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ENVIRONMENTALLY INDUCED MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT IN KAZAKHSTAN

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1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In 2011 Kazakhstan officially recognized environmentally induced displacement of population by inclusion into the Law on Migration[1] a term "a displace" defined as *"a person displaced within the Republic of Kazakhstan in accordance with the displacement quota for internal migrants from settlements with adverse environmental conditions and a low development capacity to economically perspective areas of the Republic of Kazakhstan for permanent residence"*. In the country with few hot environmental spots in the past such as the Aral Sea region and surroundings of the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site, environmentally induced migration is a familiar phenomenon. However, since those times environmental migration or displacement has not been thoroughly approached in Kazakhstan either in academic researches or normative regulations. The attempt of the Law On Migration 2011 to regulate environmental displacement of population has been the first one in this context. The researchers and experts[2] point to absence of methodology to identify ecological migrants and their needs and lack of relevant data to explain environmental roots, including indirect ones, of migration outflows as main obstacles to start implementing this norm.

In international practice and law the issues of recognition of enforced migration taking place due to unpleasable environmental situation have emerged around 20 years ago. Initially they were mostly connected to providing humanitarian aid to individuals affected by extreme weather events such as earthquakes, floods, tsunami etc. However, nowadays more acute and explicit consequences of climate change, an increasing number of natural disasters and ecological degradation of human habitats increase the relevance level of environmental migration of affected population. Often such people lose their traditional sources of income due to degraded lands, polluted waters or declining biodiversity, what closely links deterioration of a natural environment with impoverishment of local communities. In this regard, concerns of scholars and decision makers should lay in elaborating or adopting methodological tools to identify such people and their needs, determining a status of relevant human migration flows and introducing an environmental consideration within the migration management mechanism.

In the Central Asia region there was an example when ecological disaster caused massive outmigration. The degradation of the whole ecosystem occurred due to the Aral Sea's insiccation considerably affected structure and volume of migration out-flows from the region. It is generally

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1 Law №477-IV signed by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the 22nd of July 2011

2 Including: Buleshova and Joldasov, Environmental Change and Forced Migration Scenarios (EACH-FOR): Policy Brief – Kazakhstan, 2009 (available at http://www.each-for.eu/documents/D_2243_PB_Kazakhstan.pdf); Ilyasova, Nee and Tonkobayeva, Environmental migration and its consequences for the social policy based on the example of Kyzylorda Oblast (working report), UNESCO – Almaty, 2013.

acknowledged that environmental degradation of this region negatively influenced traditional employment opportunities and living standards of local communities, and also affected health of the population, predominantly – women and children. At the same time, there was, and still is, lack of information needed to determine scales, causes and other characteristics of migration processes in the region recognized as an ecological disaster zone[3]. Meanwhile, the experience of studying environmental migration in the Aral Sea region can provide a framework for exploration of environmental roots of migration flows in other regions of Kazakhstan.

Since its introduction into the Law On Migration in 2011 "the displacement quota for internal migrants", which means organized displacement of citizens' families from places with environmentally adverse conditions to economically perspective settlements granting a status of a displacee, have never been applied yet. Researchers maintain that there are still lots of questions regarding how the quota should be calculated and put into practice, for which settlements and regions, who and on what basis can enjoy this right.

In this research paper the author takes stock of existing theoretical frameworks, precedents in international law and practice engaged within migration – environment bond. The author makes attempt to apply one of the frameworks, Sustainable Livelihoods framework, to Kazakhstan. For this reason, data on demography, migration, income distribution, heath and state of environmental components are gathered and analysed for two regions of Kazakhstan - Kyzylorda Oblast and East Kazakhstan Oblast. The Kyzylorda Oblast represents the Aral Sea disaster zone where traditional lifestyle of local communities was nearly destroyed by the ecological crisis. The East Kazakhstan Oblast partly embraces the territory of the former Semipalatinsk nuclear testing site; however, presence of employment-providing industrial enterprises, as well as natural massifs keep the region quite attractive for residing.

2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Does environmental consideration effect migration propensity of population in ecologically affected territories in Kazakhstan?
- What are the needs of those who migrate based on environmental consideration and those who stay in affected areas to be taken into account while shaping a migration policy?
- What possibilities do exist in practice and what arrangements are needed to ensure considering an environmental dimension within migration management?

2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

To answer the research questions the author utilizes the pragmatic approach involving: literature review, expert opinion review, statistical assessment of data gathered for the time series 1999 – 2012 and earlier, and developing a theory suitable to explain all the quantity and quality data

[3] As stipulated from the Law №1468-XII signed by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the 30th of June 1992.

collected. The research is conducted along the Sustainable Livelihoods conceptual framework considering access to natural capital together with financial, physical, human, and social capital as determinants of a household's livelihood strategy[4]. The list of reviewed literature includes academic articles, documents of international and national legislation and expert researches on migration issues conducted for international organizations in Kazakhstan. In order to gather competent opinions on the issues of environmental migration and displacement in Kazakhstan, the author interviews experts involved in the public discussions on migration issues. The statistical assessment is conducted to prove correlations between variables representing demographic, economic, social and environment tendencies. By means of data and methodology triangulation, the author constructs a theory interlinking all the findings.

3 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS/EXPECTED RESULTS

It is expected that application of the Sustainable Livelihoods framework to two Kazakhstan regions will demonstrate how environmental dimension interplays with other factors causing outmigration from ecologically damaged areas. Statistical analysis will expose correlations between variables representing tendencies in demography, income distribution, health of population and environment in two selected regions of Kazakhstan. The study will make an input to exploring and justifying the phenomenon of environmental migration in Kazakhstan. The outputs and outcomes of the survey might be useful for policy discussions of not only an effective migration management but also adaptation strategies to the changing climate in Kazakhstan.

4 De Sherbinin et al. Rural household demographics, livelihoods and the environment. Global Environmental Change – 2008 (available at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2351958/); Carney et al. Livelihoods approaches compared. Department of International Development (DFID, UK), 1999 (available at: http://www.start.org/ Program/ advanced_institute3_web /p3_ documents _folder/ Carney_etal.pdf)