

The Challenges of Environmental Refugees on the Sustainability of Human Security



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Abstract: The rapid environmental changes caused by increasing climate impact and environmental crises are posing threats to human security and sustainability of societies within the international political context. This study focuses on the phenomenon of environmental displacement as prominent challenge exacerbated by these transformations, prompting need for comprehensive strategies to address global environmental challenges. The study aims to explore the significance of environmental displacement and the emerging challenges to human security sustainability. It also seeks to discover new regional or international avenues for addressing or confronting the challenges of environmental displacement and community sustainability amid global environmental transformations.

key words: environmental changes, environmental asylum, sustainability of Human security.

ملخص: تشهد العلاقات الدولية تحولات بيئية متسارعة بفعل تزايد تأثيرات التغيرات المناخية والأزمات البيئية، مما يُعزز التهديدات على الأمن الانساني وتحديات استدامة المجتمعات. تُسلط الدراسة الضوء على ظاهرة اللجوء البيئي كأبرز تحدّ يُعزز هذه التحولات التي تدفع نحو أولوية تبني استراتيجيات متكاملة لمواجهة التحديات البيئية العالمية. تهدف الدراسة إلى البحث في أهمية موضوع اللجوء البيئي وتحديات استدامة الأمن الانساني الناشئة عنه، وكذا استكشاف سبل وآفاق جديدة - إقليمية أو دولية - لمعالجة أو التصدي لتحديات اللجوء البيئي واستدامة المجتمعات في ظل التحولات البيئية الدولية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التغيرات البيئية، اللجوء البيئي، استدامة الأمن الانساني.

.Introduction:

In light of the escalation of global environmental challenges and their increasing impacts on human societies, the issue of environmental refuge has become a prominent challenge that requires serious attention and effective intervention. Rapid climate change, the collapse of ecosystems in some global geopolitical regions, and their economic repercussions pose an existential threat to humanity's sustainability. The issue that forced many citizens to migrate in search of a more sustainable and safer environment where to live.

The close relationship between human security and the issue of environmental refuge shows a significant impact on global security and the stability of societies. Though the growing challenges of environmental refuge affect the sustainability of development in environmentally and economically affected areas, it embodies many cultural, socio-political, security and economic problems that cause these host communities to lose their social and cultural fabric and their political, security and economic stability.

The issue of environmental refuge has extended from national concern to regional and international concern in light of the pressures that environmental migration poses on borders, resources and social systems in the future - the escalation of conflicts - which requires the integrated efforts of the international community to develop constructive environmental policies and strategies to provide sustainable solutions and address this challenge effectively. In line with this, we presented our research problem to study and analysed this complex phenomenon, reveal current and future challenges in the field of environmental refuge, and push for deep thinking to adopt sustainable and effective solutions to protect humanity and maintain environmental sustainability for future generations, which are as follows: **How do the challenges of environmental refuge affect the stability of societies and the sustainability of their human security in light of global environmental transformations?**

The Study Hypotheses:

1. The increase in the number of environmental refugees poses challenges for international protection due to the lack of legal

classifications with the complexities associated with environmental asylum,

2. The increase in environmental refugees raises multiple challenges in receiving countries, affecting the sustainability of human security.

The Study Purposes

The challenges associated with environmental refuge are a real threat to human stability and security in the long term. The study aims to show the intersections between environmental, sustainability and human security variables in the current global context, as well as to provide a comprehensive analysis of how environmental changes affect the phenomenon of environmental refuge, and the implications of its challenges on the societies' stability and human security.

The Study methodology

The study includes a comprehensive analysis of the data and information available about the main environmental challenges and their impact on human refuge and security. In line with this, the analytical model was adopted to address this study that sheds light on the challenges of environmental refuge on the sustainability of the security of human societies, while showing the complexities faced in dealing with the phenomenon in light of the international environmental changes.

