

MEETING OF THE MIGRATION DIALOGUE FOR WEST AFRICA (MIDWA) THEMATIC WORKING GROUP ON “CLIMATE CHANGE, LAND DEGRADATION, DESERTIFICATION, ENVIRONMENT AND MIGRATION”

24-25 March 2021, Online Meeting

Concept Note¹

I. Background

Migration, displacement and planned relocation in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation in West Africa²

West Africa, as a region, which includes Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo, has a long history of population movements. These have always been linked to the environment, be it in form of displacement in the context of disasters, transhumance and pastoralism, migration during the harvesting season or longer-term labour migration in the context of agricultural activities.

Like in most regions of the world, sudden and slow onset events and processes interlink in West Africa too, creating environmental drivers of migration. The most frequent environmental drivers of population movements in West Africa are floods caused by heavy rains, and drought. Coastal erosion, land degradation and water scarcity are also heavily affecting the 16 countries. These hazards can be natural and are also accelerated by the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Over the last decades, the adverse effects of climate change have intensified environmental events and processes in the region, such as droughts, desertification, rising sea levels, coastal erosion and flooding, compelling more and more people directly and indirectly to leave their homes.

The main livelihood activities in the region include agriculture, mining, and fishing, rendering the West African economy highly dependent on natural resources. Disasters, the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation are putting at serious risk these income-generating activities, while simultaneously exacerbating the environmental impacts on the populations. Such impacts can in turn lead to displacement, migration, and planned relocation. If not well-managed, migration, displacement and planned relocation can put people in very vulnerable situations, but safe, orderly and regular migration can also increase people’s adaptive capacity and build their resilience. On the other hand, voluntary or involuntary population movements can also put pressure on environment sites which are prepared to receive populations.

There were more than 328,000 people newly displaced by disasters in 2019 within the 16 West African countries, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) (2020). However, this number is only an estimate, as the migration flows in the context of slow-onset hazards are unknown.

¹ Drafted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in coordination with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Platform on Disaster Displacement.

² For more details, please see IOM (2021), *Environmental Migration and Disaster Displacement in West Africa*.



Indeed, knowledge on these types of movement is very limited due to methodological and scientific challenges, along with a lack of systematic data collection and analysis. Nevertheless, projections for the region show that up to 86 million people could become internal climate migrants in Sub-Saharan Africa, if no action is taken, according to the World Bank (2018).

Policy developments related to environmental migration and disaster displacement

There have been significant advancements related to addressing environmental migration and disaster displacement at the global policy level, including: the adoption of the Global Compact for Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration (GCM) in 2018, the endorsement of the Nansen Initiative Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change in 2015, the signing of the legally binding Paris Agreement on climate change in 2015, the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015, and the agreed targets related to responsible migration (SDG 10.7) and climate change (SDG 13) in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Together, these frameworks recognize the environmental drivers of migration and their impacts, and provide solutions for States and other stakeholders to ensure that people are able to stay in their homes, or that alternatively they can move via safe, orderly and regular pathways, and that people on the move receive the needed assistance and protection.

In Africa, achievements have been made in relation to environmental migration and disaster displacement within the African Union (AU). The revised *AU Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA) together with the Plan of Action 2018 – 2030* recognizes the role of the environment and climate change as a driver of migration and provides strategies for States to address these links, including by integrating environmental considerations in existing domestic migration policies and addressing environmental degradation, with the goal of minimizing displacement. In line with the MPFA and to implement the GCM at the regional level, in December 2019, the AU developed the *3 Year Implementation Plan of Action for the GCM in Africa (2020 – 2022)*. In this plan, migration in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation is a priority for the region; there is an ambition to create more evidence, policy coherence and development, and migrants' protection and assistance. The AU plan relies, among other, on national ministries, the Regional Economic Commissions (RECs), such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the UN for implementation. Several other regional frameworks are of relevance, including those related to refugee protection, internally displaced persons, pastoralism, free movement, the environment, agriculture, climate change, disaster risk reduction and humanitarian affairs.

