

MYTH BUSTER

MIGRATION, DISPLACEMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE



Mingulay Prewell
Trust

THE EDITH M ELLIS 1985
CHARITABLE TRUST

A number of myths have emerged about how climate change will influence the movement of people. There are connections between climate change and the movement of people. However these connections are not always obvious and the way the connections are described in the media is not always accurate.

UK CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION COALITION

The UK Climate Change and Migration Coalition exists to challenge the lack of long-term strategies to support and protect people at risk of displacement linked to environmental change. Our goal is to ensure a people centred policy response at the national and international level.

www.climatemigration.org.uk

MYTH

- CLIMATE CHANGE WILL CREATE 150 MILLION CLIMATE CHANGE MIGRANTS

REALITY

- ALTHOUGH THERE ARE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION, IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO ESTIMATE THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO WILL BE AFFECTED.

Several estimates have been made about the possible numbers of people who might be displaced by climate change. Numbers vary between 50 million and 1 billion, depending on how the researchers have made their estimates. However, the idea of identifying a group of people whose movement is mainly caused by climate change - let alone estimating their numbers - is problematic. An individual's decision to move always has a number of causes. Economic, political and social factors all influence someone's decision to stay or move. The impacts of climate change could be an additional factor among these others. Climate change may also play a role in changing some of these other influences. There will always be multiple "push" and "pull" factors, so identifying climate change as the sole driver for someone's movement is very difficult.

MYTH

- CLIMATE CHANGE IS GOING TO CAUSE NEW CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE.

REALITY

WHEN CLIMATE CHANGE IS ONE OF THE FACTORS IN SOMEONE'S DECISION TO MOVE, IT IS FAR MORE LIKELY THEY WILL MOVE WITHIN THEIR OWN COUNTRY.

Moving requires resources, and when people have little money they often choose to move the shortest distance possible. Climate change may make farming in rural areas progressively more difficult. People affected by this may decide to move away from farming areas as incomes fall. When this happens, many people will probably decide to move the shortest distance possible, and to move somewhere they can find work. The most likely option is that they will move to the nearest big city within their own country. Or, when people are displaced by sudden disasters like flash floods and storms they tend to move the shortest distance possible. People often leave the affected area in advance to stay with relatives at the nearest safe location. People fleeing disasters also often move to somewhere assistance is being provided by the government or an international agency. While there are some cases where people may move cross-border, however internal, short distance movement will be far more usual.

MYTH

- CLIMATE CHANGE WILL CAUSE PEOPLE TO MOVE PERMANENTLY.

REALITY

- PERMANENT MOVEMENT MAY HAPPEN IN SOME CASES, BUT MANY PEOPLE MAY MOVE TEMPORARILY, OR EVEN REGULARLY, BETWEEN A NUMBER OF LOCATIONS IN RESPONSE TO A CHANGING CLIMATE.

As climate change affects people's ability to make a living from farming they may choose to move temporarily to find work elsewhere. For example, they may move to a nearby city and find non-farm work and then return to their original rural area during busy times in the agricultural calendar. They may also move to other rural areas that are less affected by some of the impacts of climate change (e.g water stress) and then return to their original area if conditions improve slightly. In the case of sudden disasters people will often move away from their homes in the immediate aftermath of the disasters, but are usually keen to return as soon as possible and begin repairs or reconstruction in their communities. They could well be displaced again in response to a similar disaster. Climate change is reinforcing patterns of temporary and circular movement, rather than permanent movement to new places. This not to say that there will be no permanent movement, as there are a few locations where areas could become permanently uninhabitable. However patterns of temporary and seasonal movement will be far more common.

MYTH

- CLIMATE CHANGE WILL CAUSE LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE TO ALL MOVE AT ONCE. THERE WILL BE A SUDDEN MASS EXODUS FROM SOME AREAS, CREATING A SUDDEN INFLUX OF PEOPLE ELSEWHERE.

REALITY

- COMMUNITIES ARE FAR MORE LIKELY TO MOVE “BIT BY BIT”. FAMILIES MAY NOT EVEN MOVE TOGETHER.

As subsistence farmers find it increasingly difficult to make a living in rural areas they may move to nearby cities to find work. Whole towns or villages will not move together: in fact, families may not even move together. Far more likely is that one or two household members will move, find work elsewhere and send money home to their community. This kind of movement happens for a number of reasons. Farming activities may still be able to support some - but not all - household members. Not every member needs to find other employment. Some people moving and sending money back to their household, boosts household income and makes continued existence in the rural location more viable for the remaining people. In the case of sudden disasters like floods and hurricanes people will often move together temporarily. However, after the immediate aftermath of the disaster some people will often decide not to return and will seek work elsewhere, while some will return. So although disasters can create immediate *en masse* movement, in the long term movement away from disaster prone areas will be more gradual.

MYTH

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES WILL TRY TO MOVE TO THE UK AS THEIR OWN COUNTRIES BECOME UNINHABITABLE BECAUSE OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

REALITY

- CLIMATE CHANGE IS FAR MORE LIKELY TO REINFORCE EXISTING TRENDS OF SHORT DISTANCE, INTERNAL MOVEMENT.

Climate change is more likely to reinforce existing trends of short distance, internal movement than create new movements from developing countries to the UK. Migration and displacement linked to climate change is far more likely to happen within developing countries or between developing countries. As we've seen, moving requires resources and moving a short distance is usually easier than moving a long way. After disasters people tend to be displaced short distances and then return. Because of the UK's geographical location, it is unlikely that people who have a climate change dimension to their migration or displacement will come to the UK.

MYTH

- THERE IS A DIRECT CAUSAL LINK BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISPLACEMENT.

REALITY

THERE ARE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE, HOWEVER THEY ARE NOT DIRECTLY CAUSALLY CONNECTED AND OTHER IMPORTANT FACTORS AFFECT PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT.

There is a connection between rising global temperatures and the frequency and severity of some extreme weather events. However it is still impossible to say that any particular event happened solely because of climate change. Rather, it is more accurate to say that climate change may have increased the likelihood of some kinds of natural disasters taking place. There is a clear connection between natural disasters and the displacement of people. However other important factors also shape the kind of movement that happens when a disaster strikes. A country's ability to respond to a disaster may have a bigger impact on how and when people move than the severity of the disaster itself. For example a hurricane hitting a well resourced, developed country with existing defences will result in less displacement than a similar disaster striking a less prepared country.

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CLIMATE OUTREACH AND INFORMATION NETWORK

Climate Outreach and Information Network (COIN) is a charity established in 2004 motivated by a vision of a low carbon future that includes everyone. COIN started and now manages the UK Climate Change and Migration Coalition as part of its Defending Rights stream of work.

www.climateoutreach.org.uk

SUPPORTED BY:

CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION

COIN's work on migration and climate change is funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF). The Foundation is an international charitable foundation with cultural, educational, social and scientific interests.

www.gulbenkain.org.uk

THE FUNDING NETWORK

The Funding Network (TFN), founded in 2002, enables individuals to join together to crowdfund social change projects. TFN is a community of givers who have together raised well over £5 million for over 670 diverse local, national and international projects.

www.thefundingnetwork.org.uk

THE EDITH MAUD ELLIS 1985 CHARITABLE TRUST

Edith Maud Ellis (1878 - 1963) was a Quaker much concerned for peace and justice in South Africa, in Ireland and worldwide. The Edith Ellis Charitable Trust was established by her for general charitable purposes. The Trust aims to give small grants to a broad range of Quaker and other UK registered charities or Non Governmental Organisations.

www.theedithmellischaritabletrust.org

THE MINGULAY PREWELL TRUST