



# Climate Change & Elections

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**FEMBOSA**

**September 4, 2024**

# Climate Emergency & Elections

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“Humanity has opened the gates of hell. If nothing changes, we are heading towards a dangerous and unstable world.”

"This is a crazy situation: rising seas are a crisis entirely of humanity's making. A crisis that will soon swell to an almost unimaginable scale with no lifeboat to take us back to safety.”

- UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres

# Impact in numbers



**3.5 billion people** are highly vulnerable to climate impacts and **one half of the world's population** suffers severe water shortages at some point each year



The number of people moving within and across country borders-related to climate change will be between **50 and 200 million people** by 2050, mostly in developing countries



**One in three people** are exposed to deadly heat stress



If global warming continues, and little adaptation takes place, **183 million** more people are projected to go hungry by 2050



Source: IPCC climate report, 7 February 2022; 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet: Environmentally Displaced People, Oxford Department of International Development

# Climate Emergency & Elections

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Vibrant and inclusive electoral democracies that center the voices of marginalized populations, the most at-risk of climate impact, are the surest means of ensuring we have a reasonable way out of this climate emergency.

There is a deep link between Electoral Integrity and the Climate Crisis. It goes beyond administrative and operational resilience.



# Malawi's Election Preparations Impacted by Cyclone Idai Flooding

By Editor © May 8, 2019

Malawi  
2019  
Population  
20 million

Cyclone Idai disrupted elections  
preparation and participation ahead of  
Presidential elections in Malawi, May 2019

➡ 60 people killed and 90,000 displaced

➡ Registered voters living in evacuation camps lost voting registration certificate

➡ "We had no time to rescue our voter certificates because the house was collapsing. The only thing we could do, was to run for our dear lives."

➡ Not having voter certificates led to disenfranchisement

➡ People with disabilities and the elderly were affected significantly as they found it harder to move out of flood areas and then move to voting centers

**Candidates: “People are not in their homes. Some people are camping in various camps and obviously when you go to do campaign, you will not find people around that area and you also not allowed to campaign at the camps.”**

**Some election officials said campaign rallies at evacuation camps would bring chaos as they are already too crowded.**

**“As Malawi Electoral Commission we have not received this [complaint] officially but we will do our own investigation to find out why they are not allowed to go to the camps. Because everybody is supposed to be reached. They have to know what these candidates are offering for them to have an informed choice on polling day and those who are affected by floods cannot be left out.” - Sam Alufandika, Chief Elections Officer**

**Malawi’s government announced it will start closing the evacuation camps on just one week before elections.**



# Wildfires weeks ahead of elections in California and Oregon, September 2020



POLITICS • 2020 ELECTION

'They Have Lost So Much But They Will Not Lose  
Their Right To Vote.' Advocates Fight To  
Enfranchise Americans Displaced by Wildfires



- ➔ **Less than six weeks before the general election 2020**
- ➔ **500,000 Oregonians and 400,000 Californians under evacuation orders**
- ➔ **Although both states offered flexible voting options for in-person and mail-in voting, many voters faced significant logistical challenges**
- ➔ **Indigenous communities and people with disabilities particularly impacted**
- ➔ **Need to maintain trust in the electoral process**

**California and Oregon state election laws are flexible, and both states issued specific guidance for voters displaced because of wildfires.**

**Displaced voters could cast provisional ballots in any Oregon county election office, even if it's not their own.**

**California, which has same-day voter registration, also allowed voters in some counties to cast ballots at any county voting center. In other counties, voters are assigned a specific location, but if they show up at the wrong one, they can still cast a provisional ballot.**

**Vote by mail in both states, voters can simply update their mailing address online—even if it's a temporary switch—and then receive a ballot in the mail.**

**Temporary addresses can be homeless shelters or an advocacy organizations.**

**Californians and Oregonians aren't required to re-register to vote if they change their address.**

**In Santa Cruz County, California, County Clerk Gail Pellerin hosted biweekly Zoom sessions to inform voters about their options. Her sessions included information on voting for fire evacuees and were also held in Spanish.**

**Santa Cruz also had a mobile voting unit, funded by US Federal CARES Act. A mobile voting unit traveled around the county, including to shelters and areas devastated by wildfires, helping people to register, vote, and access replacement ballots.**



Karachi, Pakistan, 2022



- **Karachi city, Population: 14.91 million**
- **Pakistan's election body postponed local government polls in the country's southern port city of Karachi due to "weather conditions," a day after deferring them in nine other districts of the southern Sindh province where heavy monsoon rains claimed 239 lives.**
- **50,000 policemen required for election duty in Karachi, for which 16,000 personnel had to be deployed from outside Karachi city, which was not possible due to floods in interior Sindh.**
- **Difficulty in transporting 63,000 polling staff to 49,000 polling stations across the city.**

## **India - World's largest elections**

**33 poll workers died from  
heatstroke during final phase of  
elections in 2024**

**Under the order of the Election  
Commission, the family members  
of the poll personnel received  
₹1,500,000 compensation**

**- Uttar Pradesh Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa**



# Climate Change/ Disasters Nexus

- ▶ **Climate change is a threat accelerator**
- ▶ **Extreme weather events (sudden onset)** - tropical storms, flooding, wildfires, landslides, tsunamis
- ▶ **Seismic hazards and events** - volcanos and earthquakes
- ▶ **Long-Term (slow onset) events** – extreme heat, drought, sea level rise, melting polar ice/glaciers, desertification, food insecurity
- ▶ **Conflict and complex emergencies** such as wars, outbreaks of violence and complex political crises, pandemics
- ▶ **South Asia Region** is vulnerable to a range of climate disasters. Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are in the top 10 vulnerable countries to climate change in the world.





