed high-rise buildings. Problems included poor planning, inappropriate housing, violence - particularly against women, lack of infrastructure, complete loss of livelihoods, destruction of social networks and social fabric, loss of former way of life.

Arif Rahman, CEO of Bangladeshi NGO Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), a long-time partner of Displacement Solutions, shared the findings of a survey of climate displaced people on Bangladesh's southeastern coast which found that 70% had been displaced twice or more, 50% were forced to change their occupation, 95% were living in unsanitary conditions resulting in disease, and 68% wanted to relocate within their own local district. In many instances people are often relocating from drought or flooding in rural areas to urban areas where they are at risk of flooding in the slums, so they are merely moving from one risk to another.



Lobsang Sangay, Harvard Law School and former Tibetan Prime Minister of the Tibetan-Government-in-Exile, highlighted the crucial role of the Himalayan region, emphasising its significance and delicate nature akin to rainforests. He underscored Tibet's position as the source of the world's major rivers, serving as the lifeline for many countries. Lobsang delved deep into the socio-political challenges Tibet faces, including forced urbanisation, mining exploitation by global powers, and mass displacement. He painted a bleak picture of the plight of nomads and farmers who have been forcibly moved to ghettos without basic facilities so their land can be utilised for mining. Lobsang shed light on similar issues faced in Inner-Mongolia and Xinjiang, illustrating the monopolisation of land, forced displacements, and mass imprisonment. In addition, 70% of the Tibetan plateau consists of permafrost. Rising temperatures are causing rapid melting of permafrost that releases methane, a gas 30 times more potent than CO² in warming the atmosphere. He concluded with a dire warning about the rapid melting of glaciers in Tibet, reiterating that a 1 degree increase in global temperatures results in a 2 degree increase in Tibet, and the profound environmental consequences for the entire Asian continent.

Win Myo Thu, a leading environmental activist from Myanmar now living in exile, highlighted the grave reality of climate vulnerabilities in Myanmar, citing alarming statistics on the numbers affected by various natural disasters. He pointed to Myanmar's rank as the second most vulnerable country globally. Cyclone Mocha badly affected Rakhine state and caused further displacement in an area already drastically affected by displacement caused by persecution and conflict. However, these displaced populations were unable to receive aid due to the disastrous effect of the cyclone. Again, what the world is seeing are the compounding effects of climate change on the world's most vulnerable.

Climate Financing

Rey Guarin, a climate expert from the Philippines, emphasised the importance of the financial dimensions of climate displacement. Financing is the most necessary of all climate displacement interventions: while other measures are also clearly important, financing remains the key to effective action. Displacement itself has a carbon footprint: climate considerations need to be mainstreamed in financial decision-making. There can, however, be unintended consequences of certain financial incentives which might inadvertently anchor communities to high-risk zones.

Chandni Singh then noted that good development is the bedrock of climate action. If countries meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals this will equate to some climate change adaptation measures being put in place. The link between the SDGs and climate action needs to be better understood and acted upon.

Arif Rahman highlighted the Bangladesh government's climate displacement plan as one of the better examples of official efforts to deal with the problem. He reiterated that the national internal displacement policy in Bangladesh drew heavily on the approach taken within the Peninsula Principles. The action plan has been supported with funding, with the budget being doubled over the past seven years. There has also been some international support through the loss and damage fund, but much of this remains at the symbolic level only, with far greater commitments required.

Governance, Land and Place

The climate displacement crisis is a global systemic problem requiring a global response. Individual states will not be able to cope with the scale of the crisis – from Bangladesh to the USA – no matter how wealthy the state, existing systems will be disrupted as a result of the climate crisis and will require global co-operation and new systems of governance, with the private sector also needing to play a critical role in propelling climate solutions. Currently the world's governments are not appropriately addressing or even ready to tackle the urgency of Asia's looming climate displacement crisis.

While there is, in fact, enough land globally for people threatened with displacement to be relocated, there is a lack of political will and global governance to make this land available to those who need it. However, there is a need to distinguish between the notions of 'land' and 'place', with the latter involving cultural, infrastructural, economic and societal aspects that also need to be present.

