

Submission to the Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change's report on actions to address climate change, particularly in the context of loss and damage

June 23, 2022

Introduction

As an organization rooted in faith, [Church World Service \(CWS\)](#) believes that all people deserve to lead lives of dignity, wherever we find ourselves. In the context of climate change, we live out our mission by increasing access to information, skills, technology, and financial resources by climate-impacted families and communities to adapt to slow-onset changes, manage disaster risks, and expand safe options for human mobility.

In 2021, a CWS study documented perceptions of climate change, in-place adaptation, and migration in five countries – Cambodia, Georgia, Haiti, Indonesia, and Kenya – where we support local climate adaptation. We [issued a report from the research](#) in August 2021.¹ This submission highlights findings from our study in relation to questions posed by the Special Rapporteur for their forthcoming report on actions to address climate change in the context of loss and damage.

Loss and damage in climate-vulnerable communities

In rural communities where CWS works, climate change is very much felt in people's lives. Climate risks are already negatively impacting rural production, household income and debt burdens, health conditions, and access to education. During our research in 2021, these were expressed in terms of economic and non-economic losses and damages, in the context of both sudden-onset events and slow-onset changes. Examples in this note are illustrative of loss and damage being experienced in locations where local adaptation remains technically possible, but where external support is increasingly needed for vulnerable households to adapt in-place and live safely and with dignity.

Economic loss and damage

In Cambodia's Battambang province, floods and typhoons have caused loss of livestock and destruction of rice fields in CWS partner communities. Drought and increasingly unpredictable rainfall are damaging rice yields, contributing to **lost agricultural income**, and increasing **household debt burden**. Adaptation is beyond the ability of the most economically vulnerable families, who lack resources to improve water access and report that they can only "*rely on nature*." Inadequate physical infrastructure and early warning systems, exacerbate the risks of sudden-onset events and compound losses from slow-onset changes.

¹ Research included 211 one-on-one interviews and 26 focus group discussions in 30 communities; interviews with 43 key informants (e.g., local government officials); and 12 community report-back workshops to share interpretations of the data and discuss potential recommendations. CWS lead research activities Cambodia, Haiti, Indonesia, and Kenya, in coordination with community partners. Research in Georgia was led by Rural Communities Development Agency (RCDA).

Similarly, in the northwest of Haiti, climate change is making the land drier and unproductive, contributing to crop failure and food shortages in partner communities. These changes also create **livestock losses**, whose growth and breeding are hampered by the lack of food and water. In coastal areas, inadequate seasonal rainfall means fewer fish to catch.

Climate change is increasing the risk of landslides, mudflows, floods, and snow avalanches in the mountainous regions of Georgia. These sudden-onset events have **destroyed houses, property, and roads** in partner communities. In some locations, drought is a growing concern, and is decreasing agricultural yields as land becomes less arable.

In Kenya's Kitui county, climate risks such as extreme heat, water scarcity, and unpredictability of rainfall are directly affecting agriculture and **damaging crop yields**. Land is becoming drier and conditions more desert-like each year. Many households and communities have little or no resources for adaptation, and cope with climate risks by taking on debt, short-term casual labor, or through prayer. External financial and technical support to improve year-round water access and adopt more resilient farming is critical to avoid otherwise avoidable loss and damage.

By comparison, adaptation resources are more accessible in Palu Valley, in Indonesia's Central Sulawesi province. Still, farmers report that increasing water scarcity is making cultivation more difficult and contributing to decreasing yields or harvest failure. One study respondent described this as a **loss of marginal benefit from labor and other inputs**: *"we must triple the efforts to have a successful harvest. It is not like it used to be, plant once and it would grow easily."* For women, small business activities are one way to cope with climate change impacts and to offset losses of agricultural income.