In West Africa, several developments within ECOWAS are relevant to environmental migration and disaster displacement. Firstly, the 2008 *ECOWAS Common Approach on Migration* and its revision into the *ECOWAS Regional Migration Policy* provide West African States with key strategies and solutions on how to support people moving in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation. Secondly, the 1979 *ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment* and the *ECOWAS International Transhumance Certificates* are agreements which implicitly grant environmental migrants and disaster displaced persons the right to enter and remain in any ECOWAS State, thus supporting their assistance and protection. Thirdly, the *Migration Dialogue for West Africa (MIDWA)* was established in 2000 and it includes a Thematic Working Group on "Climate change, land degradation, desertification, environment and migration" established in 2016. Finally, 2008 *Regional Environmental Policy (ECOWEP)*, the 2009 *Regional Action Program to Reduce Vulnerability to Climate Change in West Africa*, the *Regional environmental Action Plan (2020-2026)*



and the *Policy for Disaster Risk Reduction*, while not directly addressing human mobility, are especially important to ensure solutions for people to be able to stay in their homes.

There are varying levels of policy coherence and awareness of the ways in which migration, displacement and planned relocation manifest themselves in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation in West Africa. There is an opportunity to shape a common and integrated approach across the region.

It is with this background that a meeting of the MIDWA Thematic Working on Group on “Climate change, land degradation, desertification, environment and migration” is being organized in the context of the project on “Implementing Global Policies on Environmental Migration and Disaster Displacement in West Africa” led by IOM together with the Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) and with the generous support of the Government of France. The project is aligned with Objectives 2 and 5 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and with the African Union 3 Year Implementation Plan of Action for the GCM in Africa (2020-2022).

II. Meeting of the MIDWA Thematic Working Group on “Climate change, land degradation, desertification, environment and migration”

The Migration Dialogue for West Africa (MIDWA), a regional consultative process on migration under the auspices of ECOWAS, is an opportunity to advance discussions and action on migration, displacement and planned relocation in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation in West Africa.

MIDWA was designed as a platform to encourage the Member States of ECOWAS to discuss in a regional context such common migration issues and concerns for which immediate solutions may not be forthcoming on a national level. Its objective is to promote and ensure high quality cooperation among ECOWAS Member States, third countries and other international consultative fora on free movement and migration by:

- institutionalizing permanent national platforms and secretariats for cooperation on migration and mobility;
- implementing projects in the area of migration management;
- awareness raising of migration issues in the Member States;
- sharing experiences and challenges with other consultative processes on migration to foster solidarity, partnership and shared responsibility;
- participating in national, regional and international migration forums;
- and maintaining a robust website on migration issues.

MIDWA has regularly organized meetings, conferences and workshops and produced reports and concrete recommendations on migration for the ECOWAS Commission and ECOWAS Member States. MIDWA has facilitated the development of the ECOWAS Common Approach on Migration (adopted by the 33rd regular meeting of ECOWAS Head of States and Governments in January 2008). MIDWA has also facilitated the development of the ECOWAS Regional Migration Policy. This approach serves as reference point for the development of each Member State’s National Migration Policy.

In 2017, MIDWA’s regional secretariat was created within the ECOWAS Commission’s Directorate of Free Movement, implementing the Members’ decision to create MIDWA institutions to strengthen the coordination and cooperation amongst Member States to promote and implement harmonized



policies on managing migration. IOM supports the MIDWA Secretariat and the ECOWAS Free Movement Directorate in this work, especially through the Free Movement and Migration for West Africa (FMM) project.

MIDWA is composed of the ECOWAS Member States and Mauritania. It is structured in seven Thematic Working Groups (TWG) whose primary responsibility is the drafting of policies and guidelines and implementation of recommendations. Each working group is chaired by a MIDWA Member State. A MIDWA Thematic Working Group on “Climate change, land degradation, desertification, environment and migration” was created.

This meeting seeks to build on the advancements at the global, regional and sub-regional levels and the existing efforts of ECOWAS and of MIDWA Member States in order to strengthen the work of this MIDWA Thematic Working Group on “Climate change, land degradation, desertification, environment and migration.”

