Climate migration in the Dry Corridor of Central America: integrating a gender perspective

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Climate migration in the Dry Corridor of Central America: integrating a gender perspective. Executive summary.

This document was produced, coordinated and revised by InspirAction/Christian Aid based on research conducted by the Women’s Environment & Development Organization (wedo) and the Professional Services Cooperative for Social Solidarity (Cooperativa Autogestionaria de Servicios Profesionales para la Solidaridad Social R.L., CoopeSolDar R.L).

Authors of the research: Ivannia Ayales, Eleanor Blomstrom, Vivienne Solis Rivera, Daniela Pedraza and Paula M. Perez Briceño.

The research has been coordinated and reviewed by: Gaby Drinkwater, Arantxa García, Alejandro González, Sagarno Monedero and Kas Sempere.

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«Climate change affects us women because we have the responsibility of buying the products and cultivating the land; because of the effect of climate change, there is now less work, and an economic crisis means that we have to migrate... there is total unemployment...»

(A woman from San Ramón, Nicaragua)
Every second, one person leaves their home due to climate change-related causes, according to the United Nations Frontiers 2017 report. The countries of the Central America Dry Corridor – Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua – are among the most vulnerable to the consequences of climate change and rank highest on the German Watch Global Climate Risk Index 2018 (Guatemala is ranked eleventh, while El Salvador is sixteenth).

Some studies have partly analysed how these climate changes lead to internal and even international migration in the region (Carazo et al., 2012 and Crush, 2013). However, very little research has focused on gaining a thorough understanding of the causal effect, the scope and impact of climate change on this migration, or on the communities’ own perceptions of the appearance of this problem, and still less on analysing the impacts of gender on this climate migration in the Dry Corridor.

This study intends to explore the relationship between migration, gender and climate change in the Central America Dry Corridor in greater depth because, although there is a vast body of literature that addresses each of these three factors individually, there is a significantly smaller number of sources which cover the link between two variables, and studies which analyse the three factors together are virtually non-existent.

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What are the dynamics of environmental migration, the causes of which are now likely to worsen as a result of climate change, in the Central America Dry Corridor and the associated gender impacts?
2. What adaptation and resilience actions have women planned and implemented to tackle climate change?
3. What aspects must be taken into account when formulating public policy at different levels to combat climate change from a gender-equality perspective?
Key Results

Our findings give a strong indication that these three issues are intertwined, and the perception is that migration and the impact on women is increasing because of climate change. We give recommendations on how climate change policy can be enhanced through gender informed responses, on further research needed in to these linkages and on more coherent policy making between climate, migration and social policy.
All the communities visited clearly identified climate change as the cause of increased drought, extreme rises in temperature, floods and changes in rain patterns: they explained that the periods of rain and drought were much more predictable a decade ago than at present, and they linked this irregularity to climate change.

An increasing migration related to uncertainty about rain or drought during harvesting seasons, linked to climate change or worsening environmental conditions, was identified in the testimonies collected in the four countries. According to the interviews conducted, migration is mainly temporary during the first planting season: in the past, there were two harvests each year but, in response to climate change, the Dry Corridor populations no longer risk beginning the first planting cycle and migrate in search of other sources of employment. Although in El Salvador, some of the communities (especially in San Miguel) do establish a link between migration and climate effects, particularly drought, they highlight violence continues to play a more significant role in migration than the climate variable. Residents usually migrate internally to rural areas with crops which require manpower during the harvesting seasons (coffee, sugar, banana, melon, etc.) or, in the case of women, to cities to look for domestic work or jobs in maquilas (textile factories).

In the four countries, people normally migrated to other regions within the same country or to neighboring countries, most frequently to Costa Rica and El Salvador, as they have the dollar, which enables migrants to obtain higher salaries than in their countries of origin. The people interviewed mentioned international migration to the United States or Spain less often; Nicaraguan women from San Ramón and Somoto spoke of migration to the latter country for domestic work.

In the regions visited in Honduras and Nicaragua this phenomenon is reported to affect a similar proportion of men and women, while the perception of the communities is that there’s an increase among women who decide to migrate; in Guatemala and El Salvador migration continues to be a masculine practice. Due to the increase of climate vulnerability, both in Nicaragua and in Honduras, more whole families migrate temporarily for the coffee-picking season, and, in particular, women and children migrate because of the high demand for workers to pick this crop. Some schools in places of origin described how they have had to adapt school calendars and make timetables more flexible as a result of pupil absenteeism during the coffee-harvesting season; in the region of Marcala (Honduras), students are absent from school for periods of three to four months, from December/January to March.

During field work, evidence was found for some permanent, forced migration in Nicaragua and El Salvador (the families concerned migrated to Guatemala) due to extreme events related to climate change, such as hurricanes or landslides caused by heavy rain.

