Climate Migrants and Urban Adaptation in India and China

Climate change will exacerbate environmental stressors and shocks, leading to increasing numbers of migrants who move due to destruction of homestead and arable land. These climate migrants join an existing upward trend of rural-to-urban migration. This project considers urban area’s capacity to incorporate this influx of climate migrants in India and China. The assessment results provide ND-GAIN with additional indicators for its Urban Adaptation Assessment on cities in the developing world.

A central finding from our analysis is that in these countries, neither authorities nor migrants themselves recognize climate migrants as a distinct category of migrant. Therefore, we attempted to isolate climate migrants by focusing on those who were directly affected by two climate shocks: Orissa 2011 and Sichuan 2013. We analyze these migrants’ decisions to migrate and experience migrating into the cities of Surat and Chengdu using a combination of literature research, agent-based framework analysis, and fieldwork.

In studying an individual’s decision to migrate, we found that even though national level policies exist to discourage migration, climate change will likely exacerbate rural-to-urban migration.

Other key findings are:

- **Economic integration** is hindered by informal job markets and neglect of labor rights.

- **Accessibility to basic public services** (such as health care) is low as a result of climate migrants’ lack of official recognition, and their low awareness and utilization rate of disordered services. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) play an important role in raising awareness about access to services.

- **Social integration** proves difficult due to language barriers and discrimination.

Informed by our findings and bearing in mind ND-GAIN’s objective to assess cities’ adaptation readiness, we recommend that ND-GAIN include indicators such as percentage of migrants under formal contract, presence of NGOs focused on migrants, and percentage of migrants fluent in local language into their existing Urban Adaptation Readiness Index (see Figure 1). We also recommend that ND-GAIN reach out to NGOs in cities of interest for on-the-ground information.