

# Migration doesn't have to be a failure of adaptation

## An escape from environmental determinism

Climate Adaptation Futures  
2010 International Climate Change Adaptation Conference

*Gold Coast, 30 June 2010*

**François Gemenne**

*IDDRI – Sciences Po  
Francois.Gemenne@iddri.org*



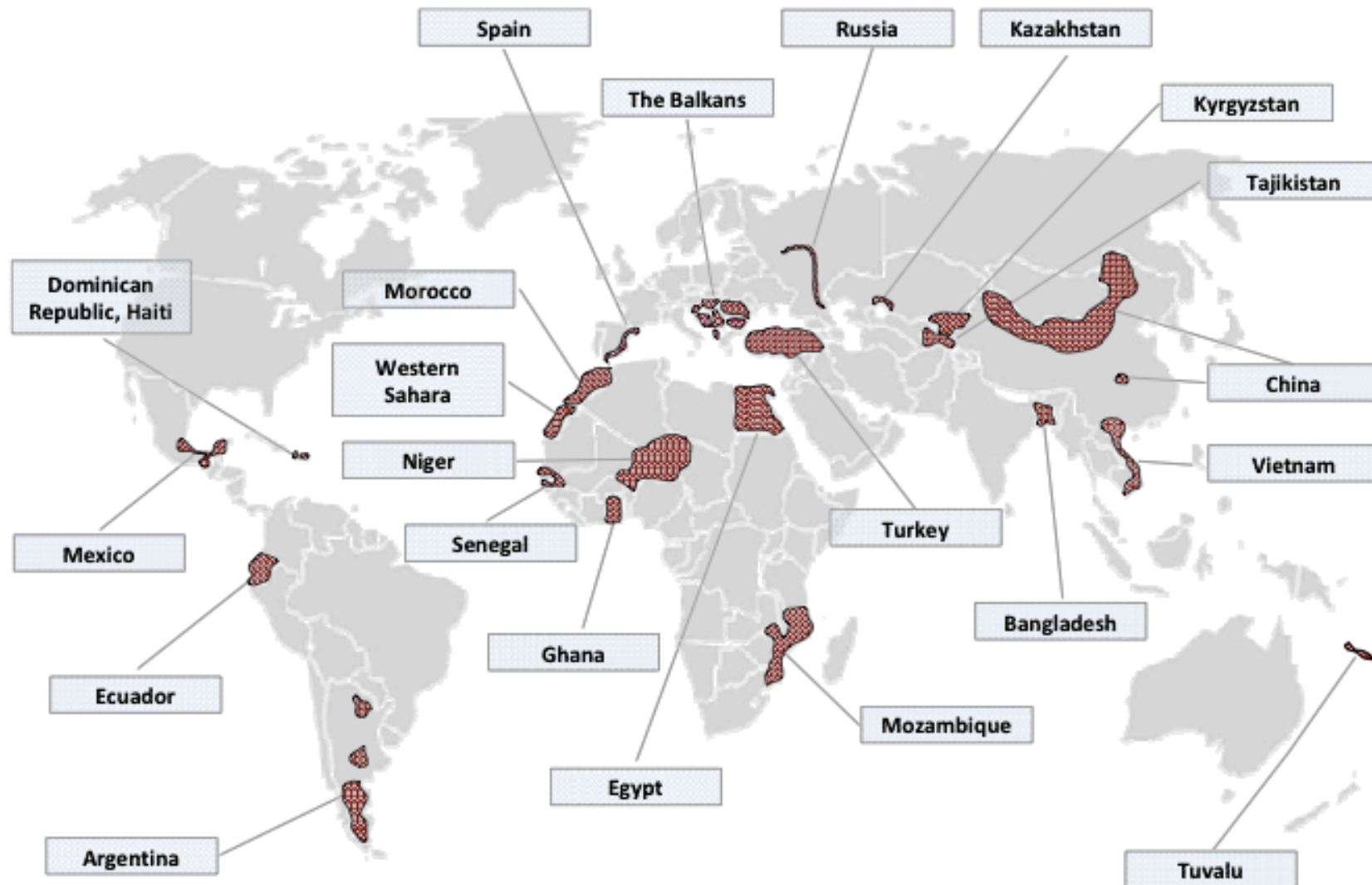
**Institut du développement durable et des relations internationales**

27 rue Saint-Guillaume – 75337 Paris Cedex 07

[www.iddri.org](http://www.iddri.org)

# The EACH-FOR project

---



# Key empirical conclusions

---

- ▶ Most of migration movements associated with environmental degradation are internal movements, either on (very) short distance or from rural to urban areas.
  - ▶ International migration is the exception, not the rule.
- ▶ Environmental drivers are mixed with other drivers, but represent an additional constraint to migrate.
- ▶ Migration does not necessarily increase when the environmental situation becomes worse.
  - ▶ Migration can be reduced in case of severe drought.
- ▶ Migration is often used by the migrants as a coping strategy.
- ▶ Those that are the most vulnerable are often unable to migrate.
  - ▶ Migration requires both economic and social capital.



# Yet the dominant discourse on the topic is disconnected from these observations

---

- ▶ Migrants are seen as expiatory, resourceless victims of climate change.
  - ▶ Many of them don't consider themselves as victims, or don't want to be considered as such.
  - ▶ Migrants are resourceful agents – they are not the most vulnerable
- ▶ Migration is perceived as an adaptation failure
  - ▶ In many cases, it can be an adaptation strategy
- ▶ We assume a direct, causal relationship between climate change and migration.
- ▶ We expect that these displacements will be forced and international.
- ▶ We assume that the nature and extent of the migration flows will depend upon the impacts of climate change.
- ▶ Climate-induced migration often perceived as a threat to security.
  - ▶ In many cases, it can actually improve human security.

---

▶ **This discourse remains rooted in environmental determinism and promotes a security agenda**

# Adaptation as a key factor

---

- ▶ Though migration is often presented as a failure of adaptation to environmental change, many migrants used migration itself as an adaptation strategy.
- ▶ Migrants are not resourceless in the face of environmental change, and portraying them as such might do some harm:
  - ▶ On the conceptual level
  - ▶ With regard to assistance and protection
  - ▶ With regard to development policies
- ▶ Two key policy challenges
  - ▶ Enabling the right to leave
  - ▶ Enabling the right to choose



# Enabling the right to leave

---

- ▶ The right to leave is the key condition of asylum, originating after the Peace of Westphalia.
- ▶ This right is currently jeopardised by environmental change.
- ▶ The most vulnerable often find themselves unable to leave
  - ▶ Because they don't have the resources to do so
  - ▶ Because of barriers to migration
- ▶ Their life, health and livelihood are directly exposed to danger
  - ▶ *Migration as a risk-reduction strategy*
    - ▶ *Issue of pro-active population displacements*



# Enabling the right to choose

---

- ▶ Many of the migrants are forced migrants, and many of the stayers are forced stayers.
- ▶ Adaptation needs
  - ▶ In the origin region, adaptation will reduce the environmental constraints to migration.
  - ▶ Adaptation will also be needed in the destination regions.
  - ▶ In many cases, a sensible adaptation policy would be to promote and facilitate migration: migration can be a key tool to improve human security.
- ▶ Adaptation and migration policies need to be consistent with each other.

