

CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFLICT

Synthesis Report

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The Initiative for Peacebuilding – Early Warning Analysis to Action (IfP-EW) is a consortium led by International Alert and funded by the European Commission. It draws on the expertise of 10 members with offices across the EU and in conflict-affected countries. It aims to develop and harness international knowledge and expertise in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding to ensure that all stakeholders, including EU institutions, can access strong, independent, locally derived analysis in order to facilitate better informed and more evidence-based policy and programming decisions.

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We work in Africa, several parts of Asia, the South Caucasus, the Middle East and Latin America and have recently started work in the UK. Our policy work focuses on several key themes that influence prospects for peace and security – the economy, climate change, gender, the role of international institutions, the impact of development aid, and the effect of good and bad governance.

We are one of the world's leading peacebuilding NGOs with more than 159 staff based in London and 14 field offices. To learn more about how and where we work, www.international-alert.org.

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INTRODUCTION

Climate change will negatively affect livelihoods in many developing countries and will increase competition over natural resources in many places. Natural resources such as water – a key source of livelihoods and indispensable for human health and sanitation – are already scarce in many regions and will be further affected by climatic changes. In this context, competition over and crises around resources, both between and within countries, are expected to increase in frequency.

The IfP-EW Climate Change and Conflict cluster aimed to explore: the linkages between climate change, conflict and fragility; the challenges of responding to climate change-related risks in ways which avoid violence; the role of governance in managing and preventing conflict. The cluster attempted to build an understanding of how these complex and interlinked issues could be addressed and integrated into the policy and response mechanisms of local, national, regional and international institutions.

Through the review and development of conflict analysis approaches, in-country research, regional dialogue and meetings, we analysed the implications of current and future climate impacts on security in fragile contexts, in particular looking at the ability of governance structures and institutions to manage these changes. Focus areas for the research covered four regions of the world which are highly vulnerable to climate change:

- Southern Europe and the Mediterranean
- Latin America: Argentina and Mexico
- Asia: India, Nepal and the Philippines
- Africa: Uganda

Based on our research findings, we aim to build knowledge, provide practical guidance, and support advocacy efforts around opportunities for action and to promote peaceful responses to climate change risks and consequences.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1. CHALLENGES

The members of the Initiative for Peacebuilding – Early Warning (IfP-EW) Climate Change and Conflict cluster, in close cooperation with local partner institutions and civil society, have identified a number of challenges for crisis- and conflict-prone regions and countries. Insights from Latin America, East Africa, South Asia and the Southern Mediterranean suggest that:

- the **physical effects** of climate change directly affect quality of life and increase people's vulnerability. In the regions covered by IfP-EW that means, above all:
 - increased frequency and intensity of extreme phenomena, severe storms and tornadoes, floods and a rise in sea level;
 - increasing temperatures, droughts, desertification, land and forest degradation;
 - retreat of glaciers, e.g. resulting in landslides and mudslides;
 - decrease of river flows and levels of water, decrease in rainfall;
 - significant losses in biodiversity and gradual replacement of tropical forests.
- Climate change will affect different ecosystems and regions of a country **in different ways, creating a variety of scenarios** and, thus, a great deal of **uncertainty** about the true impacts and their magnitude, given also the lack of sufficient information and **data** collected.

NEGATIVE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS ASSOCIATED WITH CLIMATE CHANGE

- Climate disruption will affect national economies, especially when most of the gross domestic product comes from **agriculture and/or tourism**. Increases in economic damage due to the greater intensity and frequency of hurricanes and tropical storms may cause **a loss of infrastructure**, mainly in the energy industries located in coastal areas, but also a disruption of economic activity in general.
- Certain **production systems** depend not only on water availability but also on the natural temperature range, two aspects which will be affected by global warming, with consequent impacts on productivity levels.
- It is anticipated that the impacts of climate change will lead to **increased unemployment** and that **inequality** will be cemented as well as **social disparities**. This may lead to a greater **impoverishment** of the rural population because their sources of income will be negatively affected by climate change.

WATER AVAILABILITY

- **Water resources** are under increasing pressure from **population growth, economic development, industrialisation, urbanisation and inefficient water use**. Climate change will exacerbate this situation, causing important changes in the quality, quantity and availability of water resources for human consumption.
- Rising sea levels will lead to **salt intrusion into coastal fresh water sources** and thus threaten water availability in densely-populated areas and those areas crucial for agricultural productivity.
- In addition, decreasing water levels of rivers will reduce the potential for **hydropower generation**, bringing about negative consequences for the economy and societies alike.

FOOD & NUTRITION

- Lower water availability for **agricultural development** will affect productivity levels, particularly for crops requiring a large degree of irrigation. Existing allocation problems will be aggravated, meaning adverse consequences for **food security** and **exports**.
- Vector-borne diseases and certain plagues and diseases which negatively affect crops will impact agricultural productivity as well as **health due to malnutrition**.
- Reductions in agricultural productivity will be most significant among the most **vulnerable** sectors of the population, for whom price increases will mean higher production costs and a lower supply caused by the lack of timely and effective adaptation measures.

