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15 OBSERVATIONS ON DISASTER DISPLACEMENT AS LOSS AND DAMAGE

REFLECTING ON COMPREHENSIVE AND SYSTEMATIC DATA COLLECTION ABOUT WHY, WHERE, WHEN AND HOW PEOPLE MOVE IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

THE CONTEXT



The impacts of the climate crisis are already being felt by vulnerable people, communities and societies and will only grow more acute and widespread as we are confronted with environmental shocks and stresses that exceed our efforts to adapt, reduce risk and build resilience. Minimizing and addressing the losses and damages that will be incurred due to climate change is an urgent, global concern and is becoming a priority for relevant actors and policy dialogues.

In countries all over the world, these impacts also manifest through the forced movements of populations. Displacement is a recurring impact of both sudden onset hazards and slow-onset environmental degradation, and will only become more significant as disaster risk grows, fueled by climate change and unsustainable development. At the same time, displacement also multiplies and extends losses and damages, through a diversity of social and environmental cascading impacts that increase and reproduce risk for vulnerable people and communities. Understanding the occurrence and impacts of disaster displacement is an essential component of efforts to assess, avert, minimize and address loss and damage in the context of climate change.

The centrality of data efforts to the work on displacement and climate change has been clearly set out by the Task Force on Displacement, established through the Paris Agreement under the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage. Enhanced collection and analysis of displacement data are also identified as priorities through other relevant global policy instruments on disasters, climate change and human mobility, including the report of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, and the Global Compacts on Migration and for Refugees.

Despite the relevance of this topic, and the work that has already been carried out by national and international actors, there remain gaps in our understanding of, and knowledge on, displacement in the context of the adverse effects of climate change. Some need to be addressed through improved coverage of disaster displacement and its impacts across time and space. Others relate to the lack of clarity, shared definitions, and universally-recognized approaches that characterize theoretical discussions and operational efforts in both the loss and damage and the human mobility domains. This document aims to provide some observations on some of these challenges, and some recommendations on how to address them.

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1
Displacement due to the impacts of climate change is already happening, with significant consequences on communities and people's well-being.

2
Discussions on displacement under the Loss and Damage workstream of the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) have mirrored the focus on interventions to 'avert, minimize and address'. Each objective has different relevance for adaptation, risk reduction, preparedness and humanitarian concerns and approaches – and needs to be supported by corresponding data efforts.

3
There is a need for better clarity and rigorous use of terminology. Different actors have different understandings of loss and damage concepts, and the lack of internationally recognized terminology on human mobility further constrains the outcomes of discussions and understanding.

- ☉ For instance, “averting loss and damage” might be used to advocate for interventions to mitigate climate change and reduce emissions, while “minimize loss and damage” might be associated with DRR and CCA adaptation work. “Averting displacement”, on the other hand, is usually considered the outcome of successful DRR, while “minimizing displacement” relates to disaster preparedness efforts.
- ☉ The use of human mobility terminology is also quite blurred within climate change discourses. Migration, displacement and human mobility are often used fluidly and interchangeably.
- ☉ Data collection efforts need to build upon - and can contribute to - clearer definitions that better inform climate action.

4
There is a need to discuss where displacement is conceptually situated in the loss and damage discussions.

- ☉ While there is no universally accepted definition of loss and damage, some key concepts have been discussed at large. “Damage” is often used to refer to something that can be recovered (house, crop, roads) and repaired with funding and compensation. “Loss” is often used to refer to something that is irrevocably gone (human life, biodiversity, or ecosystem loss) and cannot be repaired.
- ☉ Displacement may simultaneously be: 1) a signal and a (non-economic) parameter of loss and damage incurred by people and communities, 2) a damage or a loss in itself, 3) a determinant of loss and damage, i.e. a process through which the loss and damage people suffer is produced or magnified.

5
Displacement should be approached as a process that takes place in the context of climate impacts, but also produces diverse, complex repercussions for different people across time and space. This makes data and operational work on displacement highly relevant, but also quite sensitive, as it is situated within difficult conversations on how to “address” loss and damage incurred by people, communities and countries.

6
Losses and damages that may be suffered as a result of displacement, and which should be the object of relevant data collection efforts, may include:

- Trauma and psychological impacts;
- Direct economic costs;
- Access to food and water;
- Loss of income and livelihoods;
- Loss of future outlooks and opportunities;
- Reduced health and access to healthcare;
- Reduced safety of women and girls;
- Reduced access to education;
- Reduced access to political representation;
- Disruption of community;
- Loss of sense of place/identity.



7
All forms of loss and damage are not homogeneous, and this diversity needs to be reflected in data approaches adopted to assess them. Non-economic losses may be the most significant impacts associated with displacement, but are also the most difficult to quantify.

