



# CLIMATE & MOBILITY IN **SURINAME**

A Case Study for the Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Initiative



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# Suriname Snapshot

## Study Locations

**Paramaribo-** The capital and largest city, located on the Suriname River 15 kilometres inland from the Atlantic Ocean. As a coastal city, it faces increasing challenges posed by flooding, which has progressively damaged critical infrastructure. The erosion of coastal protection, largely attributed to human activity, further exacerbates Paramaribo's vulnerability as an area with a high risk of rising sea levels.

**Para & Brokopondo-** The rural inland districts stand out as some of the most climate vulnerable districts in Suriname, facing heightened risks in the agricultural sector as well as resulting from destruction of infrastructure. The region grapples with increased temperatures, flooding, limited access to drinking water, and deforestation due to mining.



Map 1. Map of Suriname showing areas where research was conducted. Image Credit: Samuel Hall 2024.

# Key Findings

1

The ethnic diversity in Suriname underscores the country's history of migration. Amidst this backdrop, a substantial proportion of respondents have a more recent history of migration (both internal and international), with 1 in 4 respondents having moved in the past 5 years.

2

When it comes to future migration plans and aspirations, most respondents (59%) had no desire or plans to move, with the highest proportion of those not wanting to migrate being in the interior region.

3

A majority (66%) of respondents reported experiencing the effects of climate change in their daily lives. About 1 in 4 respondents (24%) said their households have been frequently affected by natural disasters, while nearly half (49%) reported being occasionally affected.

4

Climate change influences the migration decisions of 1 in 3 respondents (33%), with 11% stating that it is the primary factor in their migration decision-making.



When thinking about mobility, which of the following applies to you as an individual?

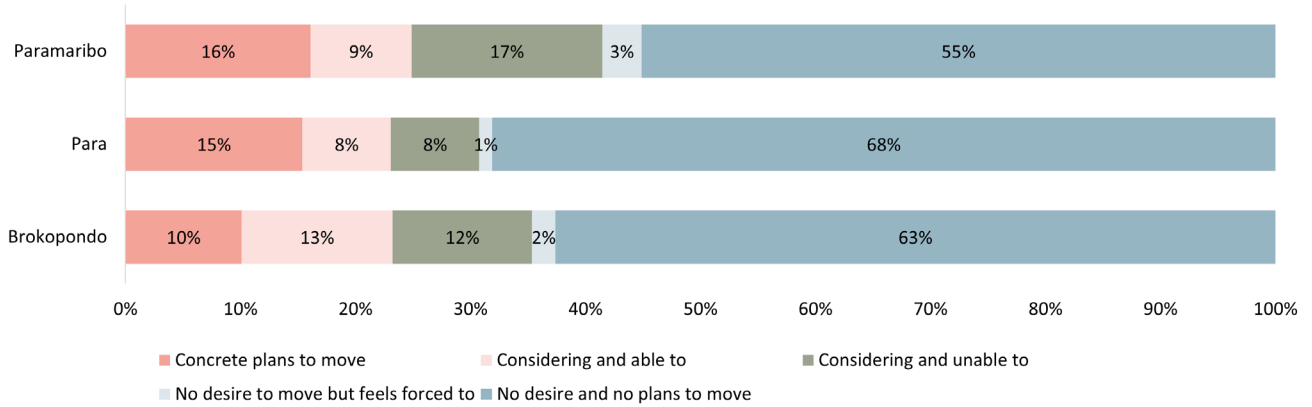


Figure 1. Mobility Intentions and future plans



Image 1: Local guides with research team within Suriname. Photo Credit: Nicole Stoumen, Samuel Hall 2024

# Introduction

## Project Background

Samuel Hall, a research organisation specialised in migration and displacement, undertook research to address the critical issue of climate-induced human mobility in the Greater Caribbean region, assessing in particular how climate-related factors influence people's decisions to migrate or to stay and their resulting lived experiences.

This project is part of the Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Initiative (GCCMI), a partnership of the Global Centre for Climate Mobility (GCCM), the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the World Bank, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). It aims to inform strategies for enabling people-positive adaptation journeys by strengthening adaptive capacities, supporting mobility and addressing climate-forced displacement in the region. The conceptual framework, based on Carling's ability/aspiration model developed for the African Climate Mobility Initiative (ACMI) was adapted for the GCCMI to focus on factors that shape people's vulnerability to climate change and their decision-making.

By collecting data in frontline communities affected by climate-related events, the findings from this field research complement the results of the Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Model, which projects climate-induced movements up until 2050. Samuel Hall engaged with the modelling efforts during the simultaneous research phases, and both teams shared their results to ensure synergy and alignment. The research findings were presented during the GCCMI stakeholder consultations in May 2024 and will inform the GCCMI's Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Report.

## Methodology

Location	<p>Six Association of Caribbean States (ACS) member countries in the Greater Caribbean region, chosen for their diverse climate events and mobility patterns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costa Rica</li> <li>• Suriname</li> <li>• Colombia</li> <li>• Jamaica</li> <li>• The Bahamas</li> <li>• Antigua &amp; Barbuda</li> </ul> <p>Three districts in Suriname, selected to represent a diverse mix of urban and rural settings, both origin and destination areas for displaced populations, and regions experiencing a range of climate-related impacts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paramaribo</li> <li>• Brokopondo</li> <li>• Para</li> </ul>
Selection Criteria	Mainland country, key economic sectors affected by climate change (mining, agriculture, services), extreme weather events (floods) and slow onset events (sea level rise, droughts).
Key Phases	Desk review and research design, data collection and analysis, consultations and reporting (September 2023- September 2024).
Research Tools	In Suriname, <b>399 household surveys, four focus group discussions, and four in-depth key informant interviews</b> were conducted to examine the relationship between migration and climate, focusing on mobility features, climate change adaptations, and the impact on decision-making.

Further information on site selection, methodology, and regional findings can be found in the synthesis report.

## Note on data collection and localisation

In February 2024, a local Surinamese research team led by Samuel Hall staff conducted fieldwork in the districts of Paramaribo, Para and Brokopondo. A total of 399 household surveys were conducted with community members and four focus group discussions were held with 24 participants from the sample area, including Maroon communities<sup>1</sup>, Indigenous peoples, chiefs, women, youth etc. In depth interviews were conducted with four key informants representing relevant organisations, such as the Mulokot Foundation, Climate Tracker, the University of Suriname and IOM.

<sup>1</sup> Maroon communities refer to descendants of enslaved Africans who escaped to the interior and formed their own settlements, extending to the present day.



The research in Suriname was carried out as part of a regional study undertaken in six countries: Costa Rica, Colombia, Suriname, The Bahamas, Jamaica, and Antigua & Barbuda. The study aimed to understand the full range of mobility outcomes for populations in the Greater Caribbean region affected by climate change, examining the degree to which these outcomes are climate-related, how climate mobility interacts with other mobility dynamics, and the perceptions of those who have moved due to climate impacts. Throughout the data collection, Samuel Hall's team implemented a localisation approach, encouraging local researchers to lead the process and for communities to define the study's concepts themselves. A localised approach ensures that the research process is tailored to the specific context of the affected communities involved in the study.

## Note on contextualisation

This study offers an in depth exploration of three selected communities in Suriname. Given the limitations on timeframe and scope, the findings do not represent the perceptions of the entire communities, country, or the region as a whole. Rather, they provide a snapshot into the experiences and decision-making of individuals and households impacted by climate-related factors. Therefore, all findings should be contextualised to each specific location's dynamics and features. Additional fieldwork within different areas of each country would offer a more comprehensive view, and additional country case studies would provide a deeper comparison within the region.



Image 2. Local Surinamese research team before fieldwork. Photo credit: Tiarra Simon, 2024

## Key terminology and concepts

Climate Change	<p>"Long-term changes in the Earth's climate that are warming the atmosphere, ocean and land. Climate change is affecting the balance of ecosystems that support life and biodiversity, and impacting health. It also causes more extreme weather events, such as more intense and/or frequent hurricanes, floods, heat waves, and droughts, and leads to sea level rise and coastal erosion as a result of ocean warming, melting of glaciers, and loss of ice sheets."<sup>2</sup></p>
Climate Adaptation	<p>"Actions that help reduce vulnerability to the current or expected impacts of climate change like weather extremes and natural disasters, sea-level rise, biodiversity loss, or food and water insecurity."<sup>3</sup></p>
Climate Resilience	<p>"Resilience is the capacity of a community or environment to anticipate and manage dangerous climatic events and recover and transform after the ensuing shock, with minimal damage to societal wellbeing, economic activity, and the environment."<sup>4</sup></p>
Vulnerability	<p>"The conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to be affected by the impact of hazards."<sup>5</sup></p>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). "Climate Dictionary: An Everyday Guide to Climate Change." <https://www.undp.org/iran/news/climate-dictionary-everyday-guide-climate-change>

<sup>3</sup> UNDP. "Climate Dictionary: An Everyday Guide to Climate Change."

<sup>4</sup> UNDP. "Climate Dictionary: An Everyday Guide to Climate Change."

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). "Vulnerability." <https://www.undrr.org/terminology/vulnerability>



# Context & Profiles

Climate change presents significant risks to Suriname, the smallest sovereign country in South America and one of the most ethnically diverse in the region.

