

# Climate change, conflict and displacement: implications for protection agencies

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## Abstract

Systems thinking has often been adopted by humanitarian and specialist protection agencies – both to map the relationships between drivers and triggers of displacement, and to better understand the capacities of those at risk to manage and adapt to changing conditions that can result in displacement outcomes. It is believed that this, in turn, can help to ‘identify and mobilise the right actors and approaches’ to respond preventatively and post-displacement (IDMC and NRC, 2015).

Yet, so far, siloed approaches to dealing with the climate crisis, displacement and conflict remain dominant, and in juxtaposition with the increasing recognition that complex interactions between displacement drivers and triggers span issues related to conflict and climate.

Despite increasing recognition of these complex interactions, humanitarian and protection agencies are only just getting to grips with the implications for the way they understand and act on displacement issues.

As we argue throughout this paper, however, rather than becoming another compartmentalised specialism within the field of displacement, adding climate change to the mix presents an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the complex interactions between displacement drivers and triggers – and must be understood as such.



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# Acronyms

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<b>DRC</b>	Danish Refugee Council
<b>ICRC</b>	International Committee of the Red Cross
<b>IDMC</b>	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
<b>IGAD</b>	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>NRC</b>	Norwegian Refugee Council
<b>PDD</b>	Platform on Disaster Displacement
<b>STAG</b>	Scientific and Technical Advisory Group
<b>UNDRR</b>	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

# 1 Introduction: complex interactions

Understanding displacement drivers and triggers has long been part of the process for those seeking to unpack the complexity of displacement trends and to identify durable solutions. Systems thinking has often been adopted by humanitarian and specialist protection agencies – both to map the relationships between drivers and triggers of displacement, and to better understand the capacities of those at risk to manage and adapt to changing conditions that can result in displacement outcomes. It is believed that this, in turn, can help to ‘identify and mobilise the right actors and approaches’ to respond preventatively and post-displacement (IDMC and NRC, 2015).

Yet, so far, siloed approaches to dealing with the climate crisis, displacement and conflict remain dominant, and in juxtaposition with the increasing recognition that complex interactions between displacement drivers and triggers span issues related to conflict and climate.

Recognised drivers of displacement have commonly included violence and conflict, military incursions and aspects of human physical insecurity. More recently, climate and environmental change has also been added to this list – as a driver of displacement in itself and as a complicating factor that alters and exacerbates patterns of conflict and displacement. Sudden-onset weather/climate hazards (e.g., floods and typhoons, and which may be influenced by climate change) or the disasters that arise in their aftermath, have also been increasingly recognised as a displacement trigger in relatively peaceful settings and in conflict contexts (Peters, 2019; Peters and Lovell, 2020).

There is also a reverse relationship between conflict and climate. Conflict displacement can increase an individual’s vulnerability and exposure to hazards, making them more at risk of climate-related disasters. Moreover, ‘social and violent conflict can drive patterns of displacement that intersect with displacement caused by natural hazard-related disasters’ (Peters and Lovell, 2020: 17). And these examples are just the tip of the iceberg.

Despite increasing recognition of these complex interactions, humanitarian and protection agencies are only just getting to grips with the implications for the way they understand and act on displacement issues. Just as addressing the structural drivers of displacement requires participation beyond the humanitarian constituency – to also include those concerned with human rights, peacebuilding, poverty reduction and security, among others (IDMC and NRC, 2015) – it also requires engagement with those concerned with addressing climate change risks and impacts. But the current approach to the complex interactions of conflict and disasters does not bode well: ‘unfortunately policy and operational frameworks have tended to approach displacement according to the precipitating trigger’ (ibid: 5). Taking the example of disasters, it has been found that ‘[h]umanitarian response to conflicts and disasters has thus come to use separate language and terminology and there is often a lack of coordinated analysis and programming’ (ibid.).

As we argue throughout this paper, however, rather than becoming another compartmentalised

specialism within the field of displacement, adding climate change to the mix presents an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the complex interactions between displacement drivers and triggers – and it must be understood as such.

