REFUGEES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The forgotten element of sustainability

by Jean Lambert MEP

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Ethiopia – refugees leaving degraded agricultural land.

The Greens/European Free Alliance
in the European Parliament

Contents

NOTE BY JEAN LAMBERT MEP

Current EU and UK Government policies on asylum and immigration emphasise deterrence above all else. We have recently heard statements concentrating on the reinforcement of borders and on using 'the EU's economic and financial clout with those (source countries) which are not co-operating' (letter from Tony Blair, 16th May 2002).

If our governments respond with draconian measures to those who may well have a valid claim to asylum, or who have no hope for the future in the country of their birth, how will they respond to the even larger challenge of the increasing numbers of environmental refugees?

This approach to migration completely misses the point. Lacking wider vision, it fails to acknowledge the factors pushing people to come, and therefore cannot provide a solution for anyone.

We can monitor the deterioration of our planet while divorcing this from the millions of lives it affects. But migrants are not appearing from a void. They are coming from regions experiencing poverty, drought, or severe environmental degradation. Many are environmental refugees.

Perhaps governments will finally be more responsive when global warming really bites and the waters of the North Sea lap around the Sizewell nuclear power stations or across the Fens.

In the meantime, what can these people expect when they have no official recognition or status?

By recognising environmental refugees, you recognise the problem. By recognising the problem, you start on the road to accepting responsibility and implementing solutions.

The best way to deal with forced migration of all kinds is to deal with the causes. Increasingly these are linked to the state of our environment and the way we are degrading it. This report looks at some of the problems and indicates some of the changes we need to make.

The Johannesburg Summit in August 2002 is an important opportunity to step up the pace of positive change. Are we up to the challenge? Millions of lives in every corner of the globe may depend on our success.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The term 'environmental refugee' has been appearing with increasing regularity in the press. *"More now flee environment than warfare"*[1] stated one national headline in 1999. *"Millions 'will die' in global warming"*[2] and many more will be forced to flee due to the disastrous results of climate change in their areas, another had reported the previous year.

Alarming figures lie behind these headlines. An estimated 135 million people live in areas affected by desertification, and some experts predict that up to 100 million of them could be displaced in the next 20 years. Approximately two out of every six people face problems with water supply, such as shortages and polluted sources; over the next 25 years this will rise as the global population increases in size. In China, government assessments have put the number of potential displacements due to climate change at 30 million people.

Some estimates predict that by 2050, the number of environmental refugees will have increased to 150 million[3]. The Red Cross has said that *" ... natural disasters in 1998 created more refugees than wars or other armed conflicts. Declining soil fertility, drought, flooding and deforestation drove over 25 million 'environmental refugees' from their land and into vulnerable squatter communities of crowded cities: 58% of the total refugee population worldwide".* (10 million recognised, 15 million unrecognised).

The majority of these people live in developing countries in the most marginalised and vulnerable sections of society. They are people who cannot afford to cushion themselves from the harmful effects of the environmental degradation around them and so are forced to move. For them, one form of poverty is often simply replaced with another as large numbers migrate to slums and shanty towns on the edges of big cities which have their own environmental and social problems. Sometimes their search for hope involves travelling further afield.

Yet no body, national or international, is taking responsibility for these individuals, families and communities. There is a widespread failure to recognise that many of these problems are a result of trends working at local, national and international levels which aggravate poverty, famine, and environmental degradation and often lead to

"These people are the millions fleeing from the droughts of Northern Africa, the victims of Bhopal and the thousands made homeless by the Mexico earthquake. They are environmental refugees"

Mustafa Tolba, Executive Director of UNEP (1985), on displaced people unaccounted for in official figures.

About a third of the total land area of our planet is in some stage of becoming desert-land, infertile and barren (UN estimates)

At least 15% of the Earth's surface is already degraded by human activities. In 30 years 70% will be suffering severe impacts of man's activities, destroying the natural world with roads, mining and cities.

Germany, Wertheim – people shopping in high street flooded by River Main.

migration. While governments push for an increasingly globalised economy, they refuse to recognise the global effects of this economy and to accept, and deal with, the results. Forced migration is an unsurprising result of the current economic system, where capital can flow freely but more and more barriers are put up against 'illegal immigrants'.

