

Lesson 3: The damaging effects of Global North/South inequalities on the environment and its consequent impact on migration

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Personal touch by Corinne and Luna

Why did you focus on this particular topic? Why do you find it important? What is the reason you think learners in this module should get familiar with the topic? How do you think knowing what you wrote can contribute to change?

Because we are migrants, because we feel what it means to leave your place and travel to find the other part of yourself away from home. And maybe for the same reason we have the sensibility to watch people around who did it for forced reasons... like the climate crisis.



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Lesson contents

Lesson 3: The damaging effects of Global North/South inequalities on the environment and its consequent impact on migration

3.1. The impact of north-south power dynamics and inequalities on the environment

3.1.1. Resource extraction

3.1.2. Waste generated by production and consumption

3.2. Environmental degradation and its impact on migration

3.2.1. Climate migration

3.2.2. About numbers

3.2.3. Current policies

3.2.4. COP27

3.3. Senegal: drought, coastal erosion and overfishing

3.4. Colombia: climate change

3.5. Conclusion





"People start to worry for the environment only when their basic needs are satisfied"
But, what happens with those who cannot supply their basic needs due to the climate crisis?

3.1. The impact of north-south power dynamics and inequalities on the environment

3.1.1. Resource extraction

- *Our current world system has been shaped by land grabbing since the colonial era. What we now call Global South, encompasses many regions of Africa, America, and Asia, all of which were subject to colonial rule, which itself functioned through mining and material extraction.*
- *We can clearly see that the tendency in these regions has not changed its course, in more modern times we are still operating under a process of land grabbing and extraction in order to sustain our narrative of exponential growth and progress. As we know, in order for capitalism to operate, large amounts of energy need to be deployed for the creation of goods. The energy we consume and the supply we have created require raw materials such as minerals, oil, and gas to be extracted from the land.*
- *The process of exploitation is inefably damaging since it not only requires the destruction of the land, but also needs large amounts of water, energy, and the displacement of the population, all of which give rise to inequalities and political conflict.*



3.1.1. Resource extraction

- *Although the process of resource extraction mainly takes place in the Global South, the dynamic also occurs in less powerful regions of the Global North. The case of La Mina Cobre Las Cruces, Sevilla, España exploited by the Canadian company First Quantum exemplifies this. According to EJATLAS, the aquifer of this region has been illegally extracted for the use and exploitation of the open sky copper mine. While the mining company has been sued and proclaimed guilty by local authorities the land has been damaged and the water resources drained and contaminated and people have been displaced and exposed to health deterioration.*
- *Although green and renewable energy has become an important way to tackle our fossil fuel extraction it still requires minerals to assure energy storage. Once again, this will be a delicate process as the raw material of batteries (cobalt, lithium, graphite, and manganese) are mostly found in the Global South. A clear example of this is Chile. Chile is not only the world's first producer of copper iodine, rhenium, sodium, and potassium nitrate.*



The mining of this land requires people to be displaced, and more often than not, these are indigenous communities who are deprived of their land, water resources, and sacred sites. According to the International Institute of Environment and Development, “the Colla are a legally recognized Indigenous People who live in the Atacama Region of northern Chile. While their ancestral territory stretches across more than 800,000 hectares, the Chilean government has only granted the Colla title to roughly 9,000 hectares of land”.

These land mines are abundant, but as the NRDC explains, they are “producing toxic tailings ponds while simultaneously polluting and depleting water resources. To date, the majority of Chile’s lithium extraction has taken place on the Atacama desert salt flat(...). The Colla community’s ancient culture and traditions are also at risk.

Guided by the earth mother goddess Pachamama, the nomadic group coexists with the mountains, the water, and the wildlife, and performs seasonal ceremonies in reverence to her. About 70 percent of the community now lives in the urban center of Copiapó, and if the salt flat continues to dry up, those who have remained in the mountains will be forced to leave.” (Greenfield, 2022), this displacement of people once again exemplifies how colonial hegemonies are still operating.