Suriname's rich cultural tapestry, shaped by a history of migration waves, comprises Hindustani, Creole, Maroon, Javanese, Chinese, and various Indigenous communities.

The country's colonial past under Dutch rule brought waves of contracted labourers from Java, India and China following the abolition of slavery in 1863, deeply influencing its contemporary migration patterns.

House affected by flooding in Paramaribo, Suriname. Photo credit: Tiarra Simon, 2024. Post-independence, many Surinamese nationals migrated to the Netherlands in pursuit of education and employment, while Suriname's welcoming stance towards migrants has attracted third-country nationals from the region and beyond. The following subsections provide an overview of climate change impacts and related mobility dynamics in Suriname, followed by the profiles of study respondents.





Image 3. House affected by flooding in Paramaribo, Suriname. Photo credit: Tiarra Simon, 2024.

## Locations profile: climate risks and mobility dynamics

Suriname faces diverse climate risks such as sea level rise, heavy rainfall, and droughts, particularly impacting vulnerable coastal and inland regions. These environmental challenges are closely linked to mobility patterns, shaping how communities respond and adapt. Despite its richness in natural resources, Suriname contends with significant challenges such as illicit mining and deforestation, especially in the interior rural areas where Indigenous populations are actively engaging in conservation efforts. Climate risks, especially sea level rise (SLR), pose a grave threat to Suriname's small population of approximately 618,040 inhabitants<sup>6</sup>, with 75% at risk from a five-metre rise<sup>7</sup>.

Although climate mobility is rarely mentioned in policy documents or official climate statements, Suriname's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions recognize that "climate departure" might become necessary by 2028 due to irreversible damage expected from SLR.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The World Bank. "Population Estimates and Projections". <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/population-estimates-and-projections>.

<sup>7</sup> Centre for International Earth Science Information Network (2023), GCCMI Desk Review.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas, A., & Benjamin, L. (2018), Policies and mechanisms to address climate-induced migration and displacement in Pacific and Caribbean small island developing states. *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management*, 10(1), 86–104.

In comparison to the rest of the Greater Caribbean region, **little information is readily available regarding general climate trends and impacts in Suriname, though specific climate events and related mobility dynamics are increasingly being documented**, highlighting the timeliness of this research and its focus on certain understudied geographic areas.

Suriname's 2019 National Adaptation Plan (NAP) insists on the particular exposure of urban areas to flooding, resulting from "the combination of abundant rainfall, poor drainage, and rising sea and river levels."<sup>9</sup> The challenges in urban areas have far-reaching implications as most of the population and economic activity are concentrated in the capital city of Paramaribo.

**Climate risks such as storm surges, saltwater intrusion, and landslides, affect various regions of the country.** Key sectors under threat include forestry, energy, livestock and fisheries, energy and water resources, all of which are key to the development strategies currently in place.<sup>10</sup> A lack of preparedness is also evident within Surinamese government agencies, which suffer from limited awareness surrounding climate impacts notably stemming from "poor observation and monitoring networks,"<sup>11</sup> according to the NAP. These shortcomings highlight critical gaps in the government's climate change response.

**The NAP further outlines the severe impact of climate disasters in coastal districts, especially in the Saramacca region.**<sup>12</sup> Here, saltwater intrusion has ruined crops, threatened farmers' livelihoods, and disrupted local food systems, causing food security risks both within and beyond the region. Furthermore, since the Paramaribo region heavily relies on agricultural production from Saramacca, negative impacts extend beyond production areas.

**The interior regions face similar challenges, with extreme weather events occasionally leading to natural disasters.** Farming communities living further inland are also said to present heightened vulnerability to climate change, notably in the form of drought.<sup>13</sup> The district of Nickerie, situated further inland, for example, suffered from drought and decreased rainfall which, combined with saltwater intrusion in rice fields, also produced food insecurity.<sup>14</sup>

**Suriname's climate change impacts are exacerbated by environmentally harmful economic activities, exploiting the country's wealth of natural resources.** Human activity in both areas has increased vulnerability to climate change. Coastal erosion in Paramaribo, worsened by human activity, increases risks from SLR and flooding. In Brokopondo and Para, gold mining has led to significant deforestation and decreased water quality, with mercury poisoning threatening rivers in water-insecure Indigenous communities.<sup>15</sup>

9 Government of Suriname (2019), Suriname National Adaptation Plan

10 Government of Suriname (2019), Suriname National Adaptation Plan.

11 Government of Suriname (2019), Suriname National Adaptation Plan.

12 While Saramacca is mainly coastal, it has some extension into the interior and is therefore known for its agricultural activities.

13 Government of Suriname (2019), Suriname National Adaptation Plan.

14 Government of Suriname (2019), Suriname National Adaptation Plan.

15 FGD6

The IDMC indicates that, between 2008 and 2022, approximately 14,000 internal displacements occurred as a result of floods in Suriname. These numbers are attributed to only four disaster events, suggesting a high event to displacement ratio in the country.<sup>16</sup>

Mobility and migration are deeply rooted in Suriname's history and contemporary society, influenced by factors ranging from cultural practices among Maroon and Indigenous communities to economic opportunities in urban centres like Paramaribo. For Maroon communities, seasonal migration to sell crops is fundamental to their economy, with the harvesting of cassava being an agricultural practice deeply tied to their culture and ancestral lands. Other Indigenous communities often move along the Brazilian border, whereby mobility patterns Indigenous hunting traditions.

Additionally, cross-border movement from Suriname to French Guiana is common among Indigenous communities seeking better government and support services. Historical migration patterns also reflect the country's colonial past, with Indigenous communities fleeing from Brazil to Suriname to escape violent colonial forces.

These risks and impacts identified in secondary literature are corroborated by study participants, highlighting the urgent need for preventative, adaptive, and protective strategies to respond to climate mobility challenges.



Image 4. Transport for crop harvest, Suriname River, Brokopondo, Suriname. Photo credit: Nicole Stoumen, Samuel Hall 2024.

16 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, "Suriname," IDMC, 2024, <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/suriname/>



## Respondent profile: socioeconomic and migration characteristics

Respondents & Average Age	399 Survey Respondents, 45 Years
Gender	62% Women, 38% Men
Location	52% Paramaribo, 25% Brokopondo, 23% Para
Household Composition	Average 4.6 members, 31% Married or in Civil Union
Decision Making	63% Breadwinners, 64% Overall make decisions for their households
Education Level	Majority completed secondary education, 15% completed trade or technical school, 7% tertiary education Among those who have <b>not attained secondary</b> education, 86% could read.
Housing	63% Concrete housing, 30% wooden housing
Employment	39% Permanent jobs, 37% Not working, <15% short-term employment, *In Paramaribo 57% unemployment.
Occupation	39% formal wage employment; 7% of respondents' households in Brokopondo, 3% in Para and 2% in Paramaribo relied on fishing, agriculture or herding.
Remittances and Government Support	11% receive money from abroad, 12% receive support from the government





Image 5. Retired teacher, Nieuw Lombé, Brokopondo, Suriname. Photo credit: Nicole Stoumen, Samuel Hall 2024.



## Migration profile

About one-third of respondents have lived in the same location since childhood, with slightly higher proportions of lifelong residents in Para (40%) and Brokopondo (42%) compared to Paramaribo (31%). These numbers reflect dominant patterns highlighted in qualitative interviews describing Paramaribo as an economic destination, attracting more recent migrants. Additionally, 26% of respondents migrated to their current residences over 20 years ago, while 25% moved within the past five years, indicating a significant influx of recent migrants (Figure 2). This migration pattern suggests that economic opportunities in Paramaribo and other regions are a key factor influencing mobility, contributing to the dynamic population shifts observed in these areas.

