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# Environmental migration and conflict dynamics: focus on developing regions

ASHOK SWAIN

Environmental issues have now become a legitimate concern for policy makers as well as activists all over the world. Numerous scholars have proposed expanding the scope of the concept of security beyond its traditional geopolitical and military focus to take into account these freshly acknowledged problems. Environmental problems and related issues are now being experienced on a global scale. The mutual dependence of the peoples of the world on a single common planetary biosphere means that the environmental decline of one country or region is a problem for the entire community of nations. A growing number of people is now vulnerable to trans-boundary global environmental degradation that does not originate in the area where they live.

Environmental problems, however, in the form of natural disasters, drought, cyclone, tidal waves, etc, are not a new phenomenon at all. From time immemorial, all living beings on this planet have occasionally faced the wrath of nature and have gradually devised ways and means to survive it. Although, with the advancement of scientific technology and the aid of past experiences, the human race has to some extent been able to meet natural environmental catastrophes, environmental damage of an anthropogenic nature has worsened the situation. The anthropogenic sources of environmental change are the result of demographic, economic, institutional, technological, agricultural and behavioural changes in the human system. The extensive and intensive human interaction with the biosphere—"a dynamic equilibrium of biological forces held in position by checks and balances of a most delicate sort"[1]—has at present caused the environmental crisis to reach worldwide proportions.

It is true that environmental stress concerns each and every state of the world, but as Ted R Gurr observes, it bears more serious consequences for the poor developing countries than for the rich developed ones.[2] The developing countries belong to a vast community of independent nations, which have recently emerged from colonial rule, and are located mainly in the lower latitudes. They are poor and have been left far behind by the speedy economic development of the nations of mainly European lineage in the temperate climatic zones.[3] The developing countries are different from the developed industrialised nations not only in economic terms but also in sociopolitical terms. Most of them are

*Ashok Swain, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Box 514, S-75120 Uppsala, Sweden.*

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engaged in a quest for identity: a national identity in the form of an integral and tenacious national edifice, an international identity in the form of recognition of a place in relation to the developed countries that dominate the world arena.

There are many reasons for the relative susceptibility of the developing countries to environmental stress. Population growth combined with the struggle for modernisation has made them more vulnerable to the impact of environmental damage. In these countries, the effects of environmental destruction pushes more and more people towards the subsistence margin. Existing material inequalities become more acute, resulting in social unrest. Most of the developing countries are weak as states, lacking bureaucratic and administrative institutions to deal effectively with problems arising from environmental destruction.

## Population growth and environmental stress

According to the World Population Fund's estimate, the world's population is now increasing by about a quarter of a million people per day, or 90–100 million people every year. The population growth of most of the developed countries is nearly stable or declining. As the World Bank Report states, 95% of future growth will take place in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America.[4] Though birth rates have started to decline faster than death rates in most of these countries, India alone contributes 18 million people to this planet every year—the total population of Scandinavia. India and China together add a third of the yearly global population increase.

Demographers project that the world population may double during the next half-century and almost all the added new population will belong to the developing countries. Experts are divided in their opinions regarding the effects of this unprecedented growth. According to the pessimistic 'neo-Malthusians', natural resources and the environment, already burdened by population growth, will simply collapse under the weight of future demand for food. The optimists, on the other hand, comprising some economists and agricultural scientists, claim that the earth has the potential to produce enough food for the projected population for the next 50 years. In reality, as John Bongaarts puts it, 'the future of global food production is neither as grim as the pessimists believe nor as rosy as the optimists claim'.[5] Feeding a growing world population is technologically feasible, but at the same time, it is most likely to lead to widespread destruction of natural renewable resources. The adverse effects of a growing population on the environment could be more critical than the food problems that have received so much attention in the research inspired by Malthus.[6]

Science and technological advancement may help feed the soaring population, but as the global statistics suggest, 700 million people on this earth are already malnourished, and 40 000 die of hunger and hunger-related diseases each day.[7] One billion people in the developing countries lack access to clean water, and nearly two billion do not have adequate sanitation facilities.[8] The ever-increasing population is further multiplying pressure on all renewable natural resources: fresh water, soil, forests, air, oceans and biodiversity. These resources are renewable because they are 'ecologically integrated in a feedback circle system which guarantees their replacement or the preservation of their quality'.[9]