## 1.1 Recognition on a global stage

Concern over the complex interactions between climate change, conflict and displacement have prompted increased policy and diplomatic attention. For example, in September 2020, a Ministerial segment of the 75th United Nations (UN) General Assembly saw over 30 statements submitted – including by specialist protection agencies such as the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – on the humanitarian implications of climate change, environmental degradation and conflict. Concerns were raised about increased displacement, human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law (Peters et al., 2020). Yet such statements offered less in the way of tangible commitments to tackle these risks and few concrete ideas for policy or advocacy (ibid.).

In parallel, there has been increased academic and research attention on the complex links between climate shocks and stresses and environmental degradation that are contributing to natural hazard-related disasters, and that in turn affect the patterns and prevalence of violence and conflict in some contexts (ibid.). Climate shocks and stressors are also contributing to shifting migration and displacement patterns with people moving to seek greater livelihood security when they do not have options to stay (Opitz-Stapleton et al., 2017; Abel et al., 2019). In these circumstances, underlying vulnerabilities and exposure to shocks and stresses influence the choice – or lack thereof – in movement internally

or cross-border. However, whatever the nature of movement, a range of protection issues are being raised as a result of these changing conditions that are yet to be fully addressed by agencies working on either humanitarian, development, climate or disaster issues.

Relatedly, and warranting more urgent attention, is a growing body of evidence on what can be done at a local level – and at scale – to reverse environmental degradation and restore livelihoods, to reverse or prevent distress migration and to restore peace in the context of global climate change. The ICRC (2020a) has documented examples of people coping with the cumulative impacts of conflict and climate crisis, and the mobility and displacement consequences of this. Such examples include raising awareness of and compliance with protecting the natural environment under international humanitarian law (ICRC, 2020b), as well as infrastructural solutions to rehabilitate and expand water systems using durable energy supply and switching to drought-resistance seed varieties (ICRC, 2020a).

However, many questions remain about what this all means for humanitarians, particularly those working with a protection focus. For example, how can human rights be protected in contexts where climate change, conflict and displacement compound existing vulnerabilities? How can measures to protect people against violence be effectively integrated into interventions that seek to enhance climate change adaptation and disaster risk management? And how can measures to increase financial inclusion for those displaced, whether from climate and/or conflict drivers, help support the realisation of economic rights in the post-pandemic context? These questions require a far deeper analysis beyond the scope of this paper; but what we do here is lay the foundations

for such conversations by setting out five key areas for critical thinking and action, followed by recommendations for action.

A central belief driving this paper is the notion that protection in all its guises – be this legal protection, protection against violence or protection of access to basic rights – needs to become part and parcel of discussions and action on the intersection of climate change, conflict and displacement. Only by doing so will crucial questions be asked: such as how can we collectively enforce existing legal and policy frameworks that set a benchmark for protection, and what durable solutions might be feasible over the coming years including for people

experiencing protracted and multiple disaster displacements in contexts of conflict and climate change (Peters and Lovell, 2020)? Putting the discourse and goal of protection at the centre of these ‘nexus’ discussions will also bring to the fore the need for those working on climate, disasters and the environment to be cognisant of wide-ranging protection issues, and to systematically consider what this means for their own policy, advocacy and programming.

In short, ensuring protection outcomes for those in the midst of compounding risks requires a collective response. Protection agencies will need to lead the way and to bring others along on the journey.

## 2 State of the evidence

The current empirical evidence base on the nexus of climate change, conflict and displacement in crisis situations is limited. Research has tended to focus only on the relationship between two areas, providing piecemeal insight into the tripartite relationship. Taking each in turn, conflict–displacement links are well established (see Joint Data Centre on Forced Displacement et al., 2020), and much has been written about climate-related disaster displacement (see IDMC, 2018). More recently, there has been growing attention on the indirect links between climate change and conflict (see special issues of *Political Geography* (Salehyan, 2014); *Current Climate Change Reports* (Gilmore, 2017); *Journal of Peace Research* (Gleditsch, 2012)). In such discussions, displacement is variously cited as a driver or an instigator of changing or increased conflict, including armed conflict, and sometimes as a consequence. Common within this literature, however, is a framing of displaced people as the conflict ‘problem’; not necessarily the perpetrators, but as a changing variable from which conflict can evolve.

