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How and When Does International Migration Policy Travel Across Scales? Understanding the Limits to Migration as Adaptation Through the Lens of Thailand

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Abstract

Climate change and migration are increasingly becoming a part of policy discussions. One concept, migration as adaptation, has become popularized as a tangible way forward. While some studies focus on how this framing came to be at the international level, few have actually traced how it has traveled across administrative scales to the national and sub-national level. This paper looks to fill this gap and explores migration as adaptation policy in Thailand, a climate-vulnerable country with a highly mobile population. It finds that there is limited discussion of the issue for ideational and institutional reasons, including because migration is seen as negative or a "last resort" by Thai policymakers, limited leverage by relevant policy actors such as IOM within climate change adaptation policymaking arenas, and short-term and short-sighted policy reactions based on disruptive events. Given this, this paper questions the ability of migration as adaptation to travel to lower governance scales in particularly constrained contexts.

Keywords adaptation, migration, climate change adaptation, migration as adaptation, policy mobility

1. Introduction

Climate change and migration have increasingly become a part of policymaking discussions. Policymakers, especially in the Global North, are concerned with the numbers of people that may be forced to move (Bettini, 2013). To them, there are pressing legal, institutional, and economic considerations that need to be taken into account (Geddes et al., 2012; McLeman, 2020; Weerasinghe, 2021). To date, there has been some political fanfare at the international level, particularly in climate change fora such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) Convention of Parties (McLeman, 2008; Warner, 2012). Despite this, issues of attribution and debates over economic and political responsibilities continue to challenge policy responses (Geddes et al., 2012; Hall, 2015; Zetter, 2010). Further, policy

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debates on the issue have regularly devolved into an increasing emphasis on border security and anti-migrant sentiment (Bettini, 2013; Oels, 2015), while also serving to reproduce inequalities between North and South (Farbotko & Lazrus, 2012; Kothari, 2014); and ultimately simplify the diverse (and mobile) livelihoods of people in the Global South (Boas et al., 2019; Sakdapolrak et al., 2016; Sterly et al., 2016).

In the face of these difficulties, an alternative framing arose: *migration as adaptation* (MAA; Black et al., 2011; Scheffran et al., 2012; Tacoli, 2011). MAA looked to move the debate away from migrants as security threats, instead seeing them as potential agents of change for their households and communities as their livelihoods are threatened by climate change impacts. In this way, migration can be a means to spread risk, diversify income sources away from vulnerable rain-fed agriculture, and send remittances back home at opportune times (Afifi et al., 2016; Black et al., 2011, Scheffran et al. 2012; Webber & Barnett, 2010). While originally much more of a narrative framing, MAA has proven more amenable to institutional and political wills (Bettini & Gioli, 2015), with tangible real-world progress at the international level (Ober & Sakdapolrak, 2017), especially within the UNFCCC process (Warner, 2012). Despite some skepticism about the degree to which migration actually translates into adaptation (Gemenne & Blocher, 2017; Szaboova et al., 2023; Vinke et al., 2020), an increasing number of international organizations, especially the International Organization for Migration (IOM), have made inroads in policy debates at the international level (Felli, 2013; Hall, 2015; Ober & Sakdapolrak, 2017). They have even mapped out some of the ways in which MAA may translate into on-the-ground policy, including labor migration schemes (Dunn et al., 2023; Ober & Sakdapolak, 2017; Remling, 2020), planned relocation (Chun, 2015; Ferris & Weerasinghe, 2020), and be mainstreamed into development planning through National Adaptation Plans (NAPs; Martin, 2010; Warner et al., 2014). Despite this, it has seen limited and often superficial translation from the theoretical and to governance levels outside of the international (e.g., see Lietaer & Durand-Delacre, 2021; Qaisrani & Salik, 2018).

Why has MAA seen little translation to lower levels of governance? Ransan-Cooper et al. (2015) would argue that particular climate migration frames continue to encourage or foreclose different policy options. For example, climate-migration policymaking has been influenced by political machinations in Malawi (Arnall, 2014), "expert" intervention in the Maldives (Kothari, 2014), and networks and power dynamics in Bangladesh (Geun Ji, 2019), among others. Less discussed is exactly how and why this idea has *not* translated. This paper turns to the case of Thailand, a climate vulnerable country with a deep history of internal and international migration (Marks, 2011; Rigg et al., 2012), to understand how MAA has (or has not) "traveled" to lower governance levels, including both the national and sub-national. It also makes the case that "translation" is a cross-scalar and iterative process that does not simply move top-down.