### 1. CLIMATE MIGRATION PATTERNS BY GENDER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Impact of gender on migration</th>
<th>Desigualdad de género en la propiedad de la tierra e impactos económicos</th>
<th>Causas de la migración y circunstancias específicas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Honduras</td>
<td>Perception of an increase in female migration</td>
<td>Inequality in access to land: women rent land and receive less income due to declining harvests.</td>
<td>Temporary cyclical migration of entire families due to variations in harvests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Largely male</td>
<td>Increase in workload for women.</td>
<td>Internal and interregional migration due to variations in harvests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Largely male</td>
<td>Gender inequality in access to land. Increase in workload for women.</td>
<td>Guatemala is a recipient of non-temporary migration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>Perception of an increase in female migration</td>
<td>Increase in workload for women.</td>
<td>Evidence of interregional migration related to extreme climate events.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1. **Is it true that there’s an increase among women who decide to migrate?**
   - Yes, in Guatemala and El Salvador migration continues to be a masculine practice. Due to the increase of climate vulnerability, both in Nicaragua and in Honduras, more whole families migrate temporarily for the coffee-picking season, and, in particular, women and children migrate because of the high demand for workers to pick this crop.

2. **Does the perception of an increase in female migration affect the perception of an increase in male migration?**
   - Yes, in Guatemala and El Salvador, the perception of an increase in female migration is reported to affect a similar proportion of men and women. While in El Salvador, some of the communities (especially in San Miguel) do establish a link between migration and climate effects, particularly drought, they highlight violence continues to play a more significant role in migration than the climate variable.
The interviews revealed evidence of extra responsibilities that women assume as a result of climate variability: a double/triple responsibility (paid work, domestic work in addition to caring for children and the elderly, and participation in community projects). Women need to spend more time supplying water to their community (the nearest wells have dried up) and caring for ill people of all ages as a result of an increase in illnesses related to the temperature rise (respiratory diseases, skin diseases and diseases such as the zika virus, chikungunya and dengue, caused by higher numbers of mosquitoes).

When a woman migrates, care-related duties fall to other women in the community (grandmothers, sisters, etc.), and men do not become involved in this area. If they stay in the community, and their partners migrate, they take on a higher workload than before. For example, in Guatemala, women state that for periods of between three and six months they have fewer resources with which to meet their family’s needs; those who endure permanent migration mentioned how they began to play the role of head of the family as well as problems that they encounter regarding land ownership. Women suffer doubly because they are not land owners and experience the migration of their partners. In countries like Honduras, women farmers who do not have their own land must give 50% of what they produce to the landlord, and they are producing less and less, due to the effects of climate change, which affects their quality of life.

Women, with the support of some local governments and NGOs, are creating and promoting climate change adaptation initiatives, as an attempt to remain in their territories with their families; these initiatives are mainly focused on: the exchange and creation of native seed banks accounting for the globality of plant traits that can allow crop adaptation, work in agricultural cooperatives, water collection using water reservoirs and by harvesting water, among other actions.

However, these practices are not always effective in curbing migration; due to a lack of knowledge on how including women from a comprehensive perspective, the different policies and projects do not guarantee that women will participate fully in decision-making (in most cases they do not take part in the planning process), the projects create more work for them on many occasions (up to a triple day’s work) and the patriarchal perception of women’s work continues to dominate.

Some local governments are working with NGOs to better understand the differing needs of each community, particularly those of women, which could lead to more holistic policies and actions. Some experiences which integrate a gender focus to a greater or lesser degree should be highlighted:

- The Combrifol and Comucap agricultural cooperatives in Honduras, which are supported by the Marcala municipal office for women and led by women. They cultivate criollo seeds (previous selection of those that could be more appropriate to climate changes) while they are trained in sustainable and organic agricultural practices, credits management, gender violence prevention and empowerment (education about their land rights). Families that joined Combrifol cooperative in Marcala decided to stay in their region and take a chance of cultivate their lands.

- The seed banks in El Salvador supported by the National Centre of Agricultural and Forestry Technology (CENTA), the first Government institution with a Gender Policy and Gender unit, and the Matagalpa seed bank in Nicaragua, which is supported by the QDESAK NGO. CENTA launched specific researches led by women, taken into consideration their important land’s knowledge and its high commitment, the aim is to set up a seed bank adapted to climate change and organise future exchanges between the different communities.

- Water reservoirs in El Salvador with the support of the Ciudad Mujer (Women’s City) programme, which has its offices in the country and is supported by the Secretariat for Social Inclusion. The project not only addresses the empowerment of women in socio-productive aspects, but also the prevention of gender violence and a support in care issues for their children.
WOMEN AND CLIMATE MIGRATION

This infographic combines findings from the study and data extracted from secondary sources.