Operationally, the climate change cadre lag behind in the design and delivery of adaptation and mitigation interventions in conflict contexts that deliberately seek to contribute to peace or protection outcomes. The same can be said of those working in disaster risk reduction (Peters, 2019; Peters et al., 2020).

The humanitarian community is just beginning to think seriously about the humanitarian impacts of climate change, including in conflict contexts (Peters et al., 2020), and how the intersection is impacting all facets of protection. Progress is embryonic. In October 2020, the United Nations

High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2020: 3) issued guidance on the ‘applicability of the international protection regime in the context of cross-border climate change and disaster displacement’. It reinforced the fact that existing legal frameworks, including the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UN General Assembly, 1951), can serve as a basis for legal protection in certain climate displacement contexts. Other frameworks that support legal protection in certain climate displacement contexts include the Kampala Convention (African Union, 2009) in the case of internally displaced persons, and the Cartagena Declaration (Regional Refugee Instruments & Related, 1984) in the case of refugees displaced in Latin America. However, the UNHCR (2020) report also recognises that current legal interpretations of who qualifies as a refugee are too narrow and ill-equipped to deal with a possible future in which displacement might increase from areas with high socioeconomic and political vulnerability, including in contexts where climate change or disasters alter state–society relations, individual well-being and the attainment of human rights.

As such, there is only emergent evidence and programming on the tripartite relationship between climate, conflict and displacement. And consequently, protection agencies are well placed to work collaboratively to build an empirical basis and actionable recommendations for policy and advocacy to address this nexus over the near, medium and long term. While there is no shortage of grey literature conveying the ‘vicious cycle’ of climate shocks, conflict escalation and mass displacement, the empirical basis of this evidence varies. We do not focus on this literature in the

section that follows, but instead outline what we know from robust sources and raise the need to exercise caution with the current framing. This is

with a view to supporting more critical thinking and practical action to enable protection agencies to engage with this agenda as progressives.

## 3 The tripartite agenda: five key areas for critical thinking and action

### 3.1 The factors contributing to population movement are complex

Climatic and environmental changes have been recognised as drivers of displacement, while sudden-onset hazards – influenced by climate change – have been regarded as triggers of displacement (IDMC and NRC, 2015). To understand the intersection of climate change, conflict and displacement, however, we need to consider vulnerability, inequality, rights and power (Klepp, 2017).

It may not be appropriate or possible to say climate change or natural resource scarcity ‘cause’ movement or conflict. As the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and NRC (2015: 2) discuss, ‘displacement is a complex phenomenon that results from a combination of multiple underlying drivers, often interacting over decades. Categorising displacement into broad triggers such as conflict, natural hazards or development projects ... underestimates the degree of human agency involved in the decision to move, masking the individual’s or household’s subjective assessment of threat and their physical ability to move.’

Mobility reflects a continuum of choice, ranging from forced displacement without choice to fully chosen migration. Whether a person is displaced (and where to and for how long) in the aftermath of an extreme climate or other natural hazard event or whether they have the ability to choose to migrate as the climate changes is determined by their underlying vulnerability and exposure to shocks and stresses. Disaster and climate change

resilience capacities at the individual, household and community level are also influential here, and are shaped by broader socioeconomic, cultural and political conditions and processes (Opitz-Stapleton et al., 2017).

Some individuals displaced by a rapid-onset hazard might have been displaced through early warning and evacuation, but many do so because they cannot shelter in place and/or they lack the resources to rapidly recover post-disaster and stay. Country-specific case studies indicate that many of those displaced by disasters tend to be displaced internally, but the duration of displacement varies (*ibid.*).

Relatedly, although displacement in situations of violent conflict is often forced, in many instances there remains an element of choice in terms of who flees, when and to where. Thus, even forced displacement operates on this continuum of choice, where decision-making is influenced by longer-term causal factors or drivers (e.g., low-level violence, discriminatory laws and practices, plus climate change and environmental degradation, etc.) as well as more immediate triggers (violent attacks, firing zones, access restrictions, and climate-related hazards, etc.).

