

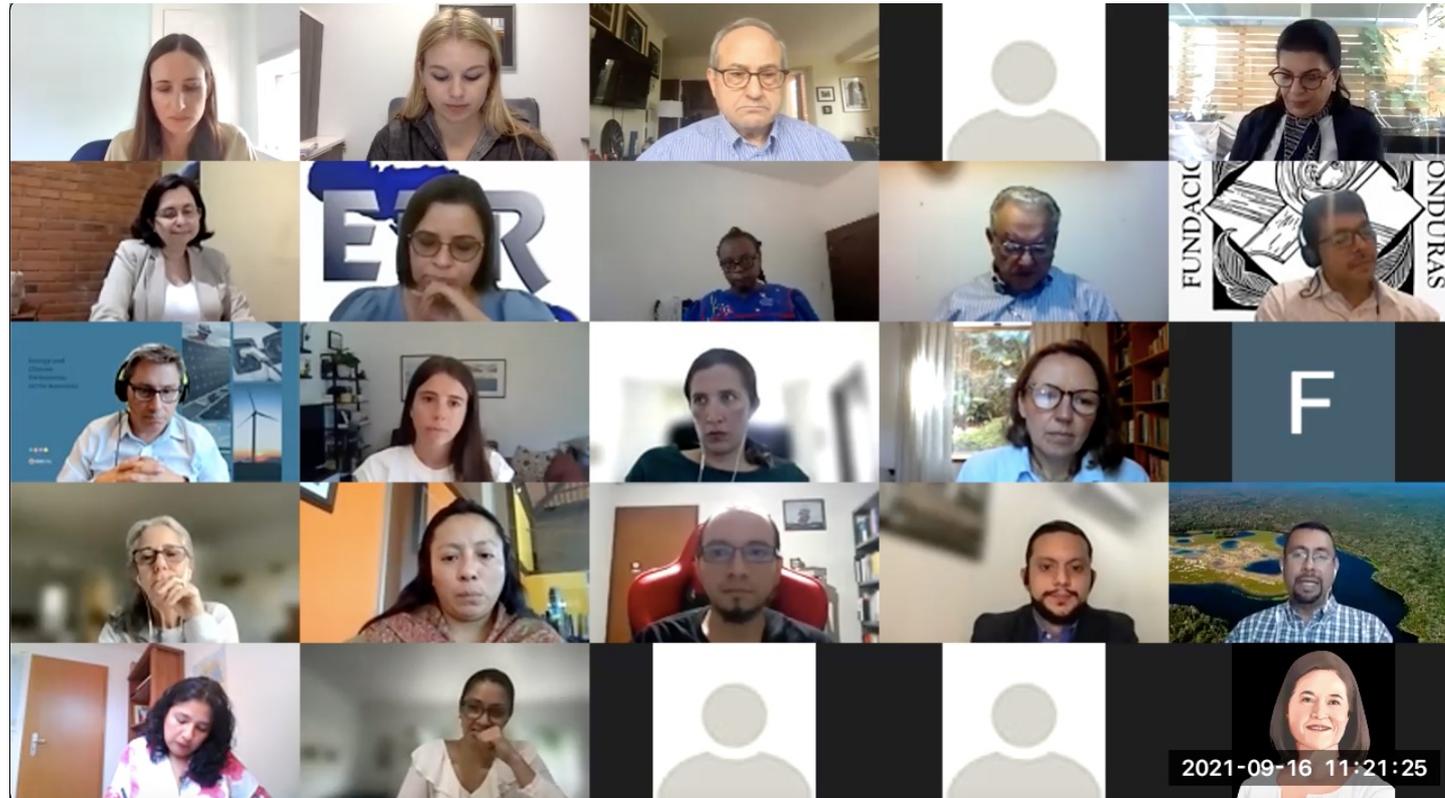
May 2022

# **Climate Change Adaptation in the Northern Triangle & the Role of US Assistance**

**Lisa Viscidi & MK Vereen**



# Task Force on Climate Change in the Northern Triangle



# Inputs from the task force informed a series of three reports.



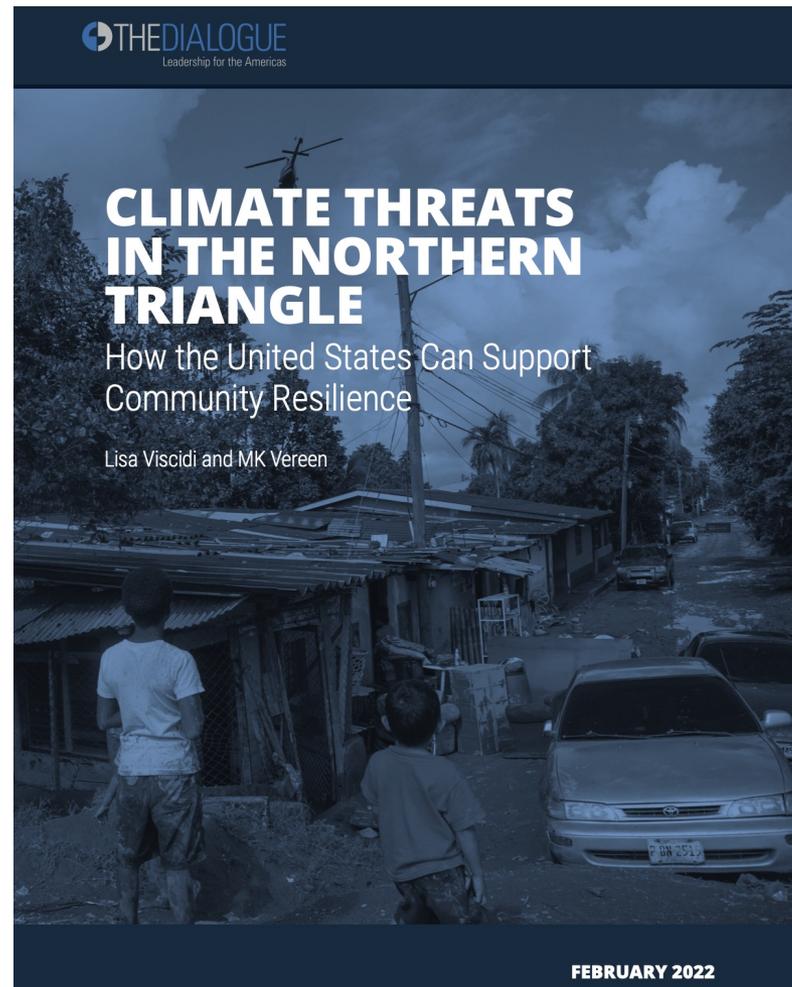
The countries of Central America's Northern Triangle—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—are highly vulnerable to the severe and worsening impacts of climate change. This trend is causing a growing humanitarian crisis in a region already wracked by poverty, inequality, and violence—and one which bears little responsibility for climate change, contributing less than 1 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>1</sup> Climate change in the Northern Triangle also has implications for the United States, as it threatens the only source of livelihood and economic development for millions of people, contributing to instability in the region and exacerbating the forces driving migration from the Northern Triangle to the United States. From 2014 to 2020, an average of 311,000 people migrated from the Northern Triangle to the United States annually, with many fleeing extreme weather events.<sup>2</sup> Projections estimate that in the next 30 years, 3.9 million climate refugees will flee Central America due to the climate crisis.<sup>3</sup>

**Projections estimate that in the next 30 years, 3.9 million climate refugees will flee Central America due to the climate crisis.**

As part of US President Joe Biden's strategy to aid Northern Triangle countries, his administration has prioritized supporting climate change adaptation and mitigation in the region, although the details and execution of this approach are still underway. In its *Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America*, the administration outlined its pillars, objectives, and goals aimed at ameliorating living conditions in migrants' countries of origin to tackle the root causes of migration. This includes an objective to "Build Resilience to Address Climate Change and Food Insecurity," which aims to increase the resilience of agricultural production, resource management, and infrastructure, as well as to enhance renewable energy.<sup>4</sup> To that end, in May 2021, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) launched a new Northern Triangle Task Force focused on increasing the security, prosperity, and governance of the region via partnerships with the private sector and civil society. In addition, President Biden has promised to send \$4 billion in aid to Central America.

