EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MOVING TOWARDS RESILIENCE:

A STUDY OF CLIMATE CHANGE, ADAPTATION AND MIGRATION

CWS
Church World Service

KEY MESSAGES

- This study on climate change, adaptation, and migration – which drew on more than 200 interviews and 26 focus group discussions in five countries – reaffirms that **climate change is very much felt in people's daily lives** in places where we work.
- Through its impacts on agriculture, rural livelihoods and disaster risks, the study also shows how **climate change is already a factor in migration** – though, not the only factor – in several of our partner communities.
- In some communities, like ones where CWS works in Cambodia and Haiti, **many people describe migration as a way of coping with slow-onset climate change impacts,** such as increasingly unpredictable rainfall, extreme heat and growing water scarcity.
- In two of the most extreme experiences shared in this study, both in Haiti, **climate change is described as a source of fear** and as a tipping point for displacement.
- In other places—such as communities where CWS works in rural Kenya—migration is not seen as a climate coping strategy, partly because of **perceptions that it has high costs, uncertain outcomes, or could lead people into difficult situations.**
- **Perceptions and actions related to migration vary** across locations, even among individuals within the same community.
- Across the board, **this study finds a strong desire for locally led climate adaptation (such as conservation farming, or expanded use of resilient seed varieties) to succeed,** to reduce the risk of displacement and to bring to life 'the right to stay' even in increasingly harsh conditions.
- Climate-impacted **families and communities are already putting their limited resources toward coping strategies,** and more must be done to ensure that additional resources are made available for locally led adaption and disaster risk reduction.
- In locations where migration is already one way of coping with climate change, **mobility can and should be considered in adaptation planning**, including expanded opportunities for safe and dignified migration within countries and across borders.
- As we redouble efforts to stop further human-made climate change, even amid the many urgent migration and displacement challenges our world faces, **we must plan now for new, humane responses to climate-related mobility – as the need for these will only grow in the future.**

STUDY OBJECTIVES

CWS has long stood for the dignity and safety of people on the move, and for responsibly stewarding the gifts of our natural environment. In 2020, we began an effort to learn systematically about how perceptions of climate change, adaptation and migration are related, in five countries – Cambodia, Georgia, Haiti, Indonesia and Kenya – where CWS supports community-based activities.

This study aimed to: (1) improve planning for climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction activities, so that they reflect diverse and emerging needs; and (2) identify new ways to strengthen the dignity and rights of people for whom climate impacts are a factor in migration. Research was conducted alongside support to livelihoods adaptation activities, rather than as a stand-alone activity, to reflect accountability to impacted communities by extending resources toward adaptation needs that had already been identified.

METHODOLOGY

The focus questions for the study were: (a) In communities feeling the impacts of climate change, how do people perceive the costs and benefits of adapting in place, as compared to the costs and benefits of migration? and (b) how do these perceptions vary across gender, age groups, occupation, and lived migration experience? As this was a pilot study, we anticipated that we might reframe our initial questions or even identify new ones, as we moved forward in our learning process and engaged community partners in the research.

CWS designed qualitative tools – semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and community report-back workshops – as a multi-country research team and with feedback from community partners. These qualitative methods were identified as viable approaches to strengthen systematic learning at the local level, and as methods that could be implemented within COVID-19 guidelines and with minimal technological requirements.

From February to May 2021, we conducted 211 one-on-one interviews and 26 focus group discussions, in a total of 30 communities in Cambodia, Georgia, Haiti, Indonesia, and Kenya.[1]

[1] CWS country teams led the research activities in Cambodia, Haiti, Indonesia and Kenya, with support from community partner organizations. In Georgia, research activities were led by the Rural Communities Development Agency (RCDA), a non-governmental organization that is a CWS partner in responding to climate change.

Interviews with 43 key informants were also conducted across the five countries. In June 2021, 12 community report-back workshops were conducted to share interpretations of the data, and to discuss potential recommendations with study respondents and local stakeholders.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

In interpreting the qualitative data, we sought to identify patterns and perceptions behind the responses, rather than just inventory the responses themselves. Key observations include:

- In communities where CWS works, climate change is very much felt in people's lives and is perceived to negatively impact rural production, household income, health conditions, and access to education.
- Slow-onset climate change impacts are contributing to or exacerbating human insecurity, particularly food insecurity, in several study locations. In one of the most extreme examples, a respondent described this in terms of subjective fear.
- There is strong desire for climate adaptation to succeed. In some places, people are already adapting agricultural practices or increasing climate resilience in other ways, with resources available and with modest external technical support.
- Migration is relatively common in communities where CWS supports climate adaptation. Climate change impacts, particularly on agriculture, are one factor in migration, though not the only factor. In at least one community, the cumulative effects of climate change were described as a tipping point for displacement.
- In some locations, migration is not widely perceived as a viable climate coping strategy, even where there is a high level of mobility in general. This may reflect high perceived costs of migration, and a sense of lacking the skills and assets needed to migrate in ways that would genuinely improve living conditions.
- There is awareness of threats that exist in migration – e.g., fraud, employer abuse, detention, even deaths in transit – particularly among people with lived experience of migration. Some respondents perceive migration as a viable option, even knowing about potential threats; for others, awareness of threats is a deterrence to migration.
- There is high demand for access to accurate information about migration and for opportunities to use this information in planning and decision-making.
- In some locations, remittances and investments by return migrants are contributing to climate adaptation. Generally, though, more could be done so that migration contributes positively to adaptation and resilience in communities of origin.