Mineral resources and fossil fuels, which have been the traditional source of competition for colonial areas and spheres of influence, are non-renewable resources because they are not integrated into such an ecosystem. Recent technological developments have reduced the use of these non-renewable resources and have also aided massive exploration for new deposits. Because of these developments, the current discussion of resource scarcity has shifted from the availability of non-renewable natural resources to the limits of renewable resources.[10]

Most of the developing countries are extremely dependent on their renewable natural resource base to sustain their economic activities. About one-quarter of the gross domestic product of Central America is based on these resources, and they also provide more than half the total employment, as well as most export earnings.[11] The lack of economic alternatives forces poor and landless people to make unprecedented demands on these resources. This, of course, intensifies the already existing environmental problems in these areas, such as land degradation, deforestation, scarcity and pollution of water, air pollution, and extinction of species. In developing countries where human populations are growing and the countries aim for speedy 'development' based on weak state structures, it is not difficult to visualise the consequences.

In an environmentally induced situation of increasing scarcity, it will be impossible for the social actors in these countries to feel comfortable with the present availability or with the prospect of future availability of their natural resources. Purposeful and conscious actions might be taken by various social actors with a zero-sum standpoint in order to work for their own interests. This situation could eventually destroy the established resource-sharing arrangement in the developing society. Increased competition among the actors can be easily presumed for the protection or exploitation of the natural resource bases. This environmentally induced competition over scarce renewable resources may create organised actors along environmental lines, and may also bring about an incompatibility among existing actors on environmental issues. The perceived conflicting behaviour between these actors may eventually turn into conflicts in the developing regions. Besides being the immediate cause of the conflict over natural resources, destruction of the environment can potentially lead to the loss of the source of living for the people of the affected area.

## Environmental change and loss of place and/or source of living

The collision between growing human needs and the availability of renewable natural resources is gradually becoming more acute in many developing countries. The spread of deserts, loss of forests, declining water supplies, changes in the climate and extinction of species threaten the survival of the present and future generations in these regions.

Environmental change can potentially reduce the agricultural output in the affected area.[12] Loss of arable land and lack of water for irrigation might lead directly to decreased food production. According to a recent global assessment, an area of about 1.2 billion hectares—nearly the size of China and India together—has endured modest to severe soil degradation since the Second World

War because of human activity.[13] Over three-quarters of this degradation has taken place in the developing countries.[14] As a result of the massive soil degradation, yields and total harvests of crucial food crops have declined in many poor regions, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.[15]

Agricultural production can also be adversely affected by massive deforestation, air pollution and climatic changes. Soil degradation and deforestation complement each other. Although loss of cropland as the result of soil degradation leads to clearing of forests, the cutting down of trees erodes the land resources even further. Impoverishment of terrestrial ecosystems as the result of deforestation may exhibit itself in a variety of ways: accelerated soil erosion, salinisation and a decline in quality. Moreover, it has been scientifically established that air pollution can directly affect crop production. A study done by the US Environmental Protection Agency estimates that ground-level ozone generated by burning fossil fuels is reducing the corn, wheat, soybean and peanut harvests in the USA by at least 5%.[16] With fewer resources at their disposal, developing countries stand to suffer disproportionately from a rapid climate change caused by the 'greenhouse' effect. The production of ordinary rice varieties goes down alarmingly at temperatures just a few degrees higher than those presently existing in most rice-growing areas.[17] The greenhouse effect is expected to cause shifts in the rainfall pattern as well. The humid tropical areas, which already receive excess rainfall, may get even more, resulting in further soil erosion and crop losses. At the same time, semi-arid areas may become even drier, making agricultural production there even more difficult.[18]

In the developing countries where agriculture is usually the most important source of subsistence, decreased production may result in the loss of livelihood for millions of people. Even now, some developing countries have fallen behind in their efforts to increase food production and to improve the quality of the diet for their citizens. This decline in production combined with an ever-increasing demand may worsen the food situation in the future.

Environmental destruction may affect not only agricultural yield but industrial production as well. Shortages in the fresh water supply may lead to the closure of industries, which are dependent on water for the running or cooling of their production equipment. Environmental change may reduce the availability of raw materials for some industries (mainly forest and fishing industries), forcing their closure and the subsequent loss of jobs. Moreover, it is needless to point out that the wiping out of the forests and depletion of the fish stock will deprive a substantial number of people of their meagre sustenance, people who are directly dependent on these resources as a source of living.

