GH: Welcome to the Delmi podcast about migration and adaptation to climate change. This is a hot topic that our world has to discuss and understand a lot more. The guests here in the studio will tell you more about this. My name is Göran Holmqvist and I’m a delegation member at Delmi, while my ordinary occupation is with the Swedish Sida, the Swedish development cooperation agency. But over to our guests, can I ask you to briefly introduce yourselves? Francoise, you go first.

FG: Yes. Hello, my name is Francois Gemenne. I’m a researcher in the human impacts of climate change, and into migration induced by climate change in particular. I’m heading the Hugo Observatory at the University of Liège, and I’m also a leader of the IPCC and the author of this report which we shall be discussing today and which is now released.

GH: Okay, thank you so much, and IPCC is this major undertaking by the UN to actually map out how the world is going to deal with climate change, and there are these academic expert reports produced periodically on different topics, including the forecast for climate change. And I should say that Francois is also the author of research overview, that Delmi then is releasing today actually, so you will find it on the Delmi website, and it is a report that focuses on what today’s research can say on this topic of the relation between migration and adaptation to climate change. So, Elisabeth?

EH: Thank you. Yes, my name is Elisabeth Haslund, and I am spokesperson for UNHCR, the UN refugee agency in our Nordic and Baltic office here in Stockholm, and climate change is a topic that we are increasingly working with in the refugee agency, but we will get back to that later.

GH: Alright. And Mats Hårsmar?

MH: Hello, I’m Mats Hårsmar. I’m deputy managing director for something called the EBA, Expert group on aid studies, which is a Swedish committee doing evaluations and analysis of Swedish development corporations.

GH: And finally, with us we have Melissa.

MS: Yes. Hi, I’m Melissa Siegel. I am a professor of migration studies at Maastricht university, and the united nations university Merit also based in Maastricht, and I’m also the co-director of the Maastricht centre for citizenship, migration and development, and I would say my key area of expertise is in the area of migration and development.

GH: Okay. Welcome to all of you. And we start with you Francois, and you are the author of this report, released today by Delmi, named *The Impacts of Migration for Adaptation and Vulnerability*. Could you please tell us about the key messages from this report?

FG: Yes, of course. Thank you very much. I would say that when we discuss migration induced by climate change, the current narrative, the current rhetoric still puts it as a future threat that we could still avoid by reducing sharply our greenhouse gas emissions and portray it as a kind of humanitarian disaster in the making as something that we should avoid at all costs. This research overview makes the case that first, migration induced by climate change is already ongoing and is a phenomenon that requires policy responses, but also about the fact that migration is not always a failure to adapt, and that usually people think that migration is an option of last resort, and this overview shows that this is not always the case and that migration can be mobilized as a strategy for the people affected by the impacts of climate change to adapt and to provide for example alternative lively hoods to their families, to alleviate the pressure on natural resources, to develop new skills as well, and of course to send remittances to their families, so that these families can basically fulfil their primary needs.

But at the same time the research overview also argues and makes the case for a broader, more comprehensive assessment of the impacts of migration on the adaptation and on vulnerability. The problem very often, as migration as adaption is now a kind of key policy trend within the UN, negotiation of climate change, the problem is that it usually considers only the viewpoint of the migrants, and this research overview attempts to consider not only the viewpoint of the migrants, but also the perspective from the community of origin and the community of destination. In a nutshell it asks the questions: “Adaptation, sure, but adaptation for whom? Whom are we talking about?” And the research overview shows that what is an adaptive process for some, can also be detrimental to the adaptation of others, and thus reinforce the vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.

For example, the community of origin might lose some essential workforce, especially the youth migrate away, and it can also be a disincentive for authorities to basically build adaptation infrastructure in the community of origin. Similarly, while remittances very often provide some form of a safety net for the communities of origin and for the families struggling with the impacts of climate change, it can also create inequalities and imbalances in a society, and sometimes people are too dependent upon remittances which in itself can also be an issue. And we show that in different contexts remittances are used in different ways.

GH: It’s a rich report. I think in the report you also discuss whether climate migration is a meaningful category to identify. Could you make a comment on that?