SUMMARY OF COUNTRY FINDINGS

Location	Climate change perceptions	Migration perceptions
Cambodia: Bavel district, Battambang province	Hotter dry seasons, shorter wet seasons, and more frequent floods and storms were the impacts described by most interview respondents from Bavel district of Cambodia. Land has become dry and unproductive, and water quantity and quality have gone down. These changes have affected crops yields and contributed to poor harvests, and a large drop in income from agriculture. Many respondents are trying to cope by creating or finding an alternate source of water, and some indicate that they are simply *"relying on nature."* To make up for income deficits, people are selling their land, or taking loans with high interest, and thus falling deeper into debt.	Many people in the study area migrate to the other parts of the country, or across the border to Thailand, for work opportunities. If successful, this helps them clear their debts and improve their family's economic conditions. Unfortunately, there are cases where people return in worse condition than before migrating (e.g., being arrested and serving prison sentence, falling seriously ill after migrating). Some respondents linked this to a lack of awareness of risks in migration or of basic labor rights; and noted a need for information on – and access to - safe and regular migration. Because of concerns about family separation, many prefer in-place adaptation over migration, or migration within Cambodia rather than across borders.

Location	Climate change perceptions	Migration perceptions
Georgia: multiple regions	Respondents in Georgia described changes in temperature extremes, e.g., colder winters and hotter summers, more frequent and more intense rainfall, and drier conditions in some regions. Groundwater sources are drying up in some locations, and land is becoming less arable, while more intense rainfall is increasing the risk of flooding and landslides. Although many respondents are aware of adaptation strategies in relation to slow-onset impacts (e.g., new water management techniques or climate resilient crops), they described a need for more external support, including from local and national government agencies, in managing the risks of sudden-onset events.	Many study respondents are eco-migrants, who had relocated previously because of avalanches and landslides. Because of their past experiences, most eco-migrants have a very negative perception of migration, which they generally associate with displacement by a sudden disaster or involuntary relocation. In contrast, persons who had not experienced relocation or displacement are relatively more open towards considering migration as a climate coping strategy, particularly in areas where agricultural livelihoods are becoming more challenging and other work opportunities are limited. Without support to access safe housing or employment, though, people face risks of migrating into situations of vulnerability.
Haiti: Northwest Department	In Haiti, study respondents described climate change impacts in terms of unpredictable and irregular rainfall, extreme heat, and intensifying hurricanes. In addition, respondents from the island of La Tortue described sea level rise among the challenges faced. These changes are making the land dry and unproductive, and fishing more difficult, and these effects are contributing to reduced household income and food insecurity. Coping strategies include finding alternate sources of income (e.g., starting a small business), purchasing with credit or borrowing money through mutual solidarity or microcredit, and reducing consumption of food and water.	Migration – both internal and international – is considered by some respondents as a strategy of coping with climate impacts, though migration is more commonly perceived as a way of finding work or educational opportunities, or a response to human insecurity more broadly. Interviews reflected stories of successful migration (e.g., migrants who help their families back home by sending remittances), as well as stories of pain and loss (e.g., arrest and deportation, accident on the way). Respondents identified a need for improving access to information and support services for safe and regular migration, alongside increasing access to resources for climate adaptation and livelihoods diversification.
Indonesia: Sigi district, Central Sulawesi province	Longer dry seasons, unpredictable heat, erratic rainfall, and frequent flooding are ways in which Central Sulawesi respondents feel climate change. Flood risks partly reflect reduced capacity of rivers, and floods have left large amounts of sand in farmland, making agriculture difficult. Many respondents also described growing water scarcity, especially scarcity of clean water during dry seasons. Common strategies for adaptation in agricultural households include changing crop varieties, using more fertilizer, and working together to clean the sand from the farmland. People are also finding alternate sources of income, such as by starting small home-based businesses (mostly by women), doing casual labor, and shifting to fishing during the rainy season.	While there is a high level of mobility in the study area, mostly short-distance and for temporary or seasonal work, migration is generally not perceived as a way of coping with climate change, and there is a strong preference for in-place adaptation. Some respondents talked about risks and uncertainty that are generally associated with moving to a new place but, unlike other CWS study locations, they do not generally associate migration with threats of abuse or risk of accidents or illness. Interview responses show strong family ties and place attachment, which could also be a reason why many study participants do not consider migration as an adaptation strategy.

