

# The Hugo Observatory

Environment, Migration, Politics

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## DEBATING CLIMATE CHANGE-INDUCED MIGRATION

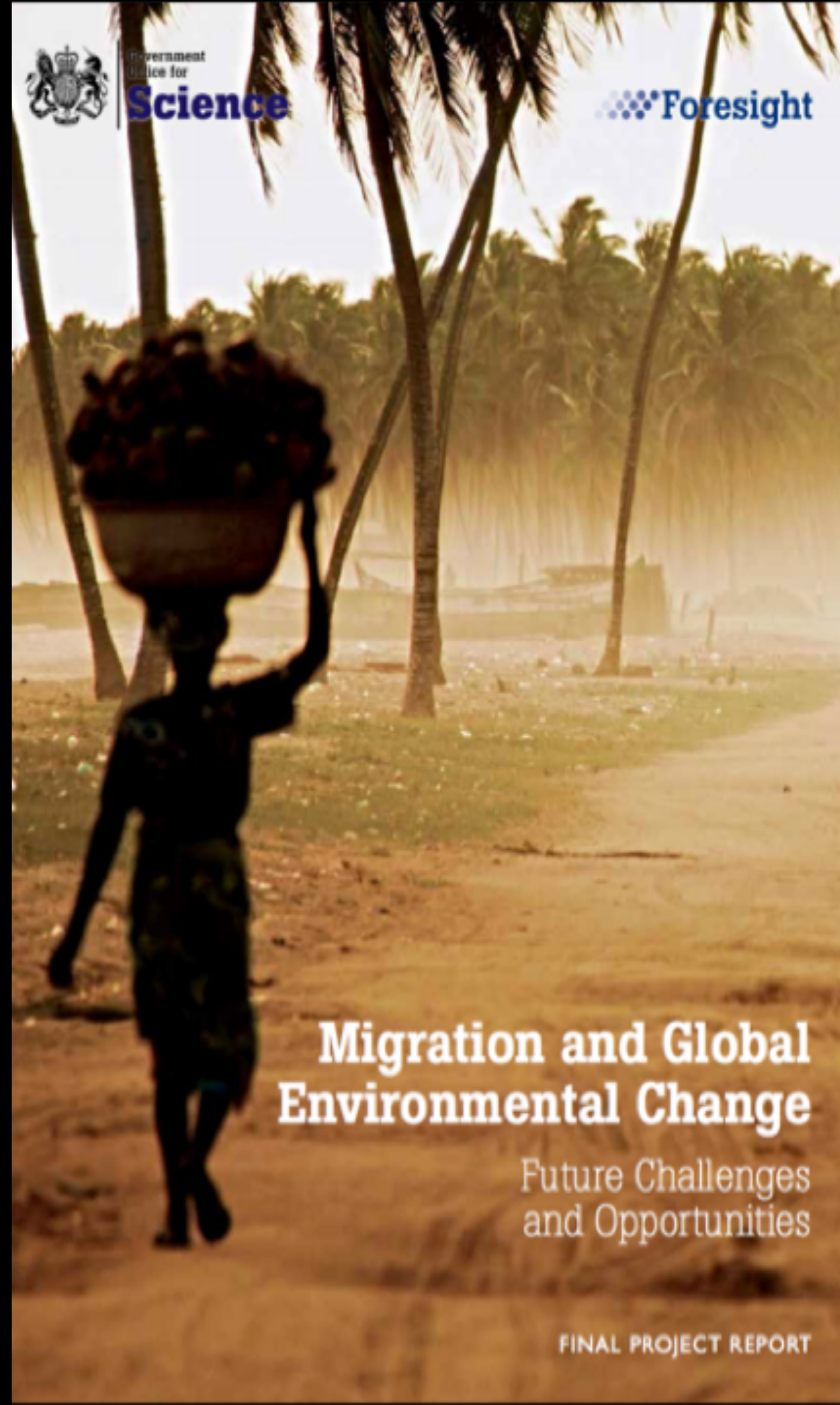
Ngadzidja, Comores  
Photo: C.Zickgraf

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# 1. DOES CLIMATE CHANGE CAUSE MIGRATION?