## Impacts of climate change on the Northern Triangle

Northern Triangle countries are already experiencing the devastating impacts of climate change, which leads to diminishing standards of living, food insecurity,



# Presentation Outline

- Impacts of climate change on the Northern Triangle countries
- Challenges for governments and civil society in adapting to climate change
- Recommendations for locally led, effective, and sustainable adaptation efforts across various economic sectors

# Resilience to climate change varies by demographic and geographic factors.

- Rural subsistence farmers, women, ethnic communities, and youth are disproportionately affected.
- Geographically, the Dry Corridor and dense urban areas are more vulnerable to climate change.

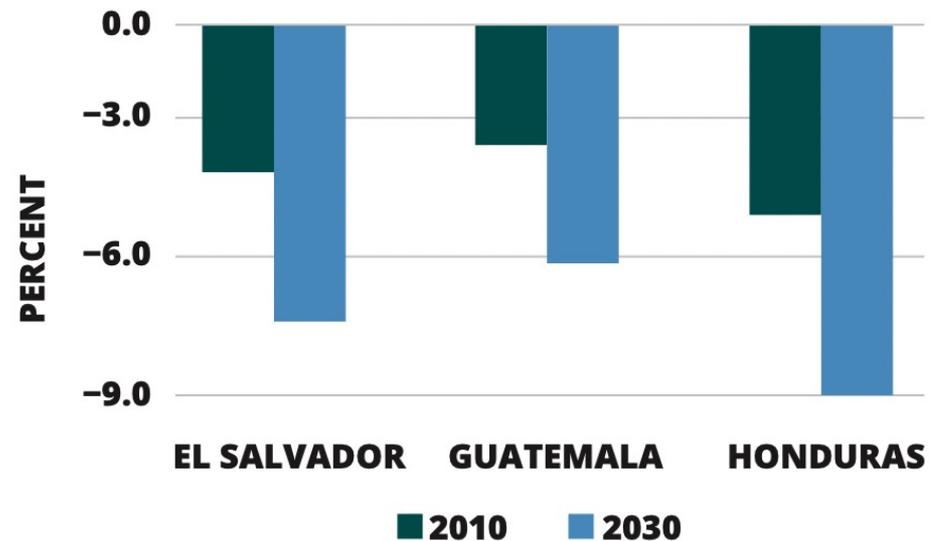


# Climate change will have severe impacts on the Northern Triangle's economies.

- An increase in the seasonal variability and frequency of extreme weather events has led to widespread damage to infrastructure and buildings and diminished agricultural output.
- By 2030, climate change could reduce GDP by 6-9%.