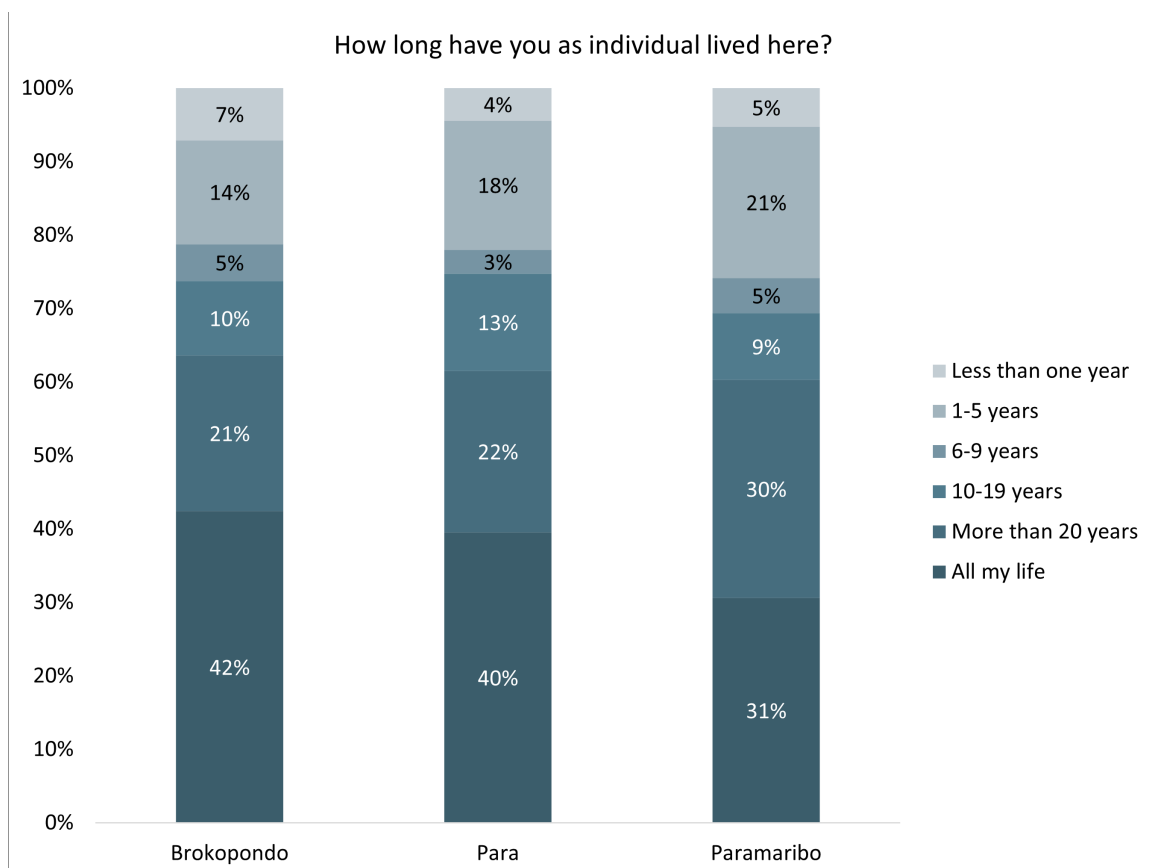


Figure 2. Duration respondents lived in sampled locations

**Family and economic reasons drive migration.** About one-third of migrant respondents surveyed moved primarily for family reasons (37%), followed by 27% of interviewees relocated for work-related or economic reasons. Around 1 in 5 reported 'other' drivers, such as seeking better housing or living circumstances, feeling attached to the place, or addressing health-related reasons (Figure 3). Migration from the interior to other parts of the country is often driven by limited access to education and employment, particularly among young men who move to Paramaribo for better prospects.<sup>17</sup> These mobility trends – whether within Suriname from the interior to the coast or vice versa; or internationally –, tend to be temporary or cyclical, depending on individuals' abilities to integrate and find employment.

17 FGD 6,7



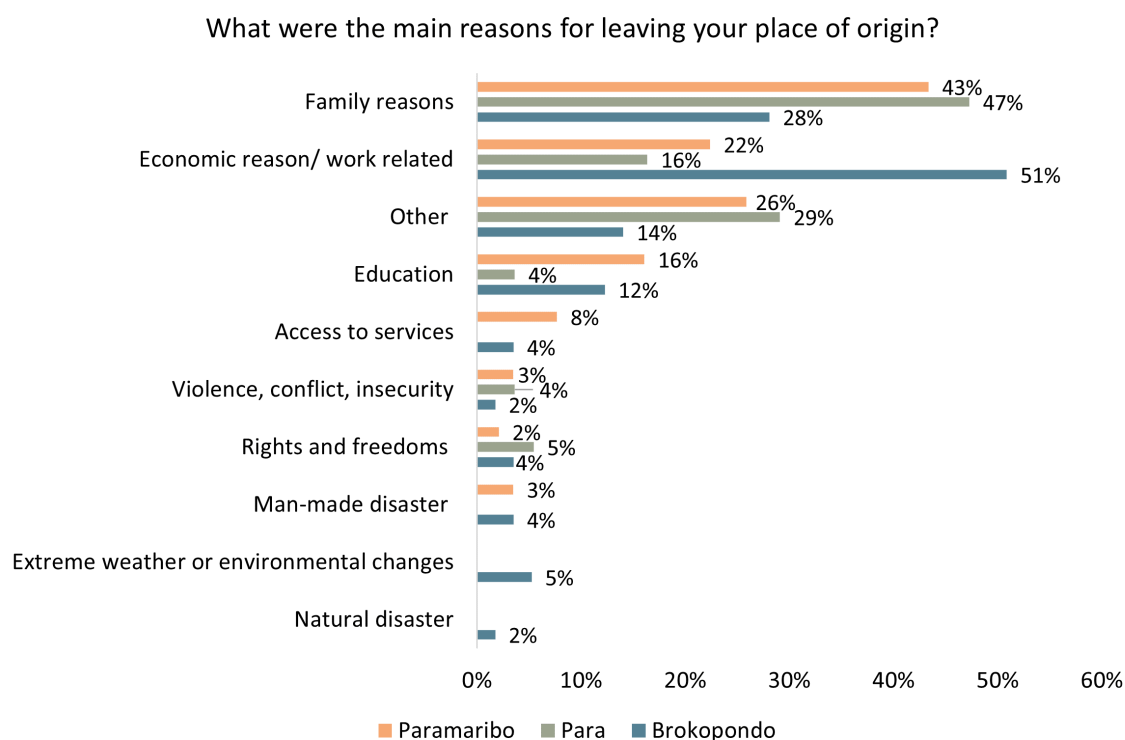


Figure 3. Reasons for leaving community of origin

### Migration supports households through remittances and economic opportunity.

Migration patterns show that 32% of migrants moved alone, while 52% relocated with their entire household. Notably, 24% of households in Brokopondo, 20% in Paramaribo, and 15% in Para had at least one member working in another location to support the family, with 52% of these members sending remittances. Migration origins vary, with most Paramaribo respondents being from urban areas (55%), a balanced rural-urban split in Para, and predominantly rural and peri-urban origins in Brokopondo (61%). These patterns highlight the role of migration as a strategy for economic survival, as households either move for an opportunity or rely on external remittances to sustain their families.

## Household profile

A key objective of this study is to comprehend the capacity of individuals and households to respond to climate change impacts, including the ability to move if needed or desired. This capacity, influenced by socio-economic, financial, mental, and physical health security, is crucial for climate change adaptive capacity and resilience. While the vast majority of respondents want to stay (59%), 13% of respondents – and 17% in Paramaribo – are considering moving but lack the necessary resources or capacities to do so.

Most respondents (55%) felt secure in their current jobs, with 30% not feeling secure. This sentiment was consistent across locations, gender, and migration backgrounds.

Additionally, 23% of respondents reported engaging in seasonal work, with similar distributions across demographics. The majority of households (78%) relied on wages from work. Pensions were another significant income source, especially in Para and

Paramaribo, while in Brokopondo, 18% of respondents relied on family or own-account businesses. Women were more likely to be unemployed but looking for work (16%) compared to men (3%), with no significant differences between migrants and non-migrants (including both internal and international migration).

Financially, 59% of respondents reported that it is difficult to get by or make ends meet, while 34% described their situation as neutral, and only 8% felt their households were comfortable (Figure 4). Paramaribo respondents were slightly better off than those in other locations. Despite financial struggles, 62% of respondents reported stable and predictable income. Para respondents had the highest financial stability (69%), which may be related to involvement in specific economic sectors including the mining industry. Despite higher percentages of stability in certain locations, overall 38% in Suriname experienced little or no income predictability. Throughout studied locations in Suriname, women were slightly more likely to report stable income than men. Migrants, in general, were slightly more likely to report stable income than non-migrants, likely related to migrants finding stable income upon moving for economic opportunities.

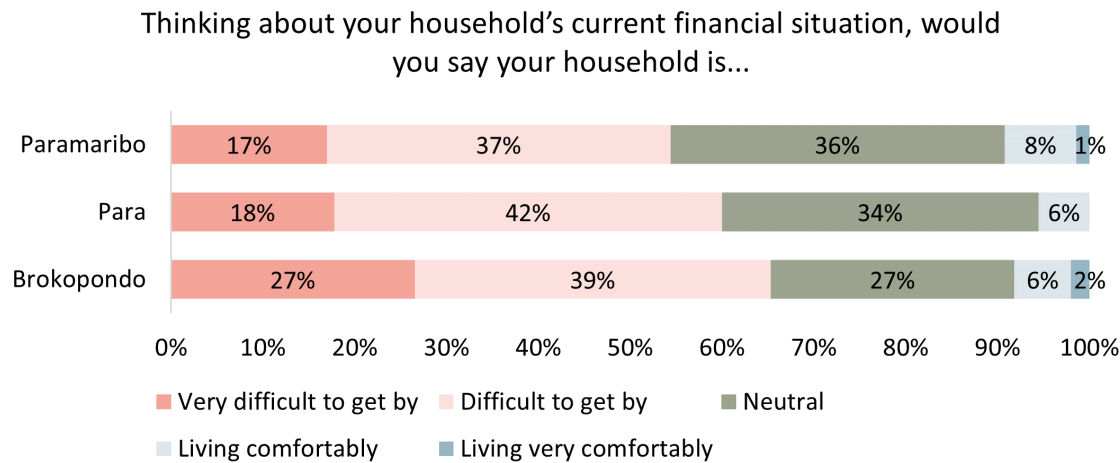


Figure 4. Financial situation of households and income predictability.

**Access to essential services, like connection to water grids was high**, with most respondents having piped water: 95% in Para, 93% in Paramaribo, and 80% in Brokopondo. Brokopondo respondents were more likely to rely on public taps, rainwater harvesting, springs or rivers, and water trucks. In Paramaribo, 5% used bottled water. Healthcare was unavailable to 24% of respondents, many of whom cite shortages of medicines or long distances travelled to receive healthcare services as the hindrances. These healthcare limitations further undermine a capacity to adapt to climate-related stresses by reducing the community's resilience to health impacts and impeding effective response to emergencies.