1. The historical context of the development of international humanitarian interest in environmental protection

Environmental protection consists in a set of actions and measures taken by countries and the international community to preserve the environment and natural resources and reduce pollution and environmental degradation. Thus, the issue of environmental protection began at the international level before domestic legislation was adopted. On this basis, there was an international interest in protecting the environment through the establishment of international law regulation, manifested through the rules of international humanitarian law that enshrines in many legal aspects the environmental protection and environmental security

1. 1. The concept of international environmental protection

Environmental law is a branch of public international law that aims to preserve the environment and creates a legal obligation to protect the environment from the challenges and threats of environmental degradation, whether within the framework of the State's internal law or within the framework of international law. International environmental law, which dates back to the second half of the twentieth century, refers to the set of legal and customary principles and rules known among the subjects of international law that regulate how to preserve the human environment and prevent its pollution (AL-AWADI, 1985, p. 36).

From a legal standpoint, the various international legislations did not set a specific definition for environmental protection, but rather limited themselves to clarifying the elements that make up the environment. The first indirect international humanitarian interest in protecting the environment - protecting the environment during armed conflict - is evident through the St. Petersburg Declaration in 1868, the Fourth Hague Convention in 1907, and the 1925 Protocol prohibiting the use of poisonous gases and bacteriological methods during war (Bouvier, 2000, p. 195). The decision of The United Nations General Assembly in 1968 stressed the need to commit to protecting the environment within the framework of the close relationship between the environment and human rights, so that environmental issues later took on a strategic dimension in their relationship to international security as a whole (Christel Couril, 2012, pp. 393-394).

1.2 Development of international measures to protect the environment

Throughout history, the environment has been the subject of concern for human societies and different civilizations. The issue we discover in the ancient Egyptian and Iraqi civilizations, which were known for their respect for nature considering it sacred, which reflected the close interaction between man and nature and the importance of the relationship between the environment and human beliefs (Kinsley D. R., 1995).

Roman civilization is considered the historical and cultural source of many legislation. In fact, the idea of the environment was known in Roman law, which appears through environmental protection legislation in the Justinian Code issued by Emperor Flavius Postumianus in 544, whose applications appeared in finding solutions for draining dirty water and preventing pollution of fresh water and seas or aggression on the soil as a common property according to natural law (FAHMI, J., 1946, p. 56).

Although the shift towards comprehensive international interest in environmental issues increased in influence and weight at the end of the nineteenth century, especially the issue of industrial pollution, it should be noted that environmental issues received limited attention locally and regionally by some of the more developed countries before they turned into pivotal international issues, as the main focus was on exploiting natural resources, which increased their depletion and threatened their sustainability, making the poorest and most marginalized countries suffer from environmental challenges and their repercussions on the sustainability of development and human societies (Wadsworth Publishing, 2000).

The international community has adopted many agreements and protocols with the aim of achieving environmental sustainability as a human imperative. - but not limited to – are:

- **The United Nations Environment Conference or the Stockholm Conference**, which was held from June 5 to 16, 1972. It was the first international conference during the Cold War devoted to discussing issues of the environment and sustainable development at the global level. (United Nations, 1972).
- **The World Commission on Environment and Development or Brundtland Commission**, was established in 1983. It came to refer to what was called “international intertwined crises». In 1987, it presented an important report called “Our Common Future” which is considered one of the most important reports in the field of environment and sustainable development. It contributed to strengthening the international environmental-sustainable development dialogue ((GEO-4), 2007).

It should be noted that the “**Montreal Protocol**” was in the same year, on 09/16/1987, in Canada. It headed in the context of the international environmental.(Nation, United, 1987).

- **The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development or the Rio de Janeiro “Earth Summit” conference**, held in Brazil, June 3-14, 1992, as the first global environmental conference following the end of the Cold War, coupled internationally with the rise of economically emerging powers in a globalized international system based on the economy, and locally, with the growing nature of internal conflicts. The problems of political stability are issues that require a local settlement so that they can be integrated into efforts to confront the environmental challenges referred to by the conference under the name of the “Comprehensive Program for Action in the Field of Environment and Sustainable Development” which is mainly represented in protecting biological diversity and its sustainability and addressing climate change and global warming (Nations, United, 1992).
- **The World Summit on Sustainable Development or the Johannesburg Conference** was held in South Africa from 08/26 to 09/04/2002, It stressed the strengthening of countries' commitment to improve the international environmental situation and pledges to achieve sustainable development for all of humanity (United Nations, A/CONF., 199/20)
- **The Paris Climate Agreement in 2015**, which was concluded under the auspices of the United Nations. The agreement covers the commitment of all parties whose nationally determined contribution includes a time frame lasting for year 2030. (United Nations, 2022).