**FIGURE 1: PROJECTED GDP DECLINE DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS**

Source: United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

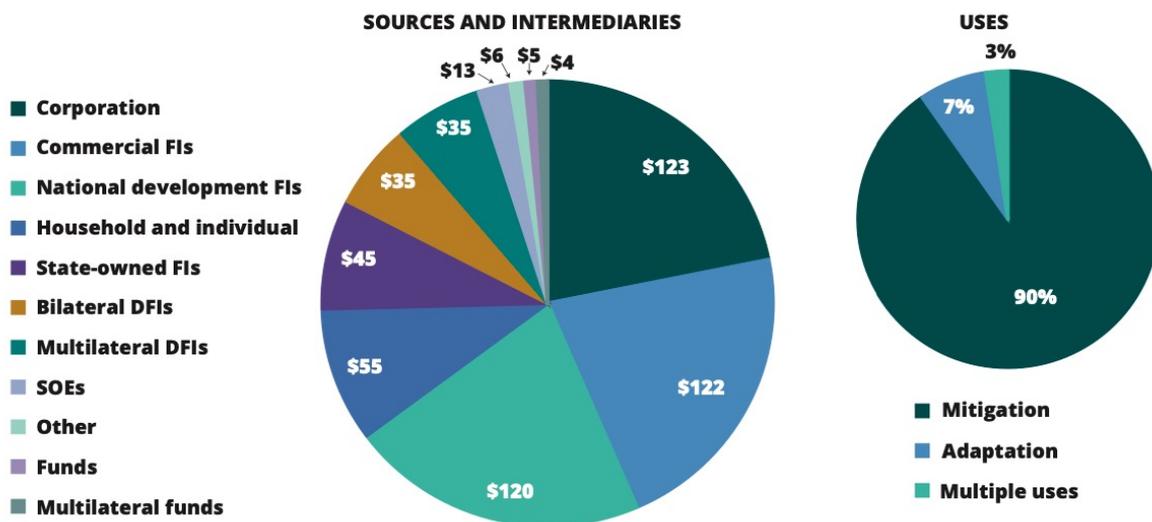


# Lack of adaptation financing and capacity prevents governments from implementing National Adaptation Plans.

- While climate finance comes from diverse sources, the vast majority contributes to mitigation globally.
- Lack of financing and poor institutional capacity hamper the implementation of National Adaptation Plans in the Northern Triangle.

FIGURE 4: GLOBAL CLIMATE FINANCE SOURCES AND USES, BILLIONS OF DOLLARS, 2019-2020

Source: Climate Policy Initiative



# Civil society also struggles to adapt to climate change due to a lack of financing and capacity.

- Civil society members consistently cited lack of capacity, especially with respect to project management, as a primary issue preventing them from executing adaptation measures.
- Other difficulties include accessing funding and the grant-writing process.
- Duplication of efforts and competition with international NGOs sometimes weaken local efforts.

# **Working with local civil society, subnational governments, and the private sector can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of adaptation programming.**

## **Recommendations:**

- Make civil society lead actors in adaptation through investing in access/outreach, local buy-in, and capacity building
- Set up incubators for youth organizations
- Strengthen Indigenous land tenure
- Support subnational government adaptation planning
- Increase supply of, and demand for, professionals in adaptation-related fields
- Foster local businesses and private sector partnerships for financial sustainability
- Mainstream adaptation into all levels of education and improve access to climate information

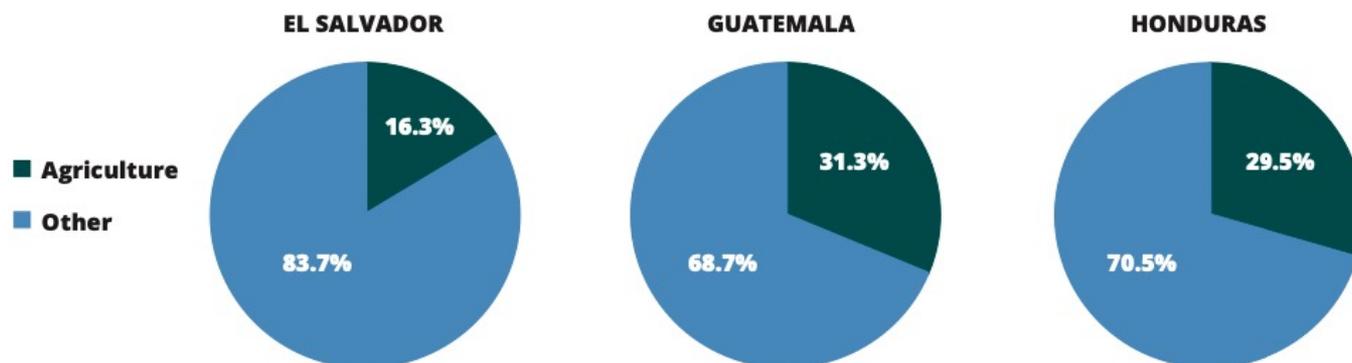
# Agriculture/forestry initiatives need support.

Agriculture is a critical source of employment and GDP, but over 90% of agricultural producers are familial farmers who lack access to modern technology and climate-resilient crops.

- Support agroforestry practices, which integrate trees and shrubs into crop and animal farming systems and can improve crop resilience/protection against extreme weather.
- Help small-scale agricultural and forest workers with training on supply chain management and market access for sustainable, climate-resilient products.
- Strengthen agricultural associations, Indigenous organizations, and community-based forest management

**FIGURE 2: EMPLOYMENT IN AGRICULTURAL SECTOR, PERCENT OF TOTAL, 2019**

Source: The World Bank



# Enhancing land & water management capacity will reduce vulnerability to climate-related disasters.

Lack of management of land and water resources is one of the main challenges to climate adaptation.