2. Understanding How and When Migration Policy Travels Across Scales

This paper seeks to engage with the literature on *policy transfer*, or simply, the process by which policies from one place are used in the development of policies in another place (e.g., Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996). While political scientists are much more interested in tracking how policies diffuse across space, especially as they relate to macro-level processes such as globalization and socio-economic and demographic changes, for example (e.g., Dobbin et al., 2007); *policy mobilities* scholars would argue that policymaking analysis should "[move] beyond political science conceptions by making history and context more central, rather than treating them as background" (Prince, 2011, p. 193), including especially by taking into account the socio-spatial and relational (McCann & Ward, 2010; Peck, 2011; Peck & Theodore, 2010). In fact, policy mobilities scholars would argue for topological and topographical views whereby "various connections, networks and flows of policy knowledge…[en]able [us] to recognise that the policy itself is just a moment (albeit an important one) somewhere in the middle of a broader socio-spatial process" (Prince, 2014, p. 192).

Given this, policies do not just move from place to place but are embedded within complex and power-laden structures that are intrinsically political and which constantly rework these *traveling ideas* (Weisser et al., 2012). An idea may or may not successfully transfer or "travel," as Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) would put it. A traveling idea is ultimately a "story of ideas turning into action in ever new localities" (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996, p. 13). The critical question is to find a means of understanding the nature of just *how* ideas may travel (Czarniawska, 2002), while acknowledging that its route may be circuitous or imperfect.

Migration-specific policy literature has shown how policy ideas may travel for a variety of reasons. Existing research places emphasis on ideational, institutional, and interest-based routes (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Boswell et al., 2011; Gsir et al., 2016; Koh et al., 2016; Palmary et al., 2018; Zaun et al., 2016). For example, *policy narratives* or framings have an outsized role in shaping policy outcomes (e.g., Boswell et al., 2011), especially if they have hooks in popular international norms (Betts & Orchard, 2014; Vammen & Brønden, 2012) or national ideologies (Ellerman, 2015; Goh et al., 2017; Palmary et al., 2018). At the same time, institutions; in particular political structures, political party ideology, and competition amongst parties; among others, can drive migration policy reforms (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Consterdine, 2015; Zaun et al., 2016); so, too, do outspoken and powerful actors within the migration governance milieux, including bureaucrats (Hansen, 2012), private sector migration brokers (Koh et al., 2016), and/or civil society (Palmary et al., 2018).

Less understood and analyzed is how and when migration-related policy does *not* travel. In the climate-migration realm, a few recent case studies from Bangladesh and Senegal address the issue: In Dhaka, there is a stalemate as to whether climate-migration policymaking should focus on reducing movement or encouraging it as a means of adaptation (e.g., MAA). While those that argue that policy should emphasize staying rather than moving have been able to mobilize resources well, the group that supports MAA "possesses better relational resources, which means credibility among stakeholders over the policy domain" (Geun Ji, 2019, p. 616). Today, it appears that those in support of MAA have found some support from Bangladeshi policymakers, who have pledged to invest in secondary "climate resilient and migrant-friendly" cities so that climate-related migrants do not go to Dhaka (BRAC, 2023). Despite different promises, Mortreux et al. (2018) find that in West Bengal, for example, the government has not planned any relocation schemes in the face of climate change. They argue that a lack of institutional arrangements as well as a high degree of risk aversion have stalled government action.

In Senegal, Lietaer and Durand-Delacre (2021) find that *sedentary bias*, which privileges addressing so-called root causes of migration and the need to stay or return home, has led to superficial engagement with MAA. Here, migration is largely seen as a failure to adapt, although there is a minor recognition that the diaspora may have a role to play in climate change adaptation goals. These two examples are instructive, and they help to illuminate understanding of policies "across different scales of governance (in particular, the interface between international level and national/sub-national governance)" (Ransan-Cooper et al., 2015, p. 114).

