



Roundtable report

People's experience of conflict, climate risk and resilience

The Hague roundtable, 3 May 2019

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About

This outcome paper was produced in support of the global series of policy-making roundtables and highlights the key areas of debate which occurred during discussions in The Hague on 3 May 2019. **The views represented in this paper are those of the roundtable participants and do not necessarily represent the views of the authors or their agencies.**

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Introduction

In January 2019, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) launched a global series of policy-making roundtables on ‘People’s experience of conflict, climate risk and resilience’. The series has also been supported by regional partners, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, the Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) programme and Partners for Resilience.

The roundtable series is accompanied by a background paper, *Double vulnerability: the humanitarian implications of intersecting climate and conflict risk*,¹ which summarises the existing state of knowledge at the intersection of climate, conflict and resilience.

The roundtable series, running throughout 2019, will include seven regional events providing a neutral, non-political space for discussions on the interaction between climate and conflict. The purpose of the series is to foreground the voices and experiences of people directly affected by conflict and climate risk, in order to inform operational decisions and shape global policy.

The primary objectives for the series are: 1) to ground international discussions on conflict and climate risk by listening to people’s lived experiences; 2) to foreground humanitarian perspectives of the climate–conflict nexus; 3) to explore how climate finance can increase people’s adaptation and resilience to the double vulnerability of conflict and climate risk; and 4) to gain insights from key stakeholders to develop the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement’s knowledge, networks and policy on conflict and climate risk.

The third event in this series, held in The Hague in the Netherlands, was jointly organised with the Netherlands Red Cross. It convened experts from institutions throughout Europe to discuss five key themes at the intersection of climate and conflict in the Middle East: 1) people’s vulnerability to climate impacts in contexts affected by fragility and conflict;

2) the relationship between climate and some of the known drivers of conflict; 3) barriers to climate finance; 4) security-centred perspectives in discussions on climate and conflict; and 5) the implications of climate and conflict for humanitarian systems.

Theme 1: People living in fragile and conflict-affected contexts

A key starting point of the discussion emphasised how eroded ability to create and enforce policies in conflict areas is very problematic. Land grabbing, declining access to natural resources and environmental degradation all increase vulnerabilities and risks. Climate change is a further accelerator. Tensions over natural resources are a key component in this discussion, but the subject has yet to be strongly included. It is vital that we better use knowledge and data on the situation around natural resources. We can see the hotspots where things are likely to turn into a conflict, with climate risk aggravating matters. We need to work in a much more anticipatory way, and even apply forecast-based financing thinking to this problem.

The discussion also dealt with the types of things we need to do more of in effective climate risk management, ranging from strengthening the capacities of local institutions, increasing social cohesion locally, investing in local dialogues that bring people together to reach agreement on natural resources, making better use of local knowledge and applying more holistic approaches, where local communities are involved in the design and implementation of projects. One expert stressed the growing distance between communities affected and the people discussing them (and in charge of policies or finance). Many funding initiatives and finance mechanisms now also look at the private sector; however, a key limitation of private sector financing is that it typically does not reach the most vulnerable, especially in conflict-affected areas. Ensuring that the goals of the Paris Agreement are met often requires difficult choices and highly complex decision-making, and we need a better

1 Available at www.odi.org/publications/11295-double-vulnerability-humanitarian-implications-intersecting-climate-and-conflict-risk

understanding of the trade-offs in decision-making in fragile countries. An example from Nigeria showed the highly complex trade-offs between long-term and short-term risk management and development, in the context of oil dependency and the transition towards green energy. Lastly, an example from the Caribbean was shared illustrating the need to provide tailored risk information based on cultural and gender needs.

Finally, with respect to people's lived experience, the point was made that many people experiencing increased tensions and declining livelihoods associated with climate change do not know what climate change is, or why certain things are happening around them. Thus, a bottom-up approach, incorporating and with the participation of the most vulnerable, is critical to any needs-based response.

Theme 2: Climate and the known drivers of conflict

Discussants agreed that climate change can affect the known drivers of conflict and can be a driver in itself. Yet climate change is frequently confused with poor natural resource management. For instance, in locations with water scarcity, such as the Lake Chad area, it is the mismanagement of resource-sharing that is leading to tensions, rather than climate change per se.

It was also noted that climate change and fragility are interconnected. When the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction was developed, conflict was left out as it touched upon state sovereignty. Today, talking about DRR without taking fragility or conflict into account, and vice versa, is almost impossible. Projects addressing the double vulnerability of conflict and climate should be both climate-sensitive and risk-informed.

There is also a need to find common ground with other actors, building more partnerships and perhaps using issues around climate and conflict as an entry point to bring people around the table. Partnerships between humanitarians and militaries were mentioned, but did not take into account the challenges of maintaining neutral and independent humanitarian action, which can be compromised in such partnerships.