What Western governments also fail to take in to account is that their own countries will not be immune from the phenomenon of environmental refugees. The predicted results of climate change for low-lying areas such as East Anglia, or coastal cities such as New York, Boston and Venice (which is already suffering the consequence of a rise in the sea level) are potentially disastrous. The situation could arise where large groups of people in Europe are forced into finding somewhere else to live.

Environmental degradation is just one aspect of a complex matrix of economic, social, cultural, demographic and political processes leading to migration. However, it is an important one, and increasingly we cannot afford to ignore the links between migration and the environment.

What then is to be done? We must address the many causes of environmental change and degradation. We need to acknowledge the important role they play in causing people to move. In the meantime, the international community needs to recognise, and offer support to, environmental refugees.

CASE STUDY ONE

EUROPE: CLIMATE CHANGE

One effect of climate change in Europe is likely to be forced migration from the worst affected areas.

The speed and extent of climate change effects could be greater than we previously thought, according to scientists. In the UK, for example:

– 1.8 million residential properties are already at risk from flooding (we have seen some of the disastrous effects over the last few years), as are 1.4 million hectares of agricultural land

– Without any adaptation of flood defence mechanisms, there will be an estimated 65% increase in river flooding and a four-fold increase in coastal flooding after 2050.

In the rest of Europe:

– Many of Europe's largest cities (e.g. London, Hamburg, St Petersburg, Thessaloniki, Venice) are built on estuaries and lagoons, and other populated areas such as the Netherlands and the Fens lie below sea level. These locations are exposed to storm surges and are likely to be adversely affected by sea-level rise. As well as more flooding, fresh water sources could be affected and water quality decreased. It is not certain how far defence mechanisms will be possible – Venice is already suffering the consequences of a 30-cm sea-level rise in the last century, and permanent solutions are still being investigated. We could see out-migration as a result of a decreased quality of life in these areas.

2.0 RECOGNITION OF THE PROBLEM

The need to explore the link between environmental change and migration was recognised at an international level during the early 1990s. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees stated in 1992, *"UNHCR is clearly concerned that environmental degradation is increasingly a cause of population movements. This relationship between refugees and the environment has long been overlooked"*.[4] Declarations made during the UN Summit on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, often referred to as the 'Earth Summit', clearly recognised the importance of the natural environment to people's well-being and the links between poverty, security, population, development and environment. Agenda 21, the UN action programme adopted at the end of the Summit, called for further research into the links between sustainable development and demographic developments, including *"the major migration flows that may be expected with increasing climatic events and cumulative environmental change that may destroy people's local livelihoods"*.[5]

Ten years on, the agenda of Rio +10, the World Summit on Sustainable Development 2002, also refers to the relationship between security, violence and the integrity of natural resources, and recognises that degradation of those resources can lead to poverty, despair and violence. However, since 1992, relatively little progress appears to have been made in either developing our understanding of the problem or generating the solutions to it. Why? It is arguable that there is little political will anywhere in the world to accept this as a problem. To recognise it is to acknowledge that fundamental

rather than incremental change is required. Yet, through this denial, the countless numbers of people caught up in the maelstrom of displacement have become the invisible victims of the discussion.

In order to address this problem adequately it is vital that 'environmental migration', 'environmental refugees' and 'environmental migrants' are recognised as a phenomenon in their own right. A conceptual framework is needed to enable thorough and meaningful research into the phenomenon, for the issue to be understood and addressed at local, national and international levels, and for the proper mechanisms to be implemented in order to deal with the causes and consequences of this migration and its devastating effects on people's lives.

2.1 What is environmental migration?

'Environmental migration' is difficult to define. The causal relationships between environment, population movement and other social and economic factors are highly complex. No clear figures exist to demonstrate the numbers or patterns of people who migrate, as currently it is not recognised to be environmental migration. However, five principal causes of environmental migration can already be identified:[6]

Natural disasters

Natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, volcanoes, droughts, famines and tropical storms. The number of people affected by natural disasters increased from 28 million in the 1960s to 64 million in the 1980s.[7] Poorer people in the developing world are the most vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters.

Cumulative changes or 'Slow on-set' changes

This category includes desertification and deforestation, which already affect more than one sixth of the world's population; climate change; erosion; land degradation; siltation; salinity; water availability. These changes are sometimes natural changes which are advanced by human activities, or directly caused by humans. For example, human-induced soil degradation often directly affects agricultural land use in rural areas. Corporate activity causing pollution and environmental degradation falls into this category.