- Provide capacity building to governments and organizations to improve land governance, land planning, and management of protected areas.
- Implement nature-based solutions in urban areas.



European Union / Flickr / CC BY-ND 2.0

# **Risk assessments and climate-resilient regulations are needed to adapt infrastructure.**

Rapid urbanization has led to informal settlements in areas that have high risk of landslides and flooding, and buildings are not constructed using climate-resilient materials and construction methods.

- Design and enforce climate-resilient building regulations.
- Aid the region with risk assessments for old infrastructure to determine the greatest needs for renovation, as well as risk assessments for any proposed infrastructure in the future so that they are built with climate impacts in mind.

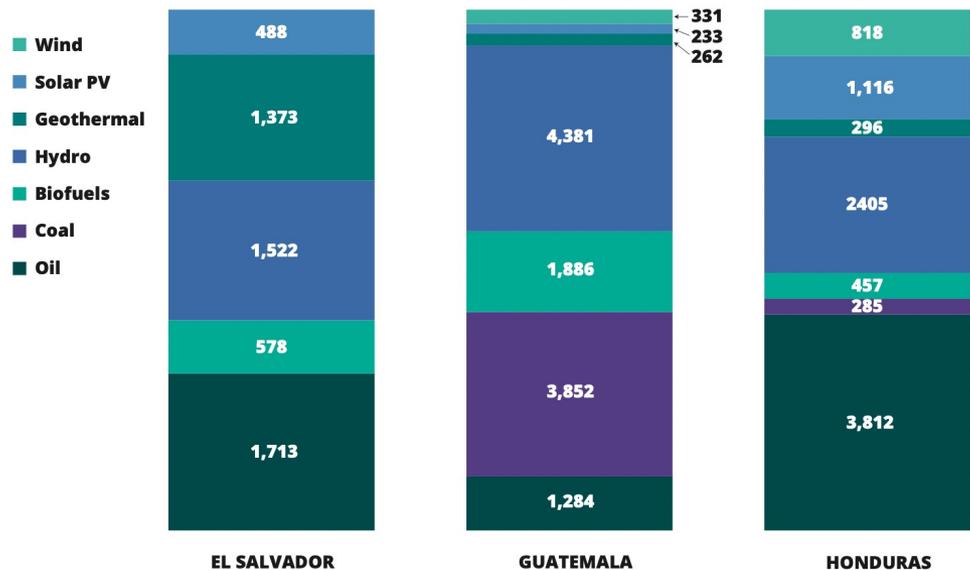
# The region needs to improve energy diversification.

Rapid growth in power demand, heavy dependence on hydroelectric power, and insufficient diversification of generation sources weaken the region's ability to adapt to climate change.

- Develop non-hydro renewable energy generation, energy storage systems, and off-grid distributed renewable energy systems.
- Increase demand-side management and energy efficiency measures to encourage conservation.
- Finance renewable energy and energy efficiency projects generate employment in construction, service and maintenance and could provide jobs to reduce poverty and inequality for urban populations.

**FIGURE 3: ELECTRICITY GENERATION BY SOURCE, GWH, 2019**

Source: Central American Integration System (SICA)



# **With technical support, financial institutions and the private sector can be leveraged to fund adaptation projects and provide disaster risk insurance.**

Private banks do not lend for climate adaptation, and many informal businesses, rural workers, and small farmers lack access to disaster risk insurance.

- Train local specialists to advise borrowers on how to design bankable projects and access finance for climate adaptation.
- Work with the banking sector to “green” and “democratize” access to capital.
- Provide technical assistance to governments and civil society organizations to apply for and execute international finance.
- Stimulate private sector investments in adaptation.



# Thank you

[www.thedialogue.org](http://www.thedialogue.org) | 202-822-9002

MK Vereen | [mvereen@thedialogue.org](mailto:mvereen@thedialogue.org) | 202-463-2561