Environmentally-induced Population Displacements: Conclusions from PERN’s Online Seminar

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Outline

• About PERN
• About the online seminar
• Suggested discussion topics
• Expert opinions
• Topics discusses during the seminar
• Conclusions: some proposals for moving forward
About the Population and Environment Research Network

- Open and free Internet-based network for all those interested in population environment research.

- Mission: to facilitate scientific analysis and dialogue about population environment relationships.

- Launched in 2001 by the IUSSP, co-sponsored by the (IHDP) on Global Environmental Change.

- In-kind support from the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) at Columbia University, which hosts the website.

- Activities:
  - (a) Collects and disseminates ongoing, new, and classic work in the population-environment field in an online eLibrary;
  - (b) Facilitates global dialogue between scientists by holding regular cyberseminars on selected topics, and by promoting and archiving (on the Internet) real-time workshops and conference sessions;
  - (c) Collects syllabi on population-environment courses from around the world and makes them easily available;
  - (d) Provides member services such as a regular What's New with upcoming conferences, workshops, job and grant opportunities, and a keyword-driven searchable member database.

http://www.populationenvironmentresearch.org
About PERN (cont.)

- Evolution of PERN membership
- Number of unique visits to the website.
About the seminar

• Objective: to advance discussion on environmentally-induced displacements by highlighting the experiences, views and concerns of the members of the population-environment research community in different countries.

• Co-sponsored by the Environmental Change and Security Program of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

• Run from 18 August to 1 September, 2008.

• Average number of participants: 513, postings: 56

• Background paper: a concise review of relevant topics, aiming to serve as “navigation” tool and to build common ground to foster brainstorming and discussion
  – Topics included: (a) definitions (who and what are we talking about?); (b) some key measurement issues; (c) mechanisms linking environmental change and population mobility; (d) methods for disentangling environment-migration interactions; (e) security concerns and policy issues in the context of global climate change; and (f) regional variation (what does the evidence show from regional studies regarding the relative weight of environmental versus other factors in displacing populations?)
Expert Opinions

• Theory:
  – Complexity of addressing the influence of environmental factors on migration behavior
  – Complex and multidirectional relationships between internal and international migration, environment and development
  – Limitations of traditional theories (particularly the livelihoods approach)

• Data and methods:
  – Potential of new directions in data collection and methodology
  – Methodological issues involved in the study of environmental change and population mobility in rural areas of developing countries: increasing sophistication (multi-scale, multi-level).

• Topics:
  – Migration and environment in urban areas, including health, slums, and the role of non-economic factors
  – The need for a gendered approach to environment-migration issues
  – The implications of growing levels of population movement between countries for the environment and development
Discussion points during the seminar

• Multiplicity and complexity of conceptual frameworks due to the multilayered and multifaceted character of environmentally driven displacements, including their contextual and institutional factors
  – Usefulness and limitations of migration theory frameworks

• Discussion about the relative merits of different research and data collection methods (e.g. ethnographic techniques, survey-based research, qualitative approaches, longitudinal and multilevel techniques, GIS environments) to address and assess environmentally driven migration.
  – Use of census data?
Discussion points during the seminar (cont.)

• Land degradation as stressor
  – Taking advantage of the richness of research on drylands

• Environment, migration and development
  – Poverty/impoverishment as factor
  – North-south relations

• Increasing availability of case studies results
  – SIDS, Bangladesh, drylands and desertification.
  – ECHO-FOR project applying common approaches and methodologies for comparability of results.
Discussion points during the seminar (cont.)

- Policy priorities and social sciences research in relation to the determination of future magnitudes for climate-induced migration
  
  - Apparent mismatch between climatology and social-sciences in terms of uncertainty?
  
  - Different scales of intervention, observation and analysis matter as uncertainty increased at higher resolutions

- Understanding, measuring, modeling
Conclusions: proposals for moving forward

• Improving the usefulness of census data by adding specific questions about motivations, including environment
  – Timely issue → 2010 round of population censuses

• Multiple/mixed methods approach for data collection and analysis: ethnographic, quantitative, GIS

• Focus on the contextual factors (including level and style of development) that could be affected by climate change events.
Conclusions: proposals for moving forward (cont.)

- Understanding how humans respond to climate-based uncertainty and disasters (including migration) before talking about ways to avoid exposure to or to mitigate the effects of catastrophic events.

- Thinking about scenarios of adaptive capacity and its multiple factors focusing on scenarios of potential flows of people considering movers and stayers more than in scenarios of stocks.

- Enhancing communication with policy makers.

- Enhancing true interdisciplinary research.
Thank you