

# Mainstreaming Human Mobility Into Malawi's National Adaptation Plan Process

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## Key Messages

1. Malawi is one of the countries most impacted by climate change in the Southern Region of Africa. The country continues to experience climate-related shocks, environmental degradation, and disasters hampering its economic development and adaptation efforts while contributing to displacement and migration.
2. Mainstreaming human mobility into Malawi's National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process provides an opportunity to plan for and invest in climate resilience that helps vulnerable communities to effectively adapt and prevent or minimize losses and damage associated with climate change. It will also help the government implement measures that align with the new Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Act (April 2023) and plan coherently to protect people who have decided to either remain or move in the face of severe climatic conditions, environmental degradation, and disasters.
3. By mainstreaming human mobility into Malawi's NAP, synergies and linkages to newly established structures within the Department of Disaster Management Affairs (DoDMA) following the DRM Act from April 2023 can be more easily drawn, accelerating efforts, building strong and coherent capacity and awareness to better respond to, plan for, and mitigate climate and environmental impacts. Adaptation initiatives can benefit from newly established climate financing mechanisms under the same bill.
4. If human mobility is not mainstreamed and integrated into the NAP process, this would represent a serious gap in resilience-building efforts, with vulnerable populations exposed to extreme climate impacts and increased susceptibility due to poverty.

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## Introduction

At the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) formulated a Task Force on Displacement. The Task Force led on developing recommendations to prevent, reduce, and curb displacement associated with climate change and its adverse impacts (IOM, 2018). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) leads the implementation of the Task Force's workplan. The primary objective of the Task Force is to map and analyze the integration of human mobility in the context of climate change into policies, processes, and frameworks at the national and international levels (IOM, 2018).

Africa is highly vulnerable to climate change. The 2018 IOM report underscored how climate change and environmental degradation continue to influence contemporary global migration patterns, impacting human mobility in sub-Saharan Africa significantly. Even though the continent's contribution to historical greenhouse gas emissions represents less than 4% of the global total, as reported by CDP Africa (2020), Africa faces an emergency as it struggles to reduce the vulnerability—and strengthen the resilience—of its people, communities, ecosystems, and institutions in the face of the climate crisis (Africa Climate Mobility Initiative, 2023).

Malawi is a least developed country and ranks 170th out of 188 countries that have a Human Development Index (HDI) well below the sub-Saharan average HDI (UNDP, 2018). It continues to experience extreme climate events and shocks that have significantly affected human settlements and livelihoods in the country. In 2021, according to the ND-GAIN Country Index, Malawi ranked 157 out of 181 countries as the country most vulnerable to climate change (University of Notre Dame, 2021). Climate hazards continue to increase in intensity and frequency due to climate change and environmental degradation. For instance, the country was severely affected by Cyclone Idai in March-April 2019, followed by Tropical Storm Ana and Cyclone Gombe in 2022, and recently Tropical Cyclone Freddy in March 2023. DoDMA reported 659,278 Malawians (336,252 female; 323,026 male) were internally displaced by Tropical Cyclone Freddy residing in 757 camps; 679 deaths were reported, and 537 people were reported missing and were declared dead, 2,186 people were reported as injured (DoDMA, 2023).

To address these vulnerabilities and growing climate risks, the Malawian government is undertaking a NAP process to set out a vision for achieving climate-resilient development. It will be critical that the NAP process integrate human mobility for effective, inclusive adaptation.

“Human mobility” refers to three types of movement of persons: migration, displacement, and planned relocation (Africa Climate Mobility Initiative, 2023). Migration refers to the “permanent or temporary movement of persons away from their place of usual residence within a country or across an international border” (SLYCAN Trust, 2023, p. 2). Disaster displacement is defined as the “movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their home or place of habitual residence due to a disaster” (SLYCAN Trust, 2023, p. 2). Planned relocation refers to the “permanent relocation of persons, infrastructure, or assets away from places exposed to hazards or prone to disasters” (SLYCAN Trust, 2023, p. 2).