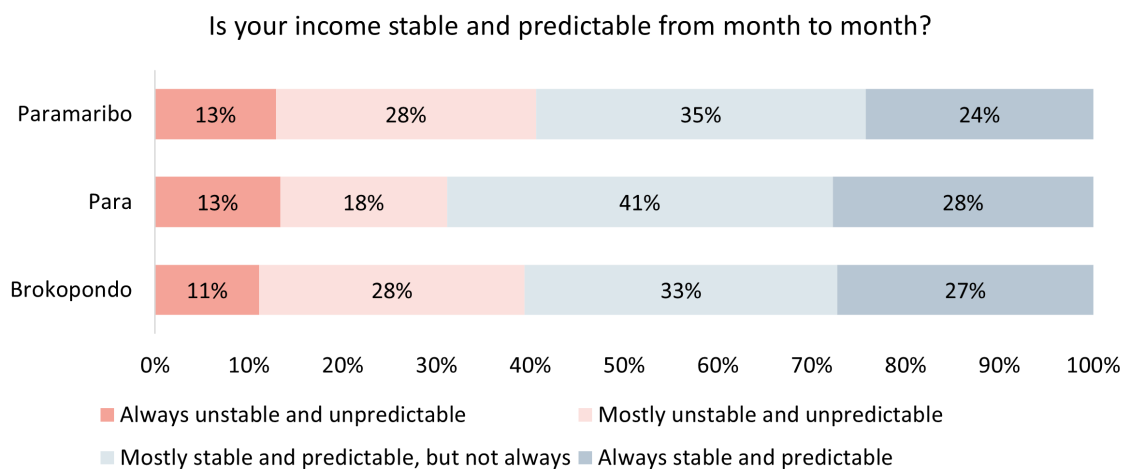


Figure 5. Household income stability and predictability

In comparison to other countries surveyed, the housing structures were less stable and resourced in Suriname, often reflecting severe flood damage and consequential decay. Every 7 in 10 respondents reported living in their own homes while 11% reported living in a rental house. Non-migrant respondents were more likely to be living in their own homes (Figure 6). Field visits observed a lack of access to food (restaurants, stores, etc.) implying that most people relied on subsistence agriculture, and had to travel to harvest, highlighting the importance of agricultural impacts from climate change.

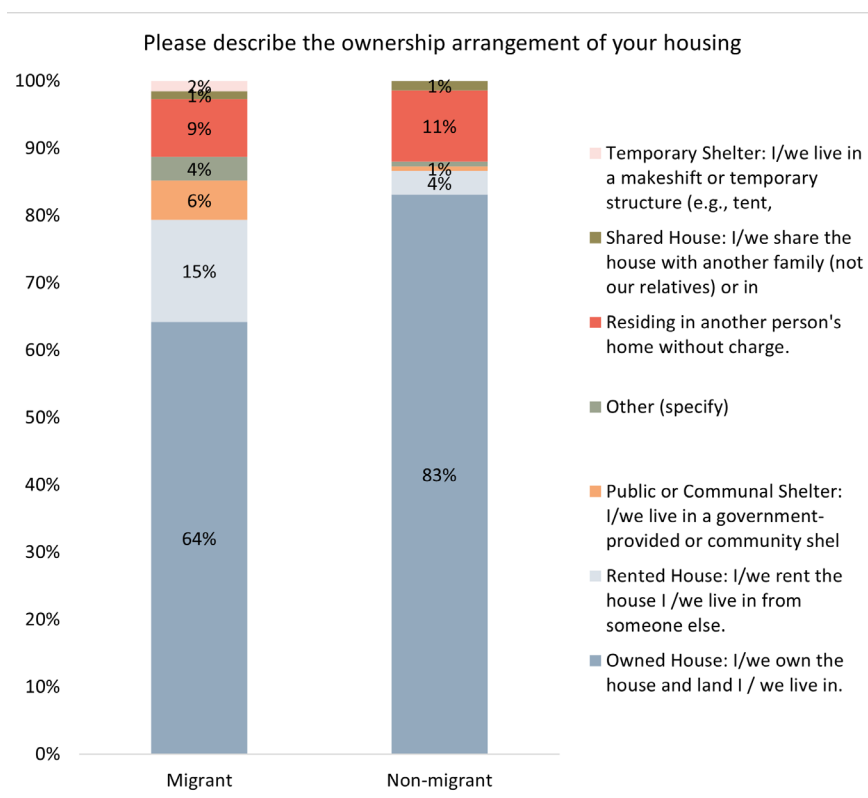


Figure 6. Housing ownership arrangements (migrant v non-migrant)



Perceived safety varied, with all men surveyed in Brokopondo and 93% of women feeling safe walking at night. Para was perceived as safe by 88% of respondents, while only 76% felt safe in Paramaribo. While perceived safety among men showed no variation by age, younger women (aged 18-29) felt significantly less safe (72%) compared to women aged 30 years or above (88%), with particularly low perceptions of safety among young women in Paramaribo (54%). This was primarily attributed to frequent reports of robberies and petty crime, with a few respondents also citing harassment as a concern in the capital city. These insights highlight the diverse adaptive capacities and challenges faced by different demographics, emphasising the need for targeted support to enhance resilience to climate change impacts.

**Most respondents have heard of climate change (83%), but felt uninformed about its regional impacts (53%), with only 31% feeling informed.** This gap between awareness and informedness reflects participants’ reported frustration with the government’s limited efforts in communicating detailed and localised climate information. Paramaribo residents showed the highest levels of awareness, while Brokopondo had slightly lower rates. This level of awareness is most likely influenced by visible coastal erosion, flooding, and sea level rise being imminent threats to residents of Paramaribo, and their witness of migration flows in and out of the capital. **Women migrants and women (were more likely to feel uninformed (56%) than men (48%).**

Limited access to technology in the rural interior areas might also play a role as well in the lack of government provided information in these areas. Despite this, many respondents did not believe that local or national authorities provide adequate support or resources for migration due to climate change (55%), and 26% were unaware of any support at all.

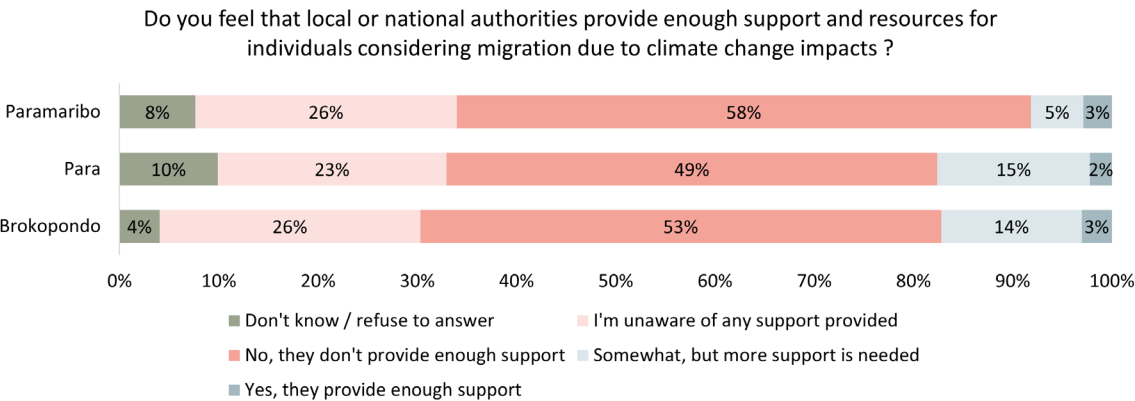


Figure 7. Assessment of government support

**Limited support leaves communities unprepared for climate adaptation.** This lack of information and support from authorities, combined with the visible lack of infrastructure and reliance on personal cultivation and agriculture, suggests that the population may not be well-equipped to adapt to climate change impacts. While respondents reported a sense of socio-economic security, this reveals a gap in their knowledge and preparedness in terms of if and why they need to adapt. Without proper information and support from the government, residents may not know how they need to respond or adapt, including the potential for migration as an adaptation strategy.

*"We city people have more opportunities to move around more easily. There is a big disconnect between Paramaribo and the other districts/the interior. The interior is dependent on Paramaribo when it comes to, for example, financial resources. Certain communities are somewhat self-sufficient. But when it comes to electricity, they are dependent on Paramaribo again. But Paramaribo is very disconnected from the rest of the country. You could say that Suriname is divided in two parts. Paramaribo and the rest of the country. The interior has not had development for years, which has caused them to be so vulnerable now to climate change. Paramaribo is also vulnerable but is way better prepared. In the interior, they don't really have the ability to move around easily."<sup>18</sup>*



Image 6. Flood-impacted house in Nieuw Lombé, Brokopondo, Suriname. Photo credit: Nicole Stoumen, Samuel Hall 2024.

# Climate-related Challenges & Impacts

## Climate Challenges and Vulnerabilities

Both coastal areas like Paramaribo and inland districts such as Para and Brokopondo face severe climate risks such as flooding and drought.