Non-economic loss and damage

Climate change impacts on human mobility are evident in many communities where CWS supports adaptation and disaster risk reduction. In Georgia, sudden-onset events have led to the **loss of human life** and are increasing the expected cost of **displacement** and forced evacuations. Managing this risk through infrastructure is beyond the capacity of local communities and requires financial support from the government or mobilizing resources from other external sources.

In Haiti, slow-onset impacts are exacerbating human insecurity and factoring into migration decisions. One in five interview respondents named climate impacts as their biggest concern with staying in their community; and in one location, the cumulative effects of climate change were described as a tipping point for displacement. One respondent in Haiti described climate risk in terms of subjective fear: *"I feel changes in weather conditions here because it hardly rains... there is a lot of impact, especially on the harvests, which means there is more hunger. The main reason I left is to search for life because misery wanted to kill me and my children. I consider the option of migration as a way to cope with weather. If I leave, I will find some relief."*

Migration into situations of vulnerability is a concern in rural communities where CWS works. There is awareness of threats that exist, particularly in irregular migration – study respondents described fraud, workplace abuse, harassment, detention, limited access to emergency health care, and even deaths in transit. Some perceive bearing the risks of migration as an imperfect but viable coping strategy, despite potential threats and uncertain economic returns. For others, the lack of safe migration pathways contributes to decisions to cope with climate risk *in situ*, even if local adaptation resources are limited.

Extreme heat and water scarcity are contributing to **health concerns** in Cambodia, where many study respondents reported health issues in relation to climate risks; and several indicated they do not know what to do to cope with these impacts. In Haiti's northwest department, **food insecurity** has increased, as successive poor harvests have widened the gap between daily needs and available income and food supply.

Climate risks are impacting **access to education** by children, both by reducing income available for parents to cover school fees and related costs, and because children need to spend more time to collect water for household and farm use. In Indonesia, women interviewed for the CWS study are keenly aware that extended droughts have reduced the available water supply. This has increased the **household labor burden on women**, who must now travel further to access water during the dry season.

Climate change, alongside other environmental factors, is contributing to **losses of ecosystem services** and **biodiversity**. In Cambodia, partner communities report decreased forest cover and diminished watershed function, correlated with decreasing rainfall and increasing extreme heat. Communities in Georgia and Haiti described how groundwater sources are drying up, and bees in Georgia and Kenya are dying off or forced to abandon their hives, as the climate grows hotter and drier.

Responses to provide redress and ensure human rights

In some places where CWS works, households and communities are using resources available to cope with climate change impacts and, in some cases, adapt pro-actively to climate risks. Within many partner communities, though, access to adaptation resources remains limited, particularly for resource-poor households.

Much of the loss and damage that research participants described last year could be avoided or mitigated, with adaptation support that builds on existing community assets and that strengthens **capacity for collective action**. External support should invest in adaptation and resilience in ways that recognize that staying in increasingly harsh climatic conditions is a difficult choice, and that robust investments are needed to bring to life 'the right to stay'. Participants in the CWS research emphasized support for:

- Improved access to year-round water, including through technical support and capacity-building with water user groups, with an emphasis on women's leadership.
- Climate-resilient agriculture, including technical support and access to agricultural inputs.
- Access to working capital and expanded livelihoods options.
- Stronger early warning systems and anticipatory actions.
- Community-involved disaster risk reduction and long-term recovery activities.

Redress for loss and damage should include **debt repayment assistance**, subsidized access to equipment (e.g., water pumps), or other subsidies that could assist climate adaptation by internal migrants and their families in places of origin. This could make internal adaptive migration a more viable option, particularly in contexts where climate-induced debt or immediate household needs are factors in migration decisions.

In places where migration is perceived as a climate coping strategy, there is demand for **safer and more predictable migration**. This often coexists with a desire to invest in resilience and locally led adaptation; or for better migration options that are closer to home, rather than over

long distances or across borders. Responses should expand viable options for **internal migration**, in consultation with climate-impacted communities and local governments; and increase access to decent work, safe housing, and social protections for persons migrating internally.