Migration has been described as *"an extremely varied and complex manifestation and component of equally complex economic, social, cultural, demographic, and political processes operating at the local, regional, national and international levels"*

Castles and Miller, 1993

Jacobson (1988) *'environmental refugees have become the single largest class of displaced persons in the world'.*

Less than 1% of the world's water is fresh water and there are increasing problems concerning supply and quality due to factors such as agricultural and industrial pollution.

Thailand – drought

©Kitt Prempool/Still Pictures

CASE STUDY TWO

BANGLADESH AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Sea-level rise and heavy rainfall events are projected with some confidence to increase with climate change; these increases, on top of existing coastal problems, would have major impacts, regardless of whether there is any change in the frequency or intensity of tropical storms. Land loss and population displacement is just one of the predicted impacts of climate change. (IPCC)

The Ganges-Brahmaputra delta is one of the world's most densely populated areas. It is estimated that a 1-metre rise in sea level could displace 15 million people in Bangladesh, and lead to the loss of 30,000 km^2 of land. The combined effects of subsidence and sea-level rise could cause serious drainage and sedimentation problems, in addition to coastal erosion and land loss. With higher sea levels, more areas would be affected by cyclonic surges; inland freshwater lakes, ponds, and aquifers could be affected by saline and brackish-water intrusion. The present limit of tidal influence is expected to move further upstream, and increases in soil salinity, as well as surface-water and groundwater salinity, may cause serious water supply problems for drinking and irrigation over large areas (Alam, 1996). Reduced dry-season freshwater supply from upstream sources may further exacerbate salinity conditions in the coastal area of Bangladesh. These impacts clearly would have immense socio-economic costs.

Development projects

Involuntary resettlement is often caused by expropriation of land for infrastructure projects. For example, it is estimated that in India over 20 million people have been uprooted by development projects in the past three decades.[8] Recent examples include the Three Gorges Dam project in China and the Narmada Dam project in India. Rapid urban development is also a cause of displacement, where agricultural land is converted to urban use. Many people displaced due to these projects receive little or no compensation and a significant number end up in slums on the edges of big cities.

Accidental disruptions or industrial accidents

This category includes industrial accidents such as the Chernobyl disaster or the Union Carbide accident in Bhopal, India, in the 1980s. Between 1986 and 1992, there were more that 75 major chemical accidents killing almost 4,000 people world-wide, injuring 62,000, and displacing more than 2 million.[9] Most displacements in this category are temporary as the disasters do not generally affect the means of livelihood but some have longer-lasting effects.

Conflict and Warfare

War can be both a cause and a result of environmental degradation. Conflict often causes grave environmental degradation, and environmental damage can also be a form of warfare itself, for example the US destruction of massive areas of Vietnamese forests with herbicides during the Vietnam War. Mass migration due to conflicts can also cause serious environmental damage in areas which receive the migrants, putting severe stress on populations, such as in the Sahel area of Africa.

2.2 Policy reponses: protection and prevention

From this evidence alone, there is clearly a need for action. However, there is no simple solution. The conditions for migration and displacement are brought about by the interplay of economic, social and environmental factors. A direct cause and effect relationship between the environment and migration is therefore difficult, if not impossible, to identify in many cases. Additionally, the form migration takes can vary; for example, it may be temporary or permanent, it may remain within national borders or not. Different contexts require different solutions.

A clear categorisation of types of migration, as suggested above, is one useful tool in trying to find appropriate responses to different situations and provide helpful solutions for people displaced for environmental reasons.

This being said, a number of angles may be suggested from which environmental migration can already be addressed.

- Establishing an Environmental Refugee status;
- Protection and alternatives for environmentally displaced people who do not qualify for the status;
- Prevention of environmental problems which remove people's choice about whether or not to leave their homes.

By recognising 'environmental refugees' you recognise the problem. By recognising the problem you start on the road to accepting responsibility and implementing solutions.

2.3 An 'environmental refugee' status

We all know that Afghanistan is still facing drought, failed harvests, landmines that make stretches of land unusable and so on, let alone the aftermath of the most recent war. But the Afghanis at the Sangatte refugee camp in Calais are currently one example of a group categorised as 'economic migrants' undeserving of any help or protection, since they are not refugees as defined under the Geneva Convention (see below).