TEMPORARY
—> INTERNAL
Rural: in Nicaragua and Honduras, entire families migrate (women and children) to harvest coffee
Urban: migration of women in Honduras and Nicaragua in search of domestic or factory work
—> NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES Costa Rica and El Salvador
—> INTERNATIONAL Spain (women for domestic work) or the USA

PERMANENT
Nicaragua and El Salvador: extreme events related to climate change (hurricanes or landslides caused by heavy rains)

MIGRATION
FEMALE (Honduras and Nicaragua)
—> Work associated with family care remains in the hands of other women in the community (grandmothers, sisters ... ) rather than men becoming involved in these tasks

MALE (El Salvador and Guatemala)
—> Women take on economic activities previously done by men (in addition to their traditional tasks)

DISEASE
New diseases due to increased numbers of mosquitoes: Zika y Chikungunya

CONSEQUENCES
—> Women dedicate more time to looking after sick people, sacrificing time and rest

AVAILABLE WATER
CONSEQUENCES
—> Women dedicate more time to searching for water —> 6 hours per day

LAND OWNERSHIP
CONSEQUENCES
—> Just 20% of properties in Nicaragua are owned by women
—> 14% in Honduras (FAO, 2005)

CONSEQUENCES
Forced to hand over 50% of the harvest to the landowner

FOOD INSECURITY
CONSEQUENCES
One and a half million people without access to food
Previously two harvests a year, now just ONE (due to climatic uncertainty)
30% of homes suffer from extreme poverty
The land: largely in the hands of men

CONSEQUENCES
—> More domestic violence against women

UNEMPLOYMENT
CONSEQUENCES
Fall in production/income
60% losses in bean and corn harvests (Honduras 2016)

CONSEQUENCES
—> More domestic violence against women

WOMEN AND CLIMATE MIGRATION
Central American Dry Corridor
Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua

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SOME INTERESTING POLICIES FOR COMBATTING CLIMATE CHANGE WITH GENDER EQUALITY APPROACHES WERE IDENTIFIED AT NATIONAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL. FOR EXAMPLE, GUATEMALA INCLUDES INTERESTING REFERENCES TO A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN ITS NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN, AND THE REGIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY, WHICH WAS ADOPTED IN 2010 FOR THE CENTRAL AMERICAN REGION, IS ALSO A GOOD EXAMPLE OF INTEGRATING A GENDER APPROACH INTO ITS ACTION PLAN, BY ACKNOWLEDGING THE ROLE OF WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE ESSENTIAL IN GENERATING GOOD PRACTICES AND POLICIES.

HOWEVER, THERE IS STILL A LONG WAY TO GO UNTIL THESE POLICIES ARE FULLY EFFECTIVE. MANY INSTITUTIONS CONTINUE TO FORMULATE CHANGES FROM A ‘WOMEN’S APPROACH’, WITHOUT ACTUALLY CONSIDERING THE CHANGES IN GENDER ROLES OR WHETHER OR NOT THE POLICIES PROMOTED STRENGTHEN TRADITIONAL ROLES INSTEAD OF ENCOURAGING EQUALITY. FURTHERMORE, NONE OF THE PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVES IDENTIFIED EXPLICITLY ADDRESSES THE THREE TOPICS OF GENDER, MIGRATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE, PROBABLY DUE TO A LACK OF AWARENESS OF THE INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN THESE THREE ELEMENTS.

PUBLIC POLICIES AT INTERNATIONAL, NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THAT THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ACCENTUATE ALREADY EXISTING INEQUALITIES. HOWEVER, IT IS NECESSARY TO AVOID SEEING WOMEN ONLY AS VICTIMS OF CLIMATE CHANGE, AS THIS COULD HAVE A PROFOUNDLY NEGATIVE IMPACT, AS IT DEEPENS THE TRADITIONAL DIVIDE BETWEEN GENDER ROLES, WHICH INCREASES INEQUALITY.

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES CANNOT BE SUCCESSFUL OR FAIR IF THEY EXCLUDE HALF OF THE POPULATION AND FAIL TO INTEGRATE WOMEN’S KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR CAPACITIES TO RESPOND TO THE CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE. IT IS ESSENTIAL TO INVOLVE THEM IN THE DESIGN, MONITORING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC POLICIES ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND MIGRATION AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL, AND ALSO AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE CENTRAL AMERICA DRY CORRIDOR. ACHIEVING THE EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN ALL DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AND BODIES INVOLVED IN CLIMATE POLICY AT ALL LEVELS (REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND LOCAL), INCLUDING EXPERT COMMITTEES AND ADVISORY COMMITTEES, MUST BE A PRIORITY GOAL.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS AT THE INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL TO IMPROVE THE INTEGRATION OF A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN PUBLIC POLICIES TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE ARE DIVIDED INTO THREE AREAS BELOW.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON INCORPORATING GENDER EQUALITY INTO PUBLIC POLICIES ON CLIMATE CHANGE