Around 40% of the world's population, mostly in developing countries, is already suffering serious water shortages.[19] Because of increasing demand, more and more regions are gradually being pushed into a situation of water stress and chronic water scarcity.[20] To deal with this situation, many developing countries are being forced to overexploit the available water supply. They are building large-scale hydro-projects in densely populated plain areas because the suitable dam sites have already been used up. These projects, besides being the cause of severe waterlogging and massive evaporation, are also submerging vast areas

under water and subsequently resulting in loss of livelihood for a large number of populations.

Scientists predict that a rise in the sea level caused by climatic change may take away the living space and source of living for millions of people in the future. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) predicts that sea level may rise at an average rate of 6 centimetres per decade over the next century. A rise of this magnitude will severely affect the densely populated low-lying coastal zones of developing countries like China, Egypt, and Bangladesh, as well as some island states, such as the Maldives. In an emotional speech to the United Nations General Assembly in October 1987, the President of the Maldives said that a rise in sea level of only one meter would threaten the life and survival of all his countrymen.[21]

The loss of living space and source of livelihood as the result of environmental stress could lead to the migration of affected people. The decision to leave home is not always a simple one. People generally choose to stay in their native land and struggle to survive the impact of environmental disruptions until their hope of survival fades away. However, environmentally forced human migration is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history, people have been forced to leave home because the land on which they lived could no longer support them. Deforestation, desertification and drought have had a significant impact on these population movements in the past.[22] One could even reasonably argue that mankind's entire history has been a history of migration. As Louise Levathes writes, 'The genes of modern populations carry the encoded history of humans' remote past and their early wandering around the globe'.[23] However, 'what is more recent and more alarming is the potential for mass migration caused by irreversible destruction of the environment'.[24] Increasing numbers of people in the developing regions leave their homes because life has become insupportable there. They are moving within and across international borders and from rural areas to cities in large numbers. In its *State of World Population 1993*, the United Nations Population Fund warns that this unprecedented migration 'could become the human crisis of our age'.

## Defining 'environmental migrants'

Migration is a highly extensive and multifaceted term that comprises all types of voluntary as well as forced movements of a population. Whereas a number of demographic, economic, socio-cultural and psychological factors determine the nature, pattern and direction of voluntary human migration, forced migrants migrate to other areas to escape civil war, political and ethnic persecution, famine and other environmental catastrophes.

Much of the existing literature on voluntary migration emphasises the economic motives of the migrants. According to the proponents of this approach, migrants move to take advantage of better economic prospects in terms of employment and income. The neo-classical economic framework, 'the equilibrium model of migration', conceptualises population movement as the geographical mobility of workers who are responding to imbalances in the spatial distribution of land, labour, capital and natural resources.[25] The push (supply)—

pull (demand) theory is the more general conceptual umbrella for this equilibrium model. Unlike the neo-classical equilibrium theory, which is based on a 'microeconomics' approach professed mainly by the North American research community, the historical—structural school of the study of migration is derived from various approaches adopted by social scientists in Africa and Latin America. This historical—structural school consists of various macroeconomic approaches: 'dependency theory', 'internal colonialism', 'centre—periphery' approach and 'global accumulation' framework.

Whereas the explanation regarding 'voluntary' migration is dominated by the economic approach, the causes of 'forced' migration are usually attributed to political factors. Leon Gordenker's widely discussed model on forced migration clearly uses the domination of politics to explain this phenomenon. His model categorises the reasons for forced movements into four types: the first, international war; second, internal disturbances; third, deliberate changes within the social structure because of political transformation; and fourth, international political tension.[26] Researchers who provide only political explanations for forced migration do not differentiate between forced migrants and the highly defined term 'refugee'. Their interpretation of forced migration seems to have been moulded by the legal definition and the universal treatment of 'refugees'.

The legal definition of the term 'refugee' was imposed by the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees, together with the 1967 Protocol, which extended the Convention by excluding restrictions on time and geography.[27] As it is defined:

> The term "refugee" shall apply to any person who … owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.[28]

This legal limitation to the term 'refugee' makes it inadequate for absorbing types of forced migration other than those stemming from persecution. In spite of efforts by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the Central American countries to make the term 'refugee' more inclusive,[29] the definition provided by the 1951 Convention is still ruling the common psyche and governmental policies. This definition is furthermore limited to transborder migrants, which prohibits the inclusion of internally forced migrants in its terminology.