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## Malawi's NAP Process

Malawi has experienced a surge in the intensity and frequency of climate hazards with devastating consequences over the past few decades. The country has been exposed to more than 19 major flooding events in the last 5 decades, and eight catastrophic droughts have struck the country in the last 36 years. Longer-term development priorities are compromised due to the need to shift scarce financing toward the restoration of damaged or impacted infrastructure following a disaster (World Bank, 2022).

### Box 1. In numbers: Impacts of Tropical Cyclone Freddy, 2023

**659,278** displaced people (323,026 male; 336,252 female)

**679** deaths

**537** people missing, declared dead

**USD 507 million** total disaster effects

**USD 680 million** in recovery and reconstruction costs

*Source: DoDMA, 2023.*

The NAP process was established internationally in 2010 as a strategic process for countries to identify and address their medium- and long-term priorities for adapting to climate change (Environmental Affairs Department, 2020; Hammill et al., 2020; UNFCCC 2021). The official definition, objectives and guidelines for the NAP process are available from the UNFCCC (Least Developed Countries Expert Group, 2012).

The Government of Malawi officially launched the country's NAP process in September 2014, led by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Climate Change in the Department of Environmental Affairs. Malawi's NAP process "seeks to reduce vulnerability to the impacts of climate change by building adaptive capacity and resilience while integrating climate change adaptation into relevant new and existing national development policies, programs and activities" (Government of Malawi, 2020).

Key milestones in the Malawi NAP process since its 2014 launch have included

- a 2016 **NAP Roadmap**, which set out the NAP's vision, mandates, and institutional structure.
- a **NAP stocktaking report** (Environmental Affairs Department, 2016) identified water, agriculture, energy, fisheries, land use change and forestry; wildlife and biodiversity; and human health as priority sectors for adaptation, and other crosscutting sectors which include gender and education.
- a 2019 grant of USD 2,849,018 from the **Green Climate Fund (GCF) Readiness Programme** to support the Malawian government's efforts for adaptation planning, with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as a delivery partner.

- a NAP Framework (Environmental Affairs Department, 2020) that builds on the NAP Roadmap, validated and updated the vision, objectives and mandates which were identified. It also reaffirmed the NAP process structure and approach, linking it to existing or planned policies, strategies, plans, and legislation meant to enable the country's ambition in addressing its medium- and long-term adaptation needs (Environmental Affairs Department, 2020).

The 2023 Global Gender Gap Index ranked Malawi 110 out of 146 countries, which shows the country's high gender inequality levels (World Economic Forum, 2023). The country has put in place policies, programs, and plans with the aim of advancing gender equality and fostering social inclusion to guide adaptation-related policies, such as Malawi's National Gender Policy (2015), which commits to gender equality and women's empowerment, protecting women's rights as a prerequisite for poverty reduction and sustainable development. Nevertheless, policy implementation varies considerably due to challenges like policy incoherence, limited gender-responsive budgets, lack of coordination across sectors and scales, and a lack of understanding of gender issues and how to effectively integrate gender into resilience policies (Lovel, 2021). However, the NAP Framework outlines opportunities for empowering women and youth (Environmental Affairs Department, 2020) and realizing the importance of mainstreaming gender and social inclusion into climate-related policies. The Malawi Government (through the GCF NAP Readiness Programme) aims to use a gender-responsive approach in the various stages of its NAP process. In particular, the government is developing a gender mainstreaming strategy and a gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation framework for the NAP process.

### Box 2. National adaptation flagship project: Scaling Up of Modernized Climate Information and Early Warning Systems in Malawi (M-CLIMES)

The project's main objective is to contribute to climate-resilient sustainable development in Malawi. In addition, the project seeks to contribute to the resilience (and improve the livelihoods) of the most vulnerable communities in Malawi. It aims to strengthen adaptive capacities and decrease exposure to climate risks of vulnerable populations, drawing on enhanced generation and use of early warnings and climate information. The targets for the project are rural populations, mainly those reliant on agricultural livelihoods and vulnerable to climate disasters and variability—more than half of whom are women. Related to human mobility, the project proposal notes that many communities face limited capacity for “relocation and rescue activities” to respond to climate hazards.

