Migration and Global Environmental Change

SR20: What would be the impact on the future global migration system – and, specifically, on environmental migration – if the Colombo Process succeeded in its aims (i.e. relatively free mobility takes place within Asia, including to the Gulf region)?

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The context of environment to migration

Although gaps in definitional understanding and consensus about ‘environmental migration’ have been acknowledged, predictions of future environmental migration are often drawn on generalised scenarios, expert opinions, back-of-envelope calculations and best guesses (Brown, 2008a) – not necessarily the best evidence on which to base international migration (McLeman, 2011). Future estimates of environmental migration or of population displacement due to climate change – a subset of environmental migration – are often given in terms of ‘environmental refugees’, a term having no formal recognition under international refugee law, but which generally describes involuntary migration driven by changes in environmental conditions (Westing, 1992; Bates, 2002). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) uses the term ‘environmental migrants’ and the following working definition:

Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad.

(IOM, 2010; emphasis added)

According to McLeman (2011), one often-cited prediction from British ecologist Norman Myers suggests that there may be 200 million environmental refugees worldwide by mid- to late 21st century (Myers, 2002). CARE International (2009) arrived at similar conclusions in a report produced in collaboration with the United Nations University-Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS), which had previously estimated that 50 million environmental refugees should be expected worldwide by 2010 (UNU-EHS, 2005), a prediction yet to be validated. The relief organisation Christian Aid (2007) had suggested that as many as 1 billion people will be displaced from their homes by mid-century from global environmental changes. McGranahan et al. (2007) observed that 10% of the world’s population lives in the low elevation coastal zone (LECZ), defined as the contiguous area along the coast that is less than 10 metres above sea level, and is consequently exposed to the possibility of displacement by sea-level rise, but made no predictions about its extent. Similarly, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported no statistical evidence beyond the commonly cited Myers estimate (Adger et al., 2007).

Thus, there are not enough statistical data available on environmental migration on which to base future projections (Brown, 2008b). However, there is widespread recognition among scholars that environmental variability, including climate change, can, and does, influence migration (Shah, 1994; Hugo, 1996; Hunter, 2005). Such migration can happen in response to environmental conditions or events that may occur naturally (e.g. earthquakes) or are anthropogenic in origin (e.g. flooding of river valleys behind large dams) (McLeman, 2011). An array of climatic events and conditions, such as extreme storm events or droughts, have the potential to stimulate large waves of environmental refugees, and the frequency and severity of many such events are expected to increase in many regions as a result of climate change.

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1 The author benefited immensely from the detailed comments by Andrew Geddes and two anonymous reviewers on earlier drafts. Any remaining errors and omissions are, however, the author’s sole responsibility.
(Solomon et al., 2007). Yet, environmental refugees represent only one end of a continuum of possible environment-migration outcomes (McLeman and Hunter, 2010). At the other end of the continuum is the environmental amenity migrant who voluntarily seeks better quality environmental conditions. Instances would include a family with an asthma-prone child that leaves a congested megacity for another city’s better air quality – an example applicable to both inward and outward migration to and from Bangalore, respectively, at the outset and maturing of the so-called Silicon Valley of India. A great many other possibilities are said to exist between the two extremes of environmental refugee and amenity seeker.

Second, although the number of disasters has increased significantly over the last two decades in Asia\(^2\), much displacement is internal, short-lived and temporary also because those who are displaced do not have the resources or networks to migrate abroad. This is why it is often asserted that environmental change is likely to contribute more to internal rather than international migration. For example, of more than 36 million people estimated by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) as being internally displaced or evacuated in 2008 due to sudden onset of natural disasters, over 20 million were those affected by climate-related disasters, with the Sichuan earthquake alone responsible for the displacement of 15 million people in China. With 31,397,358 persons displaced because of natural disasters, Asia as a whole was the most affected continent, followed by the Americas (OCHA/IDMC, 2009).