These events compound challenges tied to agriculture and infrastructure in urban and rural settings. Paramaribo experiences increasingly intense rainfall, leading to frequent and irregular flooding that damages critical infrastructure, and is highly susceptible to coastal erosion. Paramaribo North (the north of the city), particularly affected by storm surges and flooding, has been nicknamed “the mini Suriname river” due to the severity of impacts, including increasing the prevalence of water and vector borne diseases in the region.<sup>19</sup>

A participant in the field research recalled a 2006 flood event in the interior which led to widespread loss and damage for many, highlighting the effects of both drought and flooding and the issue of irregular weather patterns:

*“About the big flood in 2006 in the interior. I was there myself. So I experienced it. It also affected my family. When we walked on the plot, it was under water. All sorts of things were also lost. I also experienced a very abnormal drought in the interior. There was almost no water left in the river. I could almost cross the river without getting wet.”<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> FGD6

<sup>20</sup> FGD7



Massive flooding events have persisted, and in 2022 maroon community members reported consequential destruction and temporary displacement to higher areas in Para.<sup>21</sup>

Research participants in Suriname broadly characterised the climate as ‘irregular’. This irregularity makes it challenging to distinguish between rainy and dry seasons, hindering the population’s ability to prepare and protect themselves from extreme climate events.

The data in Figure 8 shows that drought is the most commonly reported weather event causing damage, affecting 79% of respondents, followed by reduced produce quality (65%) and flooding (48%). Drought and damage to produce are consistently reported across all locations, while Brokopondo experiences significantly more flooding (62%) compared to Para (34%) and Paramaribo (47%). Additionally, ‘other’ issues, such as strong rainfall, wind, and mosquito infestations, are noted in relation to flooding.

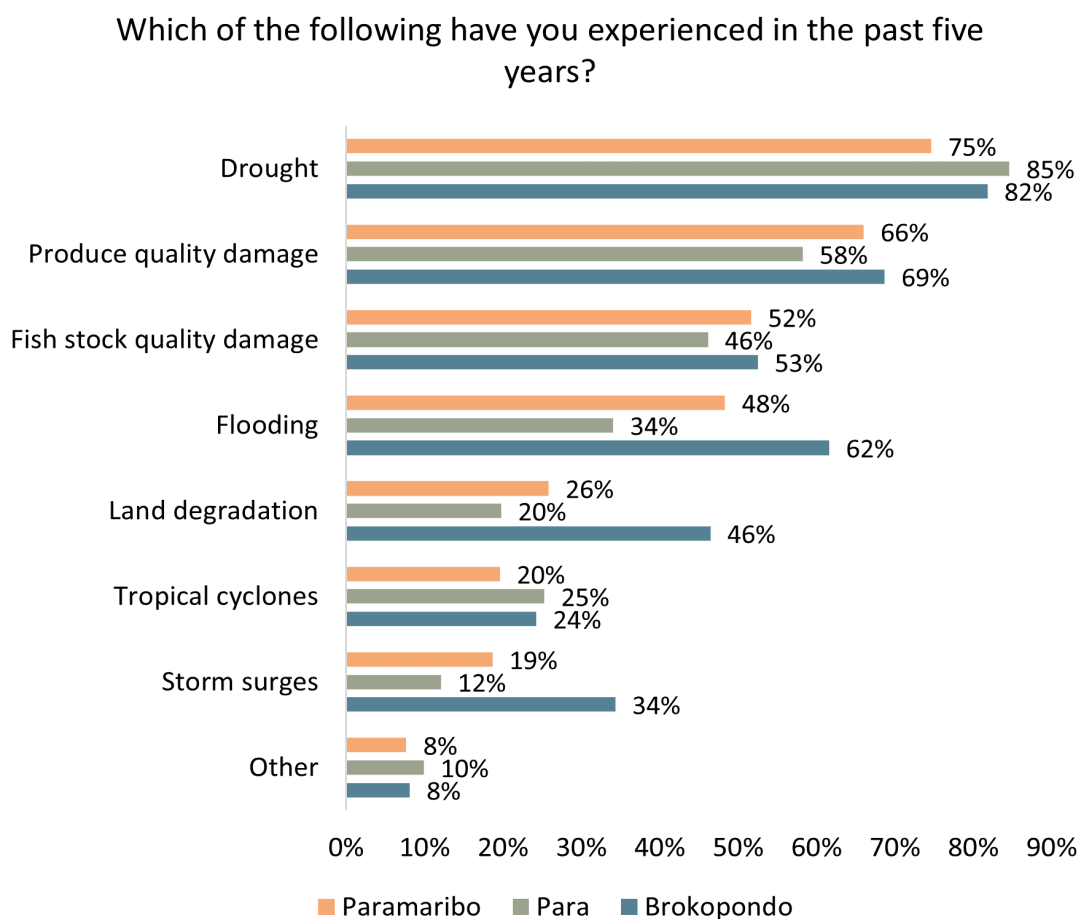


Figure 8. Weather events and phenomena resulting in damages, as reported by respondents

Rising temperatures and limited drinking water strain infrastructure by compromising water supply systems and reducing agricultural productivity. This, in turn, impacts education and livelihoods as the decreased availability of water and resources and intensity of heat disrupts essential services and economic stability

These challenges are further compounded by inadequate state development, affecting infrastructure and undermining access to essential services. Respondents indicated that drought impacts are worsened by the insufficient reach of state service grids, particularly the Surinamese Water Supply Company, resulting in water insecurity. Many areas outside of Paramaribo (“the interior”) lack development, increasing their vulnerability and reducing their resilience to climate change.

## Climate-related impacts

The impact of climate change on the lives of Suriname’s inhabitants is pervasive, affecting their livelihoods, social relations, and overall well-being. Overall, 66% of respondents have reported seeing the impact of climate change in their lives, with men more likely to report so (72%) than women (63%). Respondents aged 45 and older more frequently reported experiencing climate change effects (70%) compared to those under 45 (61%), likely due to their longer-term exposure and better ability to observe changes over time. There were no major location-based differences in the overall experiences of impacts of climate change, indicating that while the climate risks and impacts may vary- some being slow onset and some being extreme- the region as a whole is feeling the changes.

About 1 in 4 respondents (24%) reported that their households have been affected by natural disasters frequently, and nearly half (49%) reported occasional impacts, with Paramaribo respondents more likely to report frequent impact (26%) than those in Brokopondo. The following graphs and explanations outline the impacts to households and communities.

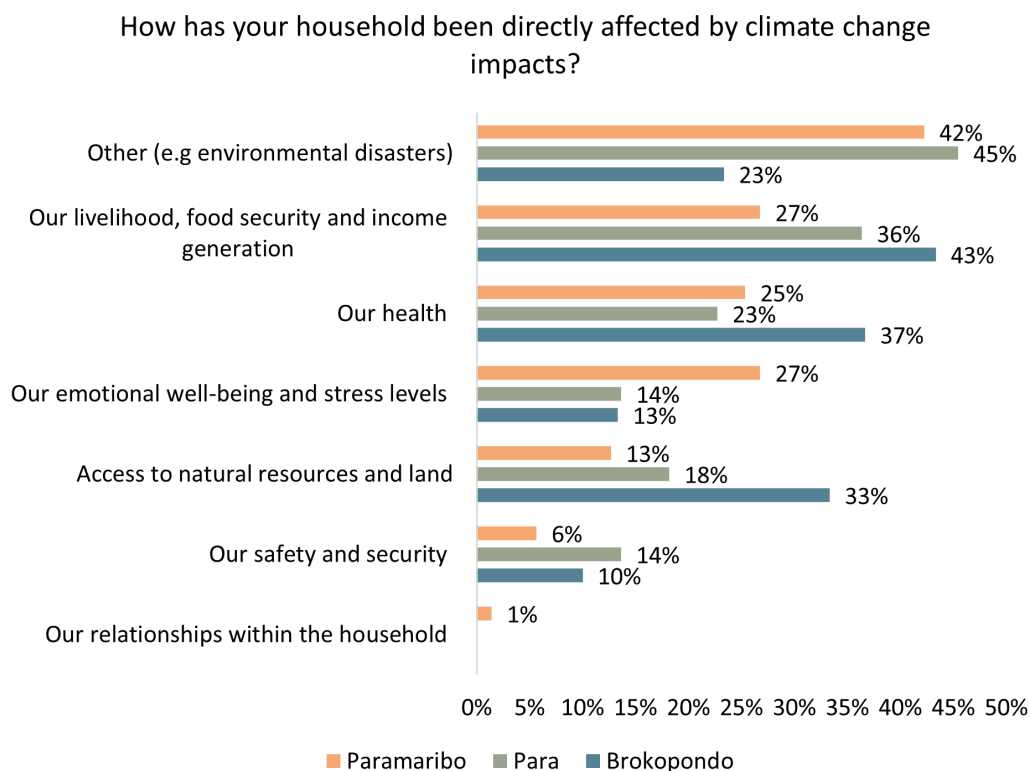


Figure 9. Effects of climate change on households

## Agricultural impacts

Climate change has dire wide-reaching impacts on various sectors, particularly agriculture. Irregular climate patterns and the frequency of more extreme weather conditions disrupt the traditional farming practices which leads to income loss when yields are affected, as well as uncertainty in preparing for the dry and planting seasons, and vulnerability in harvesting seasons. Droughts also dry up rivers, reducing water sources for irrigation, livestock, and fishing.<sup>22</sup> As a result, farmers must sell their decreased yields or stock for higher prices which generally many cannot afford, driving risks of food insecurity and social tensions, especially in the economic centre of Paramaribo.<sup>23</sup>

When it comes to the material damages caused by factors linked to climate change, the most impactful hazard across different locations was drought, followed by reduced or worsened quality of produce and flooding. The latter was seemingly more acute in Brokopondo and Paramaribo than Para. Farmlands deteriorate from heavy rains and flooding, affecting produce quality, as well as grazing lands, limiting areas available for livestock to feed, which increases food shortages and prices. These climate events also affect those involved in fishing, hunting and beekeeping, among other nature-based sectors including tourism and leisure. Climate change is thus challenging the ways that people work in various sectors and is gradually eroding some livelihood opportunities, which means that the Surinamese people can no longer rely on traditional occupations and sources of income in their areas, thus eroding cultural practices and associated social institutions.