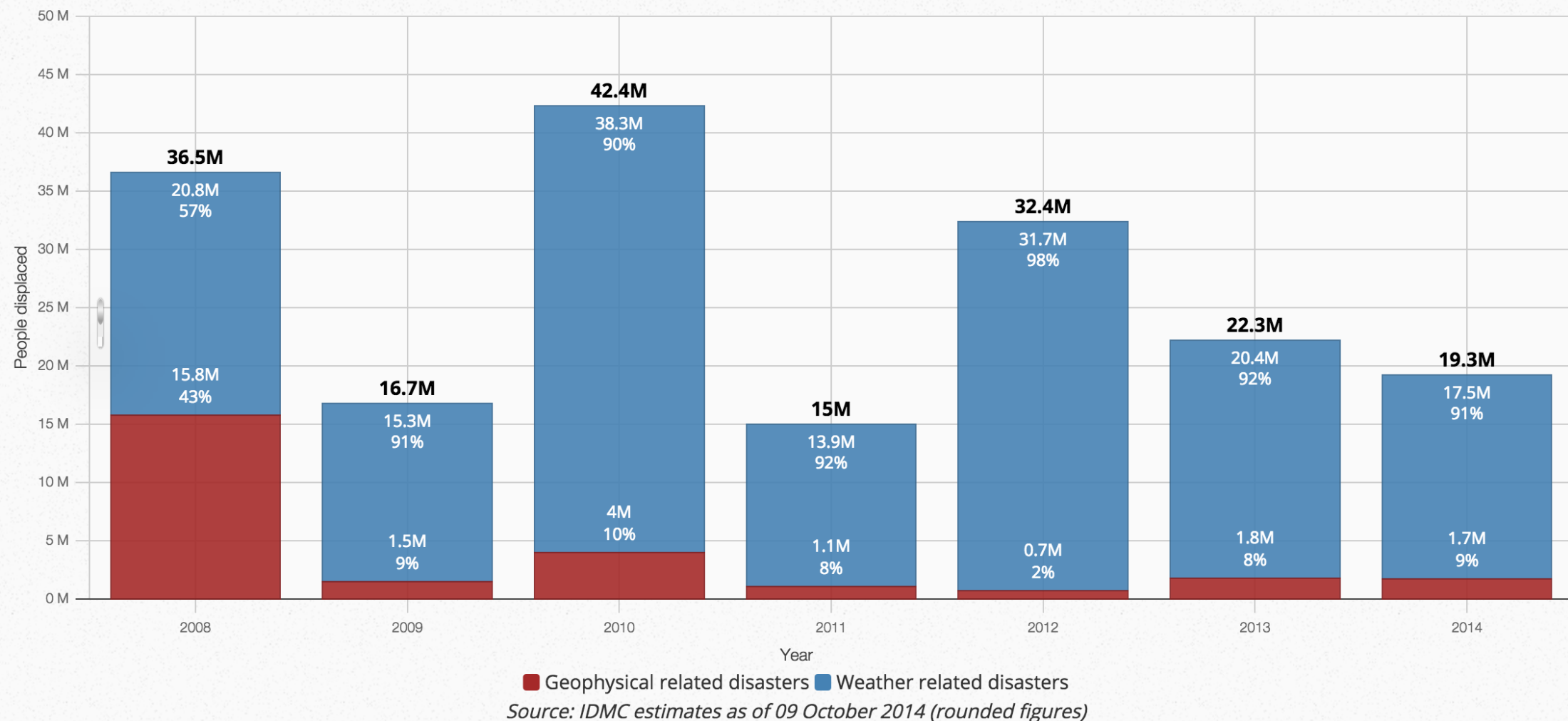
- Migration is never driven by one factor alone.
- Climate change is, however, playing an important role in making local lives unsustainable
- Key CC impacts: SLR, climate variability, temperature rise, extreme events
- Sometimes these impacts facilitate population movements, other times they prohibit it
- Geo/temporal patterns range widely, as do outcomes



2. HOW MANY?



## Disaster-induced displacement



- On average: 26.4 M / year displaced by natural disasters – one person every second
- Natural disasters account for more new internal displacements than conflict



# SLOW-ONSET?

- We don't know how many people are currently moving, or have moved, at least in part, because of climate change.
- Challenges of *attribution* and *isolation*
  - Climate change cannot be isolated from other drivers (SPEED)
- Economic, indirect pathways especially important in cases of gradual, slow-onset changes



# FUTURE MIGRATION

- Various estimates circulate, all of them have been either discredited or severely challenged
  - 150-200-300 million by 2050
- Deterministic bias
- Lack of scientific rigour
- Advocacy vs science
- Migration might also decrease in some areas and amongst vulnerable populations



3. WHAT SHOULD WE CALL THEM?

CLIMATE CHANGE

## The First U.S. Climate Refugees

192 MARCH 20, 2016 11:26 AM EST

By [Christopher Flavelle](#)

A documentary film about "the human face of climate change."