The current legal definition of 'refugee' does not encompass someone forced to migrate for environmental reasons, as it refers only to those fleeing persecution. The right to asylum is guaranteed by the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees which defines a refugee as someone who *"owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country".*

However, more is needed for today's world. A new agreement is needed on how to deal with those displaced due to some form of environmental factor.

Although the idea of environmental refugees has been around for a while, governments are unsurprisingly hostile to the idea. The Greens did not even manage to get a reference to such refugees into a report in the European Parliament (otherwise very liberal) in 2001 on the Common European Asylum Policy. Of course, no one is suggesting that coming up with a clear definition of an 'environmental refugee' will be an easy task. However, if we do not officially recognise that there is such a person as an 'environmental refugee', no one is going to take responsibility for the people affected. If they are identified as 'refugees', host nations have responsibilities for their well being and they have access to greater rights.

So how could a status for environmental refugees be formulated? It is straightforward enough to identify someone forced from his or her home or region by a natural disaster. Such an event may be seen as requiring humanitarian assistance, which is voluntarily offered. If this is a relatively short-term event (an earthquake in Gujarat, for example) any resulting movement of people might be deemed a temporary phenomenon and dealt with accordingly.

Where return is impossible in the medium to long term, or at all, (perhaps because of volcanic activity, or the salination of fresh-water supplies due to a tsunami), it could be argued that there must be an entitlement to assistance on an individual basis. This could be provided by an international convention and the level of assistance could be dependent upon the internal capacity of the authorities and their infrastructure to provide help: the Sahel could expect more than Sweden. If people need to be resettled outside national boundaries this could be agreed multilaterally or through an agency such as the UNHCR.

The situation could prove more difficult when we are looking at slow on-set changes, as there is no sudden, identifiable ecological shock. However, you have a clear argument for assistance when it is no longer possible to survive on the land because it can no longer sustain you. There are independently verifiable and measurable factors such as lack

Homer-Dixon (1991) argued that environmental degradation is likely to lead to *"waves of environmental refugees that spill across borders with destabilising effects"* on domestic order and international relations.

"The number of people affected by weather related disasters has risen from 147 million a year to 211 million in 10 years."

UN Global Environmental Outlook report 2002

CASE STUDY THREE

INDIA – THE NARMADA DAM PROJECT

Huge numbers of people are involved in an ongoing protest against the continued building of 3,200 dams along the Narmada River in Gujarat, West India. The project will submerge an area greater than the size of New Delhi, including much of the most fertile agricultural land and forest in the state.

For over 15 years the people who stand to have their lives and livelihoods irreparably damaged - as well as the ecology of the river - have protested along with activists, first to prevent the building of the dam, now to block increases in the dam's height. Many villagers are even willing to risk their lives, and have refused to leave their villages even as the waters rise to shoulder level and above. Most famously, Booker Prize-winner Arundhati Roy is heavily involved with the campaign and was recently sentenced by the Supreme Court as a result of her ardent protests ("freedom of speech is subject to reasonable restrictions" commented the judges).

As far as migration is concerned, the government has estimated that 225,000 people will be displaced, for whom resettlement schemes will (in theory) be provided. However, government figures of the numbers to be displaced only include those directly displaced by the reservoir, and not those who will be displaced by the extensive system of canals and of wildlife sanctuaries, the effects on the water supply of villages, on the livelihoods of fishermen and so on. The true figure for displacement is estimated at 500,000, the majority of whom do not have resettlement schemes promised for them.

In any case, resettlement schemes have such a poor record that most of the farmers who left their homes to take up the resettlement package have returned to their villages after seeing what was on offer, in some cases having seen their children suffering illness and starvation. These farmers now refuse to move from their villages, even if it means death by drowning. Plus, many resettlement schemes which exist on paper have been found not to exist in reality.

It appears, furthermore, that despite the devastating environmental and social costs to be paid by the region, the project will have significantly fewer benefits than grossly exaggerated claims have suggested. A World Bank study indicates that the net financial benefit of the project is zero (The World Bank has pulled out of the project). Concerns about the project have also been confirmed by studies carried out by the European Union, the International Rivers Network, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Campaign) and the Government of India.

of rainfall, a fall in soil fertility or the rising level of arsenic in the water (as in parts of Bangladesh). Thus you can demonstrate immediate causal agents of your situation and a coercive factor to the resulting migration. A need for protection could be asserted and your status as an 'environmental refugee' recognised, with the attendant rights.