Another factor in the complexity of movement is location. The world is rapidly urbanising, towns are growing and those previously displaced and seeking shelter in a city might find themselves displaced again (Peters and Lovell, 2020). Poor urban planning and uncontrolled growth exacerbate inhabitants’ pre-existing vulnerabilities through weak urban infrastructure, informal

settlements, violence and criminal activity, lack of services and jobs, and levels of social cohesion between the displaced and host communities. Addressing the needs of host communities has too often been neglected by humanitarian agencies, serving to aggravate these challenges further. It is the lack of choice, set by intersectional vulnerabilities and exposure (IPCC, 2019), that gives rise to displacement post-hazard and which can lead to negative impacts and suffering.

Displacement and migration patterns are likely to change too under increasing climate and demographic pressures (Rigaud et al., 2018). Some early adopters might begin migrating as slow-onset environmental degradation begins impacting their livelihoods, or those with access to resources and social safety nets may have the means to be able to move earlier. Those who migrate later as conditions continue to deteriorate might do so under greater duress. Additionally, choice in movement and an ability to integrate well into a new community may actually serve as a sound adaptation strategy (Opitz-Stapleton et al., 2017). Thus, movement may be neither forced nor voluntary but ‘somewhere on a continuum between the two’ (OHCHR, 2018: 7).

### **3.2 Climate change may become a more direct driver of displacement in the absence of appropriate mitigating actions**

The evidence and practice on climate-induced/environmental population movement is weak and contested (Opitz-Stapleton et al., 2017; Selby and Daoust, 2021). The majority tracks only those displaced by rapid-onset, extreme events like typhoons, flooding or wildfire, and some events may still be within natural climate variability. Climate change is also contributing to slow-onset, creeping changes in seasons

and environmental degradation (IPCC, 2019), but tracking displacement due to these events is difficult because they are so gradual. Where evidence is available, it is largely focused on relatively peaceful, stable contexts. There is a severe neglect of understanding climate-related displacement drivers and triggers in contexts of active armed conflict, violence or fragility, particularly from a local or a long-term perspective (Peters et al., 2020).

Slow-onset climate change impacts can slowly erode people’s assets and livelihoods, and contribute to greater vulnerability which makes people more likely to be displaced when a rapid-onset extreme is superimposed (Desai et al., 2018). Slow-onset changes might also exacerbate conflict indirectly in contexts with high political and social inequality and where there are existing tensions over natural resources, thus contributing to displacement (Peters et al., 2020). Additionally, with time and due to sea-level rises, a number of people in some low-lying coastal areas, including on some Small Island States, might be forced to move. This may occur if coastal defences are not built (both nature-based or hard measures like sea walls) or if people need to be relocated (Oppenheimer et al., 2019).

Slow-onset shifts due to climate change have implications for human rights and protection over a longer term, but these may be neglected because attention is largely directed towards high-impact extreme events. For example, increasingly warmer and wetter/drier seasons can slowly facilitate the spread and severity of disease and contribute to creeping food insecurity as water resources and growing conditions for crops are altered. These represent direct threats to the enjoyment of the right to life and an adequate standard of living, among other human rights.

There is currently very little evidence that climate change-related displacement (internal or cross-border) will be as extensive as some reports suggest, however, given that most of these studies ignore adaptation initiatives (Selby and Daoust, 2021). The World Bank's Groundswell study (Rigaud et al., 2018) is one of the few to project the impact of adaptation measures on reducing internal displacement and migration. It finds that measures could reduce internal climate-influenced mobility to between 50% and 80% of that predicted if no action were taken (ibid.).

Furthermore, predictions of large-scale cross-border displacement are also not borne out by the current evidence – those displaced by today's disasters tend to stay largely within country (Opitz-Stapleton et al., 2017). Crossing borders requires significant financial and social resources that often act to limit such movement. There is little convincing evidence to indicate that such conditions will shift in the future under climate change; vulnerabilities that contribute to displacement will not make it easier to cross borders in the years ahead.