Third, it is important to bear in mind that not all environmental migration will be long term. Natural disasters tend to generate temporary movements if the affected area remains habitable, whereas slow-onset processes may lead to long-term or permanent exodus (IOM, 2010). Although extreme environmental events such as cyclones, hurricanes and tsunamis tend to capture the media headlines, gradual changes in the environment are likely to have a much greater impact on the movement of people in the future. For example, over the last 30 years, twice as many people worldwide have been affected by droughts as by storms (1.6 billion compared with approximately 718 million). Similarly, environmental degradation may be the result of changes in average annual temperatures or rainfall levels, but it may equally be the result of deforestation or poor land management – or a combination of these factors. In the Middle East and North Africa, for example, it has been predicted that environmental degradation will reduce the amount of fertile arable land, and thus compound a shortage of employment for a youthful population expanding quickly as a result of demographic trends, a proportion of whom may thus migrate to look for work. In this case, environmental degradation, demographic trends and economic factors (such as lack of employment) combine as potential drivers for migration. It can thus be difficult to isolate environmental factors from other drivers of migration, such as political, economic, social and cultural factors that may also concurrently influence migration behaviour (Suhrke, 1994; Hunter, 2005; McLeman, 2010). Some migrants will move for sheer survival, others as part of a family strategy to maximise household incomes.

\(^2\) There is considerable but scattered literature on these concerns – including the arsenic poisoning of drinking water, which affects 20 million people in Bangladesh alone, and the deforestation in Himalayan headwaters of the Brahmaputra and Ganges Rivers, which cause frequent flooding in Bangladesh but soil erosion in Nepal – and their potential for causing future conflicts in the subcontinent, population growth and related problems with water supply, overfishing and desertification. For examples of environment-related migration in Asia, see Asian Development Bank (2011).
Environmental migration in various existing national legal frameworks

Thus, although the term ‘environmental migrant’ is not accepted universally, nor are the estimates based on any scientific projection, it is still possible to speculate that existing global legal frameworks could be manoeuvred to address the speculated challenges arising from it. For example, the application of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement at the national level provides a model for the adoption of ‘soft law’ guidelines in national laws and policies. Currently, about 30 countries worldwide have developed national laws or policies on internal displacement, and there have been four main approaches. One is a brief instrument, simply adopting the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, exemplified by the one-page Instrument of Adoption of Liberia. The wholesale incorporation of the Guiding Principles may appear an effective way of ensuring the implementation of all provisions of the principles, suggesting absolute agreement with the principles and ensuring against the dilution of its provisions. Such an approach, however, limits opportunities that the development of a more tailored law would present for national authorities, relevant governmental bodies, civil society and internally displaced persons (IDPs) themselves. A second approach has been to develop a law or policy to address a specific cause or stage of displacement. The Indian National Policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation for Project Affected Families, for example, addresses displacement only as a result of development projects. The Angolan Norms on the Resettlement of the Internally Displaced Populations, as well as laws and policies adopted in Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Nepal and Serbia, address only return and resettlement. A third approach is a law or policy developed to protect a specific right of the internally displaced, examples of which include the Turkish Law on the Compensation of Damages that Occurred due to Terror and the Fight Against Terrorism and the US Hurricane Education Recovery Act, which was developed following Hurricane Katrina, and addresses, among other issues, the needs of displaced students and teachers. The fourth and final approach is a comprehensive law or policy addressing all causes and stages of internal displacement. The Colombian Law 387 and Ugandan National Policy for Internally Displaced Persons most closely approximate a comprehensive law on internal displacement.

Although most of the movements within a state’s borders that can be envisaged as a result of the effects of environmental change are included within the remit of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, a significant gap that remains unaddressed in the current legal and normative framework is that of cross-border environmental migrants, especially those moving permanently. Even if a ‘soft law’ approach is adopted to address these current shortcomings, achieving consensus and then translating it into national laws and policies is a lengthy process. A shorter-term option is to amend national immigration laws and policies, particularly for the neighbouring countries or those with strong migration channels that are likely to be impacted by the effects of environmental change in the near future. The immigration policies of most potential destination countries are not conducive to receiving large numbers of environmental migrants, unless they enter through already existing admission categories – for example, for labour or for family reunification, or on humanitarian grounds. The Temporary and Circular Labour Migration (TCLM) programme between Colombia and Spain is an unusual exception of an existing labour mobility programme that specifically extends to populations in high-risk
zones of natural disasters. Nevertheless, there are examples of countries having special policies and/or taking new initiatives:

1. The USA, for example, enacted a law in 1990 to provide temporary protected status (TPS) to persons ‘in the United States who are temporarily unable to safely return to their home country because of ongoing armed conflict, an environmental disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions’. ‘Environmental disaster’ here includes ‘an earthquake, flood, drought, epidemic, or other environmental disaster in the state resulting in a substantial, but temporary, disruption of living conditions in the area affected’. In the case of environmental disasters, however, as compared with conflict, the country of origin must request designation of TPS for its nationals. Importantly, TPS applies only to persons already in the USA at the time of the designation. It is not meant to be a mechanism for responding to an unfolding crisis in which people seek admission from outside of the country. It also only pertains to situations that are temporary in nature. If the environmental disaster has permanent consequences, a designation of TPS is not available, even for those already in the USA, or it may be lifted. Another significant factor is that the designation is discretionary and can be granted only by the Secretary of Homeland Security.