This paper looks to build on these insights through an analysis of Thailand and the ways in which MAA has (or has not) traveled to the national level. It also looks to explicitly follow the traveling idea of MAA from the global to the national, and in some cases, the sub-national, in order to call attention to the inter-/multi-scalar nature of policy mobilities. It also seeks to connect the ways that sub-national framings and policies may also influence and underpin the potential of policy translation at the national level.

3. Methods and Approach

While dissecting MAA policy, we keep in mind that there is no single accepted definition of policy itself (Cairney, 2016), much less a universal theory (Smith & Larimer, 2018). We thus will follow Cairney's (2016) definition of seeing policy as "the sum total of government action, from signals of intent to the final outcomes" (p. 3). Cairney also sees policy as equally about *not* doing something. We use Cairney's (2016) conceptual outline as a focal point for our analyses, focusing on (i) *actors* and their policy environment; (ii) *networks*, or the relationships between policymakers and vested parties; (iii) *institutions*, or the rules and norms that actors follow in governmental organizations; (iv) *ideas*, such as the beliefs that actors use to define policy problems, or the solutions they propose; (v) *context*, or the socioeconomic factors to which policymakers must pay attention; and (vi) *events*, or the anticipated (e.g. elections) and unanticipated (e.g. crises) occasions which change the conditions in which decisions take place.

In order to be able to make a holistic assessment from such varied points of analysis, the first author executed a systematic review of policy documents related to climate change, environment, natural disaster planning, agriculture, water, and land development to see in what ways migration and/or climate change adaptation issues may be discussed. The documents reviewed were the Climate Change Master Plan

(2015–2050; The Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning [ONEP] & Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, 2019), Agriculture Strategic Plan on Climate Change (2017–2021; Food and Agricultural Organization of United Nations & United Nations Development Programme [FAO & UNDP], 2016a), Thailand's Communications to the UNFCCC (ONEP, 2012), Thailand's Nationally Determined Contributions (ONEP, 2015), the Climate Public Expenditure and Institutional Review Report (Overseas Development Institute [ODI], 2013), Thailand Technology Needs Assessments Report for Climate Change Adaptation (National Science Technology and Innovation Policy Office [STI], 2012), the National Economic and Social Development Plans (National Economic and Social Development Board [NESDB], 2012, 2017, 2021), and the inception report related to the National Adaptation Plan (NAP; FAO & UNDP, 2016b).

Additionally, from February to November 2015 and June to August 2018, the first author of this paper lived and gathered research in Bangkok, Thailand, and occasionally other provinces, such as Udon Thani, Buriram, and Chiang Rai. During this time, the first author executed semi-structured interviews with 34 Thai national, provincial, and district-level policymakers working for ministries and line agencies relevant to climate change and migration issues, including the ONEP, which leads efforts on climate change initiatives in Thailand, as well as the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MOAC), Land Development Department, Community Development Department, Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, Office of Agricultural Economics, Royal Irrigation Department, Department of Agricultural Extension, Ministry of Labour, and the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB). These interviews served as the basis for understanding the baseline capacity of policymakers to envision or engage with climate migration policies specifically. These interviews took place in Thai with the support of a translator. In addition, there were 12 semi-structured interviews with migration and/or climate change adaptation experts that did not work directly for the Thai government, including Chulalongkorn University, IOM, Raks Thai Foundation, Southeast START Regional Center, Thailand Development Research Institute, International Union for Conservation of Nature, and the Climate Justice Foundation; as well as bilateral and international development agencies, such as UNDP, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ), and US Agency for International Development (USAID). These interviews took place in English. All interviews were transcribed and coded with the aid of Atlas.Ti.

4. Analyzing How Migration as Adaptation Does not Travel as an Idea

4.1 Understanding Context and Ideas: How Ideologies Shape Existing Migration Policy in Thailand

By last count, there are an estimated 5.6 million internal migrants in Thailand (National Statistical Office, 2010), or around 8.3 percent of the total population. Most hail from the rural North and Northeast, where people engage in traditional agriculture-based livelihoods and households are relatively poor compared to other regions (Pholphirul, 2012). These migrants mostly move because of limited opportunities in their places of origin and the opportunities in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region (BMR) and Central region (Porst & Sakdapolrak, 2018), particularly in low-wage construction, manufacturing, and service sectors (Amare et al., 2012; IOM, 2011). A considerable share work in factories in the BMR (Clausen, 2002), especially the garment sector (Jaisat et al., 2014). Many work under precarious circumstances, with short-term or temporary contracts, and little to no social security or severance guarantees (Hewison & Tularak, 2013; Rigg & Oven, 2015).