Efforts to expand **safe and regular cross-border migration** pathways are becoming more critical as climate change impacts human mobility. Attention is particularly needed to ensure that migration pathways are affordable and accessible by households who are experiencing loss and damage from climate risks in economic terms, such as loss of income or increased household debt. Practices that can strengthen protection in these contexts include:

- Improving access to accurate, reliably sourced information about migration, including requirements for safe, regular migration.
- Link information provision with skills training, financial planning, and other pre-departure planning.
- Provide information, incentives, and support services for the reinvestment of skills, savings, and remittances in climate adaptation.
- Assistance to access state-issued identification, passports, and other documentation required for regular migration.
- Facilitating contact with consular services for international migration destinations.
- Organizing border reception and assistance for safe transit.
- Communicating with and monitoring employers to ensure that migrant workers' rights are respected.
- Know-your-rights information and well-informed communication about personal safety and rights and responsibilities in migration, across communities of origin, transit locations, and places of destination.
- Assisting migrants to access legal, medical, and mental health support in places of transit and destination, and upon return to countries of origin.

Locally driven **climate action** can play an important role in strengthening human rights in the context of loss and damage. In many CWS partner communities, there is information about locally experienced climate change, but little or no information available about regional or global trends, nor about national government plans or global climate action commitments. This can be addressed through:

- Connecting local communities with national or regional information campaigns.
- Establishing climate change resource desks in municipal and regional governments or organizing community information sessions.
- Addressing digital divides so that online information about climate action plans is more readily accessible.
- Integrating climate adaptation strategies with other sectoral planning, particularly agriculture.
- Training for journalists to strengthen media coverage and professional standards in reporting on climate adaptation, and on the links between climate change and human mobility.

Ensuring that adaptation support reduces vulnerabilities

While resources and information for adapting to climate change may be available at national and global levels, less than 10 percent of climate finance currently reaches local communities.² Member states, civil society and the private sector must do more to reach families and communities who feel climate change most acutely, and to support community-based organizations and local governments that serve them. Actions that can increase the effectiveness of adaptation support in the context of loss and damage include:

- Provide **longer-term, multi-year funding** support. This is particularly needed to support livelihoods adaptations and increase climate resilience in semi-arid regions, where geographic and socio-economic isolation can exacerbate communities' vulnerability to climate shocks and increase the expected value of loss and damage.
- Ensure **flexible funding** that is adaptable to local contexts and to locally defined needs and resource gaps. Flexibility could allow for climate resilience activities to link with broader ecosystem restoration activities, and to address other human-made pressures on the environment (e.g., deforestation, land tenure insecurity, large-scale agribusiness, or extractive industries) that compound the environmental impacts of climate change and that also contribute to displacement.
- Maintain **simple reporting and accreditation processes** for community-based organizations or local government units to access climate finance. The greater the administrative burden of accessing climate finance, the less likely that community-based organizations or local governments will be able to access these resources.
- Prioritize and/or incentivize **community participation** (e.g., participatory hazard mapping, climate vulnerability assessments, or mobility assessments) in adaptation responses, so that local governments' climate action plans are strengthened by local knowledge of slow-onset impacts; and so that plans reflect community perceptions of the 'pros and cons' of adaptation and risk reduction options. Community participation can also encourage more transparent planning processes and increase accountability of how climate finance is put into use.
- Invest in learning and data collection on climate and mobility in ways that reflect **accountability to climate-impacted communities**. While there is value in continuing to increase the evidence base on climate, local adaptation and human mobility, such investments should encourage research in which climate-impacted communities, and people who are on the move because of climate impacts, are leading or co-leading research agendas and knowledge production.

END

² See: Soanes, M, Rai, N, Steele, P, Shakya, C and Macgregor, J (2017). Delivering real change: getting international climate finance to the local level. IIED Working Paper. IIED, London. Available at: [10178IIED.pdf](https://www.iied.org/10178IIED.pdf).