Results to date have included notable gains and achievements realized by the targeted communities as the project continues toward its goal of reaching 1.6 million farming communities, 115,000 flood-prone communities, and 60,000 fishing communities in Malawi; further, the project is contributing to poverty reduction (and protection of lives and livelihoods) in the face of climate change and natural disasters.

**Project Duration:** 2017–2024

**Project Budget:** USD 16.2 Million

**Funding:** GCF

*Source: GCF, 2015.*

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Malawi's NAP process seeks to scale up adaptation efforts already being undertaken by Malawian communities, such as the national adaptation flagship project Scaling Up of Modernized Climate Information and Early Warning Systems in Malawi (M-CLIMES) (presented in Box 2). Through the NAP process, the Malawian government can coordinate and ramp up adaptation, assess risks and vulnerabilities, set priorities, track progress, and access greater finance for adaptation.

## Human Mobility in the Context of Climate Change in Malawi

As Malawi continues to face the adverse impacts of climate change, disasters, extensive environmental degradation, internal displacement, and the need for planned relocation of people living in high-hazard-risk zones, human mobility will continue to increase (Africa Climate Mobility Initiative, 2023). Repeated tropical storms, flooding, and drought have had significant impacts on crops and livestock; land degradation, socio-economic amenities, damage and loss of assets; and access to safe drinking water—all of which contribute to human mobility issues within Malawi and neighbouring countries (Mixed Migration Centre, 2023a).

These events disproportionately affect poor and vulnerable groups. According to the World Bank (2023), the poor are identified as those living on less than USD 2.15 per day which is an international poverty line. The recent Malawi National Statistical Office Poverty Report (2021) reported that 50.8% of the population falls into the “poor” category. In Malawi, vulnerable groups include ultra-poor households, women, girls and youth who are victims of violence, people living with albinism, people living with disability, and people with serious illness or health conditions (United Nations Population Fund Malawi, 2023). The IOM *Mainstreaming Migration Into Environment and Climate Change* (MECC) report (2014) depicts gender as a critical element in shaping vulnerability to climate change and influences the subsequent probability of migration. Cultural norms, gender roles, and unequal migration policies may limit people's ability to migrate: in some regions, men in the households are the ones that move, while in other regions, female household members are more likely to migrate (IOM, 2014). The report further underlines that “migration can also exacerbate existing inequalities between women and men, expose them to new vulnerabilities, and intensify gendered experiences of poverty, discrimination and socio-economic inequality” (IOM, 2014, p. 103). The report goes on to suggest that

gender-equality concerns must be integrated into international negotiations and agreements on climate change mitigation and adaptation, and environmental migration discussions more broadly, to ensure that policies are effective, fair and implementable on the ground, and that they do not exacerbate existing inequalities and vulnerabilities or create new ones. (IOM, 2014, p. 103)

In addition, economic challenges have seen increasing numbers of Malawians migrating to South Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and other countries where they are exposed to social and compounding risks (Mixed Migration Centre, 2023b).

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Migration in the context of climate change and economic challenges can be considered as a coping mechanism and adaptation strategy, affected individuals and communities use it to build their resilience. Human mobility in the context of climate change is not clearly mainstreamed into the NAP, and no commitments have been made in Malawi's climate change adaptation policies or the initial steps of the NAP process. Key relevant policies that are critical to Malawi's climate and disaster policy framework provide an opportunity for mainstreaming migration and human mobility. They include the *National Disaster Risk Management Policy* (DoDMA, 2015); *National Multi-Hazard Contingency Plan*; and *Malawi's Nationally Determined Contributions* (EAD, 2021). At the regional level, the Southern African Development Community Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan provides a broad outline for harmonized and coordinated regional and national actions to address and respond to the impacts of climate change and the different forms of human mobility.

It is imperative that the government use the NAP process to implement effective and adaptive approaches to protect the lives, livelihoods, and assets of displaced households; provide adequate funding and ensure that planned relocation is done in a safe, orderly, and regular manner (IOM, 2018); and consider human mobility issues in Malawi's adaptation priorities.