These rural-urban labor migrants face trial and tribulations within the Thai popular cultural landscape. The social divide between Bangkokians and those from *Isaan*, the Northeast part, for example, persists, with the urban elite viewing these migrants as "country bumpkins" (Mills, 2012; Rigg & Ritchie, 2002). The rising popularity of country music from the Northeast part of the country (*lukthung*) has only served to reinforce notions of "authenticity, which is closely linked with the notion of Thai-ness" (Jirattikorn, 2006, p. 24). Many of these songs narratives focus on the pains with which migrants have ripped themselves from the bosom of their "traditional homelands," only to face hardship abroad and upon return (Kitiarsa, 2009).

When talking to policymakers, it is clear that this sort of framing of rural livelihoods, in which the rural life is simple and preferable, has only meant seeing migration as either a "last resort" or a "negative" phenomenon that is hard to control (Ober & Sakdapolrak, 2019).

At the national level, this has meant that policymakers focus on "enabling" poor, rural farmers to adapt to a changing climate. In some cases, bureaucrats at the MOAC believe that rural people "[are] just happier as a farmer" and that in order to stay a farmer they just need more climate information (Interview 7, MOAC). Meanwhile, if intervention is needed, it means circumventing the worst migration routes, as was demonstrated in one development plan which sought to develop industrial areas away from Bangkok in order to reduce migration to the BMR. Despite this sort of planning, effects did not shake out as intended:

> I remember a time after we finished that plan, construction, and people start to move to work in that place, but also there are some problems… they went to work during the weekday but then during the weekend, they still came back to Bangkok because…there's no schools for the children, there's no good hospital, so it's very clear that… probably our lesson learned would be to plan for…social infrastructure with that development. (Interview 9, NESDB)

Internal migration, then, is more about returning migrants home rather than enabling them to stay in cities, such as the BMR. This thinking has deep roots in national development policy driven by the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP), which was popularized by His Majesty the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The SEP's basic tenants argue for a "balanced way of living" rooted in moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity (Mongsawad, 2010, p. 123). While popular for a number of decades, its relevance and application expanded after the economic recession of 1998 in which thousands of rural-urban migrants in the construction sector found themselves without employment and returning back to their villages in the North and Northeast. This return was generally thought to be disastrous, with some scholars suggesting that villages were having a hard time socially and economically absorbing migrants (Kittiprapas, 1999). This feeling went hand-in-hand with a rising "localism" discourse, in which a multitude of prominent scholars and policymakers encouraged Thai people to return to a simpler way of life, less attached to the vagaries of globalisation and urban life (Hewison, 2000).

Related to this philosophy, migrants are seen as living in precarious positions in places outside of "home." Therefore, returning home should be the ultimate goal. This framing also exists at the sub-national level. As one agricultural officer at the Tambon Administration Office (TAO) in Udon Thani, a province in Northeast Thailand, told us:

> In the past there were not many professions in the community; only farming, so our work is to promote different jobs so that we can persuade them to still live in the community…we need to do something to make them come back to work in the agricultural sector in their own community. (Interview 10, TAO Udon Thani)

4.2 Understanding Actors: How Climate Change Institutions Engage With Migration

In climate change institutions, migration has rarely featured. In most cases, migration is seen as simply an outcome that needs to be part of assessing risk. In the national Climate Change Master Plan (2015–2020; ONEP, 2019), migration "due to sea-level rise or other changes" may be planned for by "[a]ssess[ing] the severity of impact in order to develop precise risk and vulnerability maps…" (ONEP, 2019, p. 73). Therefore, addressing risks at home may be able to mitigate migration outcomes.