2. At the European Union level, the Temporary Protection Directive establishes temporary protection during ‘mass influxes’ of certain displaced persons. The term ‘mass influx’ refers to situations where large numbers of people are suddenly displaced and where it is not feasible to treat applicants on an individual basis, and it is defined on a case-by-case basis by a qualified majority of the European Council. Sweden and Finland have included environmental migrants within their immigration policies. Sweden includes within its asylum system persons who do not qualify for refugee status but require protection. Such a person in need of protection ‘has left his native country and does not wish to return there because he has a fear of the death penalty or torture, is in need of protection as a result of war or other serious conflicts in the country, is unable to return to his native country because of an environmental disaster’. The decision is made on an individual, rather than group, basis. Although many recipients of this status are presumed to be in temporary need of protection, the Swedish rules foresee that some persons may be in need of permanent solutions. Similarly, in the Finnish Aliens Act, ‘aliens residing in the country are issued with a residence permit on the basis of a need for protection if […] they cannot return because of an armed conflict or environmental disaster’. A number of other countries provide exceptions to removal on an ad hoc basis for persons whose countries of origin have experienced significant disruption because of natural disasters. Following the 2004 tsunami, for example, Switzerland and the UK temporarily suspended deportations of individuals from such countries as the Maldives, India, Indonesia, Seychelles, Somalia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Canada in North America did the same.

3. In contrast to the above examples, to date there are no examples of legislation or policies that address resettlement as a result of slow-onset processes that may destroy habitats or livelihoods in the future and make return impossible. The Green Party in Australia launched an initiative in 2007 to establish a ‘climate refugee visa’ in immigration law. The initiative had three components: to amend the Migration Act to incorporate a Climate Change Refugee Visa class; to establish a programme for the

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3 These examples are drawn from IOM (2010).
migration of up to 300 climate change refugees from Tuvalu per year, 300 from Kiribati, and 300 from elsewhere in the Pacific, where appropriate; and to push the government to work in the UN and other international forums for the establishment of an international definition and framework on climate change and environmental refugees. The visa would be available to persons who had been displaced as a result of a ‘climate change induced environmental disaster’, which, in turn, was defined as: ‘A disaster that results from both incremental and rapid ecological and climatic change and disruption, that includes sea level rise, coastal erosion, desertification, collapsing ecosystems, fresh water contamination, more frequent occurrence of extreme weather events such as cyclones, tornadoes, flooding and drought and that means inhabitants are unable to lead safe or sustainable lives in their immediate environment’ (cited in IOM, 2010: 83). The bill was defeated in 2007. New Zealand, under similar pressures regarding the potential need for resettlement of Pacific Islanders affected by rising sea levels, also has not yet established a specific category of admissions. The Government has introduced a Pacific Access Category (PAC), under which 75 people from Tuvalu, 75 from Kiribati and 250 from Tonga may immigrate to New Zealand each year. The programme is, however, based on employment rather than environmental factors. The immigrants must be 18–45 years old, have an offer of employment in New Zealand, have English skills, meet a minimum income requirement, undergo a health check, and have no history of illegal entrance. The programme is not intended to provide access to those who may be most vulnerable to climate change-induced displacement, such as the elderly or the infirm.

4. A number of origin countries see the potential need for large numbers of their population to relocate internationally if the worst-case scenarios of climate change come to pass. Anote Tong, President of Kiribati, has made it clear that the population of his island might be forced to relocate en masse. His focus has been on identifying immigration possibilities for Kiribati nationals in nearby countries, particularly Australia and New Zealand. In a recent trip to New Zealand, he suggested that the best educated people of Kiribati should emigrate first, in an orderly fashion, and then establish communities that others could join as the situation requires. President Mohamed Nasheed announced at the end of 2008 that the Maldives was establishing a sovereign wealth fund that could be used to purchase a new island for the country’s population. According to Nasheed, ‘this trust fund will act as a national insurance policy to help pay for a new homeland, should future generations have to evacuate a country disappearing under the waves’. Hoping that the funds would never be used for this purpose, Nasheed used the announcement as a call for renewed action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Colombo Process as a regional framework of cooperation for migration in South Asia