The objectives of the meeting are to:

1. Promote a shared understanding among regional and national stakeholders of how migration, displacement and planned relocation manifest themselves in the region in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation.
2. Identify the priority issues to be addressed, including challenges and gaps as well as opportunities and good practices related to addressing environmental migration and disaster displacement in West Africa at regional and national levels.
3. Strengthen the structural arrangements of the MIDWA Thematic Working Group on “Climate change, land degradation, desertification, environment and migration.”
4. Define strategies to support States to implement at regional and national levels the commitments made under the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) Objectives 2 and 5 related to environmental migration and disaster displacement.

The expected outcomes of the meeting are:

1. An overview of the main ways in which migration, displacement and planned relocation occur in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation in West Africa.
2. An overview of the policy, normative and operational challenges, gaps, opportunities and good practices related to addressing environmental migration and disaster displacement in West Africa at regional and national levels.
3. An overview of the actors and institutions that address these issues.
4. A draft annual work plan for the MIDWA Thematic Working Group on “Climate change, land degradation, desertification, environment and migration.”
5. Endorsed Terms of Reference (TORs) for the MIDWA Thematic Working Group on “Climate change, land degradation, desertification, environment and migration.”
6. Draft West Africa messages for the GCM regional review regarding migration, displacement and planned relocation in the context of disasters, climate change and environmental degradation.

III. Participants

Participants will include representatives of MIDWA Member States: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d’Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo; Donors and partners, European Union and Switzerland as well as



other champion States and State-led initiatives, including France and the PDD; and representatives of regional and international organizations, including ECOWAS, IOM, UNCCD and UNHCR. UNOWAS, CILSS, WASCAL, Great Green Wall, Sahara-Sahel Initiative, CORAF will also be invited.

Representatives are expected to have contributions and suggestions in the areas of immigration/migration management, disaster/emergency management, and/or environment/climate change. Following the meeting, participants are required to share and discuss the ideas proposed with their national colleagues in their respective sectors.

IV. Logistics

The meeting will be online via the Zoom platform. Details will be shared by the organizers to the confirmed participants.

The meeting will be facilitated through simultaneous interpretation in English, French and Portuguese.

V. Meeting organizers and contacts

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

ECOWAS is a 15-member regional group with a mandate of promoting economic integration in all fields of activity of the constituting countries. ECOWAS catalyzes international and continental commitments as well as directions to apply them at the sub-regional and national levels in its top-down approach. In its bottom-up approach, it builds upon the national and local efforts of States to form sub-regional approaches and positions relevant for regional and global processes. The ECOWAS Commission serves as the MIDWA Secretariat and oversees the coordination of the MIDWA Thematic Working Groups and the programmatic interests of sectors pertinent to migration and the creation of synergies between those sectors.

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The International Organization for Migration (IOM)

IOM, the UN Migration Agency, is the leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. With 174 Member States and 8 Observer States, and more than 430 offices in over 150 countries, IOM is dedicated to promoting safe, orderly and regular migration for the benefit of all. IOM has been addressing the links between migration, environment and climate change for more than 25 years on all fronts, research, capacity building, policy development and operational response, and at all levels,



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
The UN Migration Agency



FMM West Africa
Support Free Movement of Persons & Migration in West Africa

global, regional and national, including in West Africa. IOM also has a strong cooperation ECOWAS across multiple initiatives, including the “Support to Free Movement of Persons and Migration in West Africa” funded by the European Union.

IOM is also engaged in a number of state-led initiatives on this topic, including the Migrants in Countries in Crisis (MICIC) Initiative, and the PDD. IOM has been supporting PDD since its establishment in July 2016 as well as its predecessor, the Nansen Initiative, since 2012. IOM is, together with UNHCR, a Standing Invitee to the PDD Steering Group, and plays a key role in supporting States’ efforts to implement the Nansen Initiative Protection Agenda and the priorities identified by the PDD Steering Group, which are directly in line with IOM’s vision and action on migration, environment and climate change. PDD is currently chaired by the Government of Fiji and with the Government of France as Vice-Chair, representing the European Union.

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