MIGRATION

- Climate change is likely to increase the pressure **to migrate within a country or across borders** with unclear consequences for the receiving areas.
- Densely-populated coasts are affected by **rising sea levels** and millions of people may be displaced.
- **Urban migration** will increase pressure on the urban system through an increase in urban poverty; a mainly unplanned increase in urban populations would also exacerbate the overall situation.

LACK OF CAPACITIES

- **Low capacities** to adapt and to balance increased resource competition between different users of the same resources (water, land, forests, etc.).
- **Political vulnerability** and **national security**: weakness of the state (due to a lack of resources but also poor governance and high corruption levels) to help and relocate the victims of natural disasters, alongside an increase in subversive groups and authoritarian practices to control the situation.
- **Institutional gaps** between the **generation of information** and the **capacity of governments** at the regional and local level to assimilate this information and produce sound policies.
- **Inadequate institutional reforms** and **ineffective implementation** exacerbate the situation and, in addition, state legislation sometimes conflicts with customary laws and local norms.

2.2 CONFLICT POTENTIALS

Across the regions covered by IFP-EW, there are a number of examples of increasing conflict potential as a result of climate change and its interaction with other political, social and economic drivers. Today, socio-environmental conflicts already exist in Latin America, eastern Africa and southern Asia which are linked to overuse of natural resources and increasing resource scarcity. Generally, human insecurity and poverty are exacerbated by climate change impacts, as these impacts may deepen the poverty crisis among the most vulnerable sectors of society, simultaneously causing deterioration in the quality of life of communities.

More concretely, the following examples can be mentioned as far as violent conflicts are concerned:

- Increasing competition over **water, land or food resources**:
 - Internal **water-related disputes** can arise between states, communities or different water-user groups (e.g. domestic, industrial or agricultural), but can also lead to tensions on the regional level, as a result of climate-induced water scarcity.

India: The river systems of the Brahmaputra, the Ganga, and the Indus have a history of regional conflict with neighboring countries. In addition to international riparian concerns, there are several internal water disputes in India at the local or intrastate level. Additionally, at the community level, more and more conflicts are likely to emerge around water issues. Climate change may not only increase the pressure on already existing tensions within water management structures, but also cause new crises and conflicts in the region.

- **Land and water “grabbing”**, as well as **increasing land speculation**, carry the potential for land and water conflicts because of their significant impacts on water access and availability.
- **Key sectors** such as water, agriculture, energy and trade will be especially affected by climate change. As a result, the ability of states to **provide people with basic services** may be negatively affected, which could have a potentially destabilising impact.

Uganda: Land and water “grabbing” and increased land speculation have led to increasing competition over land and water, as well as marginalisation, insecurity, injustice and the absence of the rule of law, creating a vicious cycle of violence and conflict. Due to climate change, land and water “grabbing” will result in reduced water availability and simultaneously threaten food security, ultimately fostering conflicts over land and water and potentially increasing the risk of violent conflicts.

Conflicts associated with **migration**:

- **Disasters** have a **direct impact on local infrastructure** and indirectly produce social conflicts affecting access to the basic needs of food, housing and health. This can also lead to situations of *anomie*, looting, violent protests or the collapse of primary health systems if disaster events were to overstretch coping capacities in a region or country.
- The **extension of agricultural borders** can generate population displacement and changes in local development policies, modifying productive traditions. In the course of this process, urban migration may increase and social conflicts arise.
- **Indigenous people** are considered especially vulnerable to climate change, which can lead to displacement, and to changes to natural habitats and influences on their ancestral customs and modes of economic production.

Argentina is not only confronted with climate-induced **migration** within the country but also faces environmental refugees coming from neighbouring countries, where the impacts of climate change are expected to be much worse. Conflicts associated with migration may additionally arise due to the alteration of areas suitable for cultivation, a lack of land and increased urban migration. In particular, conflicts with indigenous people over ancestral domains and customs relating to their displacement might be a direct result of climate change. Displacement due to a rise in sea level will also result in increased conflict potential.

Conflicts associated with **insufficient policy responses**:

- If governance structures **fail to provide human security**, e.g. due to an absence of **strong governmental leadership**, climate change will weaken confidence in the social order and increase the risk of instability or violence.
- **Legislative processes** often **exclude affected populations**, which is likely to lead to tensions and could possibly compromise the effectiveness of policy implementation.
- **Misguided response strategies** and government policies, together with a **history of marginalisation**, insecurity, corruption, perceived injustice and the absence of the rule of law and conflict, lead to heightened potential for water and pasture conflicts.
- **Ill-informed climate change interventions** can – in spite of good intentions – foster local conflict dynamics and support local élites in further tightening their grip on resources. This could, therefore, provide an opportunity for political and economic élites to strengthen their positions in situations which lack equitable governance systems.

