



FIAN INTERNACIONAL HONDURAS

REPORT SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

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On the occasion of the first visit to Honduras of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Climate Change.

INTRODUCTION

Honduras faces one of the highest rates of poverty and income inequality in Latin America. Approximately 82% of the country's rural population lives in poverty. Climate change and other forms of environmental degradation are having a devastating impact on the livelihoods of people who depend on fisheries in the Gulf of Fonseca region of Honduras, further exacerbating poverty and inequalities.

This report is based on the experiences of accompaniment of our Association in the geographical areas of the Municipality of Marcovia, Department of Choluteca in the south of the country, as well as in the municipalities of Copan Ruinas, Department of Copan, and Omoa, Department of Cortes, located in the north-western part of the country.

In the localities of Punta Ratón, Cedeño and Guapinol, located in the municipality of Marcovia, department of Choluteca, subsistence fishing is the main source of income and food. However, this way of life is extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate and other environmental factors. There is no local livestock production to replace fishing as a source of food, and the small-scale agriculture that used to exist has been devastated by saltwater intrusion due to rising sea levels, and the frequency of natural disasters has increased significantly in the region in recent years. The country is now considered highly vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change. A clear example of this vulnerability was evidenced by hurricanes ETA and IOTA in 2020, which highlighted the socio-environmental fragility of the nation.

The Municipality of Marcovia, located on the coast of the Department of Choluteca, has a population whose main economic activities are centred on artisanal fishing, trade in fish products and tourism. Despite its abundant biodiversity and potential for sustainable tourism, as well as its capacity for sugar cane, melons and shrimp production, a large part of the population, approximately 65%, lives below the poverty line (SwissContact, 2021). Illiteracy rates are high in these communities, and employment shortages are a constant concern. Agro-industry and shrimp production, which are the main sources of employment, often hire workers from the city of Choluteca, meaning that more than 80% of employees are

not local residents. The jobs available in the area are mostly temporary and precarious. As a result, artisanal fishing has become the predominant employment activity in these communities.

I. IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON COMMUNITIES INVOLVED IN ARTISANAL SUBSISTENCE FISHING AND SMALL-SCALE AGRICULTURE IN THE MUNICIPALITIES COVERED BY THIS REPORT.

Investigations and studies carried out by FIAN International Honduras Section in the communities of Guapinol, Cedeño and Punta Ratón, located in the municipality of Marcovia, department of Choluteca, have revealed precarious housing conditions prevailing in the area. The vast majority of the dwellings are characterised by their modest construction, using materials such as wood and walls made of mangrove sticks. Floors are usually made of earth, while roofs are made of thatch and plastic. In terms of sanitation infrastructure, rudimentary systems such as latrines are prevalent, and most dwellings are affected by significant overcrowding among their inhabitants.

According to the study "Impact of climate change on coastal resources and livelihoods in the communities of Guapinol, Cedeño and Punta Ratón, Marcovia, Choluteca" developed by FIAN Honduras in 2021, a variation of the coastline is established taking 2012 as the initial reference year. The results indicate that in the site known as Cedeño Centro, approximately 65 metres have been lost, up to a loss of 108 metres in the place known as Restaurante Sol, playa y Arena. In the village of Las Puntillas, in the community of Punta Ratón, the loss ranges from 66 to 85 metres. The inhabitants indicate that the damage began 15 years ago and in one of the recurrent climatic events in the area, in 2015, the sea occupied the place where 200 houses were located. Currently, 59 houses remain in a resettlement, the rest of the displaced families subsist in makeshift shacks. In the areas mentioned above, homes and businesses have been partially or completely lost.

As already mentioned, Guapinol, Cedeño and Punta Ratón, as well as other sectors in the southern part of the country, are constantly threatened by different natural phenomena, especially of meteorological origin, such as hurricanes, droughts, floods, tidal waves due to high rainfall and rising sea levels in coastal areas, the intensity and frequency of occurrence of which is associated with climate variability and environmental degradation caused on the one hand by shrimp farming companies that also build their infrastructure in the sea, closing estuaries where sea water flows. The climate crisis adds additional pressure on communities affected by non-climatic human-induced environmental degradation through the expansion of the shrimp industry since the 1970s, which has led to the disappearance of large areas of mangrove forest.