The contemporary significance of environmentally induced forced migration has led a number of researchers to attempt to conceptualise this phenomenon. Among the terms, such as 'environmental refugees', 'ecological refugees' and 'resource refugees', frequently used to describe this type of human migration, the favoured one is 'environmental refugees'. Essam El-Hinnawi, who virtually coined the term in his UNEP Report of 1985, defines environmental refugees as ' … those people who have been forced to leave their traditional habitat, temporarily or permanently, because of a marked environmental disruption (natural and/or triggered by people) that jeopardised their existence and/or

seriously affected the quality of their life'.[30] Jodi L Jacobson's Worldwatch paper of 1988 and other research studies helped to popularise the term further.[31] In an effort to give a working definition of the vaguely defined term 'environmental refugees', a discussion paper of the World Foundation for Environment and Development and the Norwegian Refugee Council in 1992 states: ' … two aspects: first, it should refer to persons who are coerced or forced to leave their homes for environmental reasons that threaten their lives. Secondly, it should be limited to persons who have crossed an international border (that is, persons who are outside their country of nationality or origin)'.[32]

The conceptualisation of environmentally displaced people as 'refugees' has become quite controversial. As Roger Zetter describes it, ' A popular conceptualisation of the refugee is readily to hand … forced refugees are categorised—labelled—as refugees with an internationally recognised legal status, given credibility by an international agency specifically charged to safeguard their interests, endorsed most powerfully of all by spontaneous philanthropy—the meaning of the level seems self-evident'.[33] The conceptual limitation to the fully labelled term 'refugee' is preventing the inclusion of environmentally forced migrants into its category. Bound by this conceptual limitation of the term 'refugee', relief officials could not come to the aid of many forced migrants in the Horn of Africa in the 1980s, which further resulted in the famine disaster in the Western Sudan, problematic situations in Ethiopia and Somalia, and so on.[34]

Besides the limitation on the causal nature of migration, the legal definition of the term 'refugee' also suffers from its exclusion of forced internal migrants. The transborder element is seen as important. Even the World Foundation for Environment and Development and the Norwegian Council could not overcome it while giving a working definition to environmentally displaced people. As the number of people internally displaced for environmental reasons is nearly 10 million each year,[35] and as, most often, the level of suffering and number of casualties is much higher among the internally forced migrants than among those who have crossed a border,[36] it will be self-defeating to the purpose of any research if they are not taken into account.

In an effort to avoid the legal and institutional hindrances and, at the same time, to make the term more inclusive, it is useful to apply the term 'environmental migrants' rather than 'environmental refugees' when referring to environmentally forced population displacement. Astri Suhrke has made an attempt to distinguish between 'environmental refugees' and 'environmental migrants'. As she defines it, ' "Environmental refugees" are "vulnerable people who are displaced due to extreme environmental degradation", while "environmental migrants" are those "who respond to a combination of pull-and-push factors" '.[37] The problem with Suhrke's differentiation is that whereas her description of "environmental refugees" is no different from the earlier ones, her portrayal of "environmental migrants" confuses this category with migrants of an ordinary economic nature. To avoid this confusion, it is necessary to draw a clear line between economic and environmental migrants. Economic migrants are those who move to economically affluent regions in search of a better future for themselves and for their family members and who are responding to both push and pull factors. 'Whereas the environmental migrants are forced to move away

from their homes as a result of the loss of their livelihood and/or living space because of environmental changes (natural as well as anthropogenic) and who are forced to migrate (temporarily or permanently) to the nearest possible place (within or outside the state boundary) in search of sustenance.'[38] While economic migrants are voluntary migrants, environmental migrants belong to the forced migration category. In the case of economic migrants, both push and pull factors may play equally significant roles in their decision to migrate from their own land, but for the environmental migrants, the push factor completely overwhelms the pull factor. There may be some role for the pull factor in the selection of the area to which they migrate, but it does not contribute in any way to the decision to leave the homeland, as there is no other choice. Within the framework of this working definition, we can now assess trends in environmentally forced migration and also discuss implications for conflict and conflict resolution in the developing countries.

## Environmental migrants and conflict in the developing society

The obstacles to developing a conceptual clarity regarding conflict induced by environmental migration are formidable. Among the elusive elements in this process is an acceptable definition of conflict. Conflict, a pervasive social process, occurs at all levels of social life: the interpersonal, the intergroup, the interorganisational and the international. It takes place not only between social units but also within the different types of social units—between persons as well as between nations. Its multidimensional character has continued to trouble researchers in their attempts to define it scientifically.

