

The Security Dimensions of Climate Change

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Introduction

Climate change is increasingly recognized as a major security issue that poses serious global threats. Events like weather-related disasters, desertification and rising sea levels, exacerbated by climate change, affect individuals and communities around the world. They bring hunger, disease, poverty, and lost livelihoods-reducing economic growth and posing a threat to social and, even, political stability. Climate change reduces access to fresh and safe drinking water, negatively affects health and poses a real threat to food security in many countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It is a contributing factor to poverty, and forces people from their homes, sometimes permanently. However, climate change can heighten existing social and political tensions or can lead to new ones. It can overstretch many societies' adaptive capacities which could result in destabilization and violence, jeopardizing national and international security to a new degree. Indeed, if unchecked, climate change is likely to aggravate old and trigger new tensions in parts of the world that may spill over into violence, conflict and war. Dramatic environmental change undeniably places the infrastructure of all countries to the test. But it poses an ever greater threat to developing countries that lack the means, the know-how and the capacity to effectively deal with these phenomena. The impacts of climate change, such as the threat of food crisis, water scarcity, extreme weather events and ensuing migration, will expose many of the weak states to additional pressure to adapt. Besides, conditions of pre-existing conflict, poverty, weak institutions, food insecurity and spreading diseases will leave such communities unable to meet the challenges of adapting to climate change impacts and will exacerbate existing problems. This can lead to the collapse of the state structure and thereby increase the number of weak and fragile states. Impacts of global warming and climate change thus have the potential to challenge our development efforts, human security and the future.

The Security Dimensions of Climate Change

Climate change is seriously affecting hundreds of millions of people today and in the next twenty years those affected will likely more than double- making it the greatest emerging humanitarian challenge of our time. Climate change threatens the conditions which are

essential essential for the survival of the human being and also leads to destabilization and conflict at the various levels.

Threat to Food Security

Reduced or constrained agricultural productivity is often mentioned as potentially the most worrisome consequences of climate change. The impacts are particularly severe in developing regions such as South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and the dry land belt that stretches across the Sahara and the Middle East. More than 850 million people worldwide are currently undernourished. This situation is likely to worsen in future as a result of climate change, as food insecurity in the lower latitude, i.e. in many developing countries, will increase with a temperature rise of just 2° C. This condition has the potentiality to trigger regional food crisis and can undermine the economic performance of weak and unstable states and in this way it can ultimately lead to destabilisation and violence in the society.

Increasing Water Crisis

Climate change exacerbates water quality and availability in regions that are already struggling hardest with water scarcity. 1.1 billion people are currently without access to safe drinking water. This situation could worsen for hundreds of millions of people as climate change alters the variability of precipitation and the quantity of available water. However, countries which will suffer the greatest water stress are generally those which already lack the political and institutional framework necessary for the adaptation of water and crisis management systems. This could overstretch the existing conflict resolution mechanisms ultimately leading to destabilization and violence.

Migration

Changes in local and regional climatic conditions in the form of sea level rise, heat stress, desertification, flooding and drought severely restrict livelihood options for large groups in developing countries. This situation can potentially trigger large-scale displacement and migration from one region to other in search of new avenues for employment and/or settlement. However, the climate-induced migration has the potentiality to trigger different kinds of conflict at various levels. This includes the followings:

- The trans-border environmental migrants pose structural threat to the host country by increasing demands on its scarce resources. For this reason, the receiving state might work for stopping the migration at its border and/or repatriating them from its territory back to the country of origin, which can potentially lead to conflict with the sender state.
- Wherever environmental migrants settle, they flood the labour market, add to local demand for food and other basic necessities of life, which put new burdens on the society. The influx of migrants is likely to deplete local food supplies and to drive up food prices. The resulting scarcity of such situation might help to generate strong feeling of nativism among the original inhabitants of the area. Such feeling can help to organize themselves as a group to protect their interests on the notion that they as a people exist only within their own country, while others have other homes to which they can return and that itself can breed native-migrants conflict in the society.

State Collapse

The impacts of climate change, such as the threat of food crisis, water scarcity, extreme weather events and ensuing migration, will expose many of the weak states to additional pressure to adapt. Weak and fragile states have inadequate capacities to guarantee the core functions of the state, notably the state's monopoly over the use of force, and therefore already pose a major challenge for the international community. Moreover, the impacts of unabated climate change would hit these countries especially hard, further limiting and eventually overstressing their problem solving capacities. Indeed, when climate changes significantly or environmental conditions deteriorate to the point that necessary resources are not available, societies can become stressed, sometimes to the point of collapse.

Challenges to Development

Climate change slows-and in the worst cases reverses-progress made in fighting poverty and diseases and threatens the long terms sustainability of development process. Climate change also leads to the destruction and devaluation of economic capital as well as the loss of skilled and productive workers through environmentally induced migration and an increase in climate- induced diseases and malnutrition. Furthermore, economic

resources which would normally be channeled directly into the production process instead have to be spent on adaptation measures, e.g. preparing for extreme events, or on reconstruction or the delivery of additional health services.

Threat to Health Security

A changing climate affects the essential ingredients of maintaining good health: clean air and water, sufficient food and adequate shelter. Every year the health of 235 million people is likely to be seriously affected by gradual environmental degradation due to climate change. Malnutrition is the biggest burden in terms of deaths. Climate change is projected to cause over 150,000 deaths annually and almost 45 million people are estimated to be malnourished because of climate change, especially due to reduced food supply and decreased income from agriculture, livestock and fisheries

Climate Change and Security: The Case of Bangladesh

Bangladesh is recognized worldwide as one of the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of global warming and climate change. This is due to its unique geographic location, dominance of floodplains, low elevation from the sea, high population density, high levels of poverty, and overwhelming dependence on nature, its resources and services. The country has a history of extreme climatic events claiming millions of lives and destroying past development gains. In a changing climate the pattern of impacts are eroding our assets, investment and future. This stands for families, communities and the state. Global warming and climate change threatens settlements and the number of people displaced from their land due to riverbank erosion, permanent inundation and sea level rise is increasing rapidly every year. As a result, resource and effort of government and people are quickly drained addressing the impact of one event when another hazard strikes.

Recommendations and Conclusions

At this juncture of history, it needs to be recognized that environmental crisis has a more pervasive and more political character than any other crisis. For this reason environmental challenges should be placed at the core of security considerations in a rapidly changing world. In this backdrop, to address the effects of climate change following initiatives should be taken:

- Global information and early warning system must be expanded
- Climate protection must be integrated as a cross-cutting theme into poverty reduction strategies from the outset.
- Focus should be given on the military response to climate security.
- Contingency planning needs to be taken
- Comprehensive adaptation measures should be taken.
- Have to develop International/ Regional policy framework.
- Promote public awareness.
- Political will and co-operation must be demonstrated and
- Global consensus should be reached concerning climate security.

Climate change needs to be seen as an opportunity. The scale of the problem at hand, and the urgency with which we must tackle it, is precisely the opportunity to galvanize calls for reform and innovation. We need to question the capacity of the entire system with which we plan to respond to climate change, and the slow and abrupt disasters it causes. Indeed, the unique challenge of climate change requires a unique response which is itself an opportunity for integrating a fragmented international humanitarian and development system. That endeavour should not only enable us to better combat climate change, but also to reap benefits that will ring true for wide ranging humanitarian challenges of today and tomorrow.