International summits followed after that confirming the progress of international development and environmental sustainability efforts and the continued commitment of countries to the goals and to activating what was stipulated in previous international environmental agreements and protocols, such as the Paris Review Summit 2016, the World Climate Summit “COP22” in Marrakesh 2016, the World Climate Summit “COP23” in Bourne 2017, the World Climate Summit “COP25” in Madrid 2019, the World Climate Summit “COP26” in Glasgow 2021.

2. Environmental Refuge: A study of the Concept and Legal Status

2.1 the environmental refuge:

The concept of refuge initially appeared in international law and international relations in the nineteenth century following the migration of millions of people during World War I in search of refuge in other countries, which is reflected in the establishment by the League of Nations of the Office of the High Commissioner for Russian Refugees (United States, 1995).

The Geneva Convention of 1951 is the cornerstone of many regional treaties regulating the legal status of refugees, to which the Protocol of 1967 was later added. The Convention's concept of the term refugee indicates that: "Everyone left a country because of a well-founded fear ... because of that fear he is unable or unwilling to seek the protection of that country or to return to that country" (Sabrina, Nadia, Khelfa, HAMMOUDA, June 2021, p. 231).

The term environmental refuge was used for the first time in 1976 at the World Watch Institute by the British environmentalist Lester Russell Brown within the framework of environmental research under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme, where the link between internal and international migration and the environment was revealed. In 1985, the term environmental refugee was mentioned as the title of a report affiliated with the United Nations Environment Programme, which in turn referred to the relationship between environmental defect and the inability to live due to an imminent threat to life, which leads to departure. Dr. Issam El-Hanawy defined the environmental refugee by: "People who were forced to leave their homes, temporarily or permanently, due to advanced deterioration in their environment due to natural or human factors, which led to a major disruption in their environment that made them no longer feel reassured in their lives" (Piguet, E., 2008, p. 04).

Researcher Jodi L Jacobson is credited with defining the types of environmental refugees in a 1988 report that they are: "People who are temporarily displaced because their place of residence has been destroyed by earthquakes or avalanches, who have migrated because

environmental degradation has undermined their livelihood or imposed unacceptable risks to their health, and who have been resettled” and in giving them the first appreciation.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) referred for the first time to the issue of environmental refuge in a report in 1993, emphasizing the role of sudden disasters in the displacement of people. It explained in a symposium in Geneva in 1996 with “IOM” and “RPG” (a political group for refugees) the role of environmental causes and politics in pushing environmental displacement processes (Terminski, B, ‘2020).

To define environmental refugees in 1997 as “Those who have been displaced or forced to leave their usual place of residence because their lives, livelihoods and well-being are under real threat due to environmental, ecological and climate events” It is noted that it avoids using the term environmental refugee in the definition.

While the International Organization for Migration defined environmental refugees in 2007 as “Persons or a group of persons who are forced or choose to leave their place of residence, temporarily or permanently, for force majeure as a result of a sudden or gradual change in the environment that negatively affects their lives or living conditions as they move within or outside their country” The European Union, starting from 2008, through European Council decisions, also contributed to developing the concept of environmental refuge, as it addressed the concept of the ecological refugee and emphasized in its Recommendation No. 1862 in 2009 that environmental change represents a motivation for migration (Terminski, B, ‘2020).

Accordingly, environmental refuge refers to the fact that individuals are forced to seek refuge in a country other than their country of origin in order to obtain protection and residence in another country as a result of serious environmental threats that make the individual’s stay in his country environmentally unsafe. The environmental refuge process requires providing information proving environmental threats and their negative repercussions on human life.

2.2 Forms of the legal basis defining the environmental refugee

It is worth noting the difficulty we encountered in defining an accurate and clear definition of the concept of environmental refugee. If this indicates anything, it indicates the absence of a legal basis for the concept, that is, the failure to recognize environmental refugees as refugees in international law, despite the dynamic development of this phenomenon on the global scene and the challenges it poses to human societies.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees refused to include the environmental refugee in international refugee cases, considering that it is a broad and ambiguous concept, and because it could cause severe confusion in the jurisprudence of public international law and undermine the legal system for refugee protection. The issue was confirmed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Migrants in 2008 (Sabrina, Nadia, Khelfa, HAMMOUDA, June 2021, pp. 234/237).