Most definitions include an ingredient of struggle, strife or collision, while trying to differentiate conflict from competition. Some go further and define it as a struggle over values or claims to status, power or scarce resources in which the aims of the group or individuals involved are to gain objectives and, simultaneously, to neutralise, injure or eliminate rivals.[39] As Anthony Oberschall notes, social conflict is one of the most ubiquitous of events and encompasses a broad range of phenomena, including class, racial, religious and community conflicts plus riots, rebellions, revolutions, strikes, marches, demonstrations and protest rallies.[40] But in order to concentrate on its main objective, the present study has avoided involving itself in this never-ending debate and has chosen to use Wallensteen's definition of conflict to explore the relationship between environmental migration and the spawning of social conflicts.

Wallensteen defines conflict ' as a social situation in which a minimum of two parties strive at the same moment in time to acquire the same set of scarce resources'.[41] Here, the scarcity can be defined as insufficiency of material as well as ideological resources to meet a demand or requirement. A conflict has the potential for spawning organised actors and, at the same time, for creating an issue of contention or incompatibility among existing organised actors. As Wallensteen argues, whereas scarcity is the necessary condition for originating a conflict, its materialisation requires three factors: organised actors, a minimum of one incompatibility in their objectives, and the actors' conscious intention to achieve their goals. This definition distinguishes itself from others by bringing

the actors and their formation process to the analysis of the conflict. This provides the study with a new outlook for an extensive investigation rather than restricting it with the usual definition.

With the help of the above definition, this work aims to explore the types of conflicts that are likely to develop in a developing society in a scarcity situation induced by environmental migration. This will be done by analysing the role and formation of possible actors and their conflicting behaviours towards each other. Scarcity can be caused by several factors: economic decline, ideological differences, political control, etc. However, scarcity induced by environmental migration is in a separate category and is achieved only as the result of large-scale migration of the populace because of environmental destruction. This scarcity induced by environmental migration can potentially create organised actors and, at the same time, may create incompatibility between existing actors. The perceived conflicting behaviours of these organised actors towards each other may eventually lead to acute conflicts at three levels in the developing society: state versus state, state versus group, and group versus group.

### *State versus state conflicts*

Reduced production in the agricultural and industrial sectors in the environmentally affected regions of the developing countries might force local, small and marginal farmers and labourers to flee their homeland in large numbers in search of other areas for survival. Massive deforestation and loss of fishing habitats can also potentially lead to large-scale migration. Where the environmental destruction is more severe and widespread, and the prospects of survival in the urban areas are quite bleak, this situation may force large-scale migration from the degraded areas to better placed regions. The predicted rise in sea level may further worsen the situation. These migrations can cross interstate boundaries, culminating in a massive transborder migration.

This phenomenon has already become one of the growing concerns to the international community.[42] People are crossing international borders in larger numbers than ever before. Set in motion by the search for survival, much of the world's population is on the move, and this movement is reshaping international politics and economics. The United Nations Population Fund paints a shocking picture: 'tens of millions on the move, leaving behind desperate circumstances and these massive flows are straining industrialised and developing countries alike.'[43] Both forced as well as voluntary migrants are rapidly becoming the driving force for many government decisions and policies in the unsettled post-cold war order. Migration has already become a political issue and many receiving nations are beginning to take steps to try to stem the flow.

Large-scale transborder environmental migration has several dimensions for inducing conflict between the receiver and sender states in the developing region. In some cases, giving permission to the migrants to enter into its own territory may strain the relationship between the receiving state and the sender country. The tension may arise from the exposure of the sender's inability to handle the migration crisis by itself, or the sender may suspect or allege that the receiving country is encouraging the migration. The other possibility is that the migrants,

after being settled in the host country, may indulge themselves in anti-government activities against their native government, which they may perceive as the perpetrator of their plight. The new location, physical proximity and protection from the former regime's retribution can provide a good opportunity to them for taking revenge. In some cases, the migrants may be encouraged or used by the host state in their efforts at revenge because of existing political differences between the host and the sender states. This will of course result in creating negative implications for regional security in the developing regions.

