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Please find attached the contribution by the keynote speaker, Dr. Fabrice Renaud, Section Head, "Environmental Assessment and Resource Vulnerability", Associate Director of UNU Institute for Environment and Human Security, Bonn, Germany.

Forced migrations due to degradation of arid lands: concepts, debate and policy requirements¹

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Desertification is one of the most pressing environmental problems in the world today and affects between 10-20% of dryland areas. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) gave an alarming picture of almost all ecosystems of the world with a particular emphasis on drylands. According to the MA's conceptualisation of the linkages between human well-being and ecosystems, desertification reduces the quantity and quality of services (such as food, forage, water) otherwise provided by healthy ecosystems. When ecosystems cannot provide these services at adequate levels because of natural or anthropogenic processes, the livelihoods and basic human needs of local population (particularly in rural areas) can become compromised. Thus desertification clearly needs to be addressed in the global policy-making context particularly since desertification-related problems do not remain confined to the drylands. Loosing their meagre livelihoods, one adaptation measure of affected communities is to migrate to other places thus contributing substantially to the rural exodus towards cities and adding a potentially huge contingent to international migration. It is now estimated that the number of people migrating because of environmental problems in their region of origin (or environmental migrants) is already larger than people migrating for socio-political reasons. However it is difficult to properly quantify the number of environmental migrants and the migration routes in part due to illegal movements. The concept of environmental forced migration (environmental refugees) itself remains debated from a scientific point of view. This is principally because migrants may decide to move for a combination of reasons including environmental degradation, economic purposes and/or political strife. This lack of proper definition and consensus further contribute to the imprecision in estimates of numbers and routes. Migrations can of course be a force for good (as stipulated by the UN Special Representative for Migration) but forced migrations have the potential to bring extreme hardship to (i) the migrants themselves potentially generating a humanitarian problem and (ii) recipient countries, depending on circumstances. It is anticipated that forced environmental migrations will increase in the future and the migrants (who may become refugees) will not be recognised (and thus afforded the right) under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. It is therefore imperative that in parallel to already urgent humanitarian actions and to policies and measures put in place to prevent environmental degradation in drylands, the global problem of environmental migrants be debated internationally and that global policy answers be sought addressing in particular:

- Science: put in place programmes to allow a better understanding between the cause-effects mechanisms between degradation of ecosystems and social systems. In addition, develop proper definitions of environmental migrations, environmental migrant/refugee. Provide long-term, sustained funding for research.
- Awareness: raise knowledge-based public and political awareness of the issue and its environmental, social and economic dimensions.
- Legislation: put in place a framework of recognition of environmental migrants such as in a Convention or in parts of Intergovernmental Environmental Treaties.

¹ Paper presented at the Joint International Conference Desertification and the International Policy Initiative, Algiers, 17-19 December 2006.

- Humanitarian aid: empower the United Nations system and other major assistance organisations to provide aid to environmental refugees.
- Institutional: devise concepts and put in place institutions that are able to assist the flux of forced environmental migrants.

Introduction

Environmental issues have started to be seen in the broader context of human security since the end of the cold war which marked the end of political bipolarity and the narrow, mainly militaristic notion of security predominating the security discourse at the time (see Brauch, 2005). Environmental sustainability and ecosystem health started being recognised as being threatened by impacts of careless industrial development, short-sighted agriculture practices, exhaustion of environmental resources, disregard of recycling and renewal of material and energy fluxes, and even by direct human interference, pollution or wilful destruction. Desertification (or land degradation in dryland regions) has been recognised by the UN system as a major environmental threat exacerbating poverty for some 30 years now (particularly since the 1977 United Nations Conference on Desertification) but it was only in 1996 that the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification came into force (see UN, 1994 for more details on the Convention).

In parallel, the topic of migration has always been addressed through passionate and at times controversial debates both in receiving countries and countries of out-migration. At the time of writing in the last quarter of 2006, the issue of migration has come at the forefront again. For example, Spain and Italy have seen an increasing number of Northwest African migrants arriving on the shores of their most accessible coasts. Bilateral agreements between France and Senegal and between Spain and Gambia were struck in order to better control at the source potential illegal migrations from the African countries to European ones. In addition, high-level delegations from the EU and Africa met in Libya in November 2006 to discuss issues related to both legal and illegal migrations. Another example of attempts to deal with illegal migrations can be taken from the American continent where the United States passed a bill allowing the construction of a controversial wall along portions of their border with Mexico (House Resolution 6061: Secure Fence Act of 2006).