The Geneva Convention arose from the belief that some situations simply cannot be tolerated and that people are entitled to refuge. Surely this is equally true of those whose environment is no longer capable of sustaining them?

Of course, we would have no need to debate a new status if we were more willing to act on prevention, as discussed later.

2.4 Other environmental migrants: environment, development and migration

There would still be many people whose displacement had at least some environmental element who could not be attributed 'environmental refugee' status. This does not imply that the international community should not address the wider problem of environmental displacement. Such displacement affects millions and will transform the lives of a much greater number of people in the future.

The best term to cover these types of people would be akin to 'environmental migrant' or 'environmentally displaced person', to distinguish them from those with the legal status of environmental refugee. This would encompass all those for whom an environmental factor, whether direct or indirect, is a motive for migration. An economic motive may also be

present in combination with a number of other factors. (In fact, many migrants when questioned quote economic or social reasons for moving, even if an environmental factor can also be identified. For example, the perceived or real economic opportunities in big cities can reduce the incentive to adapt to increasingly difficult agricultural conditions.)

Although much research remains to be done on the links between environment, poverty and other factors, environmental degradation and its effect on populations needs to be integrated to a much greater extent in planning development projects and activities.[10] The intensification of development initiatives is of key importance in helping reduce poverty and providing economic alternatives when livelihoods are threatened due to many interlinking factors including environmental degradation, population growth, lack of education, and globalisation of agriculture. The following are just a few examples:

- More assistance to countries and regions most likely to suffer from deteriorating environment.
- Increased assistance in developing agricultural techniques to adapt to environmental changes and disasters.
- In regions where traditional support networks have existed for periods of temporary migration, authorities could provide assistance in building and strengthening these networks as the problem worsens.
- Development of systems to help foresee when environmentally induced displacements may occur.
- Better urban planning and improvement of city infrastructures to deal with high rural-urban migration levels.
- In areas prone to natural disasters, disaster preparedness measures should be implemented, including public education and awareness programmes and infrastructures for effective resettlement of displaced people as a consequence of weather calamities.

If we really want to deal effectively with the problem, the amount of assistance that richer countries commit to overseas development must increase substantially, particularly as richer countries bear a disproportionate responsibility for many of the causes of these problems as well as a greater ability to pay for the solutions.

Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) recently highlighted this uneven responsibility, arguing that *"The high, unsustainable consumption of the world's affluent consumers can have a negative impact on the environment that is disproportionate to their numbers. In many ways, the consumption patterns of the rich are being exported to and therefore burdening developing countries.*

The US government recently pledged to increase its overseas development assistance to $10 billion between 2004 and 2006. This sum pales into insignificance, however, when compared to the $190 billion going in subsidies to American farmers over the next 10 years in order to increase their products' competitiveness on the international markets. Moreover, currently very few Western countries are even putting the agreed 0.7% of their GDP towards development assistance. This is unacceptable."

"The number of people affected by weather related disasters has risen from 147 million a year to 211 million in 10 years."

UN Global environmental Outlook Report, 2002

"Already 40% of the world is short of fresh water, in 30 years this will rise to 50%. In west Asia this rises to 90%."

UN Global Environmental Outlook report 2002

"By 2025 nearly one-third of the projected world population (about 2.7 billion people) will live in regions facing severe water scarcity."

international Water Management Institute

CASE STUDY FOUR

NIGERIA – THE OGONI AND SHELL OIL

Oil is an extremely important part of Nigeria's economy, its sale on the global market accounting for about 80% of the country's foreign exchange earnings. Foreign companies have dominated oil exploration, drilling and shipping in Nigeria; Shell Oil controls over 50% of the domestic oil market. Shell operates many of its oil facilities in the Delta area of the country, where the Ogoni tribe is one of the main ethnic groups.

The Ogoni have complained for many years that their local environment has been devastated by Shell's oil production and that the region is no longer economically viable for local farmers and producers. While the oil revenue has benefited government elites and foreign companies, indigenous communities have actually been further impoverished due to environmental degradation, becoming more vulnerable to food shortages, health hazards, loss of land, pollution, unemployment and forced migration. Damage includes loss of fertile soil, pollution of air and drinking water, degradation of farmland and damage to aquatic ecosystems; pollution is caused by gas flaring, above ground pipeline leakage, oil waste dumping and oil spills. Soot from gas flaring affects soil fertility.