FG: Absolutely. I would say that in public debates, most of the time climate induced migration is considered as a kind of new additional category of migration that would be a kind of necessary biproduct of climate change. In this report, I argue that we shouldn’t consider migration induced by climate change as a separate discrete category, but that we should on the contrary look at the increasing importance of climate change as a driver of migration and realise that we are not talking about the migration dynamic that would be set apart from other migration dynamics, but that climate change influences the other drivers of migration such as the economy, political or demographic drivers of migration, and I think that our task is to understand how these factors interplay with each other and influence each other.

GH: Yeah, so, a multicausal phenomenon. Thanks so much Francois. Elisabeth, working for UNHCR you primarily at UNHCR relate to the part of migration that we call forced migration of refugees, both between countries and actually to the largest extent within countries. So how does this issue play out in the work of UNHCR?

EH: Well, I think what Francois just pointed to is that how climate change is an amplifying factor that plays into so many other factors, and I think this is also very much how we are looking at this from UNHCR’s point of view, because as you said we are helping and assisting refugees and the internally displaced by conflict. And what we are seeing increasingly is that correlation between the consequences of climate change on people’s lives, and how that drives forced displacement, because it plays into this, I would say dangerous cocktail, together with food insecurity, poverty, that leads to the conflict, the continuous violence and the persecution that is also forcing people to flee. So, we see it when communities who were before peacefully coexisting, now have to fight over scarce resources, have to compete over the fertile land to farm, and then we see that it boosts those conflicts and the violence that is then also forcing people to flee.

And I think one really clear figure that I want to mention, because it speaks to this very clearly, is that if we look at the entire planet, it’s about 20 percent of all of us, all people here, who live on countries that are highly vulnerable to climate change. If we look at refugees and the conflict displaced … internally displaced people, it’s 80 percent of them who come from countries that are extremely vulnerable to climate change, but at the same time don’t have the capacity and the resources to address it and to mitigate those risks coming from climate change.

GH: Yeah. Thank you Elisabeth, and you mentioned conflict, and I think there is a parallel discussion on the link between climate change and conflict, which often end up claiming the multicausal phenomenon that we are dealing with. There is no straight linear way, but actually it’s an important factor playing into, and I guess that’s what you also see from UNHCR’s perspective that deals with the consequences of conflicts?

EH: Definitely. And if I may make another point, also related to what Francois mentioned earlier. This is very much something that is happening now, so we need to act and we need governments and states to act, not because the situation might lead to people feeling to our borders, but because this is already happening and it is happening in developing regions that need help and support. And we have also seen how some of those hosting communities that have already received refugees or internally displaced groups, they are finding themselves on the frontlines of the climate crisis, so we are seeing how host communities, hosting generously refugees or internally displaced, are then faced with consequences also, because these are hotspots. So, we unfortunately see these types of crises in a crisis, where they then have to not only deal with the fact that they’ve been forced from their homes, have to leave all their belongings behind, and then they are finding themselves in situations where then flooding, drouths, extreme weather is making their living conditions even more dire.

GH: Thank you Elisabeth. Mats, you work for EBA, whose role is to evaluate and analyse the role of Swedish aid, but you have also recently come back from the Sahel region in Africa and more precisely Burkina Faso which is a bit of a hotspot for many of these topics that is raised in the report, so could you reflect a bit from the Burkina Faso perspective maybe? What does this mean concretely?

MH: Absolutely. If you follow me to Burkina where I’ve been living for several years, I can discern at least four different migratory patterns, different patterns, some positive, some negative. Building on what Francois and Elisabeth has been explaining here, but multiple factors behind, I can see also the traces to climate change in all these four patterns. The first is a very traditional one. Young men wanting to establish themselves with households. They migrate for a year or two to the coastal countries, to other countries in Africa to build a capital to establish themselves, because resources are scarce.

The second pattern has to do with introduction of cotton, which the French came and introduced in the 1930’s. They started out in the north-eastern part of Burkina Faso, which is sort of towards the Sahel, towards the Sahara desert. With time this cultivation has moved because land has been degraded with cotton, with is a tough crop to grow and people have been following this towards the southwest of Burkina where the economic centre has also moved, because cotton is a major export earner for this country. So, that’s one … second part of migration pattern.

The third one, occurring during the last five years I’d say, is caused by conflict. It so happened that along the border towards Mali, northern part of Burkina, there has been terrorist attacks, and it might be pure coincidence but it's also there where the land degradation is the harshest. So, people have been fleeing the conflict, a conflict which has really strong basis in issues related to climate change, and we have now 1.7 million internally displaced people, 8 or 9 percent of the population.