This view complements SEP framings in various national climate change adaptation (CCA) policy documents, including the National Communications with the UNFCCC (ONEP, 2012), the Climate Change Master Plan (ONEP, 2019), the NAP (ONEP, 2018), and NDC (ONEP, 2015). One part of the NDC reads:

> Thailand's adaptation efforts aim to enhance climate resilience through the guidance of [SEP], bestowed by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. [SEP] stresses the middle path as an overriding principle for appropriate conduct by Thai people at all levels, from family to community to country. 'Sufficiency' means moderation, reasonableness, and the need of self-immunity for sufficient protection from impact arising from internal and external changes. To achieve this, the application of knowledge with due consideration and prudence is essential. (ONEP, 2015, p. 111)

This idea has also crept into the way in which agricultural bureaucrats at the sub-national level working on climate-related projects have framed working with migrants. These bureaucrats critically judge migrants because "the younger generation doesn't want

to be on the farm or [deal with] the heat" (Interview 1, Agricultural Extension, Udon Thani) or as irresponsible since "some families have big debts and they go abroad as last resort" (Interview 34, Provincial Administration Office, Udon Thani). This migration also disrupts those that stay behind, through labor costs, because "[where] in the past people helped each other to work in the field, now…people depend on equipment more than exchange labor" (Interview 4, Agricultural Extension, Buriram) as well as family structures in which "parents leave and kids stay" (Interview 1, Agricultural Extension, Udon Thani). Therefore, most bureaucrats aim to circumvent migration at the village-level. This sedentary bias is common in international development programming (Bakewell, 2008), but is often recycled in CCA initiatives generally (Lietaer & Deland-Delacure, 2021; Ober, 2014), and in Thailand in particular (Ober & Sakdapolrak, 2019).

While migration is largely seen as negative by agricultural bureaucrats at both the national and sub-national level, at least it is part of their consciousness and understanding. If prompted, there are ways in which some are willing to engage with MAA. Some bureaucrats reflected on the positive innovations return migrants could bring back, such as drip irrigation or a new type of crop (Interview 1, Agricultural Extension, Udon Thani; Interview 33, District Agricultural Office, Ban Dung). In this case, the migration itself is not seen as the catalyst for innovation but rather as a conduit for access to education and skills training. At the same time, others saw the ways in which migration may provide capital to intensify agriculture, a key goal: "Once we have investment from an outside sector, like through migration…the brother or whatever in the city can send back the money. It would be easier to invest. I think that this is very important" (Interview 7, MOAC). While there were clearly inroads to inserting migration into the agriculture discussion, there are still no active migration-related policies or activities on the ground. Interestingly, and perhaps discouragingly, in Thailand, the agricultural sector is one of the most active in CCA policy (Ober & Sakdapolrak, 2019), and where generally MAA is seen to have the greatest chance of becoming a policy reality (Martin, 2010; Warner et al., 2014).

4.3 Understanding Networks: The Limited Leverage of the IOM in Thailand

While the ideas baked into Thai bureaucratic thought are important in understanding engagement with migration, it should be noted that they are additionally constrained by the context of their enabling environment. Rarely do individual bureaucrats get to determine policy goals and directions of entire plans or projects in Thailand. Indeed, many of the bureaucrats we spoke to stated that in order for a directive to be impactful and internalized it either needs to be part of the national development plan or have the ear of the Prime Minister's office. Unfortunately, CCA policy is often seen as a third rail issue, as its functions and mandate are governed under the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MONRE) and coordinated by ONEP, which have limited leverage within the Thai policy landscape (Lebel et al., 2010). While CCA interest seems to be ramping up, especially with the introduction of a Climate Change Master Plan, most ministries and line agencies have yet to see it as a priority (Eucker, 2014; Lebel et al., 2009).

To date, CCA policy has not escaped fairly traditional framings, such as budgeting, mainstreaming, or technical inputs, including different and new crop varieties, pond digging and expansion, and climate science instruction and trainings (Lebel et al., 2009; Ober & Sakdapolrak, 2019). In fact, most CCA policies struggle to overcome systemic and historical traps (Lebel et al., 2010; Marks, 2015). Given this, it seems there is limited room for maneuver to allow MAA to gain traction and evolve.