It is by no means implied here that the migration issues cited above are necessarily linked to environmental degradation, including desertification, but it is important to highlight them to understand the context within which the environmentally-driven migration debate is taking place. Migrations have various root causes including economic factors (poverty, unemployment), social factors (poor welfare or education), environmental factors (degradation of ecosystems), or degraded security conditions (disrespect for human rights, persecution of minority groups, armed conflicts, etc.) (Boswell and Crisp, 2004). Migrations are usually in response to perceived or actual differentials and disparities between regions or countries (GCIM, 2005), although other factors such as demography, and the level of poverty (not always the major reason for migration) also play pivotal roles (Hatton and Williamson, 2003). With the exception when one's life is directly threatened, the decision to migrate is often taken because of a variety of "push" and "pull" factors, rarely from a single individual constraint. However, in the past couple of decades (when environment degradation started to be included in the concept of human security) and in particular since a paper by El-Hinnawi (1985) on environmental refugees, there has been a debate as to whether environmental degradation is a major cause of migration throughout the world. Despite the twenty years that have elapsed since this paper, the debate is still raging with respect to definitions of what constitutes an "environmental refugee", the number of and routes taken by the migrants, and whether or not it is wise or necessary to have a new category of migrants and/or refugees.

The objectives of this paper are to promote a reflexion on the interrelationships between desertification and migrations and to suggest the coordinated implementation of five policy action points that should be considered rapidly in order to anticipate and be prepared should large-scale desertification/drought-driven migrations realise themselves in the future.

Desertification and ecosystem services

Desertification is the ultimate process of land degradation in drylands. It is estimated that drylands cover some 41% of the land surface of the Earth and that they are home to more than 2 billion people who experience relatively low human well-being and development indicators including high infant mortality and low GNP per capita (MA, 2005a). The low level of human well-being is not only due to the low provisioning of services by dryland ecosystems but also, for example, due to low levels of health and educational infrastructures and political marginalisation prevailing in some dryland areas (MA, 2005a). It is important to mention here the on-going debate concerning the extent and rate of desertification, as this may have implications when attempting to address the issue of environmental migrations. Indeed, the concept of environmental migrations and refugees is not accepted by all and the argument that desertification is not as serious an issue as depicted in much of the “environmental” literature can and is used to criticise the concept of environmental refugees itself (e.g. Black, 2001). Verón et al. (2006) showed that assessment methods to quantify desertification have changed in time and that the coexistence of conflicting definitions and divergent estimates of the extent of desertification have led to scepticism and inaction or insufficient actions with respect to addressing the problem. The review of Verón et al. (2006) demonstrated that the variability of assessment tools at various points in time have led authors and media to either dramatise the extent and rate of desertification or to minimise them. This is why, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA, 2005b:101) highlights that the “shortcomings of available assessments point to the need for a systematic global monitoring program, leading to development of a scientifically credible, consistent baseline of the state of (...) desertification”. This would then foster evidence-based discussions on the theme of environmental degradation and migrations.

Ecosystems provide a wide range of services to society including products (e.g. food, fuel, and fibre), regulating factors (e.g. climate regulation), spiritual and aesthetic benefits (MA, 2005a). Ecosystems are affected by direct and indirect drivers which interact with each other, operate in feedback loops and determine the level of services ecosystems can provide society. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) identified direct drivers as climate change, nutrient pollution, land conversion leading to habitat change, overexploitation, and invasive species and diseases; and indirect drivers as demographic, economic, socio-political, scientific and technological, and cultural and religious ones (MA, 2005a). Ecosystems are however highly dynamic and in constant fluxes and rarely if ever in an equilibrium state. The implication is that ecosystems have their own resilience and even though they are constantly affected by anthropogenic and natural factors, they can still provide adequate levels of services to society. What is emphasised here is that at times the degradation can become serious enough (as in desertification) that the provision of services is severely compromised which can then serve as one of several triggers for migrations. In addition, social, economic, cultural and political factors shape the relationship between society and the ecosystems of which it is part of and from which it extracts services. Thus ecosystem degradation, including desertification, is in itself generated by a complex intermix of factors. These factors can then be targeted by concrete actions and policies to reduce, stop and/or reverse the degradation processes.

