THE PHILIPPINES' NEW FRONTIERS OF HUMAN SECURITY: LOCATING MIGRATION IN CLIMATE FOREIGN POLICY

BY KATRINA GUANIO

Katrina Guanio is a Senior Project Officer at UP – Centre International de Formation des Autorités et Leaders or the International Training Centre for Authorities and Leaders (UP-CIFAL Philippines).

Family left homeless by Tropical Storm Ketsana (Ondoy) in Manila, Philippines. Source: Asian Development Blog

Climate migration will continue to be perceived as a non-traditional security threat. Climate migrants and displaced populations, whether staying temporarily or permanently, will be perceived as competition for scarce resources leading to conflict and social tension in the host communities and countries. Human mobility due to environment-related or climatic events has been at an all-time high with 8.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a result of disasters globally at the end of 2022.

The Philippines, located in the Pacific Ring of Fire and East Asia's typhoon belt, is one of the countries most affected by displacement due to disasters. In 2022, the country recorded the highest internal displacement due to disasters in East Asia and the Pacific, with 5.4 million IDPs. In 2021, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Philippines reported that coastal areas, which are home to at least 8.6 million Filipinos, are projected to be submerged by inundation due to sea-level rise in 30 years.

People will move in anticipation or as a result of both slow- and sudden-onset climate events. Climate migrants and displaced populations, whether staying temporarily or permanently, will be perceived as competition for scarce resources or economic benefits. Social, cultural, and political differences may potentially arise between the residents and the migrants.

Nomenclatures and Legal Frameworks

The major challenge in human mobility in the context of climate change is the definition of the phenomenon. Currently, there is no universally and legally accepted and agreed-upon definition for the movements related to or induced by environmental reasons or climatic events. Nevertheless, the IOM defines environmental migration as the movement of people due to sudden or gradual changes in their environment, either forced or voluntary, temporary or permanent, and within or across borders; climate migration is its subcategory.

The terms "environmental refugees" and "climate refugees" have been widely used but criticized for the haphazard reference to "refugees". A refugee is a person, due to a well-founded fear of persecution, flees their country to find safety in another. The Refugee Convention only recognizes "race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" as grounds for persecution. It also highlights cross-border movement, from one state to another. In the case of human mobility amid climate change, the environment cannot be the persecutor, and people move internally rather than cross-border or internationally.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) provides approaches to provide legal frameworks for human mobility amid climate change. Objective 3 states "to minimize the adverse drivers, including environmental and climate drivers,

that compel people to move,: Objective 5 states "to improve the availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration including that of climate and environmental migrants." However, the GCM is a soft law which means it is not legally binding. The different terminologies and definitions in environmental and climate migration lead to different measurements and projections of migration patterns and, by extension, different interpretations and use in policy.

The Philippines has several laws and policy documents that recognize the intersections of human mobility, climate change, and security. These include the National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP) 2011-2028 and the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan (NDRRMP) 2020-2030. The NCCAP has an immediate outcome relating to settlements of vulnerable communities and "climate refugees". Meanwhile, the NDRRMP is concerned with building disaster-resilient human settlements as part of prevention and mitigation. Presently, these legal and policy frameworks do not refer to the IOM definition of environmental and climate migration. Rather, the Philippines' migration and climate change nomenclatures heavily use evacuation, forced evacuation, and pre-emptive evacuation which often "do not expressingly require free, prior, and informed consent".

Climate-Migration-Security Nexus

In the Philippines, sudden-onset climatic events drive human mobility in the forms of preemptive evacuation and internal displacement. These are linked to threats to security such as human rights violations, explosive hazards, and petty crimes. For instance, in 2013, Typhoon Haiyan, one of the most powerful tropical cyclones ever recorded, triggered the displacement of over four million people. Due to the slow rescue operations and the arrival of aid, desperate typhoon survivors resorted to "looting" in search of food and water. Tacloban City, in the Philippines, was the epicenter of the combined impacts of the typhoon, internal displacement, and looting.

While the majority of climate and environmental migration is internal, it is likely that international migration will increase, even for countries like the Philippines. In fact, there were Filipinos with families in the US and Canada who migrated or tried to migrate as a post-disaster response. Yet, there are numerous reports where sponsorship applications of Filipino migrants, especially in the US, have been denied because the immigration officer did not deem that their family has been significantly affected by Typhoon Haiyan.

In addition to sudden-onset events, slow-onset events drive human mobility in the form of migration and planned relocation. Accelerated sea-level rise threatens coastal communities in some highly urbanized and impoverished parts of Metro Manila. Projections suggest that these coastal populations are likely to migrate or be displaced in a host community which may consequently face security threats particularly conflict and social tension due to increased competition in resources.

The future of the climate-migration-security nexus is shaped by the power dynamics between the Global North and the Global South. The Global North, composed of the affluent and industrialized nations, have been responsible for the excess carbon emissions and overexploitation of natural resources. They are the major migrant destination with strict immigration policies and border patrol in the name of national security. Meanwhile, the Global South, composed of vulnerable countries with developing economies, have the least carbon emissions and are exploited for their natural resources. This area is also the major origin of migrants who have limited capacity for adaptation and restricted mobility. This shows that the securitization of climate migration has been centered on territorial integrity rather than human security.

The Future Climate Foreign Policy

Moving forward, policy prospects should explore counter-securitization of human mobility amid climate change. This entails that, prior to migration, the most vulnerable countries are equipped with the adaptive capacity and climate financing to avert, minimize, and address the adverse effects of sudden and slow-onset events, as well as the impacts of climate change.

Major contributors to climate change should ensure that they commit to their nationally determined contributions (NDCs), particularly in climate financing, to compensate for loss and damages and to support adaptation and resilience-building in developing countries. Likewise, it is necessary to pave migration pathways for climate migrants and eliminate anti-immigrant sentiments. In the event of migration, they should have access to child protection, gender-based violence protection, explosive hazards protection, and protection of housing, land, and property rights. Host communities or countries should also enforce the prevention of, and response to, human rights violations, including access to justice, grievance mechanisms, services and documentation provisions, and psychological support for survivors.

With the urgency of the ongoing climate crisis and the impending mass population movements, there is a need for a paradigm shift from the state-centric security perspective to a human security approach to climate migration. The future climate foreign policy is one that channels security policies to adaptation, mitigation, and resilience mechanisms for the most vulnerable and insecure to climate risks.

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