According to the best estimates, over 2.5 million Asian workers leave their countries every year under contract to work abroad⁴. As part of south–south migration, a large proportion of ‘service

workers’ from South and Southeast Asia head for the Gulf States to perform various types of low- or semi-skilled service, trade and construction jobs, in contrast to their ‘knowledge workers’ primarily migrating to the countries of the north. Prior to the 1970s, the countries in the region maintained a liberal non-selective immigration policy. However, the ‘oil boom’ of October 1973 significantly affected the dynamics of the policy. The major oil-exporting countries, or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, were earning huge revenues by exporting oil. They decided to invest the revenue in major economic and social fields such as infrastructure and power stations, industrial and agricultural sectors, health and education (Winckler, 1997). The implementation of these projects, which were highly labour-intensive, resulted in a huge demand for migrant labour from overseas, both skilled and unskilled workers in various categories, which led to a substantial rise in the inflow of foreign workers. In the early 1980s the majority of workers in the GCC countries originated from Arab countries, but currently Asian countries have become the major source countries. The top source countries of migrant workers to the Gulf are India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Indonesia (Kapizewski, 2001). Women constitute about 25% of all migrants working in the GCC countries. They are mostly employed in the domestic service and healthcare sectors (DESA, 2006).

Given these dimensions, the countries of origin of labour migrants are increasingly not only engaged in ‘protection’ to their migrants from exploitative practices in recruitment and employment, but also they have graduated to providing them with appropriate services that enhance their ‘welfare’, such as pre-departure information and orientation, assistance during their stay abroad; and further on to their reintegration with the ‘development’ of their place of origin. These types of support are important for empowerment of the unskilled and semi-skilled migrant workers who often find themselves in a vulnerable situation. More so because – unlike the educated elite who go westward, attracted by better opportunities and a luxurious lifestyle – those who arrive in West Asia as waged labourers have a much harder time: practically no rights, hostile working environments and absolutely no support systems. They are, therefore, also more vulnerable to environmental change. Need for greater effort is also felt to optimise the benefits of organised labour migration, including the development of new markets and increasing remittance flows through formal channels. Building institutional capacity and inter-ministerial coordination; increasing cooperation with destination countries to protect migrant workers; providing better access to labour markets; and preventing irregular migration are considered important aspects of an effective regional response to the challenges of labour migration.

To accomplish these goals, a Ministerial Consultation for Asian Labour Sending Countries was held in 2003 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The 10 initial participating nations – Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam – made recommendations for the effective management of overseas employment programmes and agreed to regular follow-up meetings. Since then, the member nations of the ‘Colombo Process’ have met in countries of origin – in Manila (Philippines) and Bali (Indonesia) in 2004 and 2005, respectively, to review and monitor the implementation of previous

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5 Foreign workers in all the GCC countries have contributed significantly towards the development process. As is the case in most labour-importing countries, after the completion of the projects the governments tightened their immigration policies to reduce the number of foreign workers. In spite of such measures, demand for migrant workers remained as more private projects arose in the construction sector.

6 See Khadria (2010a).
recommendations and identify areas of future action. The Third Ministerial Consultation in Bali in 2005 was enriched by the participation of several countries of destination as ‘observers’ – Bahrain, Italy, Kuwait, Malaysia, Qatar, Korea, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – all GCC countries except for Italy. However, after the Bali meeting, the Colombo Process lost its momentum, and it took 6 years for its revival in Bangladesh, in 2011.

As the Colombo Process evolved with each ministerial consultation, new members and partners have joined the Regional Consultative Process (RCP), and the consultations have expanded in scope. The process aims to continue to provide a forum for dialogue among member states. The first ever meeting hosted by a destination Gulf country, the United Arab Emirates, bringing together the 11 Asian countries of origin (with the addition of Afghanistan to the initial 10 members) and eight ‘observer’ countries of destination was held in Abu Dhabi in January 2008 and resulted in the creation of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue as another RCP. It highlighted the potential of contractual labour mobility to benefit overseas workers as well as the development of countries of both origin and destination in Asia, through the establishment of key action-orientated partnerships. With the continued participation of the destination countries, this dialogue is set to evolve and contribute to strengthening migration management both in the countries of origin and destination the Asian region. In recent years, the Colombo Process – the RCP for the management of overseas employment and contractual labour for Asian countries of migrants’ origin – has been particularly active in promoting legal south–south migration as a means of reducing irregular migration. Bangladesh took over the rotational chairmanship of this regional consultative process in December 2009, and hosted the Fourth Ministerial Consultation for Asian Labour Sending Countries in Dhaka in April 2011.