And the fourth pattern is the small stream of Burkinabe moving to Europe along the camel routes and over the Mediterranean seas. Some hundreds of Burkinabe are found in Europe, a very small part, and this is what occupies us most in the west, that in Burkina you have a lot of different other migratory, patterns positive and negative. I guess you would ask me what aid can do in this situation? [skrattar]

GH: Absolutely, I had it on my list Mats.

MH: Because there are many ways to approach this, these variour situations. Disaster reduction is one area where aid, the cooperation is very involved already. Insurance schemes is another one. The African risk capacity is an organization of the African union, built with aid money, but where countries, if they have good enough systems for dealing with catastrophes to recover, they can become member and they pay their fee, and when there are objective criteria for … like number of days in a row of drought, you get money back to deal with this drought. So, this is one system. Then of course the major part, the adaptation work, is on underlying drivers. Land degradation, land recovery. Regreening of the Sahel, which is quite successful work being done with agroforestry et cetera. Water, dealing with water, small dams. I could talk long about that.

But then two things more directly related to migration. Working with remittances, over the five, ten last years there have been schemes built to enable the transfer of remittances more easily, and also incentivize people to use it more collectively and not only for personal consumption. And the last one, extend social protection to refugees. We are actually publishing a report very soon together with the OECD on the extent to which refugees internal … refugees are covered by social protection schemes. Legally they are covered to some extent, in practice not so much. So, we are trying to find out and how to enable that, because you should bow to xenophobia and the politics that goes with it. Refugees have resources, you need to integrate them into the host country economy, and that first step could be to integrate them into social protection systems.

GH: Okay. Thank you Mats, and thank you for reminding us that what we see in our debate and in our media, tends to be the top of an iceberg of things going on in Africa, Sahel and also elsewhere. Melissa, we’ve heard that remittances is one of the major pathways from migration to improved adaptation of communities of origin of the migrants. Could you expand on that? How much are there of remittances, and do they actually … do we have enough evidence that it plays this important role?

MS: Yeah, thank you. So, remittances are generally the money that migrants send back to their friends and families, and households and communities of origin. Now, there are a lot of different effects that remittances can have, and particularly in the context of climate change we can really see remittances playing in role, particularly as a kind of adaptive mechanism when there are chocks. So, you know when we see a climate disaster happening we know that remittances generally increase to those areas where disasters have happened. So, what you see in a lot of these contexts is that remittances really play a sort of insurance role, and that’s the context where we see remittances, I would say, playing the biggest role. That’s what we see from the current literature, although they do have the ability to have other kinds of impacts and help to probably mitigate risk also before it happens, or for people to not be as vulnerable. But what we see most is really how remittances are used in the aftermath of a disaster.

GH: Okay, great. And what about the distribution of remittances. I mean migrants tend to be self-selected as we read in Francois’s report, and the people benefitting from remittances, what can we say about the socioeconomic profile? Are the most vulnerable the ones reached?

MS: Yeah, so this is a good question, and like many things in migration studies, the answer is often: “It depends.” So, you know very much about migration and remittances is context specific. We see different things in different countries, which I think also comes out in the report, but in general it’s not the poorest of the poor who migrate. It’s not the most vulnerable in a society that generally migrate, which means that there can also be differences in who benefits from the migration and who benefits from those remittances. So, depending on the country, it’s often you know kind of the middle section of the country or sometimes even the higher socioeconomic groups that are being able to benefit more from the remittances, but again that’s context dependent and depending on where migrants are going. So, internal migration we see coming more from the lower socioeconomic groups, whereas international migration we see coming more from the higher socioeconomic groups, and so those that are able to send people further afield into other countries are often those who can benefit even more from the remittances.

GH: Okay. Thank you Melissa, and also when we speak about adaptation, somethings are done at the household level, somethings need to be done at the community level, like constructing a dam or setting up a system or something that benefits the community as a whole. Do remittances also have the potential to play a role there?

MS: Remittances absolutely have the potential to play a role at the community level, and we can see this in a number of different ways. So, there are already spill over effects, often from the remittances that go to individuals or to households, but we can also see collective remittances where a group of migrants abroad get together and send their money channelled to a specific, often development, project. It is important to note that still the majority of remittances go through to daily needs, so here is a role for policy to try to enhance these collective remittances, to you know really productive uses towards to climate change adaptation.