3.1.2 Waste generated by production and consumption

- *There is no doubt that the climate crisis is the result of human activities. Indeed our processes of extraction, production, and consumption generate garbage and CO2 emissions. A big source of pollution and degradation is also our industrial agriculture, livestock, and fishing industries all of which have an impact on our water, soil, and air.*
- *Plastic is an ever-present material that has actually existed for a relatively short period of time but now presents a real threat. Although this material did make contributions due to its durability, malleability, and low cost, it has now become detrimental, not only due to the fact that its raw material is oil, but also because it's now mass-produced and under a single-use logic.*
- *According to NOAA, its production "increased exponentially, from 2.3 million tons in 1950 to 448 million tons by 2015... [and] is expected to double by 2050" As a result of this, our land, and more particularly, our oceans are suffering the consequences. A clear example of this is the garbage patches. The entire Great Pacific Garbage Patch is situated in the North Pacific Subtropical Gyre.*



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- Gyres are systems of ocean currents that are now swirling plastic debris into patches. Contrary to our belief, these patches are not merely islands of trash but rather microplastics that are hardly visible to our naked eyes, “even satellite imagery doesn’t show a giant patch of garbage.”



3.1.2. Waste generated by production and consumption

- *Another activity that is immensely generating damage is our industrial agriculture and farming production. As we well know, cattle are one of the greatest producers of CO2 emissions not only through the livestock's gasses, as more recent analysis of emissions from animal agriculture finds "that the figure of minimum estimate should be updated to 16.5% of CO2 emissions" but also due to the large amounts of green areas that are transformed into agricultural land for cattle. This not only has a great impact on biodiversity and drought but also prevents large captures of CO2.*
- *This intensive transformation of the land is also taking a toll on the multiplication of wildfires, as farmers burn the land to clear fields for crops during the dry weather period they often lose control of these, "satellite data showed more than 46,000 fires in the Amazon, an alarming 111% increase over last year." In addition to this, industrial agriculture and GMO crops are also contributing to this damage through the large amounts of chemicals and pesticides that are disposed of on the land and in water.*



3.2 The environmental degradation and its impact on migration

3.2.1 Climate migration

- *The need to migrate is the result of multiple factors: economic, social, and political, which stem from the unequal capitalist system, born in the colonial era. However, recent climate deregulations, caused by exploitation, overproduction, and consumption are also becoming important reasons to migrate. Indeed climate refugees are on the rise and will be increasing as changes become more frequent and extreme.*
- *The climate crisis affects all of us, but it does not do so in the same way, since it largely depends on where, how, and when we are born. Today, according to data from the United Nations, in 8 out of 10 households without water inside the home, they are the ones who assume the task of obtaining it.*
- *Likewise, the younger and future generations are the ones who will have the most difficulty. A girl or boy born in 2020 will face twice the risk of being affected by fire and will endure about 30 extreme heat waves in their lifetime than someone born in their early 60s.*



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3.2.1 Climate migration

'Many people have already left, others are thinking about it'.

- *Migration is a response of human adaptation to changes, an example of this is what happens with Bangladesh and the rise of the sea levels. The most known cases of climate migration are due to water. Water is an essential common good for sustaining life, which is particularly threatened by the global environmental crisis, and especially the climate crisis, along with the mercantile and private forces that are imposed by forceful forces around the world.*
- *Also, in both situations of immobility and forced mobility, women (especially those with fewer economic resources and those racialized or belonging to other vulnerable population groups) face multiple threats in a differentiated way due to patriarchal pressures and the axes of oppression present in all societies.*
- *Environmental migrant women suffer many different consequences in these contexts, ranging from discrimination to serious health problems associated with malnutrition, increased physical, psychological, and emotional burdens, less access to education, and a high risk of being victims of human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, among others.*



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3.2.2 About Numbers

As for the figures, currently, environmental migrants are not accurately accounted for. This is due to multiple reasons, such as the difficulty of identifying environmental factors as triggers of population movements (even by the affected people themselves), the multi-causality of this phenomenon, or the lack of will policy to prioritize the collection of data on these realities.

Thus, every year the Center for the Monitoring of Internal Displacements (IDMC), produces a detailed report in which the figures for internal displacements associated with disasters are collected, on the one hand, and conflicts and violence, on the other.

In 2021 alone, a total of 38 million new internal displacements took place in 141 countries and territories, of which 23.7 million were associated with disasters, and the majority (22.3 million) were caused by phenomena that may be related to climate change such as storms, floods, fires, droughts, landslides, and extreme temperatures.