The linkages between climate change and conflict are also indirect (Peters et al., 2020). Climate change and land degradation are commonly described as 'threat multipliers for already precarious livelihoods (very high confidence), leaving them highly sensitive to extreme climatic events, with consequences such as poverty and food insecurity (high confidence) and, in some cases, migration, conflict and loss of cultural heritage (low confidence)' (IPCC, 2019: 53). Similarly, 'there is no direct and linear relationship between climate change and violent conflict, but under certain circumstances climate-related change can influence factors that lead to or exacerbate conflict' (Sida, 2018: 4). However, if climate change continues

to accelerate because international climate mitigation commitments are not met, it is possible that it will become a stronger factor in displacement and migration in contexts where people are highly vulnerable and if adaptation options are not prioritised (Rigaud et al., 2018).

### 3.3 A changing climate has implications for protection outcomes

From a climate perspective, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has provided irrefutable evidence that specific hazards such as droughts, storms and floods have been increasing in frequency and intensity over the past decades (Masson-Delmotte et al., 2018). In the absence of sufficient support to remain in-situ or to relocate (temporarily or permanently), patterns of migration and displacement are changing and needs are increasing.

Natural hazard-related disasters are responsible for significant internal displacement; in 2019 alone, 24.9 million people were displaced by disasters as compared with 8.5 million by conflict (IDMC, 2020). Because of the bifurcation of displacement statistics into two categories (disaster-related (including those that are climate-related) versus conflict-related), there is a dearth of data on the complex interactions between climate change and conflict as two of a number of drivers and triggers for displacement outcomes. In Somalia and Ethiopia, for example, displacement has been recorded as triggered by a drought or conflict when local insights reveal structural drivers of displacement such as socioeconomic factors being the primary cause of movement (Ginnetti and Franck, 2014). This has implications for protection. While the majority of disaster displacements are internal, those that cross borders may not enjoy adequate refugee protection status.

Changing weather patterns and the impacts of climate change also intersect with disruptions to access to and control over land, natural resources, livelihoods, individual rights, freedoms and lives. Yet climate change is just one of a number of human-caused environmental trends that contribute to changing land use and natural resource degradation. In resource-poor environments, competition over access to natural resources can erupt into individualised or collective violence, as has been the case in the Lake Chad basin and Somalia, for example (IDMC and NRC, 2015). While the exact causal relationship is difficult to discern, this can result in loss of life, livelihoods and displacement. In turn, these may threaten the enjoyment of the right to physical integrity; an adequate standard of living; health, water and sanitation; and self-determination and development, among other things (UNHCR, 2020). In the case of cross-border movements, human rights violations may amount to persecution, as defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention (UN General Assembly, 1951). For those internally displaced, the violations may contravene the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (OCHA, 2004).

Populations may suffer discrimination, either as a result of being disproportionately affected or targeted. For example, groups may be discriminated against in accessing limited resources. Relief in the face of natural hazard-related disasters and climate extremes may become politicised or the government may deny certain groups access to aid (including groups like women or minorities), which may contribute to reasons for internal or cross-border movement. Other examples of state discrimination and/or persecution

in response to the impact of climate change include environmental harms such as natural resources or ancestral lands being destroyed to persecute a particular group, or failing to prevent environmental harm by adopting appropriate measures, which then has a disproportionate impact on a particular group (UNHCR, 2020).

All of these changing protection harms may impact the decision and ability to cross an international border. They also have an impact on the legal definition that any such group may fall under. In terms of the legal protection implications and identification of legal status, UNHCR has noted: ‘in the context of cross-border climate change and disaster displacement, not all people displaced in this context will be refugees’ (UNHCR, 2020: 3). However, ‘the social and political characteristics of the effects of climate change or the impacts of disasters or their interaction with other drivers of displacement’ may mean that some individuals or groups will be legal refugees (ibid.).

Furthermore, in conflict contexts, the potential for an individual’s status to change from internally displaced to international refugee complicates data collection and analysis (Prívarová and Prívarová, 2019). It also complicates protection needs and entitlements, which can change according to legal status at different points in a journey. Movement is not static: it can be fluid, a process, a journey. And different factors influence the extent of movement and what pushes onwards movement, with conflict and climate-related hazards being some of the driving factors. This complexity has direct and indirect implications on protection needs which are yet to be fully realised.