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## Social impacts

Indeed, in a resource rich country, with only one significant urban area, the impacts of climate change on resource availability extend to social relations. While most respondents believed that social relations in the community were not affected by climate change, this stability may be attributed to the preexisting multiethnic dynamic nature of Surinamese society. However, the lack of information and clear response mechanisms may explain why 14% of respondents thought that social relations were negatively affected by climate change. Food shortages and risks of food insecurity threaten certain social networks as food is culturally crucial in Surinamese society for bringing people together:

*“Food is the MOST important thing. It is a gathering; it is where you talk with each other, talk about your day or plans. When a family eats and someone passes by, you invite them because you have some food, and you make a connection and share updates.”<sup>24</sup>*

Additionally, climate change exacerbates limited access to resources, straining community relations. Of those who reported negative effects of climate change on social relations, 30 % attributed these changes to access to natural resources, 25% to increased competition and disputes over water resources and 21% over loss or damage of property. Migration and displacement, particularly in Brokopondo, further affect social relations, with 30% of those reporting negative effects also noting changes in community demographics due to these factors. This highlights a compounding relationship between climate change impacts and social dynamics.

Moreover, climate change impacts intensify difficult living conditions for vulnerable populations in Suriname, especially Indigenous and Maroon communities. These groups are disproportionately affected as climate change compounds existing vulnerabilities due to industries like gold mining and logging damaging their native land. This further limits their access to clean drinking water and land for cassava cultivation, a main food source, and cultural practice: *“People are used to their staple food, cassava. If you send canned goods, it won’t work for them [they are not used to eating canned foods].”<sup>25</sup>* Climate impacts therefore significantly disrupt Indigenous cultural and traditional practices in Suriname, closely linking climate impacts to their food systems and social networks. Various climate events, such as droughts, increasingly unpredictable weather patterns, and environmental disruptions, have endangered traditional farming and hunting methods. As explained by a key informant:

*“The way we used to traditionally farm is being endangered. Because of the drought, the river has less water, and the animals we hunt or the fish we hunt go to other places, making it harder to get food.”<sup>26</sup>*

This scarcity not only threatens traditional hunting methods but also limits mobility due to insufficient funds for fuel.

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Indigenous peoples view land as integral to their identity and culture, perceiving themselves as part of the ecosystem. **The activities of gold mining and logging, combined with the impacts of climate change, threaten their existence by forcing them to adapt and possibly change agricultural practices inherent to their culture.** Indigenous leaders have expressed concerns about being excluded from interventions aimed at addressing and mitigating climate change, despite their deep connection and knowledge of the land. An Indigenous leader noted that not including people who are stewards of their own land and native protectors of biodiversity *“can lead to environmental disruptions, landslides, and even earthquakes,”*<sup>27</sup> thus explicitly linking participatory processes and the prevalence of negative climate impacts. The interconnectedness of identity, community, land, and resources for Indigenous people and Maroon communities means that the impacts of climate change for them is compounded into one, affecting their food security, emotional wellbeing, community, and personal relationships. In the case of Maroon people who work in the leading industry of mining, everyone may not be aware of the negative effects of climate change on their lands. This interconnectedness should be considered when interpreting the results illustrated in the graph above.

The impact of **climate change on Suriname’s inhabitants is multi-faceted, affecting economic stability, social cohesion, and cultural integrity.** The nature of these impacts highlights the urgent need for inclusive, informed, and culturally sensitive responses that truly represent and address the needs of the people most directly affected.

# Responses & Adaptations

## Adaptations and Strategies

In response to these climate change impacts in Suriname, people have adopted various adaptive strategies to mitigate and survive the effects.

Around one in five respondents reported that their households took specific measures to prepare for or adapt to the impacts of climate change: 17% in Brokopondo, 19% in Para and 24% in Paramaribo. Key adaptation measures mentioned include structural adjustments to homes, shifting agricultural practices, climate-resilient construction and planning, introduction of climate-responsive food systems, mangrove restoration and coastal protection, and building with natural resources through bamboo dam projects.

A respondent mentioned adjusting the structure of his house by raising his floor and yard after dealing with flooding previously. Others, who are not connected to water grids, have incurred high costs to purchase water tanks to protect themselves from water insecurity, indicating people's resilience and willingness to adapt to climate change.<sup>28</sup>

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28 FGD4





Image 8. Raised house structure in Brokopondo, Suriname. Photo credit: Nicole Stoumen, Samuel Hall 2024.

**Agricultural practices have also shifted**, particularly in Indigenous communities at the border with French Guiana and Langamankondre. Due to rising sea levels and coastal flooding, these communities have moved away from traditional farmlands near swamps and now plant closer to their homes in forests. Similarly, some Indigenous communities, such as those in Wayana, have incorporated climate resilience into their construction and planning by building villages on higher ground to reduce flood risks.<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, Indigenous community-based organisations are working with local schools to introduce climate-sensitive food systems, teaching sustainable farming practices to help prepare for future climate challenges.<sup>30</sup> One Indigenous leader noted that while these methods are not traditional, they are necessary for securing food supplies closer to home. She acknowledged that adopting these practices will take time, but they are critical in reducing food insecurity and mitigating the need for migration:

*"It is not the traditional way of farming, [but] new ways of farming so they have food, so learn them to plant in pods near your house, because traditionally your farm should be far away... but it is not easy, because they don't believe in this way, so it will take years before they have this mindset."*<sup>31</sup>

29 FGD6

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While the introduction of new farming practices can be received as intimidating, foreign, and contrary to cultural identity, it is being shown to combat the compounding effect of climate change on food insecurity and agricultural production, thus mitigating the need to move.<sup>32</sup>

**Mangrove restoration has also become a key adaptation strategy in Paramaribo to combat coastal erosion and sea-level rise.** A climate expert from the Anton de Kom University of Suriname, who has studied these impacts since 1996, emphasised the importance of strengthening the natural defences of mangrove belts and slow-moving mudbanks, which together absorb wave energy and protect the coast. However, when mudbanks shift, areas become exposed to erosion, making it essential to maintain robust mangrove protection. The informant remarked that Suriname has long been vulnerable to sea-level rise, but awareness and action have lagged behind. Expressing the uncertainty of adaptability, the climate expert reflected that:

*“you have a lot of options, you can build a dike- after 20/40/50 years you have to rebuild it again- we can teach the people to adapt to sea level rise- but are people willing to adapt?”<sup>33</sup>*

To enhance these natural defences, the “Building with Nature Project” engages university hydrology students and volunteers **in constructing bamboo dams** that mimic the natural wave-calming effects of mangroves. These bamboo structures trap sediment, creating a natural barrier that reinforces coastal protection. This innovative adaptation method, new to Suriname, offers a long-term solution to mitigate coastal erosion and the impacts of climate change.<sup>34</sup>

## Mobility as an adaptation?

**Mobility in Suriname is intertwined with cultural and historical dynamics, affecting how individuals respond to climate change.** Therefore, mobility in response to climate change is inextricably linked to these pre-existing and overlapping dynamics. Key findings reveal that mobility patterns vary significantly across different demographics and circumstances.

**Respondents report specifically moving from Para to Paramaribo due to insufficient infrastructure in Para while others report the opposite movement.<sup>35</sup>** This is most likely exacerbated by environmental impacts, both directly human induced like mining and logging; and tied to climate change phenomena such as irregular patterns of drought and flooding. Mobility- mostly local and temporary- however does appear to be a significant response to the impacts of climate change, but whether it is considered an adaptation depends on the context and affected group.

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## Mobility as a natural response for Indigenous and tribal communities

Migration is not just described as a forced consequence of climate change, but as a natural one by people who have a close relationship with their land. Maroon and Indigenous participants in Suriname tended to temporarily move to “higher places” to protect themselves and their agricultural livelihoods from flooding.<sup>36</sup> Despite the strong connection to place, mobility as a response to climate risks is already embedded in Indigenous community planning.

An Indigenous leader shared how the Wayana tribe’s villages are built on higher ground in anticipation of climate changes:

*“my ancestors saw mobility in the future- you will never see them flooded.... My village name literally means higher ground, but hopefully it won’t get that far to be moved because of flooding.”<sup>37</sup>*

The perpetuity of migration by vulnerable groups within and around Suriname is linked to its colonial history. A key informant and Indigenous community leader reflected this:

*“When you look at it historically, especially Kalmahaken, how they migrated from Brazil to Suriname, it was also an adaptation to survive...migration... moving more north, [they] heard from tribes that there were white people killing Indigenous communities, [that they] lost freedom.”<sup>38</sup>*

Due to their deep knowledge of the land and its patterns, Indigenous culture sees mobility as an inherent part of living in harmony with land. This extends to other tribal groups in Suriname, like the Maroon communities. Instead of framing migration as an adaptation strategy or “solution”, it is framed as a niche cultural practice tied to certain forms of agricultural traditions:

*“The migration of Maroons is necessary. They plant and then they do slash-and-burn agriculture. That’s a different culture.”<sup>39</sup>*

For Indigenous and tribal communities in rural areas, this characterisation positions migration and mobility as a natural response, rather than an adaptation.