The stated aim of the Colombo Process is to provide a forum for Asian labour-sending countries to:

- share experiences, lessons learnt and best practices on overseas employment;
- consult on issues faced by overseas workers, labour-sending and -receiving states, and propose practical solutions for the well-being of vulnerable overseas workers;
- optimise development benefits from organised overseas employment, and enhance dialogue with countries of destination; and
- review and monitor the implementation of the recommendations and identify further steps for action.

The current focus of the Colombo Process is on:

- Protection of and provision of services to migrant workers. In particular, protecting migrant workers from abusive practices in recruitment and employment, and providing appropriate services to migrant workers in terms of pre-departure information and orientation and welfare provisions.

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7 Newspaper and media provide first-hand reporting of the abuses and the divide between policies and practices in place. See, ‘Dreams die in the desert’, by V. Swathi; ‘Changes in policy’ by S. Dikshit; and ‘Chasing a mirage’, by K.P.M. Basheer – all in The Hindu, New Delhi, 20 Feb 2011.
• Optimising benefits of organised labour migration. This includes the development of new overseas employment markets, increasing remittance flows through formal channels and enhancing the development impact of remittances.

• Capacity building, data collection and inter-state cooperation. This includes institutional capacity building and information exchange to meet labour migration challenges. Increasing cooperation with destination countries in the protection of migrant workers and access to labour markets, and enhancing cooperation among countries of origin.

In practical terms, some of the instruments leading to the success or fulfilment of these aims could be cited from at least three large and prominent sending member countries of the Colombo Process, that is Bangladesh, Pakistan and India.

**Bangladesh**

The Bangladesh Missions in host countries now perform the following duties:

• receive and hear the complaints of migrant workers;
• take up the matter with the employers;
• provide legal assistance;
• arrange repatriation of stranded migrant workers; and
• repatriation of remains of workers who have died abroad.

Bangladesh also operates a welfare fund for providing legal support and initial sustenance.

**Pakistan**

• Orientation and briefing centres function in Protector of Emigrants (PE) offices in Karachi, Lahore, Rawalpindi and Peshawar. All migrant workers register with the PE. Offices are given pre-departure briefings about their countries of employment. They are also informed about the customs, local conditions and relevant laws in the country of destination.

• Community Welfare Attachés are posted in the manpower-importing countries. They maintain liaison with the Pakistani workers and provide them with the necessary help to solve problems in coordination with the host authorities.

• Under the Emigration Ordinance of 1979, a welfare fund has been created. It is being managed by the Overseas Pakistani Foundation (OPF) for the welfare of migrant workers and their dependants in Pakistan. Education, training, housing and medical facilities and other services are organised for the families of overseas Pakistanis by the OPF.

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8 See also GOB and IOM (2004).

9 See Gazdar (2003); Siddiqui and Mahmood (2005).
• The Government of Pakistan has taken measures to improve the skills and attitudes of the workers in demand abroad in accordance with international norms and standards.

• The majority of the emigrants remit their savings through the official channel. The Government of Pakistan has banking arrangements in some of the manpower-importing countries.

**India**

In 2004, the Government of India established a new ministry called the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA), which acts as a nodal agency to deal with issues related to Indian migrants abroad\(^\text{10}\). However, apart from MOIA, the Ministries of Home Affairs, Commerce, External Affairs and the Department of Science and Technology also interact with the Indian migrants in various capacities.

The MOIA is working towards two basic objectives:

• to take note of the problems of the Indian migrant communities in various countries and to initiate measure to overcome those problems; and

• to involve the Indian migrants abroad for India’s larger development purposes.

Towards these goals, the Indian government has floated a number of schemes. One landmark step relating to migration of Indian workers within Asia, in particular to the Gulf countries, has been the gradual abolition of the Emigration Clearance Required (ECR) for unskilled and semi-skilled migrant workers, which, having been fraught with corruption, became a roadblock in free mobility of workers from India\(^\text{11}\). Another recent step, introduced in February 2011, has been the granting of voting rights to non-resident Indians (NRIs) living abroad for participation in elections in India.