CCA progress, meanwhile, has been largely influenced by a handful of influential actors, which act as *knowledge brokers* (Lomas, 1997; Oldham & McLean, 1997). In the Thai case, those that have the most prestige and financial capital are international and bilateral aid organizations, such as GIZ, UNDP, and USAID (Ober & Sakdapolrak, 2019). GIZ and UNDP have increasingly become the main influencers of CCA policy, as USAID decreased its programming in the country post-military coup. These two organizations have become indispensable to Thai policymakers in a number of ways, but primarily through information sharing and capacity building, including hosting workshops and conferences, providing technical input for national-level plans, and financing for research and on-the-ground projects, among others. GIZ conveniently has a staff member embedded in ONEP's offices for ongoing

technical support purposes. This has meant a close working relationship and increasing financial and technical support, such as the Thai-German Climate Programme launched in 2018, for example.
While GIZ and UNDP continue to maintain strong ties to Thailand's CCA policymakers, other organisations circulate about the periphery that, in theory, should be able to also influence potential MAA policy. As shown by various scholars, the IOM is one of the most influential forces in climate migration policymaking, especially when it comes to MAA at the international level (e.g., Felli, 2013; Hall, 2015; Ober & Sakdapolrak, 2017). Their influence at the country level on MAA policymaking, however, is less established, despite their efforts in finding inroads in diverse countries, such as the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Kenya, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea, and Vietnam, where they have held a series of policymaker trainings and conducted research as part of the "Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Evidence for Policy" (MECLEP) project, for example.

In Thailand, the IOM office is well-respected and influential in a number of ways. Historically, its main areas of work have been human trafficking, recruitment and supply chain management, immigration and border management, migration health, and refugee resettlement. While climate and the environment are on its radar, it never seems to be able to gain a foothold in the country office. As one IOM country specialist told the first author in 2018, while staff recently lobbied for a climate migration project to receive funding from the IOM Development Fund, a resource that provides "seed funding" for innovative projects, they ultimately proved unsuccessful in receiving any resources.

However, this may be set to change. For the first time ever, IOM's Thailand Strategy (2022–2026; IOM, 2022) makes an explicit push in a thematic pillar on "Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience," to "support relevant line ministries and partners to enhance their analytics capacities to identify the impact of climate change and existing policies on individuals and communities in rural and urban areas" and "to identify and support migrants and vulnerable populations already facing climate impacts, including those who choose or are forced to migrate in response to climate change" (IOM, 2022, p. 8).

While this may mean that engagement with CCA may change, significant barriers remain. As one economist at the MOAC put it: "I could not imagine what policy can support this kind of mechanism [MAA]. In Thailand agriculture is like the poor sector…and we just need to increase the investment…increase the innovation" (Interview 7, MOAC). In addition, as demonstrated in Senegal, increased interest on climate-related migration in IOM regional or country strategies may not necessarily translate into policy (Lietaer & Deland-Delacure, 2021; see IOM [2020] for IOM's West and Central Africa Strategy 2020–2024). Policy is still very much constrained by limited migration imaginaries and little buy-in from the bureaucrats that would implement such projects.

4.4 Understanding Events: Fleeting Flood Politics

While framings of migration have been percolating at the national and sub-national level generally, there have been a number of disruptive events over the past decade which have shaped existing migration policy in Thailand, including the 2014 coup (which meant increasing scrutiny and restrictive laws for undocumented migrants) and the 1998 economic crisis (which led to internal migration becoming a part of policy discussions). Neither of these examples, however, has shifted the discussion on climate-related migration, and in particular, MAA. Despite this, there was one such period in time that reveals the potential of future environmental events to stimulate discourse: the 2011 Bangkok floods.

The 2011 floods were the worst seen in a century and particularly destructive. The crisis impacted more than 13 million people, with about 97,000 houses damaged and entire villages and cities underwater for months. The estimated damage is THB 1,425 billion (US$45.7 billion), making it one of the costliest disasters in human history (World Bank, 2012). Given these far-reaching impacts, there was much impetus to enact forward-looking policy, including a newly minted water management program and an allocation of THB 50 billion (US$1.6 billion) to build dams in four basins in the Northeast and THB 120 billion (US$3.9 billion) to construct flood pathways and diversion channels. A further THB 60 billion (US$1.9 billion) has been allocated to convert two million rai (800,000 acres) of farmland along the Chao Phraya into water retention areas. These plans would require moving residents elsewhere (Gordon & Spoons, 2012).