- ☉ Assessment - and, if possible, quantification - of all losses and damages due to displacement is key to making them relevant for ongoing policy discussions, future mechanisms for financial and technical support, and planning of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery operations.

8
The current assessment of losses and damages associated with displacement is limited. Data on the occurrence of disaster displacement is rarely collected in a systematic manner, and information on losses and damages people and communities incur as a consequence of displacement is largely limited to specific case studies.

- ☉ Post-Disaster Needs Assessments (PDNA), for instance, do not account for all consequences of displacement, and, in particular, do not look at long-term and indirect/cascading impacts.
- ☉ Loss and damage figures are particularly scarce for slow-onset scenarios, where there is no crisis or declared emergency and limited follow-up assessment or action.

9
Data on potential future patterns, occurrences and impacts of displacement need to be gathered/produced and used more systematically. This is likely to increase already bleak figures on impacts that vulnerable countries and communities are suffering due to weather and climate-related hazards.

- ☉ Our understanding of potential future population movements should be informed by projections and simulations based on models that are calibrated with field evidence, bringing together bottom-up and top-down approaches. Keeping research on human mobility grounded on real-world evidence and complexities is key to its accuracy and usefulness.

10
Future patterns of displacement will be specifically related to shifting habitability of areas/ecosystems, in particular, due to heat extremes, sea-level rise and droughts. Other ongoing processes, such as ocean acidification, are not irrelevant to human mobility dynamics but might have a lower overall incidence on human mobility patterns.

- ☉ These phenomena threaten the very viability of development, livelihoods, and human survival in affected areas. Their convergence concentrates risk in specific regions, including in South Asia and in Sub-Saharan Africa, and in countries with specific environmental features, such as Small Island States.
- ☉ These high-risk regions and countries should be the focus of relevant research, action and support. They will face different hazards and impacts, and will require different data approaches and operational responses.

11

Additional risks (and losses and damages) may be linked with the consequences of movements: people moving end up in destinations that are at even higher risk to future hazards. Data on mobility patterns and trends need to be leveraged to reduce these risks through mobility-informed, anticipatory planning.

12

Data professionals working on future mobility patterns and scenarios should not fall into the trap of determinism.

- ☉ Incurred loss and damage, and their mobility implications, depend on our actions and choices. They are also mediated by assets, resources and perceptions: different people will suffer different impacts, while different people suffering similar impacts will take different mobility decisions. Finally, similar mobility decisions will not necessarily result in similar well-being and risk outcomes.

13

As we assess and anticipate future mobility trends, we need to keep in mind that “averting” displacement does not only mean “avoiding movements from areas at risk or affected.” It also means improving people’s ability to move: i.e. expanding the options they have available to move in a safer, more dignified manner.

- ☉ Trying to avoid or prevent movements altogether can also translate into limitations to people’s abilities and human rights, further worsening their condition/situation. Promoting safe, regular, orderly migration pathways & other measures that enhance their freedom and self-determination will be essential to reducing the impacts they suffer.

14

The level of agency of mobility decisions has key implications on their positive/negative outcomes down the line: less forced movements generally lead to less negative (and more positive) consequences in terms of loss and damage.

- ☉ Policy and research on human mobility should understand mobility decisions as always taking place along a continuum of more forced to more voluntary choices.
- ☉ Where people are situated along this continuum is a subjective determination, which is however influenced by objective factors and constraints. Listening to those affected is key to understanding the loss of agency and opportunities that underpin forced movements.

15

Making research results usable for policy requires more follow-up from scientists/researchers and policy-makers.

- ☉ Limitations to using available information have more to do with political willingness and technical capacity than availability of knowledge.
- ☉ Loss and damage and human mobility are sensitive topics. The slow pace of negotiations and discussions may be frustrating, but progress is happening, and it can be supported and accelerated through appropriate data work.
- ☉ Research also needs to focus on the policy processes where loss and damage and human mobility are being discussed: these structures contribute to the governance of climate change and displacement, and should be analyzed (and influenced) in order to improve their ability to support work to avert, minimize and address climate impacts.
- ☉ While current and future climate impacts and mobility patterns can (and should) be better understood, calls for “more data” to be gathered and produced need to be supported by critical analyses of how data can and will be used: in support of what research efforts, policies and actions, and with what outcomes for affected and vulnerable people.

This document is the outcome of an expert panel discussion on “Disaster Displacement as Loss and Damage: Clarifying Concepts, Understanding Impacts”, organized by the Data and Knowledge Working Group (DKWG) of the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) as part of the Triple-D (Data, Disasters, Displacement) Webinar Series. The full recording of the webinar is available at: <https://youtu.be/5F5ZeRDpNj4>