Experts suggested that humanitarian actors should focus on longer-term sustainable action when addressing issues of conflict and climate change. To anticipate the risk and achieve a more effective response, better risk analysis and environmental impact assessments are needed. Qualitative and quantitative data serve as a basis for adequate and relevant risk analysis when planning projects to address climate and conflict. The importance of involving and listening to local actors when addressing the conflict-climate issue was widely raised: a combination of local realities and scientific data would help in policy-making and decision-making.

Theme 3: Access to climate finance

The issue of risk, from a wide variety of angles, was the most common thread running through the day's discussion. From an international NGO perspective, it was agreed that, while risk and the complexities of operating in conflict areas are on the rise, there is also increasing zero tolerance of risk among donors. This includes flexibility for programmatic changes as well as macro political issues, such as stringent anti-terrorism legislation, which is a serious impediment to the work of neutral organisations.

Managing competing incentives was also a frequent point of discussion in the roundtable. This includes the tension between reaching the most vulnerable places, which are often more complex and risk-prone, and the need to demonstrate large-scale disbursement and impacts of climate finance, which encourages fund managers towards the easiest-to-reach places that can absorb the largest funds the fastest. Difficult proposal processes and accreditation requirements for major climate funds were also cited as factors limiting investment in conflict areas and creating incentives to invest in easier, less fragile contexts. Experts recommended discussing strategies to overcome this and programme funds quickly and easily for the most vulnerable, as outlined in the Paris Agreement, with the Green Climate Fund board in the context of the funds they channel.

Experts also cited challenges stemming from the limitations of the additionality concept. This includes additionality from both a finance

flow perspective (ensuring that adaptation funds are new and additional, rather than repurposed development funds) as well as technical additionality (ensuring that climate finance is spent strictly on adapting to changing climate risks, rather than traditional development needs). It was noted that building on development investments allows larger amounts of funds to be programmed faster. It was pointed out that funding requirements which insist on a strict delineation between adaptation and development create practical limitations to operational impact when these strict separations are not feasible on the ground. Experts suggested that this was similar to the recurring challenges found in the segmentation of humanitarian and development financing, and that, while climate finance could be a way to overcome some of these divides, in practice it is increasing complexity for implementing governments and non-state actors.

Experts felt that there is increased appreciation of the role that private sector investment can play in achieving the aims of the Paris Agreement. Experts agreed that the public sector needs to de-risk private sector investments in order to increase private investment in conflict areas. Incentives are also needed to ensure that private sector investments reach remote communities, which often entails higher operating costs and lower returns. Special emphasis also needs to be placed on fostering the growth of small and medium enterprises in the domestic markets of places in conflict. This was cited as crucial in stimulating local economies. Mechanisms to ‘hyper-localise’ climate finance are needed to achieve this. One suggested modality is to partner directly with local banks, mobile money lenders and micro-finance institutions to ensure that loans reach small and medium businesses and local entrepreneurs. It was suggested that, for efficiency, such a mechanism should run in parallel with funds channelled through national governments, rather than through the existing funding architecture.

Experts noted the importance of layered risk management strategies in order to overcome some of these barriers. This includes mitigating risk where possible, transferring some risks to the

insurance sector, the absorption of some private sector investment risks by the public sector and a need for leadership from funders and implementers in order to proactively negotiate acceptance of higher-risk scenarios. Experts felt that, overall, the necessary instruments to leverage risk management strategies are insufficient, and this needs to be prioritised.

One participant noted that humanitarian programming which addresses climate/security issues with innovative and hybrid financing mechanisms does not yet exist. It was clear that the Green Climate Fund is not going to address fragility, and an alternative model which addresses the issue of people experiencing the ‘double effect’ of climate risk and armed conflict needs to be explored.

Finally, increased research and evidence on conflict and climate was also suggested, in order to improve funding mechanisms. Experts felt that China’s role in these discussions needs to be further explored. An additional recommendation includes exploration of the role of diasporas and remittances as another form of potential climate finance to spur adaptation in conflict areas.

Theme 4: Security-centred perspectives

The roundtable sought to understand the driving forces behind the ‘climate/security nexus’ and how this relates to the principled approach of the ICRC and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in responding to humanitarian needs generated by climate risk and armed conflict. The questions posed were aimed at understanding whether a security-focused approach is or is not compatible with a people-centred approach, and how momentum on climate and security at the UN and in other fora can incorporate a humanitarian and people-centred dimension.

Several participants noted that people’s lived experiences are often linked with a security-centred perspective, as climate risks impacting community conflict and displacement are exactly the real-world impacts occurring in people’s lives. Thus, they are not necessarily distinct. However, one participant noted that

discussions surrounding security concerns are largely driven by state interests. Consideration of those interests in relation to climate change is needed in order to influence the discussion.