From regional models it is predicted that the influence of climate change in the study area will cause the ocean level to rise over the next 50 years, resulting in increased storm surges in areas closer to the coast and in areas along active channels of the estuaries. This intrusion trend could be between 50 and 100 metres per year.

On the other hand, 259 people from the communities of Las Barras de Cuyamel and Las Barras del Motagua¹, in the municipality of Omoa, on the northern Honduran coast, were declared in a situation of public calamity and the sites uninhabitable² due to the loss of territory, physical and

¹ Information updated as of 18 March 2019 by the organisations Medicus Mundi, Honduran Red Cross and CUSO.

² Municipal Corporation 2014

economic community infrastructure as a result of marine intrusion³. In addition, seismic movements are occurring, causing changes in the territory and accelerating the process of coastal loss. As of 2019, 84 families remained in the communities, as some chose to move to other parts of the municipality, the country and even beyond the borders. Finally, the families were relocated to a settlement called Union Barras in 2022.

Marine intrusion in coastal communities causes the loss of productive land, housing, a decrease in the income of subsistence artisanal fishing families, and the modification of ecosystems that represent an indispensable livelihood for the population. These impacts imply forced displacement, food insecurity, exacerbation of poverty, exclusion and inequality.

The loss of the coastline and the consequent destruction in the communities causes a decrease in the influx of tourists and implies a reduction in family income, mainly for women, as they provide food services and other economic initiatives linked to the tourism sector.

Food production in indigenous families in the municipality of Copan Ruinas and Santa Rita. In these communities, some indigenous families have communal land, while the majority rent land for their agricultural activities or take care of plots belonging to third parties in exchange for a place to settle and cultivate, albeit in precarious conditions. Most rely on the natural resistance of their crops to pests and diseases. If agro-ecological methods are used, they are often based on previous practices.

Food production in indigenous households is characterised by a lack of sufficient resources to grow vegetables, properly treat crops and establish small-scale irrigation systems. In addition, these areas are prone to drought, resulting in constant crop failures. In rainy periods, storms are often brief but intense, which can lead to flash floods and again loss of agricultural production.

It has been established with the communities in the framework of the elaboration of the Municipal Adaptation Plan of Copán Ruinas, 2017⁴, that families are practically subsisting on only one harvest per year, the first harvest as it is known, has been lost. The Plan highlights the importance for the adaptation of local food systems of protecting native plants and seeds under agro-ecological production models and a good system of water collection and proper use. The protection and use of native seeds has allowed families participating in agroecological initiatives to better cope with drought seasons.

For the indigenous Maya Chortí families in these municipalities, sometimes, in the months of July and August, they only have two meals with their families. Until the labour situation improves, waiting for the harvest and job opportunities with the coffee harvest. This productive sector is also suffering the consequences of the increase in temperature, as the high altitude varieties no longer have the same climatic conditions, and the incidence of pests and diseases increases.

The indigenous diet is based on basic grains (maize and beans), as well as local herbs that are easily reproduced and preserved. The quality of the soils and the dry climate do not provide them with production possibilities.

³ Villagers have been reporting loss of land due to marine intrusion since 1986, according to information from COPECO.

⁴ Process led by organisations that are part of the Honduran Alliance on Climate Change (AHCC), including FIAN Honduras, and the Municipality of Copán Ruinas

II. IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION ON THE OCCURRENCE OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT AND FORCED MIGRATION OF HONDURANS FROM THE COMMUNITIES COVERED IN THIS REPORT.

The damages and losses to the different livelihoods of the population as a result of climatic conditions, and the limited social and economic opportunities, exert pressure on families to seek survival alternatives. One of these alternatives is to move to other locations in the national territory or to migrate to destinations such as the United States, Mexico and Spain, mainly.