### 3.4 From a protection perspective, the displacement outcome is arguably of greater importance than the specific climate factor

Debates continue over the strength of the evidence linking climate change and conflict, and displacement consequences. A more nuanced assessment reveals that these debates arise in part from the different research parameters employed. This includes: literature lacking rigorous climate analysis or attributing all extreme events to climate change without appropriate attribution analysis; inconsistent definitions and classifications of key terms related to violence and conflict; and a reductionist approach to the treatment of climate and disaster impacts to hazard and exposure components, rather than taking a sufficiently broad perspective on the underlying vulnerabilities and capacities, including those related to risk governance (Peters et al., 2020).

In short, it could be argued that whether or not climate change contributes to displacement (internal or cross-border) is of less significance than addressing the protection needs of those displaced. Safeguarding the rights of those displaced, meeting humanitarian needs and blending the immediate provision of livelihoods, shelter and food security with longer-term durable solutions is arguably of greater importance for protection agencies than identifying the specific driving factors – which could be incredibly granular, varying by household or even individual.

Another reason for focusing on displacement outcomes rather than ‘blaming climate change’ is the increasingly securitised narratives that often frame climate change, displacement and migration negatively and push for a securitised response (Mayhew et al., 2020). It is ‘no accident’

that misuse of IDMC data is being peddled to ‘paint an exaggeratedly alarming picture’ of displacement projections and the role of climate change in those projections (Nash and Zickgraf, 2020). In pushing back on such narratives, agencies concerned with ensuring protection for the most vulnerable – such as NRC, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the ICRC – would be well placed to promote humanitarian, rights-based narratives and approaches to climate change–conflict–displacement risks, emphasising people’s experiences, coping mechanisms and adaptation strategies (ICRC, 2020a). Focusing on the displacement outcomes could help to ensure this intersection is framed around advocacy and policy issues which align with agencies’ current strategies – such as NRC’s *Ambition 2030* (NRC, 2021), with its focus on the attainment of rights, access to services and changing protection needs. This also helps to turn attention to the need to devise collective adaptive preparedness and response strategies, which serve displacement-affected people in a changing climate who are also contending with issues of conflict and violence.

Shifting to a more solutions-focused narrative doesn’t negate discussions on the driving factors or pressures that underlie individuals’ decisions to move, however. Being clear on the causal factors for displacement may be important to ensure that the most appropriate combination of actors and approaches are mobilised (IDMC and NRC, 2015) and for other reasons – namely because of the differential legal implications. For example, UNHCR (2020) has made clear in its recent legal guidance that although human rights violations may affect a whole community, this should not undermine the validity of a protection claim of an individual. As UNHCR (ibid: 4) notes, ‘The test is whether an individual’s fear of being persecuted is well-founded. In some cases, the adverse effects

of climate change and disasters on an entire community may strengthen rather than weaken the evidence that justifies the fear of an individual being persecuted.’

Alongside the inclusion of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the context of climate- or natural hazard-related disasters in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (OCHA, 2004), the Kampala Convention (African Union, 2009) is noteworthy for its protections in the African region. So too is the recently agreed Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, which aims to ‘enhance orderly cross-border mobility and migration, regional economic integration and development’ (IGAD, 2020) and could provide important legal means for movement in response to climate–conflict–displacement.

### **3.5 Protection agencies should continue to address people’s pre-existing intersectional vulnerabilities in disaster- and conflict-prone contexts**

While hazard impacts differ drastically within and by country, common across conflict contexts are the increased impacts of climate variability and change on populations, lives and livelihoods. Contexts experiencing challenges associated with violence, armed conflict and non-armed conflict are typically more vulnerable to climate change impacts. This is owing to there being less effective climate and disaster risk governance and management systems in place and lagging socioeconomic development, such is the case in Chad, Mali and Mauritania (Peters, 2019; Peters et al., forthcoming).