The MA (2005a) has revealed an alarming degradation of ecosystems worldwide and thus of the services that could be provided to society by these ecosystems. The General Synthesis Report of the MA (2005b) highlights, among other points that:

- Fifteen of twenty four ecosystem services analysed are being degraded or utilised in an unsustainable way, mainly through anthropogenic actions to increase the supply of specific services.
- These actions could further accelerate the degradation of ecosystems although more scientific evidence of this is required.
- The poor are the ones suffering the most from the decline in ecosystem services with the rural poor being particularly vulnerable to changes in ecosystem services.

Particularly highlighted by the MA (2005c) is the fact that 2 billion people living in arid, semi-arid and subhumid regions are extremely vulnerable to the loss of ecosystem services, including water supply. The Desertification Synthesis of the MA (2005d) which directly addresses the situation in dry regions highlights in particular that (not an exhaustive list):

- 10 to 20 percent of drylands are already degraded (highlighting the fact that there is uncertainty in the measurement of the extent of desertification).
- Pressure is increasing on dryland ecosystems for providing services such as food, and water for humans, livestock, irrigation, and sanitation.
- Climate change is likely to increase water scarcity in regions that are already under water stress as they accommodate close to a third of world population but harbour only 8% of global renewable freshwater resources.
- Droughts are becoming more frequent and their continuous reoccurrence can overcome the coping mechanisms of communities.

These and all the other factors and impacts identified in the MA increase the stress on some communities and will make the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals extremely hard to be reached and sustained in certain parts of the world.

In dryland areas, the loss of ecosystem services and the repetition of droughts have forced dryland communities to look for ways to cope with scarcity of resources that can last several years (MA, 2005b). A major problem arises when these coping mechanisms are exhausted by the extended duration of the scarcity. When the coping mechanisms and adaptation strategies of communities are overwhelmed by the loss of ecosystem services, droughts and loss of land productivity can become important factors triggering the movement of people from drylands to other areas (MA, 2005d).

Given the empirical evidence of this exodus from many dryland areas of the world, the above mentioned academic debate on whether there are environmental migrants/refugees or not becomes superfluous and jeopardises the urgent development of knowledge-based policies. Scientific “concerns” instead of the pragmatic application of the precautionary principle paralyse both the scientific and the policy making communities. It is the strong conviction of the authors that in the face of the unfolding human tragedy with considerable political explosiveness, the “regular” sequential approach: science-policy-action cannot be afforded. Instead a simultaneous though iterative approach is advised, and is presented in the next section.

Desertification and migrations: policy suggestions

Links between desertification and migrations

The cause-effect relationship between desertification and migrations were flagged up at various conferences worldwide and by different stakeholders. Following and International

Year of Deserts and Desertification (IYDD) event in Montpellier, France (the Désertif'Actions conference – September 2006), people from civil society pointed out the relationship and their opinions were taken up in the French national press. This was the case for a representative of the Senegalese Prabioc association who stated that in desertified areas “farmers cannot anymore satisfy their basic needs, move to cities, towards the coasts, or to developed countries²” (our translation). A similar statement was made by an NGO representative from Mali³. Other examples include the Montpellier Appeal which emerged from the Désertif'Actions conference and which stated that land degradation “[...] leads to precariousness and poverty conditions, and to an increasingly large marginalisation which worsen migratory flows, political instability and economic losses” (Désertif'Actions, 2006); a press release of the United Nations University (UNU-EHS, 2005); and the organisation of a specific IYDD conference on desertification and migrations in Almeria, Spain (October 2006) which built on the 1994 international symposium on the same topic and held in the same location (see Almeria Statement, 1994). All the statements above remain however general with the cause-effect relationships not being systematically described or quantified. This is most likely due to the fact that given the complexity of the interaction (both land degradation and migrations are complex processes that occur because of a wide range of drivers), quantification is difficult if not impossible. Notwithstanding this critical comment due to the lack of definitional clarity and quantifications, both the IYDD and above-mentioned conferences (and in particular Almeria I and II) are crucial benchmark events making the emergence of the political concern and reflect the need for comprehensive action. It is the joint obligation of the scientific, professional, legal, policy making and humanitarian communities to build their coordinated action plans and their implementation on the foundations provided by these statements.