Local peoples have been displaced both through forced displacement by companies appropriating their homelands, and because of loss of livelihood due to environmental degradation. Oil exploitation in Nigeria has led to rural depopulation, disintegration of the peasantry, and urban marginalisation (rural populations moving to live in slums on the edges of cities), among other distortions of the social and economic fabric of local societies. The conflict has also led to political refugees.

The Nigerian Government has failed to enforce environmental protection against oil damage by Shell and other companies, and has violently repressed protests – including the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni activists in 1995. Western governments and companies have supported a series of oppressive and corrupt governments, keen to benefit from oil revenues. The Ogoni have been refused compensation for the environmental damage and its effects, and the conflict with the government and oil companies is ongoing.

Nigeria, Ogoniland – burning oil from leaking pipeline

3.0 ADDRESSING THE CAUSES: Economic Globalisation, Environment and Refugees

The Greens have always stressed the importance of examining policies in all areas to see what effects they have on the creation of the push-factors of migration where political refugees are concerned. The same goes for environmental refugees. Many environmental problems are a direct result of policies. The link is clearest with the third causal category defined above, development projects. However, government and corporate policies are also a cause of cumulative or 'slow effect' environmental changes. In Brazil, for example, much deforestation is the direct result of government policy concerning land use and the displacement of people. In the case of the Ogoni people in Nigeria, their environment has been seriously and irreparably damaged by an unholy alliance of their own government and the oil company Shell. And, of course, there is climate change.

Policy-making in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world must start to be considered in a holistic way, taking into account its direct and indirect effects on situations leading to population displacement. Again, this is an extremely complex area where a whole range of factors interrelate and produce many different outcomes, one of which is environmental migration. However, here follow some of the areas in which policies need to be rethought in terms of their broader effects.

3.1 Global trade

There is a nascent recognition that links between global trade and investment activities and their

environmental and social effects need to be recognised officially. Greens have been pushing for this for a long time. Even the G8 Environment Ministers recognised in 1999 that *"international financial and economic regimes including the structural adjustment policies of international financial institutions should take greater account of the ecological and social dimensions."*[11] However, there is no doubt that the current WTO rules reign supreme on the international stage. No international environmental or labour agreement has the enforcement mechanisms of the WTO. This has to change.

There is growing international interest in the idea of a WEO (World Environment Organisation) which would give added weight to multilateral environmental agreements. As Belgian Green Paul Lannoye said in the European Parliament, on the adoption of his report on Global Partnership in preparation for the Johannesburg Summit, *"the [Earth] Summit must focus on producing a global UN management structure which counter-balances the power of the World Trade Organisation with plans and priorities which are pro-people, pro-poor and pro-planet and which establishes that environmental protection measures must not be subordinated to WTO rules. The workings of the WTO must be made compatible with multilateral environment agreements".*

Fair trade and a fair income are also an integral part of environmental protection. Monoculture and the demand for increased yields in the face of dropping commodity prices have led to serious deterioration in both soil and water quality in many parts of the world as people struggle to earn a living wage. Large-scale agriculture for export has pushed many people into marginal areas as countries strive to earn foreign currency to repay crippling debts. The structural adjustments demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are creating environmental refugees and economic migrants that the world's rich countries simply do not want to acknowledge or assist.

Hasankeyf, Turkey – this historical city will be submerged if the Ilisu dam is built.

3.2 Development projects

Many development projects are partnerships between domestic and external credit agencies and international institutions such as the World Bank. In this new century, the principle of sustainable development must lie at the very heart of every multi-partner initiative. Qualitative risk impact assessment and environmental impact analysis must occur before project plans even reach the desk of export credit agencies or other lending agencies. If this is not the case, long term structural damage and investment in non-sustainable initiatives will continue to be a cause of displacement.

In responding to pressure from a national campaign, a major UK company recently pulled out of a

"About 60% of the world's 227 biggest rivers are disrupted by dams and other engineering works."