Given that environmental factors are considered one of the causal factors of traditional migration in legal debates about the environment, it is noted that international law is almost devoid of treaties, customs and judicial rulings that search for the legal status of environmental refugees. This legal vacuum in addressing the phenomenon of environmental refuge has created two main problems at the international community level: The first is related to the lack of legal texts that address the legal status of environmental refugees. The second is related to the existing challenges of the phenomenon and its worsening in the future. Perhaps the issue of considering the environment as a main factor separated from other causal factors of migration and refuge is a very important part of the public law's treatment of environmental refuge issues on the one hand, and a basic necessity against the arguments of host countries for specific protection for environmental refugees, especially in light of the escalating challenges of climate change and global warming that falls within international environmental threats.

At the present time of study there is no precise definition of environmental refuge in public international law. This is part of the

on-going challenges and debates in the field of refugee rights and relevant international laws. The concepts of environmental refuge and protection must be developed to confront the growing environmental challenges in light of actual and potential climate changes. What can be noted, despite the absence of an official definition of environmental refuge, is the efforts of some organizations that developed guidelines or temporary definitions of environmental refuge in the context of international laws, waiting to determine a precise, clear and comprehensive definition of environmental refuge along with the development of international laws and principles in the future in parallel with the serious dangers that environmental threats will pose to the sustainability of human societies.

3.Environmental dimensions in the context of human security: The effects of environmental refuge on host communities

3.1. Environment from a human security perspective

The emergence of human security concepts and approaches dates back to the second half of the twentieth century, in parallel with the theoretical value-based outcomes of globalization and the transformations that affected security studies. As a concept, it derives its historical context from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1945, which was associated with the establishment of many rules concerned with the protection of human rights to preserve human dignity and freedom, which is necessary to achieve human security (Mohamed, Khalil, AL-MOUSSA, pp. 97/114).

Environmental changes undermine the effectiveness and realization of a wide range of internationally protected human rights, which prompts people to seek international refuge in search of a safe haven where their human rights can be fulfilled. Perhaps the close and complex relationship between environmental change and human rights emerges clearly, according to Jane Mcadam, through the link between many environmental challenges and rights affected by - for example - “extreme weather changes/the right to life - water scarcity/the right to food and freedom from hunger - stressful health situation/the right to health”

The 1972 Stockholm Conference reflects recognition of the intersection of human rights problems with environmental issues, which issued a declaration on the sustainable environment and the principles of the relationship between countries in the field of the environment, stressing the sanctity of protecting the environment for present and future generations. The idea of environmental challenges involves the existence of threats that undermine environmental sustainability efforts and its negative repercussions on human social interaction with its environment. The issue that places the environment at the core of common international human security concerns. The growing environmental interaction with human security variables is becoming more and more apparent with shifts in international interest in issues of development, health, and environmental debate. Norman Myers is one of the first academics to call for theorizing security problems within the scope of security (Myers, N., 2002, pp. 609/613).

This is the same vision that prompted “Our Common Future” report in 1987 and the World Health Organization report in 1993 to point out the repercussions of the absence of a safe environment on human health. (Jon, Barnett, 2001, p. 102).

Perhaps the most prominent aspects of environmental challenges to human security lie in:

- ✓ Lack of environmental awareness and low sense of environmental responsibility, which would place the individual in front of challenges and priorities of preventing environmental degradation and its repercussions on the sustainability of human life.
- ✓ Scarcity of resources and misuse in light of technological development and welfare requirements.
- ✓ The loss of biological diversity and its impact on the quality of human life and the right of subsequent generations to this diversity.
- ✓ Environmental pollution (air, water, soil) and its impact on the dimensions of human health and sustainable development.
- ✓ Climate change and the escalation of environmental changes and their repercussions on what is known as green rights.