## Entry Points for Integrating Human Mobility Into Malawi's NAP Process

Analysis by SLYCAN Trust (2023) found that the majority of developing countries' NAPs reference some form of human mobility, but they vary in terms of the type of human mobility referred to, the framing of this reference, and the level of integration. Box 3 presents examples of actions identified in NAPs related to human mobility and migration.

### Box 3. Actions identified in NAPs related to human mobility and migration

#### Enhancing data availability and closing knowledge gaps

- Collecting data on climate-related migration (Benin)
- Creating knowledge products (Costa Rica)
- Developing a research roadmap (South Africa) or long-term research plan (South Sudan)
- Conducting research on resettlement (Timor-Leste)

#### Anticipatory planning and scenario development

- Developing long-term plans for climate-related migration (Chile)
- Preparing contingency plans and resilient development plans (DRC)
- Identifying vulnerable areas and safe areas for relocation (Nepal)
- Developing an action plan to address climate migration (Peru)

### **Strengthening the enabling and policy environment**

- Integrating human mobility into sub-national plans (Fiji)
- Developing national policies for human mobility (Saint Lucia) or resettlement (Sierra Leone)
- Mainstreaming displacement into sectors and identifying synergies between adaptation, relief, and resettlement (South Sudan)

### **Protecting and supporting people on the move**

- Providing medical care for displaced persons (Cameroon)
- Providing food and livelihood support (Chad)
- Building capacities of migrant populations (Costa Rica)
- Building capacities on land management and livelihoods, for example, agroforestry (Niger)

### **Preventing mobility through adaptation**

- Promoting livelihood diversification to reduce rural-urban migration (Benin)
- Strengthening infrastructure and facilities to prevent displacement (Madagascar)
- Implementing adaptation measures to reduce migration and displacement (Sudan)

### **Utilizing mobility as an adaptation strategy**

- Relocating settlements (Brazil) or infrastructure (Burkina Faso)
- Enhancing social protection and livelihood options for successful resettlement (Ethiopia)
- Providing affordable and serviced land for relocated people (Fiji)
- Providing relocation incentives for businesses (South Africa)

*Source: SLYCAN Trust, 2023, reprinted with permission.*

While there is rich and relevant experience at the global and regional levels on integrating human mobility in the context of climate change, the authors recommend the following entry points in the context of Malawi with the current stage of the NAP process. The following are key entry points and opportunities:

- strengthened skills and capacities for experts and high-level government officials
- effective institutional and policy arrangements
- robust data, knowledge, and communication systems.

The following comprehensively outlines the entry points and opportunities.

### **Strengthening Skills and Capacities for Experts and High-Level Government Officials**

- enhance understanding and knowledge of climate change impacts, environmental degradation, and climate disasters on human mobility patterns, including internal displacement, using a gender-responsive approach

- enhance skills on map reviews and use of technology to assess climate change impacts on populations and locations/geographical setups
- support the development of gender-responsive guidelines and the review of existing guidelines aimed at integrating human mobility consideration into relevant frameworks, policies, and strategies; e.g., the forthcoming NAP supplement on human mobility developed by IOM, which could be used for this purpose (to be titled *Addressing Human Mobility-Related Challenges and Opportunities in Context of Climate Change: A Supplement to the UNFCCC Technical Guidelines on the National Adaptation Plan Process*).

### **Institutional and Policy Arrangements**

- strengthen collaboration and coordination among the NAP focal point and key actors in disaster response, humanitarian, migration, environment, forestry, agriculture, lands, , private sector, Civil Society Organizations, gender, and youth.
- increase the scope of—as well as sectoral and expert participation in—the Technical Working Group on Migration, Environment and Climate Change (TWG MECC), including bringing on board adaptation experts.
- position Malawi’s engagement with the African Group of negotiators in UNFCCC’s climate policy processes (including future Conferences of Parties) to advance integrated solutions and financing for human mobility and adaptation.
- establish forums and platforms at the sub-national level aligned with existing district-level structures to integrate adaptation, human mobility, and displacement into development and emergency plans.
- work through parliamentary processes and committees to strengthen policy and legal frameworks addressing human mobility in the context of climate change NAP processes and create a dedicated, gender-responsive funding vehicle to support anticipatory action on climate mobility.
- analyze and assess the draft national migration policy to identify human mobility in the context of climate change entry points and adaptation synergies.