# **Climate change impacts are not equal!**

**Poorest and most at risk people on the front line of climate change are disproportionately affected.**



# Environmental Migration & Displacement

Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly 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.



# Rights of Environmentally At Risk & Displaced Persons



- **International instruments** strongly emphasize the importance of **upholding the rights** of people affected by environmental challenges and **involving them in decision-making**
- **Internally displaced persons (IDPs)** who are displaced within their own country have the **same rights as other citizens**
- **Externally displaced persons lack international legal protection**, as they have traditionally not qualified for refugee status under international law (**Climate Refugees, Protection Gap**)
- **Environmental challenges can exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities** - especially for women, persons with disabilities, youth, Indigenous peoples and minorities

**Source:** [IFES, Electoral Rights of Environmentally Displace Persons, April 2021](#)



# Electoral Rights of Environmentally Displaced Persons

April 2021



# Risks & Impact on Elections

## Short to medium-term

- ▶ Infrastructure & material damage
- ▶ Communication disruptions
- ▶ Polling/voter registration access limitation
- ▶ Temporary displacement of voters/ candidates/election staff
- ▶ Delay or postponement of elections - potential for executive influence
- ▶ Increased risk for conflict and insecurity
- ▶ Campaigning restrictions or limitations
- ▶ Disenfranchisement of displaced voters
- ▶ Additional election costs to address climate impacts
- ▶ Mis/disinformation & Hate Speech prevalence
- ▶ Trust in electoral process and outcomes challenged



# Risks & impact on elections

## Long term

- ▶ Long-term/permanent displacement
- ▶ Constituency sizes impact - malapportionment
- ▶ Shifts in voting patterns & electoral outcomes
- ▶ Increased risk for conflict & violence
- ▶ Reconsideration of boundary delimitation
- ▶ Voting methods insufficient to include displaced voters
- ▶ Legal reforms needed for special measures
- ▶ Continued disenfranchisement of displaced populations
- ▶ At-risk and marginalization further exacerbated

# Electoral Cycle Considerations



# Good Practices & Recommendations for EMBs

1. Election Management bodies can no longer effectively implement the whole complex electoral process in isolation, but in collaboration with other institutions and civil society actors in what is called an 'electoral ecosystem'.
2. One of the biggest challenges to electoral integrity is not operational but one of TRUST. EMBs should engage in trust building initiatives.
3. Develop contingency/risk management plans that cover climate change events.

4. Undertake research on possible modalities for election participation by environmentally impacted/displaced persons, including consideration of a range of implementation options and their respective advantages, risks and costs.
5. Support legal and regulatory amendments that facilitate equality of environmentally impacted / displaced persons such as:
  - ▶ Adjusting residency requirements and allowing alternative documentation
  - ▶ Providing additional opportunities for registration and absentee voting
  - ▶ Giving IDPs choice of whether to vote in their constituencies of origin or current constituencies, and
  - ▶ Providing mobile voting teams to visit residences of voters with disabilities.



6. Develop and implement a crisis communication plan.
7. Undertake voter education on special arrangements needed for displaced persons to be able to take part as candidates and voters.
8. Promote VE in languages of both displaced and host communities. Provide electoral administration materials and voter education in the languages of both displaced and host communities.
9. Engage marginalized communities including people with disabilities, Indigenous People, women, minorities, etc. both as recipients of information but more importantly as stakeholders.

## **Good Practices & Recommendations for EMBs**

10. Consider security implications of internal displacement regarding electoral participation to ensure the safety of internally displaced voters and candidates, including for rallies and campaigning as well as the polling and results processes
11. Counter and take action against disinformation and hate speech that undermine the electoral participation of displaced groups (within legal framework and using ethical power).



# Climate & Elections Toolkit for the Electoral Ecosystem

**1. Impact of Climate & Environment on Elections**

**2. Reducing Environmental Footprint of Elections  
Scorecard (Carbon Footprint Calculator IFES – UNDP)**

**3. Climate Leadership Module**

**4. Displaced NOT Disenfranchised**

**5. Crisis Simulation on Environmental Impact  
Preparedness**

Sweden

Brazil

Papua New Guinea

Canada

Nepal

Bangladesh


Pakistan

Senegal

Pakistan

SAARC Region



A polar bear is curled up and resting on a small, isolated ice floe in the middle of a dark, choppy ocean. The sky above is filled with soft, colorful clouds in shades of purple, pink, and blue, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The bear's fur is a light cream color, and its black nose and paws are visible. The ice floe is jagged and translucent blue.

**Whilst climate change is the biggest challenge we face, I hope that this photograph also inspires hope. There is still time to fix the mess we have caused – Nima Sarikhani**