# CLIMATE

## NZ warned to brace for climate refugees NZ

By Dan Satherley

Tuesday 19 Apr 2016 8:03 a.m.

## What Are We Doing About 'Climate Refugees'?

04/26/2016 03:51 pm ET

HUMANITARIAN CRISES

## Where will the climate refugees go?

We know that climate change will force millions from their homes, but will they even be recognised as refugees?

[Amy Lieberman](#) | 22 Dec 2015 12:18 GMT | [Humanitarian crises](#), [Poverty & Development](#), [Weather](#), [Environment](#), [Climate Change](#)

## Alaska's Climate Refugees

ALAN TAYLOR | JUL 7, 2015 | 35 PHOTOS | IN FOCUS



# THE NAME GAME

- CLIMATE REFUGEES
- CLIMATE MIGRANTS
- ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRANTS
- DISASTER DISPLACED
- CLIMATE-INDUCED MIGRATION
- CLIMATE CHANGE-RELATED MIGRATION
- MIGRATION IN AREAS AFFECTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE

- There is no consensus on a single term
- There is no legal category of 'climate refugee'
- Certain terms overstate attribution, suggest or imply climate or environment is only factor
  - People can check more than one box!
- Migrant vs Refugee (or IDPs) vs Mobility?
- Definition is also lacking – if inclusive, called too vague, if precise, too exclusive
- Numbers are related to this challenge



Environmental degradation can increase the need to migrate, while simultaneously reducing the possibility.

→ *trapped populations (Foresight 2011)*



4. WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

# POLITICAL RESPONSES

- Territorial Debate: whose responsibility?
  - Climate? Environment? Migration? Development?
- Reactive vs Proactive policies
  - Humanitarian response vs DRR, for example
  - Mitigation vs Adaptation
- Stop population movement? Facilitate it?

# MIGRATION AS ADAPTATION?

- Climate/migration nexus assumed to be negative, something to avoid
- Migration might also be part of the solution, not just a failure to adapt
- Policies with a *singular* focus on stopping migration in the short-term increase displacement risks in the long-term

# COMMENT

**CLIMATE CHANGE** Future droughts will threaten food security p.450

**SOCIOLOGY** Scientists mark their tribes with tattoos p.454



**MATHEMATICS** Persi Diaconis on magic tricks and card shuffles p.457

**OBITUARY** Ralph Steinman, the discoverer of dendritic immune cells p.460



Families in Bangladesh seek safer areas after severe floods in 2007.

## Migration as adaptation

Mobility can bring opportunities for coping with environmental change, say **Richard Black, Stephen R. G. Bennett, Sandy M. Thomas and John R. Beddington.**

The effects of global environmental change, including coastal flooding and reduced rainfall in drylands and water scarcity, will almost certainly alter patterns of human migration. Conventional narratives usually cast these displacements in a negative light, with many millions of people forced to move, and tension and conflict the result. Our study suggests that the picture is not so one-sided.

The study, the UK government's Foresight report on migration and global environmental change, examines the likely movement of people within and between countries over the next 50 years<sup>1</sup>. It contends that, although environmental change will alter an already complex pattern of human mobility, migration will offer opportunities as well as challenges. The greatest risks will be borne by those who are unable or unwilling to relocate, and may be exacerbated by maladaptive policies designed to prevent migration. It is time for a fresh discourse — and fresh research — on migration in relation to global environmental change.

International action and research are needed to identify the positive and negative outcomes of migration influenced by environmental change. Whether movement occurs within or between countries, there is a need to prepare for it and in some cases enable it. It is important to deepen understanding of how migration will affect other types of social change, such as the evolution of cities, the formation of 'poverty traps' and the coexistence of cultures. Current policy frameworks should take account of these factors to avoid having to deal later with impoverishment and displacement under high-risk conditions.

### THE REALITY OF MIGRATION

Many people across the world are already migrating, motivated by strong socio-economic factors. The United Nations estimates that there are about 210 million international migrants, but as many as 740 million internal (intranational) migrants<sup>2</sup>. People migrate for complex reasons: to improve incomes; to join families;

**NATURE.COM**  
Migration: an engine for social change:  
[go.nature.com/lebnlx](http://go.nature.com/lebnlx)

to escape persecution; and to remove themselves from environmental or other threats, often temporarily. Such



# COMPLEX SOLUTIONS FOR COMPLEX REALITIES

- Science-policy interface required to better inform policies and programmes
- Policies require climate action addressing adaptation in situ but also enable the adaptative power of migration
- Good research and good policy requires reaching across silos



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