More specifically, the intersectional dimensions of linked climate–conflict–displacement stressors

and impacts are often cited (e.g., UNDRR, 2020), but there is limited evidence documenting the intersectional vulnerabilities and impacts for different communities over varying temporal or geographical scales. Commonly, the negative impacts on women are cited in relation to limited opportunities to diversify livelihoods, to shape decision-making processes and/or to secure social safety nets. However, there is little insight on the complexity of women’s roles in conflict and peace situations including in contexts where climate-related hazards are compounding pre-existing vulnerabilities – in part reflecting the embryonic nature of the sub-field of gender, conflict and peace studies (Gizelis, 2018).

Similarly, communities and individuals with pre-existing vulnerabilities (including those owing to conflict) are at most risk of suffering protection and human rights harms as a result of the adverse impacts of climate change (OHCHR, 2018). Those vulnerable as a result of ‘multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, inequality and structural and societal dynamics’ due to poverty, gender, ethnic minority status or age, for example, will face disproportionate impacts on the enjoyment of their rights (ibid: 18). Furthermore, conflict itself increases people’s vulnerabilities to climate change by destroying assets, livelihoods and social networks and driving displacement (Opitz-Stapleton et al., 2017).

With climate impacts and their protection consequences driven by underlying vulnerabilities, there is a need for protection agencies to place much greater emphasis on addressing pre-existing, intersectional vulnerabilities amongst disaster-prone populations than on the hazards themselves. This is important as the extent of these intersectional identities and profiles may have an impact on whether an individual meets the criteria for refugee status or another form of

international protection. Strengthened preventive action would be particularly useful since most vulnerabilities are not static but change over time.

These insights lead to a common observation across the literature that the complex tripartite relationship between climate change, conflict and displacement can and should only be understood in context-specific ways. Generalisations are useful for some aspects of international advocacy but are limited for informing specific policy, advocacy or operational approaches. In Mali and Sudan, for

example, displacements driven by armed conflict and drought occur in the context of pre-existing marginalisation and discrimination (IDMC and NRC, 2015). Thus ‘instituting separate response mechanisms according to the precipitating trigger may not be the most efficient or effective approach’ (ibid: 5). Instead, specialist protection agencies must strive to instigate more harmonised and collective preventative approaches, in order to address the complex new realities of intersecting climate change–conflict–displacement risks.

## 4 Where to next: implications and recommendations

### 4.1 Implications

#### 4.1.1 Protection agencies need to accelerate action on the tripartite relationship

The role of protection agencies in addressing the linked drivers and impacts of climate change, conflict and displacement must be situated within a broader shift among the humanitarian community ‘towards “collective outcomes” and greater systemic thinking overall’ (NRC, 2020a: iii). An interpretation of this goal is that where humanitarian assistance is required, the unique nature of humanitarian action must be preserved while also being proactively aligned to ensure coherence with sustainable development and longer-term outcomes. Or, where this is not feasible – and where humanitarian responses undermine longer-term sustainability goals – such trade-offs are weighed up and acknowledged.

A general trend is being witnessed wherein humanitarian agencies are increasingly considering the implications of the climate–conflict–displacement nexus for their work. For example, at the UN Security Council meetings in September 2020, the ICRC highlighted the dire humanitarian consequences of the intersection for populations living in protracted crisis situations, while ODI, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and ICRC convened a series of global policy roundtables throughout 2019 that brought together humanitarians, government, development and climate actors to

explore the myriad ways that climate shocks are impacting operational humanitarian responses across the globe (ICRC et al., 2018).

Other specialist agencies are engaging more explicitly with the climate policy architecture. For example, NRC has been coordinating the Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility since 2013. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has submitted technical inputs to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Secretariat, is a member of the Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility, and was involved in the UN’s Task Team on the Social Dimensions of Climate Change, which sought to address different types of climate induced mobility in programming (IOM, 2014).

Others have chosen to emphasise the need to address intersectional vulnerabilities. For example, CARE (2020: 3) is doing so with the broader aim of tackling climate extreme displacement in a gender-transformative and human rights-based way in order to ‘build a safer, more equitable, inclusive and resilient future that harnesses the power of women and girls within their communities’. Meanwhile World Vision (2019) aims to better bridge development, humanitarian action and peacebuilding in its advocacy work for conflict contexts, and Oxfam (2019) continues to renew its commitment to protection in situations of violence alongside a commitment to displaced, refugee and migrant populations.

