

Experts Say Climate Change Drives Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa

By Nancy Palus

Dakar

20 March 2008

[Palus report - Download \(MP3\)](#) 

[Palus report - Listen \(MP3\)](#) 

The effects of climate change are increasingly driving people in sub-Saharan Africa to migrate in search of better living conditions, according to experts who gathered this week in the Senegalese capital, Dakar. Nancy Palus reports for VOA.



Mauritanian women fetch water in the village of Barkeol (file photo)

Migration and development in Africa were the themes of this week's conference. Climate change was a major topic. It is being seen as one of the leading causes of migration.

Al-Hamndou Dorsouma, with the Tunis-based Sahara and Sahel Observatory, says climate change worsens weather extremes in the region, including flooding, drought, and desertification.

He says even if more research is needed, the link between desertification and migration is clear. He says the phenomenon is simple. First, soil quality breaks down. Then people produce less food and poverty deepens. He says this leads to social tensions and

forces people to move - some to urban areas, some to other countries.

Guene Fatou of Senegal's Environment Ministry says people in the region will likely have an increasingly tough time feeding themselves. She says climate change will continue to fuel famine in sub-Saharan Africa.

Meera Sethi is West Africa advisor with the International Organization for Migration. She says climate change is weighing most heavily on already strained regions.

"It is going to be again more burden on the same countries, the same regions," she explained. "Because, as we hear from all sides, the ones that are going to be the most affected are the least developed countries, the majority of which are African, and especially sub-Saharan. "

And women are among the groups most affected, according to Zo Randriamaro with the U.N. Women's Development Fund in Dakar.

"If you look at all the evidence from the different studies it is quite well established that women bear the biggest part of the negative impact of climate change," she noted. "And if you add to that the issues of migration, especially in those rural areas that are affected by climate change with desertification, lack of access to water and so on and so forth, when women are left behind, when men go to urban areas or to other countries, they become not only the breadwinner, but they also become the producers."

Many people at the conference said that the right policies could help rural communities remain on their land.

Environmental expert Dorsouma says developing countries have no choice but to adapt to climate change. With the sharp degradation of living conditions, he says governments need to intervene

in a major way on behalf of rural communities.

Sociologist Cheikh Omar Ba says governments and donors should take the lead from farmers themselves. He says that otherwise, government policies will be out of sync with reality, poverty will spread, and people will be forced to migrate.

Guene Fatou says Senegal and other developing countries have come up with plans for adapting to climate change, including in the agriculture sector. Many attending the conference agreed the next step is summoning the political will and the funding to implement them.

Print