

Climate Disasters and Displacement: Role of Policies and Protection

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Abstract

The severity of climate disasters has increased over the last few decades, with episodes of droughts on the rise, and floods, thunderstorms and cyclones frequently battering cities and coastal states. Weather and climate related disasters have surged manifold, coursing out of proportion, in the last half of a century, but early warning systems and disaster management help save lives to an extent. Natural hazards manifested in the form of disasters account for deaths and economic losses. Deforestation, increased volume of emission of air pollutants, expansion and encroachment of built-up space, disappearance of waterbodies and open spaces, trigger changes in the atmospheric processes. Research and data analyses project intensification of the number of extreme weather and climatic events in the near future. Water extremes, heat waves, droughts, forest fires, storms, to name a few, have pushed different parts of India and the world to the thresholds of climate change. While riverine and coastal cities in plains of the country experience water scarcity and dry spell, and river valleys are flooded, the towns on lower mountain slopes record higher summer temperatures and settlements in higher gradients are hit by landslides and avalanches. The extreme events associated with sea level changes elevate risks and vulnerability for coastal communities, often facing economic and physical losses, subsequently inducing displacement or migration in search of safer grounds. Climate calamities are among the drivers of displacement that force people to flee, intensifying the impacts to a larger scale in fragile ecosystems. Inhabitants in climate 'hotspots' mostly lack resources to adapt to changing ecological conditions in their surroundings. Thereby, policies for protection of displaced persons ought to root for the causes of transitions in environment and sustainability of living.

The crux of conservation (forests and vegetation cover) lies in investment, education and awareness of forest values and reliance and protection of the rights of people who rely on forests, through outreach of participatory forest management (in both urban, rural and densely forested areas). To overcome the regulatory, institutional and financial barriers in planning, implementing practices integral to the framework of protection for those displaced, and building solutions for climate resilient infrastructure, collaboration with and involvement of stakeholders is important. The significance of field knowledge, identification of target groups and the drivers of potential displacement, and integration of the experiences of local communities, helps to determine problems; this aids to bridge gaps and the complexities of implementation of guidelines on the ground. Making cities and infrastructure climate resilient incur extra costs, but in turn favours long-term cost benefits. The research attempts to develop an overview of the crisis and protection issues that climate disasters and displacements ensue and the protection mechanism that builds-up on policies and plans for management of disasters and recovery from catastrophes.

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