Environmental migration, climate change and the post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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There has always been a fundamental interdependency between migration and the environment, but the reality of climate change adds new complexity to this nexus - while making the need to address it all the more urgent within the framework of Africa/EU relations. The Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)\(^1\) shows how serious the need for action is. Sea levels are rising; storms and droughts are becoming more frequent. Arctic ice and glaciers are melting. The world faces a loss of biodiversity. With changing rainfall patterns, water, already a scarce resource in many African states will become even scarcer. Extreme weather events like droughts, storms, and heavy rainfall will increase\(^2\). Many African states, who are contributing least to climate change, are affected the most with the effects of environmental migration as a direct cause of climate change.

Environmental factors have long had an impact on global migration flows, as people have historically left places with harsh or deteriorating conditions, however, the scale of such flows, both internally between African states and cross-continent into the EU, is expected to rise as a result of accelerated climate change\(^4\). At the same time environmental migration also serves as an adaptation strategy for those who are affected by the impacts of climate change. Yet mobility often remains a luxury, unavailable for those who cannot afford to migrate. Hence the most vulnerable in African states are the ones often stuck in rural places heavily impacted by climate change, unable to seek protection and to start a new life elsewhere. Even though a majority of environmental migrants are expected to end up in urban areas and bigger cities within African states, migration caused by environmental change will both directly and indirectly impact Africa/EU security and development relations\(^5\). Hence the EU should strive to enhance policy coherence by building more synergies between migration and climate change policies for adaptation planning and funding to recognise the role of migration in building the capacity to cope with climate change. It should thus be a major task of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to integrate consistent policies on migration. The SDGs are scheduled to be agreed in September 2015, a few months ahead of the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP21) in Paris, France. It is of great importance that linkages between the SDGs and governments’ in Europe official

\(^5\) Environmental migration in a warmer world: http://www.stockholmresilience.org/
climate change commitments will result in mutually beneficial outcomes for both negotiations to secure an inclusive global deal on climate change7.

Environmental migration is a transnational issue that require structured dialogue with African states at EU level. The EU has already taken several important steps by spending millions of euros on food security, climate change adaptation programmes, and humanitarian crises8. Despite this, there are still major gaps in the EU development policy, for example in the protection system for people displaced by sudden as well as slow onset disasters. Rethinking that mainstreaming climate change adaptation in EU policies is one of the main pillars of EU adaptation policy action since 2009, and continues to be a priority within the EU Adaptation Strategy there are good conditions for this step. The EU has all the potential to be a global leader in international climate diplomacy and in close partnership with the African Union advocate for a robust global emissions regime in Paris in 2015. In order for the EU to meet its policy coherence for development obligation9 and to enhance its leading role in bringing environmental concerns to the forefront of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, the EU needs to further shoulder the responsibility it shares with other polluting states to slash emissions considerably and to support environmental migrants by increasing its investment in African developing countries through the Green Climate Fund (GCF). The GCF is currently the main vehicle for the developed countries’ promise of $100 billion annually from 2020 in climate finance11. Conditions are in place since the nexus between migration and development is one of the four priority areas of the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM)12, which provides the overarching framework for the EU external migration policy but more is still needed in order for the EU/Africa dialogue to result in concrete action and accurate budget allocation in this matter not least for a better coordination between Member States in the EU13.

Political parties and foundations, within African states, have witnessed more closely, over the last decade the dramatic impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. In Rwanda, during the years of 1999, 2000 and 2001, residents of Bugesera Region, south of Kigali, faced a serious draught challenge as a natural lake, (Lake Cyohoha North), dried up as a consequence of drought and mass deforestation. Due to lack of food, populations started migrating to other areas. Some people started begging for food in the capital Kigali. An evaluation carried out by Kigali rural authorities at the time showed that about 53,000 families were affected by the famine and were in dire need of food aid. About 7,000 children

8 Climate change: http://www.concordeurope.org/coherent-policies/climate-change
9 COST Action IS1101 on Climate Change and Migration: Mid-term Strategic Vision: http://www.climatemigration.eu/
dropped out of school because their families couldn’t afford the fees anymore. This sad scenario is now repeating itself once again. In June 2014, people in Bugesera raised serious concerns about the likelihood of being affected by famine following a prolonged drought season with most of their crops drying up. As a result, it was reported that they started once again to migrate to the Southern Province. This recent trend calls for more efforts to reduce harming effects to the climate change and to explore the root causes for environmental migration, especially since this area, was once the food basket of Rwanda. Kenya often suffers from serious droughts but in 2000, it experienced its worst drought in 37 years. By December last year four million people were in need of food aid, which led the Government to launch an urgent food appeal to feed the Kenyans affected by famine. As a result of these extreme conditions, pastoralists and other subsistence farmers in the arid and semi-arid regions of the country started to migrate to other areas either in search of grass for cattle or in search of food, shelter and water. Thus, the entire East African region faced its worst famine in nearly 60 years in 2000. Affected countries were Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti and some parts of Uganda. These cases serve to indicate how serious the need for action is within the framework of EU/Africa relations to address and prioritize the important aspects of environmental migration.

Policy recommendations:

- The EU Commission and member states should live up to their commitments regarding policy coherence for development in the field of climate change and migration by promoting structured policy dialogue also on working level on nexus sustainable development – migration;
- EU should secure an inclusive global deal on climate change investment through the SDGs by including migration governance as 1 stand-alone goal within SDGs;
- EU and member states’ development cooperation with African countries should strengthen effective adaption strategies by supporting a more flexible framework for human mobility as adaptive response to environmental change;
- African and European governments should put the necessary effort into ensuring investment in the Green Climate Fund in order to specifically financially support African developing countries in their efforts;
- A revised Partnership should provide a mechanism for civil society that allows access to information and provides space for an effective monitoring;
- Development planning carried out by local authorities’ warrants greater attention in discussions on environmental migration and development.

15 The East African: http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/Rwanda/News/Save-us-from-ravaging-drought--Bugesera-residents-tell-govt--/1433218/2340030/-/kijy7wz/-/index.html
17 The East African: http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/Spreading+hunger+tests+open+borders+in+East+Africa/-/2558/1206690/-/item/0/-/l32b64/-/index.html