3.2.3. Current policies

One of the most controversial terminological aspects is the concept of the "environmental refugee". Different groups are advocating the use of this terminology for different purposes: drawing attention to the seriousness of environmental migrations, making visible the importance of global environmental change, or advocating for the use of the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees (1951) and its New York Protocol (1967) to protect affected people, among others.

However, the legal definition of a refugee is very specific:

"A refugee is someone who is outside the country of origin, or where they habitually reside, due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of ethnicity, religion, nationality, membership of a group social or political opinions, and who cannot or does not want to claim the protection of their country to be able to return there (UNTS, Article 1A)"



About this definition, the reasons for which this terminology is not recommended and for which it should not be the only option promoted to protect environmental migrants are multiple:

- 1) often, in cases of environmental migration (especially in climate) it is complicated to justify that there are they have "well-founded fears of persecution" as required by the definition of exposed refugee;*
- 2) environmental or climatic causes are not found in the five reasons included in the definition;*
- 3) this protection can only be used in cases of international transfers and most environmental migrations occur internally;*
- 4) many of the affected people do not want to be recognized as refugees, they prefer to fight to adapt in situ and remain in their homes;*
- 5) the current political context is not favorable for the extension or opening to debate of the Convention, in fact, it would be very dangerous and counterproductive.*



3.2 4.COP 27

The COP 27, the renowned congress in which world leaders meet to discuss climate change and agree on actions to take, was held in Egypt (2022). One important topic brought up this year by multiple countries from the global south is the need to create repair and assistance funds for countries that are most vulnerable to catastrophes and which have, in turn, contributed the least to emissions. Hopefully, these funds will also be directed towards handling migration and providing the following “Provide Solutions for People to Move, enabling safe and regular migration Provide Solutions for People on the Move: From anticipatory action to enabling solutions to minimize and better address loss and damage, including displacement Provide Solutions for People to Stay: Disaster risk reduction and in situ adaptation to avert and minimize displacement” (IOM UN Migration, 2022)

In brief, climate migrations are still a complex situation. If we could look at all the related topics it would look a bit like this:

- 1. WORLD WATER CRISIS** (contamination, privatization and commodification, overexploitation, violation of the rights of access to water).
- 2. CLIMATE CRISIS** (rising temperatures, deglaciation, rising sea levels, etc.)



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3.3. SENEGAL: drought, coastal erosion and overfishing

'West Africa is one of the most vulnerable regions to the current and future impacts of the climate crisis (Muller, C. Waha, K. Bondeau, À. Heinke, J. (2014)).



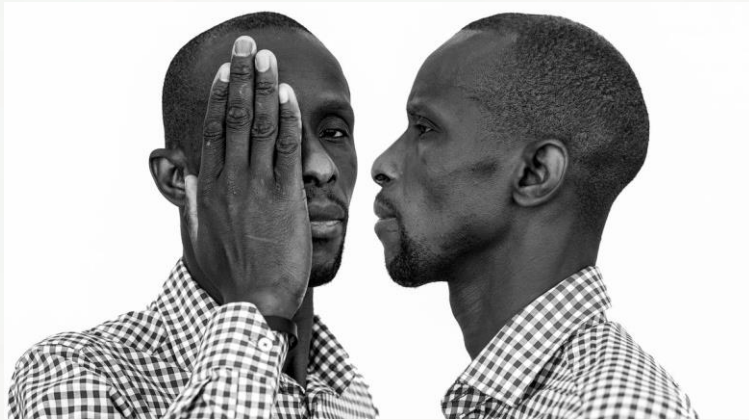
- *Some of these impacts are rising temperatures, heat waves, changes in rainfall patterns (delays in the onset of monsoons or dry periods during the rainy season, rains ever becoming more intense, etc.), flooding and coastal erosion due to intensifying storms, and rising sea levels. This territory has one of the highest rates of human mobility in the world due to a long history of trade, nomadic grazing, migration during the dry season to diversify livelihoods, legacies of colonialism and economic links with the former colonial powers.*
- *Senegal, located on the coast of West Africa, is a country highly vulnerable to the adverse effects of the climate crisis and other forms of environmental degradation. While the interior of the country is very dry and is part of the Sahel, the coast is being particularly affected by sea level rise. In the Sahel, climate impacts limit the realization of the rights to water and sanitation. Groundwater reserves are likely to be drained and not regenerated, depleting aquifers. Water and sanitation infrastructure may also be overburdened in urban areas, creating additional risks for people migrating to cities due to the adverse effects of climate change. Reduced access to water and sanitation can be accompanied by significant health effects, including the increased spread of disease.*