2.3 CONFLICT PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT

Throughout the activities of the IfP-EW Climate Change and Conflict cluster members, numerous consultations with decision makers and stakeholders took place to ensure that the insights gained as part of the cluster activities were as action-orientated as possible. As a result, selected recommendations across the regions covered by the cluster can be summarised as follows:

INTEGRATE CLIMATE CHANGE INFORMATION INTO EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

Climate change is likely to increase pressure on key resources such as water, food, land and energy. As a first step toward an integrated assessment of political tensions and resource-related crises, more sophisticated conflict analysis tools such as the “Water, Crisis and Climate Change Assessment Framework” (WACCAF), developed and applied as part of the IfP-EW project, are needed. Such tools can help to analyse and understand internal resource conflicts (e.g. over water) and to develop subsequent priorities for action such as conflict-prevention efforts or conflict-sensitive development projects. To inform decision makers, analysis needs to be designed in a way which would provide insights that would be immediately applicable. To this end, empirical evidence and information gathered during field research is helpful. In the best case scenario, a broadened conflict analysis scope would help to raise awareness, identify key risks and conflict potential, and enable the next steps of action to minimise conflict and create opportunities for peace.

RAISE AWARENESS OF THE RELEVANCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFLICT PREVENTION

Field work, workshops and stakeholder consultations in different regions of the world underlined the necessity of raising awareness of climate change as part of improving conflict-prevention and -management approaches. It is necessary to educate people both on mitigation (reducing greenhouse gas emission levels) and adaptation measures, considering that the latter are easier to implement through changes of behaviour in daily life. To this end, media are essential for putting the issue on the public agenda and for promoting greater awareness of the need to develop climate change policies both at the citizen and political level. In addition, promoting the effective enforcement of access to public information (general and environmental) and contributing to improved information systems across different ministries, sectors and levels of government will increase the quantity and quality of information on climate change.

SUPPORT CAPACITY BUILDING FOR CONFLICT-SENSITIVE CLIMATE CHANGE POLICIES

Based on a more detailed picture of the overall conflict-prone context, support for capacity building is needed to avoid climate change-related conflicts at the local level. To this end, training can be organised and offered to relevant stakeholders, ranging from public sector representatives to those active in the field of natural resource management and members of EU delegations in selected regions. The effectiveness and sustainability of adaptation and mitigation policies will depend on how much they take into account the interests, worries and needs of different stakeholders, including marginalised groups, e.g. in rural areas. It is important to acknowledge that social participation is essential for successfully coping with climate change effects and that it is also key to capacity-building efforts for conflict-sensitive policy development. Finally, the mainstreaming of conflict sensitivity is of crucial importance to ensure that institutions take into account and avoid potential negative impacts of policy measures right from the beginning (e.g. by applying “do no harm” principles).

BUILD STRONG, SUPPORTIVE INSTITUTIONS

Climate change adaptation is a key priority in crisis- and conflict-prone areas. Institutions responsible for climate change adaptation – whether under the UN climate change framework, international financial institutions, development agencies or peacebuilding organisations – need to ensure that their internal systems and structures promote adaptation even where there is no state fragility or conflict. Institutions can ensure that the design of instruments under the new climate change architecture reflects an understanding of social issues and that the political economy of conflict-affected contexts is embedded in all policies and practices. In addition, institutional constraints which impede flexibility must be minimised – otherwise it will be impossible to respond to changing circumstances in an era of climate change.

BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP RESPONSES

Adaptation to climate change in conflict-prone or conflict-affected contexts needs to be planned in alternative ways to purely top-down strategies, while also acknowledging that bottom-up approaches alone will not suffice. Top-down planning may fail to grasp micro-level vulnerabilities or the intricacies of community relations and tensions, and instead focus more on national interests. Furthermore, in communities where there is deep mistrust of central government and a history and legacy of government marginalisation of particular identity groups, top-down government-managed adaptation assistance might come across to local communities as an unwanted and potentially harmful imposition.

3. LIST OF SELECTED REPORTS: IFP-EW CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFLICT CLUSTER

F. Brodziak, A. L. García and L. Gómez Chow (2011). *Climate Change Impacts on Socio-environmental Conflicts Vulnerability in Facing Climate Change and Social Conflicts in Mexico*. IfP-EW: Brussels.

P. Lumerman, J. Psathakis and M. de los Ángeles Ortiz (2011). *Climate Change Impacts on Socio-environmental Conflicts: Diagnosis and Challenges of the Argentinean Situation*. IfP-EW: Brussels.

L. Ruettinger, D. Taenzler, Dr P. Musana and B. Narcisio. *Water, Crisis and Climate Change in Uganda: A Policy Brief*. IfP-EW: Brussels.

L. Ruettinger, A. Morin, A. Houdret, D. Taenzler and C. Burnley (2011). *Water, Crisis and Climate Change Assessment Framework (WACCAF)*. IfP-EW: Brussels.

D. Taenzler, L. Ruettinger, K. Ziegenhagen and G. Murthy (2011). *Water, Crisis and Climate Change in India: A Policy Brief*. IfP-EW: Brussels.

J. Vivekananda (2011). *Practice Note: Conflict-Sensitive Responses to Climate Change in South Asia*. IfP-EW: Brussels.

J. Vivekananda and D. Smith (2011). *Climate Change Conflict and Fragility*. IfP-EW: Brussels.

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