**Would the Colombo Process lead to relatively freer migration within Asia in the next 20 years?**

Although it may be too distant to speculate about the next half century (to 2060), evidence suggests that the stereotypes of the push and pull factors would not necessarily continue to be the primary drivers of migration within Asia, particularly to the Gulf countries, over the next two decades (to 2030). A study by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI)–BBC (2009) pointed out that the immigrants constituted the largest share of the total population in the Gulf States. Foreign nationals accounted for 90% of the labour force in the United Arab Emirates, 86% in Qatar, 81% in Kuwait, 71% in Oman, 59% in Bahrain and 50% in Saudi Arabia (DESA, 2006: 16). Such levels of migrant stocks are not what the governments of some GCC countries desire.

\(^{10}\) See GOI and MOIA (2008).

\(^{11}\) See Khadria (2010a).
Responding to a UN survey on opinions about levels of immigration and emigration, four out of the six oil-rich GCC countries – Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – considered that the immigration levels in their countries were too high and they wanted to reduce them. A review of the opinions, attitudes and policies towards immigration in the Gulf region indicate that in all six countries the trend towards restricting the inflows has increased. Also, steps towards the actual implementation of the policies are more actively being taken and enforced. In order to lower the level of immigration these countries are implementing highly restrictive immigration policies. The remaining two – Bahrain and Qatar – considered the levels to be satisfactory and had policies to maintain the inflow. There are several measures that are adopted by the governments of the GCC countries to discourage immigration: indirect taxes, such as health taxes for expatriates, not only raise revenue for the host country but also increase the cost of living for the expatriates. Owing to the lack of minimum wage legislation, the migrant workers are paid low wages. Apart from this, the ineffectiveness of the labour dispute settlement machinery results in no increments in wages and non-payment of non-wage benefits as per the labour laws.

The main factors steering the future migration in this region, therefore, need to be identified and grouped together in a generic classification of what I call age, wage and vintage. I prophesise on how the driving force of the dynamic conflict of interest between the origin and destination countries is likely to continue or discontinue in future.

The first, age, deals with the ‘acceleration’ in the migration of younger cohorts of new workers so as to neutralise the adverse effects of ‘age-structural change’ that can be brought about in population composition of countries of destination. This has been discussed predominantly in the case of Western countries, but not in the Gulf in a futuristic perspective. The second driver, wage, refers to the comparative advantage gained by a Gulf country of destination through ‘replacement’ when younger returnees remigrate a second or third time from the Asian countries (the older cohorts tending to stay in the country of origin and adding to the stocks of older workers), thus bringing with them more cost-effective production functions because of their lower wages. In addition, although there has been a lot of hype about the diaspora resources such as remittances breaking all records in India, and being substantial for Bangladesh and Pakistan, there have been no speculations on these becoming silent reverse flows in terms of lowering of wages in the Gulf, in real terms, that determine the quantum of remittances to countries of origin. The third driver, vintage, would imply the state-of-the-art know-how and skills embodied in the latest and younger generations of semi-skilled trainees,

Another issue that the GCC governments have to deal with is visa trading by fictitious companies. Ever since labour migration to the Gulf began, each employee must have a sponsor or kafeel. A system of visa trading emerged during the last two to three decades because the demand for visas to the Gulf exceeded supply. Some nationals thus opened up fictitious companies for which they procured work permits that they were able to sell to those migrants who were willing to pay for them. Frequently, the work permit was not accompanied by a job. The migrant thus found employment with someone other than the sponsor, or remained unemployed.

See Khadria (2008). These may sound like conventional explanations, but have so far been highlighted only in terms of the spontaneous ‘push’ factors for the individual migrants at the micro level; not at all as the strategic ‘pull’ factors taken advantage of by the receiving countries at the macro and meso levels. The environmental impact of the strategic element on the sending countries has not even been mentioned in the debates.
as well as students who would be enrolling in upcoming training and educational institutions in the Gulf countries, many set up by universities in the West, being ‘pre-empted’ as future migrant workers.

