

### **Overview of key findings**

Climate change is now recognised as a mainstream development issue. As the negative impacts of climate change on the world's poorest communities become clearer, strategies to adapt to changing climatic conditions are increasingly being incorporated into development policy and practice. Much of this work is informed by the existing literature on vulnerability and disaster risk reduction. However there are still some important gaps in our understanding of the more intangible impacts of climate change.

A body of evidence is accumulating on the social impacts of climate change. There is a growing consensus that climate change is likely to have differential impacts on men and women and that children are more vulnerable than adults to increased risks (eg health problems) as a result of climate change. Older people's ability to adapt is also likely to be affected by increased health risks, as well as changes to family networks, migration, a lack of insurance or pension facilities and the need to care for orphaned grandchildren. To address these vulnerabilities, a number of social protection measures that target poverty, food insecurity, livelihood vulnerability and other such situations should be considered relevant. Some important coping strategies and protection measures include compensation mitigation measures (eg microinsurance, weather-risk crop insurance, safety net approaches), ex-ante adaptation measures (eg crop diversification, irrigation systems, flood safe storage facilities, relocation, livelihood diversification and protection) and ex-post adaptation measures (eg cash transfers, asset restocking/ sale of assets and nutritional/feeding programmes).

The interplay between climate change and conflict is much less well understood, and often based on assumptions rather than evidence. Predictions of increased violent conflict as a result of climate-induced changes such as migration, environmental degradation and resource-scarcity, for example, are rarely supported with empirical evidence. The most commonly discussed scenarios are that climate change causes resource scarcity, which prompts violent conflict, or that resource scarcity results in migration which leads to conflict in the receiving area. Nevertheless, even where there does appear to be a clear link between climate change and conflict, climate change is presented as one factor among many contributing to conflict, and not necessarily a leading or important factor.

Much the same can be said of the link between climate change and state fragility. There is a general assumption that the social and economic impacts of climate change are likely to generate demands which fragile states will be unable to meet. However, in the absence of research which addresses this link in any depth, the literature on vulnerability once again provides a useful starting point for further analysis. According to this perspective, the ability of vulnerable people to adapt to climate change is based on a broad range of social factors, including poverty, support from the state, access to economic opportunities, the effectiveness of decision-making processes, and the extent of social cohesion within and surrounding vulnerable groups. These factors are all linked to the state's capacity to provide services and maintain institutions, which is often lacking in fragile states. Furthermore, increased demand for adaptation and mitigation activities may divert resources for fulfilling their core functions and this may lead to further destabilisation.

In the case of climate-induced migration, the empirical research does not support the claim that climate change will trigger waves of South-North interregional movement. Most displacements are likely to be within country borders. Cross-border migration, where it does exist, is likely to happen within existing social networks, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. However, those most vulnerable to both climate change and forced migration have the least resources to undertake long-distance migration, so are likely to be left behind. The extent to which new migratory trends are likely to emerge as a result of climate change is still unclear. Some argue that, as a 'threat-multiplier', climate change is more likely to exacerbate existing problems although it is unclear by how much. Others argue that new trends are likely to

emerge (e.g Alaska, Pacific islands) but there is currently only limited case study evidence for this.

**For a summary of some of the best literature available on these issues, see the following GSDRC helpdesk reports:**

- [Climate Change and Governance](#)
- [Climate Change and State Fragility](#)
- [Climate Change and Conflict](#)
- [Climate Change and Social Exclusion](#)
- [Climate Change and Social Protection](#)
- [Climate Change and Migration](#)

For further reading, please visit our [document library](#), or see the GSDRC topic guides on:

- [Fragile states](#)
- [Conflict](#)
- [Social exclusion](#)
- [Social protection](#)

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