Capacity building is required at the local, national and international level. The role of local officials is key in many countries. Even where policy frameworks are in place, as in Bangladesh, for example, capacity-building for local officials so that they understand climate displacement and plan and respond effectively is still required.

Inclusion Of Civil Society Actors At The Local And International Level

In addressing the complex challenges of climate displacement, a more inclusive and collaborative approach is essential. Local initiatives have shown that when governments collaborate with local NGOs, the outcomes are more inclusive and better tailored to the needs of the community and as a result, more successful. Movements aimed at creating safer and more resilient habitats have been significantly amplified when civil society has a voice. By leveraging local NGOs, governments can ensure that the concerns and suggestions of the displaced are heard and acted upon. This results in tangible changes, from improved public spaces and infrastructure like lighting to creating community-friendly areas such as playgrounds.

However, the issue of climate displacement isn't just local. It is global. States that have been heavily impacted by climate change, such as Afghanistan and Myanmar, because of non responsive governments often struggle with infrastructure and policy mechanisms to address the problem. This is where international collaboration becomes paramount. To create a comprehensive solution, there's a pressing need for an international mechanism that fosters cooperation among these states. By integrating civil society actors from affected areas into larger platforms, like the United Nations, the EU and other regional organisations, these actors can not only represent the concerns of the displaced but also bring local solutions to a global stage. Such an operational mechanism would facilitate the exchange of ideas, strategies, and best practices among states, ensuring that efforts to address climate displacement are both localised and globally informed.

This gathering of some of Asia's leading climate displacement experts comes at a time when those involved in climate change actions widely agree that the world's governments are not doing nearly enough to address climate displacement in Asia.

All participants unanimously echoed the pressing need to address this impending crisis. The webinar presentations spanned a spectrum of issues, from the overarching macro-level challenges Asia faces to the intricate nuances of individual countries such as Bangladesh, India, Myanmar and Tibet.

Beyond merely diagnosing the climate-related problems facing the region, the discussions delved deep into potential solutions, underscoring the importance of collaborative and inclusive strategies. The call for synergistic approaches, especially the integration of civil society actors both at the grassroots and global levels, was palpably clear. Such collaboration promises to yield solutions that are not only locally relevant but also globally informed. While the challenges of climate displacement are undeniably vast and complex, the collective commitment and resolve of all participants radiated hope. The path forward, illuminated by these discussions, emphasises a united, informed, and proactive approach towards a more resilient and inclusive future.

Please check out www.displacementsolutions.org for all of the latest information on this project and all other activities by DS and its partners and associates.

Participant Biographies



Aromar Revi

Aromar Revi is the Director of the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS) India's prospective Institution of Eminence and interdisciplinary national University focused on urbanisation. Over a dozen years, he has built IIHS into one of the world's leading education, research, training, advisory and implementation-support institutions, focusing on the multi-dimensional challenges and opportunities of sustainable urbanisation. Aromar is one of the world's leading experts on global environmental change, especially climate change. He is a Coordinating Lead Author (CLA) of the 2018 IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C (SR15). He has worked extensively to bring the global urban and climate agendas together, including as a coordinating lead author of the SR1.5 Summary for Urban Policymakers, released at CoP24 in Poland in 2018 and the Summary for Financial Decisionmakers in 2020.



Chandni Singh

Chandni Singh is a senior researcher and faculty member at the Indian Institute for Human Settlements (IIHS), Bangalore. Her research examines the human dimensions of global environmental change focusing on drivers of vulnerability to climate change, climate change adaptation, and human migration and livelihood transitions. She was a Lead Author on the IPCC Assessment Report 6 Working Group II and Contributing Author on the IPCC's Special Report on 1.5 degrees. Chandni has been working for more than a decade on issues of internal migration and planned relocation across South Asia. She holds a PhD in International Development from the University of Reading.



Lobsang Sangay

Lobsang Sangay is a Tibetan-American scholar and politician in exile who became prime minister in the Tibetan Central Administration, the Tibetan government-in-exile, in 2011. He was both the first non-monk and the first person born outside Tibet to hold the position. He was Kalon Tripa of the Tibetan Administration in India from 2011 to 2012, and Sikyong of the Central Tibetan Administration in India from 2012 to 2021. In 2004, he became the first Tibetan to earn a S.J.D degree from Harvard Law School. Sangay was a Senior Fellow at the East Asian Legal Studies Program at Harvard Law School through 2011. He is an expert in Tibetan law and international human rights law.