The trans-border environmental migrants may pose a structural threat to a developing host country by increasing demands on its already scarce resources. Competition with the local population over resources may lead to conflict with migrants and bring political problems for the government of the receiving state. The host country may also feel threatened when the environmental migrants try to enter into its fragile domestic political process and exert pressure on the government. In some situations, the environmental migrants may become a serious law and order problem in the receiving country, or the receiving state may even perceive the mass migration and settlement in a particular area as a ploy by the sender to prepare for a future unarmed conquest or assertion of sovereignty. Attempts by the host state—in response to pressure from its own citizens and law enforcement agencies—to send the migrants back to their own country may worsen the relationship between sender and receiver states and could even incite an armed struggle.

### *State versus group conflicts*

The failure of the ecosystem to support the rural economy in the developing regions may induce the villagers eventually to migrate to the nearby urban areas. As agriculture is the primary victim of environmental decline, villagers are more susceptible to disaster than their urban counterparts. They are also more likely to be displaced from their homelands as the result of a decline in fish catching, deforestation and soil and river bank erosion. Because of lack of resources, the state authorities in the developing countries might not be able to take the same preventative measures for the rural areas as they can take in the urban centres in order to combat the onslaught of nature. Moreover, the people displaced by environmentally disastrous big projects, mainly the big dams, may migrate to the nearby urban areas in search of survival.

There is no doubt that the world is already in the 'middle of an urban revolution'.[44] According to an estimate by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), by the year 2000, 77% of Latin America's population, 41% of Africa's population, and 35% of Asia's population will be city dwellers. It is also projected that by the year 2000, 23 cities will be mega-cities, each with more than 10 million habitants, and of these, 18 will be in the developing countries.[45] Whereas the urban population is growing by only 0.8% per year in the developed countries, the growth rate in the developing regions is 3.6%.[46] The cities in developing countries are already surrounded by shanty suburbs, which contain millions of inhabitants, a high proportion of whom are without jobs and living in slums.

The rapid urbanisation in the developing world no doubt creates various social problems, but, more importantly, it also brings environmentally affected people into close physical proximity with each other. The local community may help them to organise against the state authority, which they perceive as the culprit of their misery. Access to modern communication systems and news media can have a profound impact on this crusade. Environmental activists may also find it much easier to mobilise these people to struggle against their exploitation, something that would have been difficult in the remote villages.

State authorities in the developing countries customarily place little importance on this kind of insurgency or opposition, in terms of allocating military, economic and political resources, unless they threaten the capital or other main cities. This attitude has served to increase the importance of urban centres in the national political life in many of these countries.[47] It is very likely that the organised and motivated 'environmentally displaced' people in the cities will now bring the struggle to the doorstep of the state administration. The availability of the new resources at their hands could also possibly make them more effective in this endeavour. In this way, the environmentally imposed migration could potentially transport the conflict from the environmentally degraded rural areas to a distant urban locality in a developing country.

Probable conflicts at the urban centres of the developing countries between environmental migrants and the state authorities could be the result of a transformation of popular disenchantment into an organised political struggle. Political actors may be able to take advantage of these conflicts in their struggle against the state. This organised protest challenges imposed rule by majority, and also calls the attention of the government to the problems of the people. At the same time, the changing situation can intensify conflict in the developing society and pose a threat to the running of democratically elected regimes.

### *Group versus group conflicts*

Wherever environmental migrants settle, they flood the labour market and add to the local demand for food and other basic necessities, which puts new burdens on society. The assimilation of the migrants into a new society is not easy in any case, but when it takes place in another developing society, the situation becomes even worse. The influx of migrants is likely to deplete local food supplies and to drive up food prices. Much of the local welcome to migrants can be attributed to the benefits of cheap labour they provide.[48] However, not all the poorer hosts may be able to employ the migrant labour. Moreover, migrants can hurt hosts by reducing their opportunities for work and by driving down wages. If land is scarce in the receiving areas, as is usually the case in the developing countries, most of the hosts are likely to be hurt. The increasing competition for common property resources—water, grazing areas, forests—is likely to be especially damaging for the local hosts.

The resulting resource scarcity in the new area may help to generate a strong feeling of 'nativism' among the original inhabitants of the receiving area. Myron Weiner defines 'nativism' as a claim by a group of people that by 'virtue of its indigenous character, rooted in historical claims, it has rights upon land,

employment, political power and cultural hegemony that are greater than those people who are not indigenous'.[49] The indigenous people, called *bhoomiputras* in Malaysia, 'sons of the soil' in India and 'native people' in other societies, organise themselves as a group to protect their interests on the basis that they as a people exist only within their own country, whereas the others have other homes to which they can return; this by itself can breed native–migrant conflicts in the society.