Specifically, the communities of Punta Ratón, Guapinol and Cedeño in the municipality of Marcovia and the communities of Las Barras de Cuyamel and Las Barras de Motagua, in the municipality of Omoa, are an example of the multi-causality of migration, including extreme climatic events and the phenomenon of marine intrusion.

The communities in both municipalities are characterised by their dependence on artisanal subsistence fishing; lack of basic services; pollution and degradation of marine ecosystems; marine intrusion; and conflicts over the use and control of productive assets such as land, beaches, fishing areas, among others.

It is important to note that almost all municipalities in Honduras are highly vulnerable to climate events, and in the case of the municipality of Omoa, it is difficult to find land that is not susceptible to flooding. Therefore, human resettlement processes are complex, especially when dealing with a population that depends exclusively on fishing. In this case, the first settlers of Las Barras del Motagua⁵ moved to Las Barras de Cuyamel in 1912 due to its high exposure to natural disasters. In 1972, other families from Las Barras de Motagua moved to live in Las Barras de Cuyamel, this being the second wave of human displacement⁶.

They register in their historical memory important material losses, among other events, Hurricane Francelia (1969); Hurricane Fifi (1974); in 1984, crop losses due to drought; Tropical Storm Gert (1995) the first lagoon in the centre of the community's street was produced; In 1996, the destruction of the coast of the Motagua River Bar is reported, resulting in the first reduction of the beach and damage to 12 houses; in 1998, as a consequence of Hurricane Mitch, the second lagoon is formed, tides increase and the loss of beaches, which are aggravated in 2008 with Storm 16.

The inhabitants of Barras de Cuyamel remember these events in which there were considerable material losses. It is worth noting that after Hurricane Mitch, 1998, families were evacuated for the first time and some migrated; followed by other phenomena of this type in 2011-2012, the invasion of the sea intensified and it was concluded that the phenomenon was irreversible and also in which heavy rains caused the community to be cut off from communication⁷. Already in 2014, losses of up to 50 metres per year were recorded, announcing that if the trend continues, the imminent disappearance of these communities would be imminent in 201. To date, the communities have been totally abandoned and were resettled at the beginning of 2023.

⁵ **Barra del Río Motagua Biological Reserve.** Due to its environmental characteristics, it was declared a protected area within the National System of Protected Areas of Honduras.

⁶ Witness accounts indicate that the first human displacement was in 1912, caused by climatic conditions.

⁷ CASM 2015

III. LOCAL MIGRATION POLICIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Until now, the country has lacked a national migration policy that takes into account the different factors that force people to migrate forcibly; the National Migration Institute is in the process of consulting on a proposal. Similarly, the local governments of the accompanied municipalities do not have migration and climate change policies; no local policy to mitigate the effects of natural disasters has been identified, but immediate actions have been taken by the Standing Committee on Contingencies (COPECO). The State provides partial response in humanitarian emergency contexts to those affected during extreme weather events and disasters, but it does not have a follow-up programme, and therefore lacks guidelines on what to do in post-emergency communities.

The percentage of households with migrant members is significantly high in both zones. The percentage is higher in the Southern Zone, where about 95 per cent of households have a member outside the country, compared to more than 70 per cent of households in the Northern Zone communities⁸.

Until climate phenomena and environmental degradation are recognised as factors in the expulsion of people from their territories, the loss and damage to people's livelihoods will not be adequately addressed, nor will legislative measures and institutional arrangements be put in place to implement actions in favour of the fundamental rights of people in an unfavourable social, economic, environmental and climatic environment.

IV. PUBLIC POLICIES, LEGISLATION AND PLANNING THAT GUARANTEE DHANA IN A CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

Recurrent climatic events have highlighted the conditions of vulnerability in which the Honduran population lives. They reflect the results of a public policy that has neglected investment in social security systems and a national risk management system that responds reactively when natural disasters occur.

The Law on Food and Nutritional Security, decree 25-2011, needs substantial reforms as it practically focuses on the description of the institutional structure and does not strategically cover fundamentals contained in international instruments that seek the development of actions in favour of the right to food. This law does not even have a regulation, and activities are promoted through the National Policy and the food security strategy.