Mohammed Arifur Rahman

Mohammed Arifur Rahman is the Founder and Chief Executive of Young Power in Social Action (YPSA) a registered non-government non-profit voluntary organisation for sustainable development in Bangladesh. Arif has played a major role during frequent natural disasters and climate change especially climate displacement issues in the south east coastal regions of Bangladesh. Arif and YPSA were one of the first to respond to the Rohingya refugee influx from Myanmar that began in August 2017. These efforts resulted in various life saving humanitarian emergency projects and services, including humanitarian services supporting Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN) and Local Host communities at Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh. Arif is currently pursuing a PhD on Inclusive development at Techno India University (TIU). Arif writes in different newspapers and development publications as a freelance writer and presently serves as the Chief Editor of "Social Change" (an ISSN registered Development Journal).



Rey Guarin

Rey Guarin has expertise in a range of areas, including climate change projects in developing countries and in multiple sectors. He has robust experience in the sustainable development field, with 23 years of pioneering experience on management and advisory services for low carbon-climate-disaster resilient development in policies, plans, strategies, investments, program, and projects through new products/services across various sectors and through various partnerships (e.g., PPP, South South) in countries in Asia and the Pacific, Africa, and Latin America. He is currently Member of the Independent Technical Advisory Panel to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) Executive Board, and a freelance international consultant for Asian Development Bank, South East Asia, Partnership for Infrastructure, ProClima (India) doing climate advisory services on policies, finance, and investments programs and projects. He has worked within various sectors, public and private institutions, and developing countries, including projects on Policy Based Loans, TAs and investments programs and projects (PPP, debt, equity) in climate change, renewable and alternative energy, energy efficiency, forestry/watershed management, urban water, waste and transport services, regional cooperation, environment, climate smart agriculture, REDD+, Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), finance (e.g. loss and damage mechanism, Islamic finance/ insurance, debt, LGU finance), green/resilient cities (e.g., solid waste management, health, housing), MSME finance, education, road and transport, GIS, and green skills and jobs. Regional coverage includes Central and West Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and South Asia and the Pacific, Africa, Latin America, Caucasus. Countries covered include Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Pacific Islands and selected developed countries Japan and EU (i.e. GER, UK, FR).



Scott Leckie

Scott Leckie is the founder and Executive Director of Displacement Solutions. He is an international human rights lawyer, academic, author, social entrepreneur, environmentalist, recognised as one of the world's leading global housing, land and property (HLP) rights experts and has worked in more than 80 countries on various human rights matters. He is the world's most widely published author on HLP themes, having written more than 200 books, articles and substantive reports on these issues.



Win Myo Thu

Win Myo Thu is an environmental activist from Myanmar. During the last thirty years, he spent most of his time in remote rural areas of Myanmar to help the local poor and the most disadvantaged communities to improve access to land, forest, water, food, and a clean environment. This was done by empowering local communities to defend their resource rights, deliberating participatory democracy and good governance, and supporting local wisdom and innovation for sustainable livelihood initiatives. He was deeply engaged in the environmental justice movement to stop unsustainable and irresponsible investments from China, Japan, and Korea in the development of large-scale hydropower dams (6000 MW), coal-fired power plants (8000 MW), and commercial palm oil plantations (over 100,000 acres). He also contributed to the works of policy development at the national level for environmental performance assessment (EPA), national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAP), national communication and education for climate change, rural development strategic framework and rural development law, Myanmar sustainable development plan (MSDP), forest law enforcement governance and trade (FLEGT), and extractive industry transparency initiative (EITI). He is currently on a sabbatical leave from his parent organisation, the Association of Advancing Life And Regenerating Motherland (ALARM), and working as a visiting researcher at the Earth Science Department and Christ Church College of Oxford University. He studied at Yangon University and Yezin Agriculture Institute (Myanmar) for a B.Sc. (Forestry), Asian Institute of Technology (Thailand) for an M.Sc. in Rural and Regional Development Planning, and the Centre for International Development and Training at the University of Wolverhampton (UK) for Chevening Fellowship in Governance and Environmental Democracy.