This native–migrant conflict is also likely to occur in the developing society, as mass environmental migration can alter the power equation among the elites. To safeguard their interests, these elites can actively build up a strong group identity within their communities and can incite one group to take action against the other. In their effort to organise the natives, the elites of the community may use the ethnic differences between migrants and natives as a major instrument of mobilisation. Fear of retaliation by the natives may be used by the elites in the migrant community to counter their native counterparts. This type of conflict is an expression of a feeling of insecurity among the elites of native and migrant communities and an attempt to protect their interests against each other in the developing societies.

Environmentally induced migration can not only transport conflicts from rural to urban areas in the developing countries, it also has the potential to transmit these conflicts from the areas of environmental destruction to far away places. This transmitted group conflict can spark riots and internal wars in the host society. As Jessica T Mathews rightly points out, environmental migrants can spread 'disruption across national borders'.[50] International media generally focus on native–migrant conflicts in the industrialised developed countries but, in reality, this has been a worldwide phenomenon. Environmental migrants have also been subject to hostility from the natives in a number of developing countries.

Conflict between native and migrant communities can take place in the developing regions because of both internal as well as transborder migration of environmentally displaced people.[51] Transborder migration, besides being a cause of tension between sender and host states, may, at the same time, germinate conflict in the place of settlement. The existing natural differences between the natives and migrants, either by themselves or through the use of these differences as instruments by the elites of both communities for their political interests, can potentially bring the conflict to the surface. These migration-aided conflicts may also contribute negatively to the process of nation-building in many developing states by arousing greater ethnic rivalries. Developing countries with multi-ethnic compositions are likely to be more vulnerable to large-scale ethnic unrest, particularly if the migrants are identified with one major ethnic group of the country.

## Concluding discussion

As has been discussed previously, incompatibilities, induced or elicited by environmentally stimulated migration, may create or activate a number of opposing actors in developing societies. Furthermore, the conscious intention of

these actors to resist or prevail over the situation of scarcity can be rightly or wrongly perceived as hostile behaviour towards another actor and can result in conflict. Population migration as the result of particular environmental destruction can also be the stimulus for more than one type of conflict at the same time in a developing society.

Conflict between developing countries may arise over environmental migration when the host country accepts migrants, takes action to stop the migration from the sender country, or tries to deport migrants back to their country of origin. Whereas urban revolts may take place in a developing society as a result of the environmentally affected groups taking advantage of the migration in their fight against the perceived exploitation of a regime, group conflict is an expression of a feeling of insecurity among the natives and an attempt to protect their interests against those of the migrants. Mass migration affects the populace by altering the power equation among various actors in the host society, which induces them to take action to protect their interests.

The population migration transports, so to speak, the conflict from the environmentally affected regions to the migrant receiving areas. The displaced population, by being forced out of their native land because of a decreasing natural support base, may migrate to a better-supplied region in the hope of survival. In some cases, the receiving regions might have caused the environmental destruction and hence become the targets of the migrants. The analysis indicates that the environmental exploiters in the developing region may themselves become the victims of the conflicts induced by migration caused by their own acts of environmental destruction.

Environmental migration should be one of the most important items on the global political agenda. This phenomenon has posed a serious challenge to the peace and security of many developing nations in most parts of the world. Massive numbers of people have already left their homes to escape from environmental catastrophes, and the potential for still larger numbers to follow presents a dreary picture for the future. What is the answer to this critical predicament? A number of countries is restricting legal entry into their territories, some are constructing barbed wire fences on their borders, and some are using armed forces to resist the flow of migrants. Forcible deportation has become increasingly common in both industrialised and developing countries. However, as past experiences and present developments suggest, it is practically impossible to check the migration with the show and/or use of force.

There is a need for a positive approach in order to face this monumental task of environmentally induced human migration in the developing regions squarely. Attention needs to be focused on preventing the destruction of the environment that leads to population displacement rather than on the use of force to stop the migration. Development projects need to take a comprehensive regional approach rather than aiming at serving the short-term interests of a particular state. Increased measures for the protection of the environment and adherence to the path of sustainable development can slow down migration in the developing regions. The achievement of this objective requires true commitment: recognition of the link between environment and migration, better

developmental planning and aggressive incorporation of the migration variable into external assistance and population planning.

## Notes

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