These advantages to the countries of destination would create a dynamic conflict of interest vis-à-vis the origin countries because of different time horizons (which makes the conflict ‘dynamic’ as opposed to ‘static’) that the former perceive for development in future – most countries of origin being myopic because the time horizons of their plan perspectives are shorter, e.g. of 5 years as in India’s Five Year Plans, and most countries of destination being far-sighted in keeping the time horizons of their plans long and open ended, sometimes of 50 years in the future. Precisely because, as in all other RCPs, the outcomes of the Colombo Process are informal and non-binding, this dynamic conflict is unlikely to be resolved in the near future of the next 20 years, whereas the distant future of the next 50 years would be difficult to predict. Informality in the Colombo Process consultations is understood in neutral terms, whereby participants are not put in a negotiating position to defend national interests or political positions (the ‘party line’), which seems utopian at best and misleading at worst. Informality here is meant to break down barriers to cooperation, such as an absence of trust between states, fears of political or financial costs, adversarial international relationships or a lack of understanding of the perspectives and concerns of others, but it is also too wishful to be realistic. As the processes are non-binding in that states do not negotiate binding rules and are not obligated to implement any changes following consultations, this actually leads to a weakness in the sense that there is no in-built mechanism to tide over the dynamic conflict of interest that creates a schism between the countries of origin and destination.

**Elements characterising the future scenarios: H&H, RSEs and TcD model**

The future might interchange the ‘hubs and hinterlands’ (H&H) of migration in Asia\(^{14}\) – in 50 years, if not in next 20 years – when migration flows would reverse: originating in the Gulf countries and ending in today’s countries of migrants’ origin\(^{15}\). The Gulf countries might then have their own excess supply of highly skilled workforce because of foreign educational institutions opening campuses there. Low-skilled service workers may not find jobs in the Gulf countries because of saturation of construction-related activities. Rather, contrary to Peter Drucker’s forecast, the divide between the highly skilled and low-skilled work may go overboard and create a boom, in countries of the north, in attracting these low- and semi-skilled immigrants in the so-called ‘dirty, dangerous and difficult’ sectors of the low-skilled ‘service work’, such as agriculture and recycling. These will be the sectors where – in the wake of the on-going climate change, which is leading to the emergence of a global ‘green economy’ – too few green jobs would be created, according to an International Labour Organization (ILO) study.

\(^{14}\) Khadria (2010b).

\(^{15}\) Going to an intermediate year when India should be celebrating its 100 years of independence, the year 2047, it would perhaps be interesting to prophesise in this context by making reference to a futuristic science fiction of sorts: according to River of Gods, first published in 2004, by Ian McDonald, the well-known contemporary British science-fiction writer, a number of changes have occurred in the country by 2047.
The report has been cited to have said that the global market for environmental products and services was projected to double from US$1,370 billion per year to US$2,740 billion by 2020, with half the market in energy efficiency and the other half in sustainable transport, water supply, sanitation and waste management, and by 2030 employment in alternative energy sector might rise – to 2.1 million in wind power and 6.3 million in solar power – as renewable energy generates more jobs than fossil fuels do. Projected investments of US$630 billion by 2030 will translate into at least 20 million additional jobs in the renewable energy sector, leading to newer dimensions of migration flows in directions so far unanticipated. As the ‘stock’ of greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere by the industrialised Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries over the years is higher than the current ‘flow’ of emissions by countries such as China or India in Asia, either low-skilled service workers would move to the OECD countries to fill the 3-D (dirty, difficult, dangerous) jobs or the polluting industries would somehow find a way to silently shift their location to the developing countries in Asia, particularly India and Bangladesh (Khadria, 2009a).

Even the Colombo Process might disintegrate and another RCP may emerge among what I have elsewhere called the ‘rising Southern economies’ (RSEs) comprising the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) plus Mexico. For handling future environmental migration, the diaspora associations may form part of a hypothetical ‘global diaspora force’ (GDF) and play a constructive role not necessarily confined to their respective countries of origin, but in another country where such contingencies arise – through a third-country development (TcD) model.

Similarly, the probabilities for the next 20 years would be also contingent on the political, diplomatic and military agreements (and trust) among the large and important countries of origin in the region adjacent to the Gulf, i.e. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and China, and possibly, to some extent, Sri Lanka. Smaller countries, such as Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Afghanistan, would not play very strategic roles in this except with relation to their immediate neighbours, but stability in their internal polity would still be important. All this would be contingent on which way the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) process develops, and which way the dynamics of China and India in the emerging BRICS configuration moves.

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18 See Khadria (2010c).
The unfolding future possibilities and constraints facing the Colombo Process

Who will move under freer migration within Asia?