In this way, national adaptation policies continue to center human settlements in their potential policy directions. One of the major themes of the NAP, for instance, is human settlements. In addition, in the country's Climate Change Master Plan, it is often framed as a site of impact or one of risk analysis. For example, as a part of disaster risk reduction measures, the government of Thailand has indicated that "[a]ssess[ing] the potential impact on human settlements in areas at risk of repeated and long-term flooding, torrential floods, drought, and landslides, etc." is essential (ONEP, 2019, p. 77). There is also a dedicated section that acknowledges the need for "risk and vulnerability maps…to be created by assessing the capabilities and resilience of local communities… [and to] formulate natural disaster preparedness plans with the participation of all stakeholders" (ONEP, 2019, pp. 77–78). However, today, most flood mitigation projects related to human settlements take a hard approach, building up dykes and flood walls (Marks & Elinoff, 2020).

The 2011 floods also catalyzed much-need conversations within policy circles on resettlement and relocation. Policymakers we spoke to in 2015 mentioned both of these forms of human mobility in the context of the post-2011 floods. Much like the NAP and Climate Change Master Plan, both officials framed climate-related displacement as a future event, rather than one that needed to be addressed today. One high-level ONEP policy officer saw migration in response to floods as maladaptation; while a sub-national official based at the Provincial Administration Office in Udon Thani saw this event in a much more expansive light, in which the policy solution dealt with ensuring green growth and sustainable urbanisation in order to mitigate risks.

While the 2011 floods opened up the scope of policy possibilities and unleased massive amounts of funding for projects, migration has remained either a separate issue to be analyzed as part of risk management or a "future" outcome. Further, MAA is also not seen as a viable adaptation strategy, but rather as a by-product of unmanageable "natural" disasters (as Deputy Prime Minister Suraswadi told Marks and Elinoff [2020, p. 279]: "There was too much water. We could not handle it"), or as a simply maladaption.

5. Conclusion

While MAA has seen growing popularity in policy-making circles at the international level (Felli, 2013; Hall, 2015; Warner, 2012), particularly as it relates to labor migration schemes and "managing" migration (Ober & Sakdapolrak, 2017; Nash, 2015), it has seen limited success at the national-level (Geun Ji, 2019; Lietaer & Deland-Delacure, 2021; Qaisrani & Salik, 2018). This is surprising, as there has been a push to incorporate MAA into national-level plans, especially NAPs (Martin, 2010; Warner et al., 2014; Yamamoto & Esteban, 2017). This lack of translation can be for a variety of reasons, which are ultimately tied to place-specific agendas and subjectivities (Weisser et al., 2012). To date, MAA has not been systematically analyzed as a traveling idea (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996) across scales and in a variety of different societal or country contexts (Ransan-Cooper et al., 2015), especially outside of popular analytical case studies such as Bangladesh (Geun Ji, 2019; Mortreux et al., 2018) or Senegal (Lietaer & Deland-Delacure, 2021). This paper thus turned to Thailand, a country that is both vulnerable to climate change and has a large population of internal and international migrants, to "follow the policy" of MAA across governance scales to see exactly how and why it has not traveled successfully.

This paper used policy theory (Cairney, 2016); which looks at a wide swath of analytical angles, including ideas, context, actors, networks, and events; in order to uncover the different layers of the traveling idea of MAA in Thailand. It finds that existing national migration ideologies, in which migrants are seen as poor and uneducated/low-skilled, have meant discouraging migration in the first place or encouraging a return to their places of origin. Further, an idealization of Thai rural life and an emphasis on "self-sufficiency" have filtered into policy discussions within development and CCA, making it especially difficult for MAA to gain a foothold. Indeed, bureaucrats that work on agriculture or CCA issues see migration as negative or a last resort rather than a viable adaptation strategy. This paper also finds that while there are certain actors within the policy landscape that may have an interest in getting MAA into policy discussions, such as the IOM, they have little leverage within CCA policymaking outcomes, unlike other more powerful and influential actors such as UNDP or GIZ. Further, while focusing events such as the 2011 Bangkok floods may stimulate debate over climate-induced migra-

tion, their impact is short-term, future-oriented, and with limited consideration whatsoever to MAA possibilities. Given all of these obstacles, it comes as no surprise that MAA has not traveled from the international to the national level in Thailand. In fact, in this case, sub-national and national level policies actively have been shaping and fortifying barriers to any potential travel.

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