1. Decision 3/CP.23 https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2017/cop23/eng/11a01.pdf (Pages 17 to 20)
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Women’s Leadership and Effective Participation in Institutions and Projects with a Gender Focus

- Develop projects within the framework of the Adaptation Fund or the Green Climate Fund (GCF) to capitalise on the GCF gender-equity mandate, for example, by developing statistics and/or implementing pilot projects on mitigation, resilience and adaptation which prevent displacement and help women to adapt. To this end, Governments need more training and support so that they can gain access to finance for these types of projects. Progress is also required towards greater transparency in the operation of all the climate finance mechanisms, which would have an impact on access to funding for civil society and projects led by women.

- Increase mandatory training on gender and climate change for staff involved in decision-making processes relating to national climate change and migration policies in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala, and at regional level, to ensure that a gender focus is included in their action plans. The Regional Climate Change Strategy (ERCC) is a good example to follow, but further training is still required in order for it to be implemented properly. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, adopted by the United Nations, highlights the importance of developing gender-responsive migration policies to address the particular needs and vulnerabilities of migrant women.

- Reform and investments plans for national legislative frameworks governing land ownership to close the gender gap in access to land ownership. If women do not own their land, they continue to be excluded from formal consultation processes to determine their climate change adaptation needs and gain access to agricultural credit. For example, Nicaragua adopted in 2010, an innovative Law Creating the Fund for Purchasing Lands with Gender Equity for Rural Women but there has been no progress due to the lack of budget allocation.

- Increase institutional and budgetary support provided by local governments to women’s initiatives for climate change adaptation, especially initiatives related to agroecology, seed banks and access to non-polluting energy sources and technology. Also, social policies are essential to come along women in these processes (support for children care during temporary migration season, improvement of labour rights for temporary jobs...). In the Honduran community of Marcala, the joint work of the Municipal Office for Women and the combrifol agricultural cooperative is an example of good practice.
3 Coherent Policies and Evaluation

- Improve coordination between the various institutions and stakeholders involved in the three topics covered in the study: promote collaboration between institutions and international processes which address the different factors that trigger migration; for example, collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) on food security issues, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) or the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to build joint solutions. It would also be beneficial to have spaces for coordination with other institutions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) or the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), in order to address mainstreaming approaches.

- At national level, better coordination is required between the different offices responsible for agricultural, forestry and land-use planning issues and the offices which defend the rights of women, in order to adopt comprehensive approaches in the planned actions through, for example, mixed or interdepartmental committees.

- Evaluate the economic, migration, climate and gender policies which are currently in operation at national and regional level to:
  1. understand their impact on local communities, focusing on human and women’s rights;
  2. ensure that their implementation is not worsening women’s living conditions and that they meet the national commitments made under international frameworks (the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the 2030 Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the New Urban Agenda, etc.);
  3. identify, share and replicate strategies which achieve national targets, especially relating to climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

2 Research and Disaggregated Statistics

- Develop databases, historical and specific series which include disaggregated data to determine the actual scale of climate change and related internal, cross-border and international migration. Obtaining reliable data (supported by expert teams with proper training and adequate budgets) and more studies on the gender perspective in climate migration is essential in order for local and national Governments to be able to formulate adequate response policies, with the support of international institutions.

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This study, which InspiraAction/Christian Aid commissioned, was carried out by the Women’s Environment & Development Organization (wedo) and CoopeSolDar R.L. (Costa Rica). Regions highly vulnerable to climate change were identified for the study along the Pacific coast of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua (the Central America Dry Corridor).

The research has been conducted during 2017 and 2018. The qualitative field work included focus groups, interviews and visits to communities, NGOs and government representatives in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. A total of 251 people took part (184 women and 67 men), and it was carried out in:

- the Departments of Usulután and San Miguel in El Salvador.
- the Departments of Matagalpa (San Ramón) and Madriz (Somoto) in Nicaragua.
- the southern region of Choluteca, the western region of Langue and the northwestern region of Marcala, in Honduras.
- the communities of Jocotán and Camotán in the Chiquimula department, in Guatemala.
*InspirAction* is a Spanish Non-Governmental Development Organisation with a very clear objective: end poverty in all its forms. We are part of Christian Aid and therefore can count on 70 years of experience in the field of emergency relief, long-term sustainable development and campaigning for the world’s most impoverished and marginalised groups.

InspirAction never remains silent. We are not afraid to report any injustice because all injustice hurt us. Together, we implement real and practical solutions through more than 500 local partner organizations working in 49 countries around the world. We are experts in political advocacy and mobilisation for the fight against climate change with a gender focus, for gender equality and for the fight for the implementation of human rights for everyone.

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Found the study [here](#).