Difficulties of quantification

Some scientists have attempted measuring the extent of environmental migrations worldwide. This is a complicated exercise because of the diversity of factors that come into play and their complex interactions (Döös, 1997). Quantifications are further complicated by the fact that these migrations are mostly internal (at least in an initial phase). Nevertheless, estimates of migration fluxes have been published: 135 million who could be at risk of being displaced as a consequence of severe desertification (Almeria Statement, 1994); or 25 million in 1995 with a possible doubling of that number by 2010 with a potential of 200 million due to global warming impacts – not specific to drylands (Myers, 2002, 2005). It is now estimated that there are more environmental refugees around the world than there are refugees from other categories. All these figures, their estimation methods and the underlying assumptions behind them are criticised and debated. While the scientific debate is welcome and necessary, it should not lead to endless discussion paralysing further policy actions.

Some attempts at measuring at the national level the relationships between desertification and/or repetitive drought on the one hand and migrations on the other are relatively recent. For example, it is estimated that close to two out of three families from the Malian region of Kayes have a member of their household who has emigrated overseas (in Togola, 2006). For the same country, persistent droughts have forced people from the North to migrate to other West African regions. West Africa is the main recipient of migrants from Mali, having received 2.1 million migrants out of a total of 2.6 (2001 estimates), keeping in mind that the country had approximately 11.1 million inhabitants in 2003 (in Togola, 2006). The specific proportion of people migrating out of Mali because of desertification was not specified by Togola (2006). A second example can be taken from Mexico. A paper commissioned by the

² La constante avancée du désert est la cause oubliée des migrations africaines. Le Monde, 25 September 2006.

³ La désertification produit des exodes massifs. Libération, 25 September 2006.

US Commission on Immigration Reform looked at the interlinkages between unsustainable land and water use and migrations from Mexico to the USA. The report concluded that migrations were probably due to a set of factors that includes large wage differential between the two countries and extensive migrant network in the USA (“pull” factors) but also emphasised the fact that, based on Mexican Government’s data, approximately 900,000 people leave arid and semi-arid areas every year because of their inability to make a living from the land due to dry conditions and soil erosion (Schwartz and Notoni, 1994). As a parenthesis, it is noteworthy that the report further suggested that a better quantification of environmental migrants needed to be carried out and that the US Government would need to look beyond traditional immigration policy (e.g. border control and employer sanction) to address the root causes of the problem (e.g. international cooperation, technical support) – to be put in light of current policies (see Introduction).

Framing the issue

Because of the complexity of the interactions between desertification and migrations, the concepts of environmental migrations and refugees are not commonly accepted and critics of the concept sometime use the argument that environmental degradation in general and desertification in particular are not as serious issues as depicted in much of the literature to criticise it. In addition, critics often use the valid argument that migrations have many root causes to dismiss the need for a specific new category of migrations or to argue that the terminology “environmental refugee” is misleading and too narrow at best as it focuses on only one of many potential or real “push” factors (e.g. Black, 2001; Castles, 2002). Nature can be seen as “environment” only in relation to humans. Hence, environmental deterioration is rather man-made than nature’s work. Thus, by identifying environmental refugees, human responsibility is felt to disappear, which is not the case. However, environmental degradation in general and desertification in particular are serious problems that can be exacerbated by several social, economic, political and global environmental factors and could thus become one of the major “push” factors in the future. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment considers that “droughts and loss of land productivity are considered predominant factors in the migration of people from drylands to other areas” and “these migrations often create environmental refugees (...)” (MA, 2005a:625, 645) as drought impacts income and food security in environments where few if any alternative livelihood opportunities exist. We note here that drought and desertification are not equivalent but because desertification is the consequence of land degradation, it is understood that climatic droughts would have a bigger chance of becoming agronomic droughts (thus affecting agricultural production) in desertified areas.

Although migration models are useful tools for prediction of migration fluxes (if they account for all push and pull factors), Hatton and Williamson (2003) argue that future trends in migrations will probably be driven more by policies which are difficult to model. Sound policy recommendations which are based on facts and consider all factors advanced by proponents and critics of the concept of environmental migrations/refugees are therefore required. When dealing with the concept of environmental migrations, the question becomes: is there a specific need for a new category of migrant or refugee? The environment we shape is, by definition, in constant flux and as highlighted above, there is increasing evidence that the new equilibrium that ecosystems may reach through inherent and anthropogenic changes cannot sustainably supply dryland populations with required essential services. It is therefore likely that increased stresses on ecosystems will have direct and indirect impacts on societies which, when their other coping mechanisms are overcome (for desertification, engaging in wage labour, borrowing of food, sale of livestock, etc.), will have no other option but to migrate as a permanent or temporary adaptation strategy.