In the same legislative line, it is worth highlighting the need to update and harmonise the same Law on Climate Change issued by Decree 297-2013, which to date does not have its respective implementing regulations with the Law on Food and Nutrition Security, as well as other elements of the related national regulations and its policies and strategies.

In general terms, these national regulatory instruments need to recognise in a cross-cutting manner the need to confront the impacts of climate change on food systems, especially local food systems and those made up of men and women who produce food in an artisanal manner, for subsistence or for exchange in their localities. There is also a marked bias towards agricultural production, with a focus on agro-industry, ignoring other productive activities on which the

⁸ Exploratory study on social, economic, environmental and climatic conditions affecting internal displacement and migration in coastal communities, AHCC/FIAN, 2023. Taken from the focus groups.

population depends, such as beekeeping, small-scale livestock farming, aquaculture and artisanal fishing, among others.

It focuses on the accompaniment and assistance to productive chains, which in reality do not incorporate small family units, small-scale producers' cooperatives, women with economic initiatives that are part of informal commerce. These are populations that, according to their social, economic and environmental conditions, are highly vulnerable and unable to recover from losses and damages on their own.

It is essential that the food sovereignty axis of the National Adaptation Plan be strengthened by the other State bodies that are linked to the food issue, prioritising measures such as the promotion and establishment of ecological agriculture, which not only favours adaptation actions but also mitigation.

Among the gaps observed in the area of national planning is that, in the definition and scope of climate change and risk management actions, both nationally and locally, there are still gaps in the definition and scope of climate change and risk management actions. The instruments for the collection and design of Municipal Development Plans (PDM) are still lagging behind in these aspects, which are so essential for a highly vulnerable country like Honduras.

Similarly, these planning instruments do not have indicators that can be used to know or assess the characteristics of the country's vulnerability.

However, it is positive that the National Adaptation Plan is in line with principles and objectives based on human rights and climate justice.

V HUMAN RIGHTS AFFECTED BY THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON PEOPLE LIVING FROM AGRICULTURE, FISHING AND OTHER PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES.

5.1 The right to life: This is a fundamental and universally recognised principle in the field of human rights. It states that everyone has the inherent right to life and to have his or her life respected and protected by government authorities and society in general. It is an essential and basic right, for without it, other rights and freedoms cannot be exercised.

Importantly, the right to life encompasses not only protection against arbitrary or unlawful execution by the state, but also the obligation to take positive measures to ensure dignified living conditions, access to health care and other essential services that preserve and promote human life.

The right to life and climate change are related in several respects, as climate change poses a significant threat to human life and the environment on the planet.

Climate change causes extreme weather events, such as droughts, floods, more intense storms and heat waves, which pose direct threats to human life. These extreme weather events can cause severe damage and even loss of life. It can also drive forced migration. When extreme weather conditions make areas uninhabitable or unproductive, people are forced to move in search of a safer and more sustainable environment in which to live. This can lead to conflict and mass population displacement.

5.2 The right to a healthy environment: This is a fundamental human right recognised in many constitutions and international human rights treaties. This right implies that all people have the right to live in an environment that allows them to enjoy a dignified and healthy life. The right to

a healthy environment implies that governments and societies have a responsibility to protect and preserve the natural environment for present and future generations.

The right to a healthy environment and climate change are intrinsically linked, as climate change poses a significant threat to the quality and health of the environment and thus to human well-being. Protection of this right is essential to effectively address climate change and its impacts.

5.3 Right to health: The right to health is a fundamental principle that recognises that all people have an inherent right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The right to health is a fundamental component of human rights that recognises the importance of caring for and protecting the health of all people, without discrimination, and ensuring that they have access to adequate and quality health services.

Climate change presents a number of significant challenges to the right to health, and its impacts can be particularly severe for the most vulnerable populations. Addressing climate change and its effects on human health is a critical concern from both a human rights and a public health perspective. This implies taking measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as well as to adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change and strengthen the capacity of communities to protect their health.