GH: Mm. Francois, you discussed a bit of that in your report, the research findings on how to make better use of remittances also for collective purposes. So, what are the findings?

FG: Yes, absolutely. Well, the findings are that the remittances are used very differently depending on the context, but in many cases are used to fulfil the families primary needs, which means that remittances usually do not really serve an adaptation purpose and are usually not invested in collective projects that could serve adaptation. And I think there is a great role for development policies here to basically pool the remittances together, so that they can be used for collective projects. And I think it is important to recognize on the one hand that remittances are private money, but also that by taking that into account in development policies and adaptation policies, it is possible to mobilize this money to add development funds, so that this money can be used by the community to fund its own adaptation, and therefore there is a huge potential there that remains largely intact.

GH: Yeah, but we could think about creating incentives for, and matching grants with remittances and so on, to … because actually much indicate that the volume is extremely high seen at the global level, and actually much higher than the volumes of development cooperation as far as I understand. I had one question that any of you could comment on, but it’s a point made in Francois’s report that there is a kind of divide between the evidence that researchers produce on migration and the way the public debate plays out. At least in our part of the world. Do you recognize that there is such a divide? Maybe Francois, if you wanted to do a little bit and others can comment if you recognize yourself in that …

FG: Yes, absolutely. There is a huge discrepancy between the way migration is portrayed and depicted in public debates, and what the empirical realities tell us, and this is a comment we can make for migration at large, not only for migration related to climate change, but it is also the case of course for migration related to climate change, where it is often seen as a humanitarian disaster in the making. And the problem is that many of the media reports will feed this biased perception and that in many cases in migration policies, policies are taken on the basis of perceptions of migration, rather on the basis of realities. And I think that our task as researchers is really to try and reconcile these two perspectives, and to make sure that the perception that the public opinion, but also policymakers have of migration, as much as possible conform with the realities with migration.

GH: Thank you, and what you say echoes very much with the very mission of this Delmi that organizes this podcast, which is to bridge this divide. And Melissa, you even run a YouTube channel trying to bridge this divide I understand? What’s your experience, do you succeed?

MS: Yes, exactly. So, you’re absolutely right, or both of you are absolutely right about perceptions, and I think migration is one of the areas where there is a huge amount of misconceptions around the topic, and we do see a huge disconnect between perceptions both of policymakers and of the general public and actual realities on ground. You know, even things from just estimating the number of immigrants in a country, we see huge, huge differences there, and the perception of numbers of migrants in a country [skrattar] and the actual numbers of migrants. So, you know things like this podcast, things like the work of Delmi and things like, you know the YouTube channel that I run, the whole purpose of this is to try to get you know fact based real information out to the general public in a hopefully you know digestible way.

HG: Yeah. Thank you Melissa. Mats, you wanted to comment?

MH: Just a minor addition to this. I agree very much with what has been said here, but I think there is a need for a shift of perceptions, especially when it comes to refugees. They are to be seen as people, individuals with resources, not as problems primarily, and if you shift that perspective in that way you would tend to work in a different way, so it’s a huge task but I think it’s important.

EH: Well, I think that you said it perfectly. I think we really … it is necessary to shift the focus a little bit, and I think one thing we need to realize here in Europe is also that the majority of the worlds refugees and internally displaced are not here or are not on their way here. The majority of people who have been forced to flee their homes are either in their own country, or in a neighbouring country to that conflict. But exactly as you say, refugees and internally displaced people are people with resources and with skills, but they sometimes just need a little bit of help, the inclusion to make sure that they can actually contribute to everything that’s being done.

GH: And I think that that’s misconception that is fairly widespread also in Sweden, that the majority of refugees would end up in high income countries, when I think it’s … the number is maybe 15 percent or something that actually have high income countries as countries of reception. Delmi is even running a quiz trying the address misconception by testing people on this particular … that’s one of the questions that people answer … give the wrong answer to quite frequently. So, thank you so much. Unfortunately, time is out. I really recommend people who are keen on learning more on this topic to read the report which is released today on Delmi’s website. Thank you Francois. Thank you Melissa. Thank you Mats. Thank you Elisabeth. And with that we close this podcast. Thank you.

FG: Thank you very much.

EH: Thank you.

MS: Thank you so much.

MH: Thank you.