We are still at the beginning of an unavoidably long process. Yet, the aim must be clear. It is to gain recognition in order to assist a potentially emerging new category of migrants. While the multiple reasons and their respective weights case-by-case make it fairly difficult to assign individuals or group of migrants into well defined categories like political, economic, ethnic or even environmental migrants/refugees, there are potential sub-classes which may be useful to indicate the motivation (root causes) to move and the urgency to receive assistance. Concerning environmental-related mass movement of people we may distinguish between:

- Environmentally motivated migration;
- Environmentally forced migration, and;
- Environmental refugees.

This latter class may include also disaster refugees (e.g. due to severe drought). While the environmentally motivated migrant “may leave” a steadily deteriorating environment in order to avoid the worse, the environmentally forced migrant “has to leave”. These two categories may imply the option to decide to stay or not to stay, or when to leave, though these questions are already part of the survival dilemma (Brauch, 2005). The distinction between environmentally forced migration and environmental refugees could be sought in the swiftness of necessary actions. The environmental refugees “flee” rather than “migrate”. Another distinguishing criterion could be sought in environmental assessment. Would it be possible to rehabilitate the degraded land to undo migration, or should people be allowed to seek permanent refuge (and livelihoods) elsewhere? Farmers whose livelihood was destroyed by irrevocable desertification clearly need similar status and assistance than people fleeing from violence, war, ethnic cleansing or other harassment, irrespective whether they crossed a border or not. The authors argue that internationally agreed standards are needed to identify these or similar sub-groups in order to devise appropriate strategies, measures and assistance programmes on how to assist those falling into the different categories. These standards could possibly be discussed within the emerging UN structures dealing with migrations (see below). It has been reported that individuals who could fall under the above environment-related categories have received assistance from UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies occasionally. It is to be noted that without recognition status and corresponding mandating of the respective aid organisations this assistance, based on human solidarity and compassion, would not be sustainable. In order to avoid looming human disasters at massive scale, institutional empowerment and funding are needed.

Even critics of the concept of environmental migrants or refugees such as Black (2001) contend that should environmental refugees be included in a future international convention, the scientific and empirical basis of the fluxes and specific needs will require further elaboration. Similar points of view were elaborated in a brief review on the subject presented by Flintan (2001). Castles (2002) argued that environmental refugee terminology and conceptualisation is inadequate but nevertheless did not dismiss the fact that environmental factors can be very important for the triggering of migration in certain circumstances. This latter fact is also highlighted by Oliver-Smith (2006) who argues that the environment cannot be the single cause of migrations but at the same time cannot be dismissed as one of several factors triggering migrations. No one can disagree with the need to address these issues more scientifically and systematically, but the fuzziness of the concept as it stands now, and the difficulty in estimating the number of people concerned and migration routes should not be a reason not to act and move forward with adequate policies. Lonergan and Swain (1999:2) put it best: “Although the estimates and projections of environmental refugees are based almost entirely on anecdotal evidence and intuitive judgements, it is important not to trivialize the role environmental change and resource depletion may play in population movement”.

Policy suggestions

It is the precautionary principle above put forward by Lonergan and Swain (1999) that is promoted here and which serves as the basis of the following five-pronged policy approach to address the issue of environmental degradation (including desertification) and migrations (see also Bogardi and Renaud, 2006):

Requirement for a strong scientific basis: there is a need to put in place programmes to allow a better understanding between the cause-effects mechanisms between degradation of dryland ecosystems and migrations. This echoes ideas put forward in 1994 at the end of the International Symposium on Desertification and Migrations in Almeria (see Almeria Statement, 1994). Most reports on the topic of environmental migrations recommend further quantification and research and few if any research activities have attempted rigorous quantification. This needs now to be addressed. In addition, there is a need to develop proper definitions of environmentally motivated and/or forced migrations, environmental migrants/refugees. All this can only be achieved if there is a political recognition of the importance of the problem, if the research topic is accepted by major funding organisation, if long-term, sustained funding for research is made available, and if research cooperation between emigration and immigration countries as well as international organisations is achieved. In early 2007, the project EACH-FOR (Environmental Change and Forced Migration Scenarios) funded by the European Commission will be launched. While the concept and expected results are steps in the right direction, neither the project duration (2 years) nor the scope (migrations towards Europe) are sufficient to answer all questions.