5.4 Right to housing: This is a fundamental human right recognised in several international human rights treaties and documents, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. This right implies that everyone has the right to live in housing that is safe, adequate, affordable and provides an adequate level of privacy and dignity.

Climate change causes extreme weather events such as floods, storms, droughts, storm surges and sea level rise, which can destroy homes and force people from their homes. This forces displacement and affects people's right to adequate housing. They have no support or response from local government and the state.

5.5 Right to Migrate: The right to migrate is closely related to the right to freedom of movement, which is found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 13) and other international treaties. This right states that everyone has the right to move freely and to choose his or her place of residence within the borders of a State.

Climate change is causing an increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, such as hurricanes, floods, droughts, storm surges and rising sea levels. These events can destroy homes, farmland and livelihoods, forcing people to leave their communities in search of safety and livelihoods. People who are forced to migrate due to climate change have human rights that must be protected, including the right to life, security and protection from discrimination.

The most vulnerable populations, including the communities described in this paper, often face the greatest impacts of climate change. Migration is often a survival strategy for these populations.

5.6 Right to adequate food and nutrition: This right could be defined as the right, on its own or in conjunction with other rights, to be free from hunger and malnutrition, to physical and economic access to adequate food at all times in terms of both quality and quantity. It is the right to nutritious and culturally acceptable food, with dignified and sustainable means of procurement, while ensuring physical, emotional and intellectual development.

Climate disruptions can lead to food insecurity, which refers to the lack of access to sufficient and nutritious food for an active and healthy life. Vulnerable populations, such as rural and fishing communities and low-income people, often face the greatest impacts.

Rising ocean temperatures and ocean acidification affect marine ecosystems and the availability of fish and shellfish, an important source of food for artisanal subsistence fishing communities in the Gulf of Fonseca.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Legislative and public policy measures:

- ✓ Establish in the law initiative on forced displacement the mechanisms for the protection of people affected by loss and damage to their livelihoods as a result of, among other factors, climate impacts and environmental degradation.
- ✓ Participatory design and development of a national resettlement policy and strategy for people who have lost their livelihoods as a result of the effects of climate change and environmental degradation, such as coastal families affected by marine intrusion.
- ✓ In the international framework of the Loss and Damage Mechanism, consider actions and investments for the problems of the coastal population in terms of restoring their livelihoods under the approach of human rights, climate justice and humanitarian protection.
- ✓ Establish a National Mechanism for the recognition of losses and damages, with an ethnic and gender approach, which is approached from a human rights, climate justice and humanitarian protection perspective to compensate vulnerable populations who are victims of impacts on their rights and livelihoods due to the effects of climate change.
- ✓ To address the challenges caused by sea intrusion and other climate change impacts on affected communities, it is essential that the state and local governments implement housing relocation programmes. These programmes should consider the needs of people whose livelihoods are threatened by environmental destruction. In addition, sustainable urban and rural planning that takes into account climate risks should be promoted, thereby ensuring the safety and resilience of communities to the effects of climate change.
- ✓ National and international recognition that migration is a right of people who are victims of the effects of climate change and environmental degradation.
- ✓ States, both nationally and internationally, must ensure the protection of the human rights of people who are forced to migrate due to the climate crisis. This includes, crucially, respecting and promoting rights such as access to adequate housing, quality education and quality health care.
- ✓ Establish a legal framework to protect the use and management of seeds and plants that are native to the territories and that constitute the cultural food base of communities, indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants.

6.2 Implementation measures, planning and investment:

- ✓ Incorporate successful initiatives that enable the adaptation of local food systems to climate effects into public planning and investment.
- ✓ In investment plans, give priority to projects with artisanal producers, small cooperatives and women's production initiatives under ecological management, provide adequate financing for the conditions of these groups and provide them with technical assistance.

- ✓ Responding effectively to the climate crisis from the perspective of vulnerable groups must be comprehensive and sustainable. This includes planned migration and relocation strategies, as well as adaptation of existing infrastructure to cope with climate challenges. Active participation of affected communities and collaboration between governments, organisations and civil society are essential to address these challenges safely.



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