- *The Senegalese population has a long history of internal migration and international migration (nearly 5% of the population lives outside the country) of various kinds, particularly marked by displacement for work and economic reasons, but also due to internal armed conflicts and in neighboring countries.*
- *Added to these factors are disasters associated with natural threats, climate change, the consequences of COVID-19, and other socio-environmental factors. 'Recent data also show that internal population movements are occurring in Senegal due to worsening environmental conditions. In fact, more than 1,300 disaster-related internal displacements took place in this country in 2021 alone'.*
- *The activities of certain companies in the Global North also directly generate resource scarcity and environmental degradation, which drives migratory movements to and from Senegal. An example is what is happening on the coast, where artisanal fishing, which used to be an essential activity for the Senegalese economy, is being diminished due to the consequences of the proliferation of large fishing vessels.*
- *Unfortunately, most of the small fish that once supported local populations are now used as feed for livestock and aquaculture, as well as cosmetics, dietary supplements, and pet food products outside the African continent.*



- *The case of Serigne Mbayè (photographer), a social activist and politician of Senegalese origin who lives in Madrid, reflects this situation. Serigne, like so many other people who risk their lives trying to reach the European Union, had to leave his country due to the lack of opportunities that caused the decline of fishing due to the overexploitation carried out by the large foreign boats and the lack of opportunities in agriculture related to the drought.*



‘In 2021 alone, more than 4,400 people lost their lives trying to reach Spain, the majority on the Canary route’ (Caminando Fronteras, 2022).

3.4. COLOMBIA: climate change

Colombia is considered one of the most unequal countries in the world and the second most unequal country in Latin America after Brazil (Portafolio, October 27, 2021).



- *Colombia is the fourth largest country in South America, the only one with marine areas in the Pacific and the Caribbean Sea, and with a maritime jurisdictional area relatively equal to that of its emerged territory (Government of Colombia, 2017). Among the climate risks highlighted is the increase in average temperature, the alteration of rainfall patterns, and the rise of the sea level, as well as floods and soil degradation.*
- *Although Colombia represents only 0.6% of global emissions, it is one of the countries most vulnerable to the climate crisis. In this sense, Colombia is one of the territories with greater complexity in terms of human mobility. And the main factors of population movement in the country have to do with armed conflict, economic factors, and with environmental degradation. One aspect to highlight is the historical link of the Colombian armed conflict with the dispute over land and natural resources.*



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Therefore, the factors mentioned above are interrelated and feedback on each other, thus being another example of the multi-causality of migratory flows. It is expected that for the period 2011-2040 the temperature in Colombia will increase by 1.4°C, for the period 2042-2070 by 2.4°C, and for the period 2071-2100 by 3.2°C. At the same time, forecasts made by the Instituto de Hidrología, Meteorología y Estudios Ambientales (IDEAM) indicate that annual precipitation will decrease between 15% and 36% for the periods 2071-2100, with the Department of Bolívar being one of the most affected in the country.

And the fact is that the effects of the climate emergency have already been felt in Colombia for years: during the last three decades more than 15.5 million Colombians have been affected by disasters related to environmental threats and near of 15 million people (35% of the Colombian population) has been exposed to a high level of risk of suffering this type of disaster. On the other hand, 20 million people (47% of the population) are exposed to a medium risk of being affected by disasters.



3.5. Conclusion

- *We are in a situation that is, in many ways, impacting our ecosystems and our society. Human overconsumption and production are deregulating our climate at a high speed by the exponential amount of polluting chemicals we deposit in our land, air, and water.*
- *The consequences of this deviation are already being felt, especially in the Global South, where people are increasingly being pushed to leave and seek an opportunity to meet their basic needs.*
- *Basically seven years away from 2030, a date in which, according to the UN 2030 Agenda, we should attain the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets. We all know we are still far from these and far from “leaving no one behind”, which is why we cannot waste any more time, our actions as citizens but mostly as institutions and States are paramount.*
- *The situation we are currently facing is no different, it requires us to reframe and understand that this issue that has so imminently arisen, is global, and although some countries -mostly South - will be more affected than others, the responsibility and accountability should be global as ultimately the consequences will be too.*