Increasing awareness: it is important to raise worldwide knowledge-based public and political awareness of the issue and its environmental, social and economic dimensions. This step is particularly timely and important as the debate on migrations is high on the agenda of many countries/regions and as the UN is currently addressing the issue of migrations through relatively new mechanisms (see below).

Improving legislation: following the two steps above there is then a need to put in place a framework of recognition of environmental migrants/refugees such as in a Convention or in parts of Intergovernmental Environmental Treaties. It is not suggested here that the 1951 Convention be amended (as for example put forward by Conisbee and Simms, 2003), as adding a new category of refugees to that convention could weaken the case of categories of refugees already covered by it, a legitimate worry put forward by for example Castles (2002) and Gemenne *et al.* (2006). However, individuals who are clearly displaced by environmental degradation processes (even if mixed with other socio-economic factors as will often be the case) should be protected adequately by an international mechanism that would afford them certain rights. By-lateral arrangements are already put in place with respect to sea-level rise, but this should be systematised (possibly in other forms) for the most pressing environmental degradation issues, including desertification.

Giving the means for an adequate humanitarian aid: there is a need to empower the relevant entities in the United Nations system and other major assistance organisations to provide aid to environmental refugees. This can best be achieved if there is an international mechanism in place recognising this category of migrants/refugees.

Strengthening institutions: the final suggestion is that concepts need to be devised and institutions reinforced or created in order to be able to assist the flux of forced environmental migrants, both at the international and national levels.

These actions should be implemented with all other envisaged policy actions that address directly the multi-dimensional problem of desertification itself. UNU and its topically relevant and interested Centres and Programmes can certainly not address all the points listed above but can contribute to several components in research and policy development jointly with other UN agencies dealing with the subject.

The UN system and migrations

These policy recommendations could feed into the current process going on within the UN system regarding how migrations should be addressed internationally. There are, at the moment no specific distinctions being made in terms the “push” or “pull” factors which generate migrations so environmental migrations are not recognised specifically within this debate yet. The chronology of events within the UN system was as follows (UN, 2006a):

- The “new thinking” on the topic of migrations originated when it was acknowledged that international migrations were linked with development at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development.
- In 2003, the General Assembly decided to hold a High-Level Dialogue on the subject of international migrations and development. The outcome of the dialogue was to be the identification of ways to maximise the development benefits of international migration and minimise its negative impacts.
- In 2003, the Global Commission on International Migration was launched and one of its recommendations to the UN Secretary-General in 2005 (GCIM, 2005) was to establish a high-level inter-institutional group to ensure a more coherent and effective institutional response to the opportunities and challenges presented by international migration.
- In addition, the International Labour Conference adopted in 2004 a resolution requesting the International Labour Office to implement a plan of action on migrant workers.
- Following further consultations within the UN system, the Secretary General established the Global Migration Group which contributes inputs to the Secretary General’s report for the High-Level Dialogue.
- In January 2006 the Secretary-General appointed a Special Representative on International Migration and Development.
- The outcome of the High-Level Dialogue was a proposal by the Secretary-General to establish a consultative Forum to offer Governments a venue to discuss issues related to international migration and development. This forum is not meant to produce negotiated outcomes between Member States, but it would foster increased cooperation between governments (UN, 2006b).

The September 2006 High-Level Dialogue also highlighted that it “(...) was essential to address the root causes of international migration to ensure that people migrated out of choice rather than necessity” (UN, 2006b:2) with poverty being one of several factors forcing or encouraging people to migrate. Environmental degradation in general and desertification in particular being one such root cause it is urgent to address the issue of environmental migrants/refugees consistently through policies and science. As there is a broad consensus that migration is most likely to increase substantially there is the urgent need to prepare potential immigration countries to cope with the expected influx of migrants regardless of whether the immigration country is developed or developing. The UN initiative is especially strong in its claim to view migration as a positive process contributing to keep global

economic and social balance, to account for cultural enrichment in spite of the undeniable stress migration implies. A strong humanitarian/solidarity issue is associated with the acceptance of incoming migrants/refugees.

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