Location	Climate change perceptions	Migration perceptions
Kenya: Kitui County	People are feeling the impacts of climate change in terms of extreme heat, unpredictability of rainfall, change in land (drier, desert-like conditions) and increasing water scarcity. These impacts are directly affecting agriculture and the crop yield. Adaptation strategies include ensuring water access, adopting resilient farming techniques, and finding short-term casual labor to make up for the income deficit. People engaging in these strategies tend to consider them to be succeeding. A good number of respondents did not indicate any coping strategy, though, and more resources for adaptation – particularly access to water, climate-resilient agriculture, and new livelihoods options – are widely seen as needed.	Migration is quite common in the study area, including both rural-to-rural (in search of better farming land) and rural-to-urban migration (for work or educational opportunities). In most cases migration is perceived to bring positive economic results, particularly for younger people. However, most study respondents do not see migration as a viable option for themselves – for climate change adaptation or otherwise – because of its perceived high cost, unforeseen challenges and uncertainties, family separation, or strong place attachment. As climate conditions become increasingly harsh, support to adaptation and resilience for people choosing to stay will be critical in mitigating risks of food insecurity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are drawn from the interviews, focus groups, and community workshops; and from CWS experience in working with climate-impacted communities to adapt livelihoods, manage disaster risks, and increase resilience.

A. **Invest in adaptation and resilience in ways that recognize that staying in increasingly harsh climatic conditions is a difficult choice.** While we found that there is a strong desire for adaptation to succeed, it was by asking about both mobility and in-place adaptation that we heard clear demand for longer-term investments that are most needed to bring to life 'the right to stay':

1. WATER. Improving access to water, particularly for agriculture, is a prominent concern. This requires moving beyond customary irrigation and introducing new ways to harvest rainwater; improving access to technology; and mobilizing public investments to access groundwater sources, expand clean water distribution systems, and maintain community water infrastructure.
2. RESILIENT AGRICULTURE. Agriculture remains a key source of food, income, and social and cultural identity. There is demand for expanding climate resilient agriculture, including conservation farming and use of drought-resistant crops and hardier livestock breeds.
3. COMMUNITY-BASED FINANCE. Access to microfinance and working capital remains critical for expanding livelihoods beyond agriculture and other activities highly dependent on natural resources. It is particularly needed in places where climate-induced debt is a factor in migration, or where financial resources are needed to adopt or scale-up adaptation and disaster risk reduction technologies.
4. PARTICIPATORY DRR AND LONG-TERM RECOVERY. For early warning systems to be effective, information on risks and disaster risk reduction needs to be communicated in ways that are accessible and understandable. Community participation in recovery from sudden-onset events can ensure that long-term needs are addressed.
5. CLIMATE ACTION. While many respondents have some information about locally experienced climate change, there is little information available about national government plans or global climate action commitments. This can be addressed through national information campaigns and community information sessions, establishing municipal and regional climate resource desks, and

the digital divide so that online information is more accessible.

B. While resources and information for adapting to climate change may be available at national and global levels, less than 10% of climate finance currently reaches local communities.[2] We 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:

1. Provide longer-term, multi-year funding support.
2. Ensure flexible funding that is adaptable to local contexts and to locally defined needs and resource gaps.
3. Keep reporting and accreditation processes simple for community-based organizations or local government units to access climate finance.
4. Prioritize and/or incentive activities that incorporate community participation, such as through participatory hazard mapping, climate vulnerability assessments, or mobility assessments.

C. In locations where migration is perceived to be a climate coping strategy, **incorporating mobility into adaptation planning and climate action** can expand – and make safer and more dignified – the options that are available:

1. Establish information centers that can make available accurate, reliably sourced information about migration, including requirements for safe, regular migration.
2. Link information to migration support services, such as skills training, financial planning, and other pre-departure planning; and provide information, incentives, and support services for the reinvestment of skills, savings, and remittances in climate adaptation.
3. Expand 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.
4. Assist people to access government-issued identification and passports, which are required for accessing regular international migration; and which may add some protection in irregular migration.
5. Expand safe and regular migration opportunities that are accessible even by the poorest households.
6. Provide know-your-rights information and facilitate community discussions about staying safe in migration; and encourage well-informed communication about personal safety and rights in migration, across communities of origin, transit locations, and places of destination.
7. National government should increase their capacities to monitor the treatment of their citizens who migrate to other countries, and to safeguard human rights.
8. In locations where climate impacts are linked to high demand for safe and regular migration, support community groups to connect with trans-local and transborder efforts to improve migration governance and increase climate resilience.
9. Encourage research that reflects accountability to climate-impacted communities, including approaches in which climate-impacted communities, and people who are on the move because of climate change, are leading or co-leading research agendas and knowledge production. ■

[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.


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