3.2. The environmental refugee: Challenges and repercussions on host communities

Humanitarian environmental refuge - even if it truly falls within the protection of human dignity - poses many challenges to the societies of host countries, which often have a negative impact on their internal and regional stability conditions and at various levels and dimensions, the most important are:

3.3The impact of environmental refuge on cultural issue

Cultural security is a vital variable that achieves the preservation of cultural identity in a way that enhances the stability of the State and its social integration, as the priority of building the strength of the cultural self-existence, which in turn extends to human values, their rooting and developing to adapt to international changes, is a very important issue for strengthening the ability of States to continuity, especially in light of the problems and challenges that cultural diversity poses to the cultural issue in the current era of globalization.

Perhaps environmental refuge is considered one of the most prominent problems that have become a challenge to the cultural system of the host countries in the context of the repercussions of international environmental changes, especially in their climatic aspect. The culture of indigenous peoples has aspects that can be found in their ways of living, their achievements, their creativity, and in their spiritual and material relationship with the natural geographical space in which they inhabit. People's cultures are affected by new changes in their surroundings, which is reflected in the issue of environmental refugees who reflect a system of values that differ from what exists in the host societies in terms of, for example, patterns of use of natural resources, consumption, methods of production, and the nature of behaviours and customs. Or even the view on environmental changes and methods of adapting. To enable environmental refugees to do so may require internal legal measures, all of which are issues that, in one way or another, affect the individual's culture and identity (for indigenous peoples) (HRC, 2012).

In such cases, the values of identity, belonging and integration - solidarity and social relations as a whole on the one hand, and the relationship of host communities with their land and resources on the other hand - may be affected, such as the relationship of spiritual, social, economic and political affiliation. Losing the ability of

indigenous peoples to practice their cultural identities in a normal manner would lead them to lose the ability to adaptation and continuity in the context of international changes. Anthropological analysis of culture focuses on identity, society and economic activities, as what threatens the culture of indigenous peoples in light of the growing environmental challenges and climate changes is the issue of losing part of their territories or depletion of their resources, which would create crowding and pressure on the available resources in a way that reduces the share of the indigenous citizen compared with the environmental refugees who benefit from these same resources. Thus, over time, this situation may lead to problems of cultural practices and identity, as well as problems of undermining paths of sustainable development, social justice, scarcity of resources, and internal political and security tensions.

1. The impact of environmental refuge on political stability:

A strong and stable state, locally and regionally, is more capable of managing environmental degradation and adapting to existing and emerging environmental challenges. However, the environmental climate change often has a significant impact on the national security policies on stable States, which entails the possibility of entering into regional competition or conflict. The impact of environmental refuge on the stability of host countries manifests through - but not limited to - the following:

✓ Impact of resource scarcity: Environmental refuge is an important factor that increases pressure on natural and environmental resources in host communities. An issue that may lead to the exacerbation of social and economic tensions within these countries (J. Smith, 2018, pp. 361- 374).

✓ Changing demographics and cultural identity: The flow of environmental refugees would lead to noticeable demographic changes in the communities of host countries, which could lead to shifts in the population balance and cultural identity of local communities (Myers, N., 2002, pp. 609/613).

✓ Pressure on the economic structure and services: The flow of environmental refugees is likely to cause increased pressure on infrastructure and basic services in host countries, such as education, health, and housing, which would lead to a deterioration in the quality

of life and dissatisfaction of the indigenous local population, and may manifest in the form of internal tensions (Fuguet, 2008, pp. 06 – 08).

✓ Security tensions and conflicts: The environmental and economic pressure resulting from the growing flow of environmental refugees may increase the potential for internal disputes and conflicts over natural resources and land. These tensions may escalate into security incidents that threaten the stability of the host countries, but more than that, they may extend to neighbouring countries, creating regional insecurity (Buhaug & H. Urdel, 2013, pp. 1-10.).

✓ Policy influence and management adaptation: The management and implementation of environmental refuge policies within host countries can affect their political stability, especially if these policies are ineffective and unable to achieve the actual integration of these people into the original societal structure as a positive value, which would lead to exacerbating tensions and disturbing relations with regional neighbouring countries and vice versa (Gemenne, R.A.McClellan & F., 2018, pp. 447-449).