As of now, exclusively environmental concerns for Asia are conspicuous by their absence in the Colombo Process dialogues or proceedings, except as emergency measures. On the other hand, given that the primary focus of the Colombo Process is migration, it may be speculated that if relatively freer migration within Asia sets in over the next 20 (or 50) years, environmental migration, as an emergency fall-out, if not policy, would indeed incorporate those prone to be affected by the natural disasters, mostly uneducated, unskilled and semi-skilled migrant workers, only if it is assumed that people would prioritise anticipated safety over immediate livelihood. On the other hand, as emphasised in the inaugural India Migration Report 2009: Past Present and the Future Outlook (Khadria, 2009a), freer mobility would certainly encourage migration for work and livelihood, particularly from the neighbouring countries for seasonal migration, into those Asian countries where ‘polluting’ industries would find safer havens, vis-à-vis the rest of the world, to set up non-regulated or less-regulated factories (e.g. in China and India, unless they both keep the promises held out recently in Cancun and presumably to be reiterated in Durban later this year, and Bangladesh too). In any case, these migrants would be unlikely to be in the affluent, highly educated skilled categories, rather, they would be considered as the so-called ‘huddled masses’.

What would matter most for future success of the Colombo Process?

Much of the conflict resolution would depend upon the nature of what I have called the ‘dynamic conflict of interests’ (i.e. the division of time horizons between the more developed destinations and the relatively less developed countries of origin in Asia – usually long term for the former and short term for the latter), and much cooperation for the success of the Colombo Process would depend upon how fairly the nations would engage in what I call the ‘equitable adversary analysis’ (EAA), rather than playing ‘hide and seek’ in a game-theoretic situation, in the multilateral or even bilateral negotiations, if any (Khadria, 2009b). The EAA has to lead to binding norms and codes of conduct to tide over the schism between the practices and the policies agreed upon by the countries of origin and destination, and not merely to some ‘informal’ relationship among them without any legal bindings. Second, for the success of the Colombo Process, there must be some kind of time-bound guarantee for stability in the adopted policies. Frequent changes in immigration policies of destination countries lead to maximisation of future uncertainties that adversely affect long-term planning of investment in training and education by the migrants. To guard against this, it should be made mandatory that immigration policy changes, like all genuine and quality products and services, will bear expiry dates (or ‘best-before dates’), short of which there would be no major surprising changes, unless warranted by extraordinary, justifiable and rationalised circumstances, such as the sudden onset of the recent global economic recession. The Colombo Process countries, as well as other countries, need to pledge themselves to such norms if the global migration system needs to be stabilised and made more humane than what it has been.
Concluding remarks

The most remarkable impact of the success of Colombo Process in terms of making migration across countries of Asia, particularly migration to and return from the Gulf countries, relatively freer would give it the characteristics of resettling IDPs. On the contrary, if the Dhaka Declaration of Colombo Process Member Countries, adopted on 21 April 2011, is any indication of the future shape of things to emerge, the fact would remain that it is unlikely for the Colombo Process to usher in anything like that kind of freer migration in the region. While the declaration took note of the global financial and economic crisis as well as the political unrest in key destination countries of West Asia and North Africa affecting labour mobility, the eighth and the last recommendation of the declaration under ‘services and capacity building’ reads as follows: ‘To encourage mobility in job market, consistent with national regulations’ (emphasis added). The two recommendations under ‘emergency response and emerging issues’ read as follows:

(i) To develop appropriate policy and institutional response capacity to mitigate the impact of emergency situations on migrant workers, including ensuring their safety, security and well-being as well as early evacuation, repatriation, compensation and opportunities to return to their jobs; (ii) To further explore the possible nexus between environmental degradation and climate change on one hand and human mobility on the other, and its likely implications on labour migration.

In both cases, it is the national, rather than the multilateral or the bilateral, framework that is likely to be strengthened, and environmental migration would be dealt with only under ‘emergency measures’. The declaration also resolved that the next, fifth, consultation would take place only in 2013, and not earlier despite the fact that the fourth was unduly delayed. Under the circumstances, only the following second best developments could be speculated to take place:

- There would be tendencies for much more seasonal (pre-monsoon, for example, to avoid floods) migration in these categories across national borders to India, mainly from Nepal (as there are no visa requirements), and less from Bangladesh (though not necessarily from Pakistan), than for permanent settlement, mainly because ‘temporary return’ to homeland would become easier over the next 50 years.

- The Colombo Process would probably facilitate evacuation across the borders for crisis management in the case of extreme events such as flash floods, earthquakes and similar disasters.

- Short of dual citizenship, empowering people with a rights-based approach to building such resilience, transnational ties would be the second best surrogate to provide protection against unforeseen but anticipated environmental change.

References