UN Global Environmental Outlook Report, 2002

Klaus Toepfer, director of the UN Environment Programme, on the Global Environmental Outlook Report, 2002 ***"Without the environment there can never be the kind of development needed to secure a fair deal for this or future generations. It would be disastrous to ignore the picture painted."***

project constructing the Ilisu hydro-electric dam in the Kurdish area of Turkey, the building of which would have had devastating effects on the local environment and society (including the displacement of thousands of people). Yet public pressure should not have to be the scrutiniser of how public funds are offered to development projects. There has to be an underlying ethical and environmentally sensitive framework that fulfils this function. In the UK, the Export Credit Guarantee Department introduced in 2001 a set of guiding Business Principles against which to measure the applicability of project bids. In May 2002, the government announced a review of the principles in partnership with their stakeholders. It is already clear that there is a reluctance to fundamentally overhaul the current supporting political attitude. There is as yet no binding international agreement on the criteria for such export support, yet these funds far outweigh those provided by the World Bank to projects around the world.

There is also an overwhelming amount of evidence about the damage caused by such large-scale, prestige projects such as dams or Spain's Plano Hydrologico (Hydrological Plan), which is designed to divert the country's largest river to the dry south. Running roads through the Amazon jungle areas has caused enormous environmental damage, displacing indigenous peoples in the rush to open up logging opportunities.

3.3 Addressing climate change

Although the study of climate change is not and cannot be an exact science, scientists almost unanimously agree that climate change is a reality, and

India, Mumbai – slum next to open sewer.

CASE STUDY FIVE

LATIN AMERICA – MIGRATION TO THE CITIES

Latin America is just one region where we can see the links between development, the environment and forced migration. Many migrants in Latin America are what can be called 'environmentally displaced people', where the environment is one factor which has led them to move.

Poverty has increased dramatically since the 1970s in Latin America. One significant trend is the rising 'urbanisation of poverty' as people migrate to the cities. Out of 37 million new poor created between 1986 and 1998, 31 million were urban. Migration to the cities occurs for a variety of reasons, one of which is rural poverty, due to a mixture of socio-economic and climatic reasons (e.g. drought, landslides).

The World Bank has stated that *"Migration is essential for rural poverty alleviation - on average, rural areas will loose 7% of their population to migration every year over the next 25 years."* But urban poverty is not pretty either, and these millions of migrants must be given a chance to build a new life. Up to 25% of urban dwellers in Latin America live in slums (90 million people). Many slum-dwellers are in very precarious situations, due to insecurity of tenure, and the poor quality of land which is illegally settled (flood plains or landslide zones; proximity to polluting industries).

Migration to cities creates enormous pressure on already stretched urban infrastructures – in most cities piped drinking and sewage services are not available to everyone. The effects of climate change on cities are often magnified due to over-burdened urban areas. Many cities in Latin America have begun suffer from the impacts of sea-level rise, adverse weather and extreme climate conditions, and their indirect effects on water supply, sanitation, energy supply and so on. In shantytowns established in the drainage valleys of rivers and streams, flooding is already becoming more frequent as a result of climatic variability and might be exacerbated by global warming.

that humanity's contribution to its acceleration is indisputable. Though they disagree over the finer details of what we can expect to encounter over the next century, there is no doubt that much of it is bad: threats to food production due to changes in climate and weather trends; water availability (water quantity and distribution depend to a large extent on rainfall and evaporation, which are both affected by a changing climate); desertification; sea level rises; human health problems; increased frequency of extreme weather events such as El Niño and summer droughts; mass population displacements and ensuing social conflict. Climate change has the potential to destroy eco-systems and render entire countries uninhabitable if it is not addressed now, and it is already making itself felt.

In 1990, the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) noted that the greatest effect of climate change may be on human migration as millions of people are displaced due to shoreline erosion, coastal flooding and agricultural disruption.

Our governments have to take this seriously. Europe and the US will not be exempt from the effects of the changes, let alone the many far more vulnerable populations of the world. Yet the US chief climate negotiator recently announced that *"We are not going to be part of the Kyoto protocol for the foreseeable future"*, saying that an independent US initiative to cut emissions of greenhouse gases would not be assessed until 2012. This position betrays a complete lack of awareness of the real effects that climate change is having and will have in the USA, as well as abroad. The USA and the EU each produce over 20% of the world's climate change gases, but there is no sign of either being prepared to take any of the millions of Bangladeshis who will

CASE STUDY SIX
TUVALU

This independent nation of nine Pacific atolls is to be one of the first victims of first-world affluence. It is predicted that within a century, rising sea levels will inundate these low-lying atolls and Tuvalu will cease to exist. Coastal erosion is already eating into shorelines, and seawater has seeped into the groundwater, killing coconut trees and flooding taro pits. Sea walls may slow the erosion, but as ocean levels continue to rise, the entire population of Tuvalu – 11,000 – may eventually have to evacuate.