✓ The influence of regional and international powers: The interference of external regional or international powers in the issues of environmental refugees in the host country may affect its political stability, and accordingly new conflicts may arise or old conflicts may escalate due to this foreign interference (Betts, A., 2011, p. 10).

Accordingly, environmental refuge has significant impacts on the political stability of host countries. It generates challenges ranging from basic services for environmental refugees and distribution of limited resources to competition for work and security. The pressure on economic and environmental resources increases the possibility of exacerbating social tensions, identity discrimination and its repercussions on the deterioration of internal security. Yet, effective adaptation and political intervention of host countries in environmental and social challenges would enhance their ability to maintain stability and reduce political tensions.

2.The impact of environmental refuge on sustainable development paths in host countries

Environmental refuge, as the most prominent repercussions of global environmental challenges, greatly affects the growth paths of host countries, as this refuge weakens the ability to achieve

sustainable and stable growth, given that the flow of environmental refugees increases pressure on the natural resources and infrastructure of these communities, causing a reduction in investments in development projects and identification of development possibilities. In addition, the increase in population increases economic and social needs, which negatively affects the direction of policies and development efforts. Host countries also face challenges in providing job opportunities, education, and health care for environmental refugees, which may undermine their efforts to achieve economic growth and sustainability (Myers, N., 2002, pp. 609/613).

The impact of environmental refuge on food security can be multifaceted and complex, as it can affect the availability and access of food resources and agricultural sustainability in host countries. In addition, the growing population as a result of environmental refuge can lead to increased demand for food, putting additional pressures on food security, local food supplies and agricultural systems. This, in turn, could lead to a shortage in food availability and a rise in prices, affecting the population's ability to obtain adequate and balanced nutrition, thereby weakening the possibility of achieving sustainable food security in host countries.

Water preoccupation is at the heart of discussions of environmental refuge because of its ramifications on sustainable development efforts in host countries. Environmental changes represent an important challenge to water security in many countries of the world. These changes include rising temperatures, changes in the pattern and distribution of precipitation, melting ice, and deterioration of water quality ... All of these factors directly affect the availability and sustainability of fresh water and pose a direct challenge to human health, land and food. Water security is viewed as the ability to obtain water for human consumption, as a productive source, and for other needs in a way that enables the success of strategies for equity, sustainability, and human development (United Nations, UNHCR, 2020).

Accordingly, and by focusing on the environmental impact of new population flows on resources and ecosystems, it becomes clear that the population increase resulting from refuge will cause an increase in demand for fresh water and water resources in host

countries, which will exacerbate the pressure on existing water systems and its repercussions on the shortage of water supplies and the deterioration of water quality. It puts water security at risk and affects the ability to achieve long-term sustainable development.

Despite the right of a person to enjoy basic needs in a way that guarantees his human dignity, environmental refuge would represent an additional burden on host communities and pose many challenges at various levels, which could lead to undermining the efforts of these countries in achieving their environmental, developmental, and human sustainability as a whole. Rather, their security and stability will be weakened if these societies are unable to positively adapt these refugees to their economic, social, cultural and political system.

Conclusion:

The study sheds deep light on the analysis of the challenges of environmental refuge and its impact on the sustainability of human security. It also provides a comprehensive and integrated look at the complex dimensions of this phenomenon, which requires harmonious international cooperation and joint efforts to address it effectively. Based on a careful analysis of the topics raised, the study showed that the challenges of environmental refuge are considered comprehensive challenges that extend to multiple aspects of human security.

Results:

- The study showed the importance of international protection for environmental refugees and the necessity of providing effective mechanisms that realize their rights and guarantee their dignity in light of the absence - so to speak - of the application of environmental refuge laws.
- The study highlighted the shortcomings of the current environmental refuge law in providing adequate protection for environmentally displaced people, leaving them vulnerable to threats and exploitation.
- The study indicated the urgent need to develop and strengthen international legal frameworks for environmental refuge and to update national laws to meet the needs and protection of environmental refugees.

- Environmental refuge represents a complex challenge that affects the sustainability of human security and imposes pressures on host communities.
- The study shows that there is an urgent need to provide funding to support countries that suffer from environmental challenges in a way that reduces the phenomenon of environmental refuge and the burdens that the phenomenon imposes on the communities of host countries.

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