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## Mobility as a necessary and forced response

In many instances, data collection showed that climate change-induced mobility appears to be more out of necessity or urgency rather than an adaptive strategy. This observation is nuanced by the fact that only a few respondents across countries felt “forced” to move (3%). While respondents may not describe their decisions as forced, the urgency driven by deteriorating environmental conditions often leaves them with limited options, making migration a constrained choice rather than a fully voluntary one. This situation reflects a complex interplay between perceived agency and external pressures, and migration to be in many cases understood as a reaction to worsening conditions instead of a proactive strategy.

One respondent described their mobility experience as a form of deracination, feeling out of place and unaccepted in new locations. This sentiment underscores the emotional and cultural dislocation that accompanies forced migration.

*“My experience with migration. I call it deportation... Because it doesn’t match our art and culture. From here to Paramaribo. And when you get there, you get the chance to emigrate again. To go somewhere else. But there they don’t accept you, you’re there but you don’t belong.”<sup>40</sup>*

Flooding, especially, is a key factor behind such displacement and migration, forcing people to move from coastal areas like Paramaribo (where they had initially migrated to for better opportunities) to the interior.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, following the massive flooding event in 2022, respondents mentioned that the Maroon community was heavily affected and was temporarily displaced to higher ground due to the destruction of homes and property.<sup>42</sup> Mobility in these cases thus seems to be a forced consequence of climate change, although affected persons may not refer to their situation as forced.

These differences in framing are descriptive of the community level discussion of migration as an adaptive response. When asked about their individual capacity to cope with a climatic shock, women were less likely to feel prepared than other people in the community (25%) when compared to men (35%). Meanwhile, among simultaneous feelings of deracination, respondents with a history of migration still reported feeling more able to cope than others. This suggests that migration may have increased their confidence to adapt to new shocks. In this sense, migration remains a complex response to climate risks across various groups and situations.

## Involuntary and voluntary immobility

Immobility in Suriname reflects strong ties to home. Despite climate challenges, a majority of respondents (59%) express no desire to relocate, with Para exhibiting the highest reluctance at 68%. This quantitative trend is reflective of focus group discussions in which participants described the strong attachment to home and place outweighing the threat of climate risks in many cases. However, a notable portion (13%) consider moving but lack the necessary resources to do so, particularly in Paramaribo (17%).

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<sup>40</sup> FGD 5

<sup>41</sup> FGD 6, 7

<sup>42</sup> FGD 4, 5

The experience of immobility in Suriname, characterised by those who either do not want to move (voluntary) or who lack capacity despite wanting to do so (involuntary), reveals significant vulnerabilities. Among those who are not able to move with their entire household, elderly family members most frequently stay behind (33%), followed by children (20%). This highlights a critical vulnerability in climate migration, as these individuals may be less capable of adapting to climate impacts or evacuating during sudden-onset disasters and other extreme weather events. The youth, particularly young men and boys, often leave the interior in search of better education and livelihood opportunities, a pattern perceived negatively by those who remain.

Conversely, older residents of cities like Paramaribo often desire to return to their rural origins, sometimes accompanied by their children who build homes in these areas. This demonstrates the cyclical nature of mobility and immobility, as older generations had primarily migrated for more opportunity to the urban capital, but ultimately seek to return to their land that feels like home, regardless of climate risks and impacts on living conditions. Mobility patterns therefore reveal generational shifts despite climate risks.



Image 9. Flood-impacted house in Nieuw Lombé, Brokopondo, Suriname. Photo credit: Nicole Stoumen, Samuel Hall 2024.

# Looking Ahead: Decision- making

## Factors Influencing Decision-making

Mobility decisions are shaped by community ties and access to services. Generally, decisions regarding climate adaptation tend to be collective, community-based processes. However, mobility as a climate-adaptation measure tends to be perceived through the lens of individual agency, disconnected from community interests and decision making processes.<sup>43</sup>

The understanding is that mobility or departure are not perceived as positive or long-term decisions, but rather are a mode of survival ("survival mode adaptation") and there is an expectation that they will be able to return. In this way, migration as a response is not a community decision because it essentially leads to the disappearance of those same communities.

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Accordingly, attachment to home and community is a significant factor influencing mobility decisions, particularly the choice to stay or return. An Indigenous community leader noted that **even though individuals from communities affected by climate change had the opportunity to move elsewhere, such as to Guyana for better pay and livelihood opportunities, they preferred to stay despite poorer socio-economic prospects** due to their strong ties to home and the security of being in their community.

**Climate change-induced mobility decisions are also guided by the ability to access basic services.** Respondents indicate that people try to make informed decisions based on access to education and healthcare services when weighing the impact of climate change on their current lives and the decision to move.<sup>44</sup> A focus group participant described how the main driver of mobility to Paramaribo from the interior was the unavailability of educational opportunities, despite migrants facing language barriers in the city.<sup>45</sup> **When asked about the climate factors that would make respondents consider migration, an increase in extreme weather events was selected most frequently (51%),** especially in Brokopondo (65%), followed by scarcity of resources (28%).

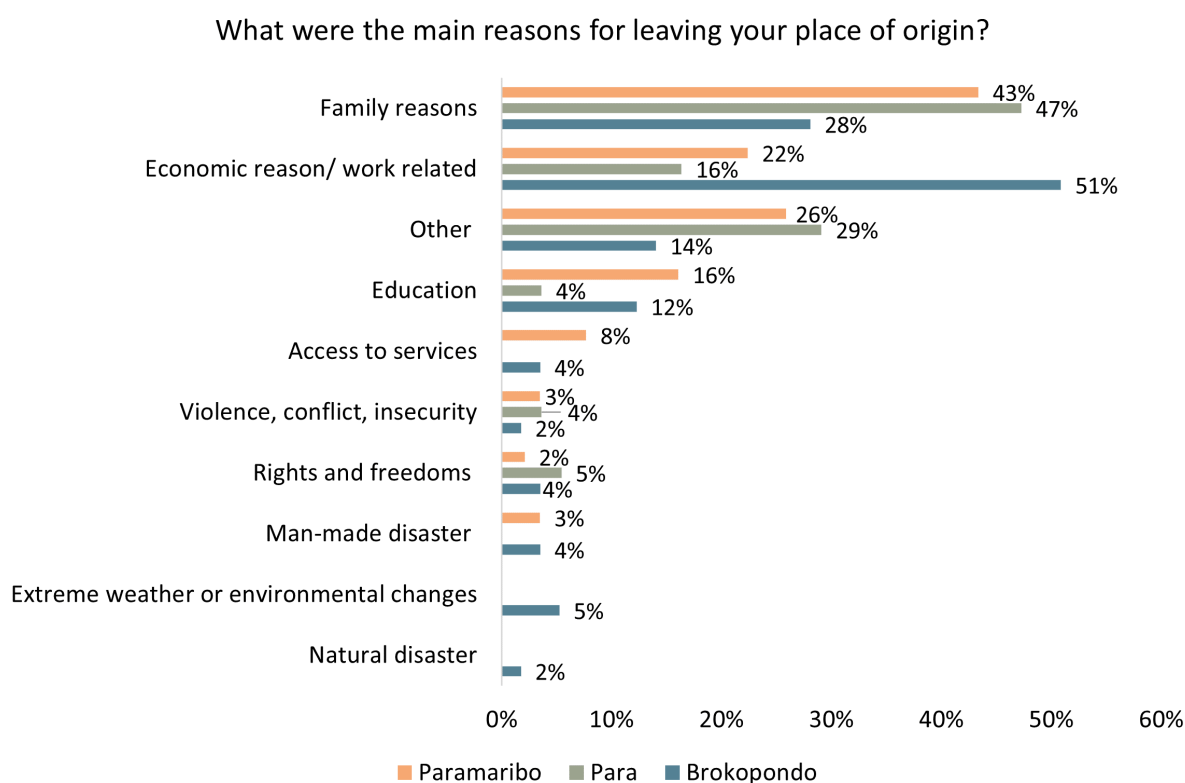


Figure 10. Climate-related factors decision-making factors

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## Climate and mobility decision-making nexus

Climate change influences the migration decisions of a significant number of respondents in Suriname who acknowledge that it plays a role in their decision making. When examining the migration dynamics in Suriname through the lens of climate change, it is evident that security and certainty are important aspirations driving mobility decisions. Despite climate challenges, a majority of respondents (59%) express no desire to relocate, with Para exhibiting the highest reluctance at 68%. This quantitative trend is reflective of focus group discussions in which participants described the strong attachment to home and place outweighing the threat of climate risks in many cases. However, a notable portion (13%) consider moving but lack the necessary resources to do so, particularly in Paramaribo (17%). By contrast, 14% of respondents are actively planning to move and feel capable of doing so (Figure 1), based on the adaptive capacities surveyed and reviewed in the above sections. Few feel forced to relocate solely due to climate impacts (11%) (Figure 11).