The situation is so grave that last year the Tuvalu government took concrete action in preparation for the predicted submergence of the nation. It appealed to Australia and New Zealand to take in its many environmental refugees-to be, and while the response from Australia was less than welcoming, New Zealand promised to offer a new home to at least some of the islanders. Other options include buying land in neighbouring nations.

Tuvalu (along with the Kiribati and the Maldives) recently announced that it was preparing to take formal legal action against the biggest polluting countries that are the main culprits of Tuvalu's predicament. The country has already hired law firms in Australia and the US to take its case to the International Court of Justice, and legal experts in Australia have warned its government that it must take the challenge seriously. Australia is a relatively easy target for such legal action as it accepts the International Court of Justice's jurisdiction without reservation.

Thirteen of the world's 20 current 'megacities' are at sea level; just a one-metre sea level rise would inundate low-lying areas and affect many millions of people. London is one of these sea-level cities, as is New York.

The UN Environment Programme has concluded that *"the modern industrial economies of North America, Europe and parts of East Asia consume immense quantities of energy and raw materials, and produce high volumes of wastes and polluting emissions—-the continued poverty of the majority of the planet's inhabitants and excessive consumption by the minority are the two major causes of environmental degradation. The present course is unsustainable and postponing action is no longer an option".*

be displaced by rising sea levels, or even to provide adequate aid.

Despite its efforts during the Kyoto summit, Europe is underestimating the gravity of climate change, though European leaders are at least recognising the problem. Michael Meacher, the UK's Environment Minister, recently commented that *"I am so disappointed that ... the US refused to reconsider coming back into the climate talks for 10 years. The need for action is urgent".* Kyoto was an important step forward and Europe must be congratulated for committing itself to a long-term carbon dioxide reduction strategy, especially given the USA's obstructive attitude and eventual decision not to participate. However, we must remember that the final deal means that the cuts in greenhouse gases by 37 of the world's richest countries will be only 1%-3%, compared with the 60%-80% scientists are recommending to stabilise the climate. With this in mind, and if we take into account the range of EU and national policies in Europe (transport, economic, and so on), the issue is still being treated with remarkable nonchalance.

There are hopeful developments, such as the association of greenhouse gas creation with financial risk. The UK, for example, has introduced a climate change levy and emissions trading scheme that together attribute a financial cost to every tonne of greenhouse gas that is emitted into the atmosphere. The European Union is developing a similar scheme. There is an expectation that this 'commoditisation' of emissions will be a vital step to transferring the responsibility for climate change onto the shoulders of business, who are often the big polluters and are not subject to one country's environmental regulation. Schemes such as this are just the beginning, however, and need to be developed far more rapidly and more widely than is currently the case.

More must be done, such as introducing measures to lighten the blow of the devastating impacts of climate change, which will continue to fall disproportionately on those countries which have the least resources with which to offset them.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Environmental refugees exist. Even if we cannot yet provide the fine statistical details regarding the number of such refugees and the precise factors which cause them to move, it is clear that there is a significant and growing problem.

The question now is how to get governments, corporations and other actors to take these environmental problems seriously. Really seriously.

How do we break the obsession with profit above all else, supported by a blind belief that market-led economics is the answer to all problems? How do we show that policies on one side of the world have a real effect on the lives of people on the other, and that richer countries and corporations bear a disproportionate responsibility for many of the world's environmental and social problems? And having done this, how can we make those who are in a position to do something about it, do it?

We cannot afford to ignore the slippery to slope to poverty and environmental destruction that many regions are already descending. A fundamental shift in attitudes towards economic paradigms, to the way migration is understood, and to the way we comprehend the interdependence of human beings with their natural environment and with each other will be required.

Some leaders will respond to world problems for genuine moral and humanitarian reasons. Others, however, will only act when they see that their own well-being could be jeopardised - in this case due to the perceived threat of increasing immigration and the uncertainties of climate change. By setting out the issue in terms which illustrate that a range of effects will be felt in their own back yards, we just may begin to get somewhere.

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REFUGEES
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