With respect to ensuring that humanitarian voices and programming are integrated into security risk models, participants agreed that this is a hard security problem, but one which does not necessarily require hard security responses. The entry point, in many cases, is evidence-based analysis on the impact of the ‘double effect’ on people and resulting needs. Traditional humanitarian responses need to be adapted and cannot be climate-blind, and all responses, including military, peacekeeping and humanitarian, need to be climate-proofed.

The dichotomy between climate change as a hard security problem requiring a soft security solution also prompted discussion around the role of the military. While participants noted that the military already accepts that solutions do not lie in hard security, it was argued that the military skill set should still be utilised, for instance in the form of experience in foresight and risk analysis. In addition, both developing the transdisciplinary capacity of the military and combining its ‘can do’ attitude with non-military areas such as engineering could lead to innovative solutions. It was also noted that the high regard in which the military is often held may mean that military voices hold greater weight with governments than those of NGOs.

Theme 5: Implications for the humanitarian system

The importance of utilising available data in terms of what works and what doesn’t in addressing vulnerability was a recurrent theme throughout the discussion. It was stressed that, while such data exists, humanitarians are currently not using it. Such data was seen by experts as a means to develop scenario planning, which could help model the impact of shocks, explain past patterns of interventions and help to adapt responses in the future. Experts argued that certain natural hazard-related disasters – such as droughts – were predictable, providing a space for planning and developing longer-term solutions, such as

addressing water governance structures. The knowledge generated should also be shared with local communities before a crisis emerges. In line with this, experts argued that efforts should be made to build institutions at the national level to analyse risks and facilitate adaptation to climate change. With regard to the latter, it was argued that humanitarians should not be seen as strangers to climate adaptation, as these actors have transferable skills to identify and act on emerging risks.

Experts also made the argument that there was a need for greater synergy between planning by humanitarians and national governments. The point was raised that, while humanitarians might be organising one year in advance, governments may be thinking in terms of three- to four-year plans. It was stressed that this gap needs to be addressed. However, while there might be an enabling environment and funding available for organisations to move towards longer-term planning, concerns were raised regarding organisational capacity to manage such changes. One participant noted that governments often lack both the organisation and capacity to explain what they need to address longer-term solutions.

The issue of funding was also raised, with humanitarians encouraged to be more effective and efficient in its use. This included calls for funding for innovation. One expert noted that, in the Zataari refugee camp in Jordan, businesses are generating a significant turnover. Therefore, humanitarians were encouraged to combine their work with funding to stimulate business enterprise among people living in the camps. However, in terms of ability humanitarians to fund longer term development work barriers may exist outside of organisations control. For example, one expert raised the point that the rejection of interventions focused on development is often a decision taken by national governments, which in some cases are reluctant to accept such funds due to what is seen as the permanent nature of these programmes. Concerns were also raised regarding funding mechanisms for forecast-based financing. While this was identified as an important funding strand, it was suggested that it was too small in scale, and that donors were often reluctant to provide financing based on a forecast.

Conclusions and next steps

Three cross-cutting themes emerged throughout the day's discussions: risk factors, the role of data and financial aspects. Experts agreed that risk tolerance is rarely explicitly discussed when responding in conflict areas, yet it is important to understand the risk levels that funders are prepared to accept. To inform such negotiations, experts suggested better data utilisation to improve risk assessments in general, including climate and non-climate risks. Incorporating uncertainty into assessments can help identify a range of possible unintended programme outcomes. This can be used as an entry-point to discuss the level of risk a funder and implementer are willing to tolerate. Experts also argued that, in some instances, extreme weather events may ease tensions, for example if a usually drought-affected area receives more rainfall than normal this could help de-escalate communal violence.

Another common thread in the discussions was the role of climate finance. It was noted throughout the discussion that climate finance does not effectively reach conflict-affected areas, and when it does do so it is not evenly distributed and often does not reach the most vulnerable people. Experts suggested that higher risk tolerance among donors, or the use of de-risking tactics, could help adaptation finance reach marginalised areas. Experts recommended increasing the number of instruments available to ensure layered risk management approaches,

and identifying new incentives to overcome the inherent tension between the need to demonstrate large-scale disbursement and impact of climate finance flows and the commitment to ensure that adaptation finance reaches the most vulnerable places, as outlined in the Paris Agreement.

Additional cross-cutting themes included the need to consult local populations when developing solutions to ensure that interventions are community-driven; the need to bridge the growing gap between communities and policy-makers; and the need to raise the profile of discussions on the double vulnerability of conflict and climate change in political and security fora.

About the roundtable series

The first roundtable in this series, held in January 2019 in Nairobi, explored these themes from the Greater Horn of Africa perspective. The second roundtable was held in Abidjan in April 2019, with a focus on West Africa. The Hague was the third roundtable in this series. A fourth took place in Amman in June 2019, exploring perspectives from the Middle East. The fifth roundtable, focused on Asia, was held in Manila in August 2019. Subsequent roundtable discussions will be held in Washington and Geneva. A report of insights gained from the discussions will be prepared after the series concludes.



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