Preferences for migration destinations reveal varied aspirations. Approximately one-quarter of respondents (25%) are uncertain about their future destinations, while 22% prefer moving within Suriname and 20% aim to migrate internationally. Brokopondo residents show a preference for local moves, whereas those in Paramaribo and respondents with prior migration experience lean towards international relocation (both 25%). Concerning the duration of their stay, 41% intend to settle permanently, while 16% foresee a temporary stay of a season or less. Brokopondo residents are more inclined towards temporary moves (29%) and underscoring an attachment to home, contrasting with Paramaribo residents' preference for permanent relocation (46%).

Access to basic services plays a crucial role in decision-making, as potential migrants weigh the implications of losing access to education and healthcare available in their current communities. One-third of respondents (33%) report climate change as a factor in their future migration decisions, with 11% identifying it as the primary motivator, while 28% indicate that climate change does not affect their migration plans.

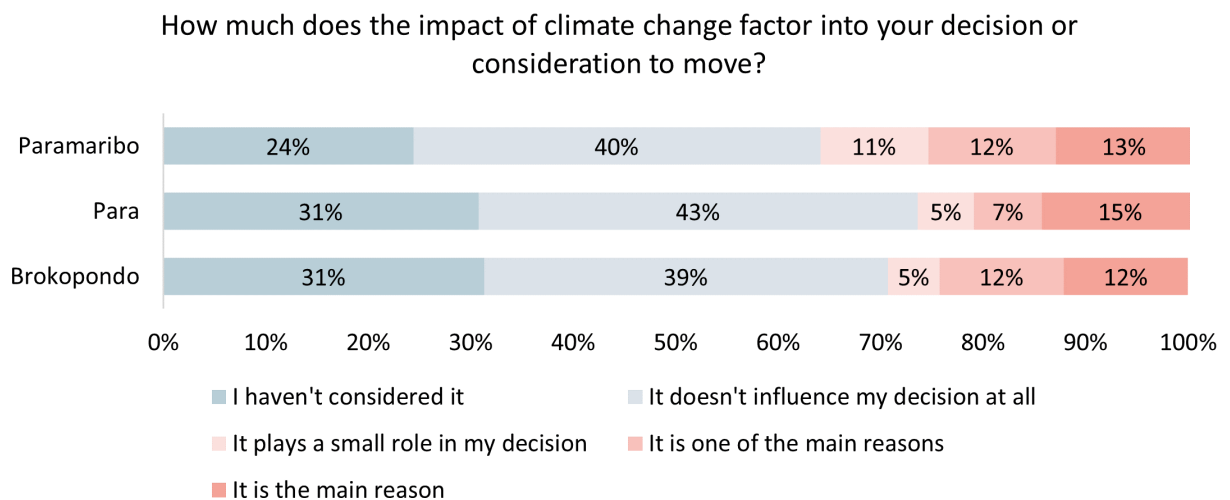



Figure 11. Climate mobility decision making



# Conclusions: Findings on Climate Mobility

The data collected underscores the intricate relationship between climate change and migration patterns in Suriname. While climate impacts like irregular weather patterns, flooding, and droughts prompt temporary and local mobility, the majority of respondents express a deep attachment to their homes and agricultural practices, mitigating the perceived threat of climate change.

Despite high awareness levels (83%) of climate change, many remain uninformed about its regional impacts (53%), revealing a critical knowledge gap that could hamper effective adaptation strategies. The lack of comprehensive government plans further impedes adaptive capacities, despite respondents' confidence in their ability to adapt within their communities. Overall, while climate change influences migration decisions for some, economic constraints and cultural ties primarily drive mobility patterns in Suriname.

- **Climate change poses significant risks to Suriname, affecting both coastal and inland regions with threats such as sea level rise, heavy rainfall, droughts, and saltwater intrusion.** Adaptive strategies are diverse and include modifications to housing structures, investments in water storage solutions, and shifts to more resilient farming methods. These adaptations reflect the deep stewardship and traditional knowledge of those closest to their land, who are well-equipped to address environmental challenges. However, despite their expertise and resourcefulness, there is a notable lack of support from the government, underscoring the need for greater resources to adapt.
- **Indigenous communities in Suriname face profound disruptions to traditional farming and hunting practices due to climate change,** threatening both food security and cultural practices. This leads to the threat of immobility, as their reliance on these traditional practices makes it difficult to relocate to new areas where they may not be able to continue these practices or where the land is not tied to their identity and community. The disruption of their ancestral land not only impacts their ability to sustain their agricultural and cultural practices but also challenges their sense of identity and connection to their heritage.
- **Migration patterns in Suriname illustrate a nuanced balance between aspirations for new opportunities and a deep-rooted attachment to one's place of origin.** While climate impacts influence migration decisions, compounded with some respondents expressing a desire to relocate internationally or within Suriname for better opportunities, a significant number prefer to remain in or return to their original communities despite these challenges. This preference reflects a strong attachment to home and a sense of belonging that frequently outweighs the potential benefits of relocation.
- **Analysis indicates that climate-induced mobility in Suriname often results from urgent necessity rather than deliberate adaptation.** Although few respondents explicitly feel "forced" to move due to climate impacts, many find themselves migrating as a result of worsening environmental conditions, which limits their options and makes relocation feel like a constrained choice. This reveals that while climate impacts are a significant factor in migration, the distinction between perceived agency and actual constraints is crucial. The migration process is frequently influenced by urgency and resource limitations, rather than being driven by proactive adaptation strategies.
- **Decision-making regarding climate-induced mobility in Suriname reflects a tension between collective community values and individual agency.** While climate adaptation strategies are often driven by community-based processes, migration is typically framed as an individual decision. This distinction reveals that, although migration may be seen as a necessary survival strategy, it is influenced by personal circumstances and individual choices rather than broad community consensus. As a result, migration decisions are shaped by both personal and communal factors, where the collective attachment to home often conflicts with individual needs for relocation due to survival or better opportunities.



- Experiences of climate change impacts and mobility decision-making are also determined by socio-demographic factors and intersectionalities, with the elderly, children, and women more likely to be left behind. Women also felt less prepared to cope with climatic shocks than men and more frequently reported feeling uninformed about climate change impacts than men. Meanwhile, social gender roles and practices dictate that young men and boys more frequently than women in Suriname seek migration as an opportunity to earn better income and establish themselves. This suggests that both gender and age play into the mobility and climate change response dynamics within the community, highlighting the need for a more targeted and nuanced approach towards initiatives enhancing community-level resilience and adaptation.

# Acknowledgements

Samuel Hall, in partnership with the Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Initiative, would first and foremost like to extend our deepest gratitude to the research participants and their families in Suriname, who experience the impacts of climate change firsthand, especially to the community leaders who welcomed us with open arms to meet their communities and invited them to share their stories— without their trust, leadership, and openness this research would not have been possible.

Many thanks in addition to the Suriname team, led by Tiarra Simon who oversaw a team of 12 local researchers made up of surveyors, educators, and climate change activists: Fallon Kathleen Lambert, Sheniva Vrij, Defny Aretha Geldorp, Nathalie M.J. Valpoort, Fynaida Ligeon, Merlien Nelson, Maira Angelie Esajas, Danielle Denise Vola, Xafiria Adriaans, Nucretia Natashia Dorder, Stefanie Shibikie Lauchman, Sathinder Rashwien Mohabier. Together they provided invaluable insight into climate and migration patterns in the site communities and made the people-centred and localised approach of this research possible, allowing us to enter intimate settings and have open and meaningful dialogues with affected communities. The local connections of the national researchers also invited the support of local organisations in each country who work at the intersection of migration, climate change, agriculture, disaster response, and policy, including IOM Suriname, UNHCR Suriname, the Mulokot Wayana Indigenous Foundation, the Anton de Kom University of Suriname, Climate Tracker, and Maroon community leaders.

Research for this study was led by Hervé Nicolle, Nicole Stoumen, Daniel Provost, Wendy Indira, Mwara Namelok and Shana Pareemamun, with the data and analytics team at Samuel Hall led by Stefanie Barratt, Marta Trigo da Raza, Akville Krisciunaite, Mohammad AlQaruoti, and Sheila Mwathi.

Additional thanks to GCCMI's Technical Advisory Group the Center for Information and Earth Science Information Network at Columbia University (CISEN). This project was supported by the Global Center for Climate Mobility (GCCM) in close collaboration with the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) and GCCMI core partners: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the World Bank.



Image 10. Suriname River, Suriname. Photo credit: Nicole Stoumen, Samuel Hall 2024.



# About Us

**Samuel Hall** is a social enterprise specialising in research, program evaluation, and data analysis in migration and displacement contexts. Since 2010, we've focused on understanding the disproportionate impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities. Our work across Africa, South, and Central Asia shows that real change often begins at the grassroots level, where local activists, migrants, and displaced people lead constructive dialogues and actions.

**The Greater Caribbean Climate Mobility Initiative (GCCMI)** is a joint undertaking coordinated by the Global Centre for Climate Mobility and the Association of Caribbean States, bringing together 25 countries, amongst them numerous Small Island Developing States, whose people are most at risk from the impacts of sea level rise and other climate related stressors. The initiative's partners include the World Bank, the UN Development Programme, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).