### **Data, Knowledge, and Communication**

- strengthen multisectoral collaboration and coordination to accommodate new data and information for planning for and monitoring extreme climate events and mobility patterns.
- incorporate participatory, gender-responsive, and community-based approaches into adaptation solutions and mobility and displacement plans.
- raise awareness on links between environmental degradation, climate change, disasters, and displacement through national and sub-national adaptation flagship programs and projects, including partnering with local radio stations and faith-based and community organizations.
- disseminate climate information and empower the most marginalized and vulnerable groups with knowledge, skills, and information on adaptation, protection, social inclusion, and rights to foster their participation in decision-making processes while acknowledging their role as agents of change.
- initialize an age- and sex-disaggregated database on gender-responsive approaches to climate adaptation, displacement, and protection, including targets and indicators for reducing women’s and girls’ vulnerability to climate change.



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Among these recommendations, the authors would emphasize the TWG MECC as a key actor to engage in the NAP process to assist mainstreaming migration and climate change issues in national development plans and strategies. The TWG MECC was established in 2022 under the Malawi National Climate Change Management Policy. It is mandated to provide technical guidance and support to relevant ministries, departments, and agencies and other relevant government structures and stakeholders on matters related to MECC. Further research is needed on the nexus of climate change, gender, and human mobility, including having a national database of disaggregated data on the impacts of climate change and climate disasters; and specific approaches for addressing gendered impacts of human mobility in the context of climate change.

## Conclusion

This briefing note highlights the status of Malawi's NAP process, places human mobility in the context of climate change in Malawi, and uses a gender-responsive approach to identify entry points and opportunities for integrating human mobility—including migration and displacement—into Malawi's NAP process. The Malawi Government recognizes the implications of climate change and disasters for its national development and has put in place an ambitious climate policy, including developing its NAP, with the aim of increasing the resilience of communities and ecosystems. However, climate change impacts continue to severely affect the country's economic and development plans while contributing to internal displacement. This briefing note emphasizes the need to build the adaptive capacities and resilience of populations in situations of vulnerability affected by climate change impacts by ensuring that the government puts human mobility at the centre of the NAP process. It identifies entry points and opportunities for integrating human mobility in the context of climate change into Malawi's NAP process, taking gender into consideration. This comes at the right time as the government undertakes activities through the GCF NAP Readiness Programme, including the formulation of Malawi's first NAP document (GCF, 2019).

These entry points and opportunities are only the initial steps toward safe, orderly, and regular migration as a potential means of adaptation. There is a great need for more research on the nexus of human mobility (including migration and displacement), climate change, environmental degradation, disasters, and gender. It will also be necessary to strengthen cross-sectoral collaboration and coordination within government agencies, key UN agencies, and institutions in Malawi (and within the Southern African region) working on human mobility, including migration and displacement. Alongside this, deliberate finance commitments in national and sub-national budget processes—and unlocking both private sector and international development investments—could support the NAP process in implementing gender-responsive actions related to adaptation and human mobility, including migration. It will be critical to empower the most marginalized and vulnerable groups—including women and youth, recognizing their positive role as agents of change—with adaptive skills, climate education, and opportunities for building sustainable livelihoods and resilient investments.

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## About the Initiative for Climate Action and Development (ICAD)

ICAD is a non-profit and independent think tank based in Malawi that works on climate, energy, water, agriculture, economics, trade & private sector engagement, extractives, migration & human mobility, and sustainable development. ICAD is also a Co-Chair for the Technical Working Group (TWG) on Mainstreaming Migration into Environment and Climate Change (MECC) in Malawi. The TWG MECC is led and supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

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Flood relief replacement housing near Blantyre, Malawi, built by the government for persons displaced by flooding in 2023.



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