Strengthening legal frameworks has been a priority for others. The ICRC (2020c) recently updated its Guidelines on the protection of the natural environment in armed conflict, which ‘bring together existing IHL [international humanitarian law] rules that provide specific protection to the natural environment, along with general international humanitarian law rules, including those which govern the conduct of hostilities and rules on specific weapons that protect the natural environment in conflict’. CARE (2020: 5) has also committed to advance ‘the legal and international institutional architecture so that it comprehensively addresses climate-induced displacement and provides protections to climate displaced people’.

UNHCR has focused on setting out legal and policy guidance on how displacement from climate change contexts interacts with the 1951 Refugee Convention (UN General Assembly, 1951) and international human rights law. In a recent legal guidance note, UNHCR (2020: 6) stressed that ‘People may also have a valid claim for refugee status where the adverse effects of climate change or disasters interact with conflict and violence. These adverse effects may exacerbate violence, or vice versa, and render the State incapable of protecting the victims of such violence, resulting in a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of one or more Convention grounds.’

These efforts are a step in the right direction in relation to the tripartite relationship between climate change, conflict and displacement, but more work still needs to be done. Too often commitments have been made on one or two of the links but not all three. To date there has been little in the way of specific commitments or changes to business models that explicitly address this intersection, or actions targeting the

current protection gap associated with climate–conflict–displacement risks. Where movement is required, the climate–conflict–displacement nexus demands that protection gaps are minimised and eligible persons can find and enjoy international protection whether under international refugee law or international human rights law. Where protection and humanitarian challenges remain, efforts should be made to ensure that temporary protection and humanitarian arrangements are in place – taking into account applicable national and regional instruments (see UNHCR, 2018). In short, there is urgent demand for protection agencies to provide guidance and to support measures to address protection and other humanitarian challenges in the midst of such complex contexts of intersecting risks.

#### 4.1.2 Complexities associated with terminology and data need to be addressed

In order to progress from a policy and advocacy perspective, the complexities associated with terminology, language and use of data need to be addressed.

##### **Legal framings and lay terminology matter**

Legal framings, terminology and definitions in regard to forcibly displaced groups can vary enormously, reflecting differences in interpretation and inconsistent responses to the various practical and policy challenges that emerge from different displacement contexts.

Efforts have been made to improve the collection, collation and disaggregation, reporting and overall quality of statistics on forcibly displaced populations, most recently with the adoption by the UN Statistical Commission in March 2018 of the International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics (IRRS) and the International

Recommendations on IDP Statistics (IRIS). Yet legal framings and consistent use of definitions remain an ongoing challenge in accurately collecting displacement and migration statistics.

Whether those displaced by conflict have been displaced internally (i.e., IDPs) or across an international border (i.e., refugees) they have legal protections under national, regional and international law with legal framings, terminology and definitions that apply to each group set out across regional and international legal frameworks. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (OCHA, 2004) provides a clear definition for IDPs. Those Guidelines have considerable authority, having been recognised by the UN General Assembly as an important international framework for the protection of IDPs. Although not directly legally binding, some states and regional organisations have incorporated them into their binding national laws and policies. However, despite these protections and clarity on legal framings, many displaced by disasters – regardless of whether climate change influenced the hazard event that triggered the disaster – lack adequate legal protection.

Another challenge relates to differences in how ‘conflict’ is defined, what types of events are recorded in international databases and the sources reporting those events. Some databases only record violent conflict events that result in a certain number of deaths (e.g., the Uppsala Conflict Data Program)<sup>1</sup> or those attributed to violence designated as terrorism (e.g., the Global Terrorism Database).<sup>2</sup> When events are compiled, a database might rely only on international media sources, for example, and not include local

language sources. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED)<sup>3</sup> database collates data on events from a variety of sources and takes a broad definition of conflict that includes violent and non-violent types of events. The upshot is that different definitions of conflict and sources of events and their impacts might mean that some conflict-displacement events are unreported or underreported.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, as noted previously, not all extreme events are yet influenced by climate change. Often, popular discourse will say a flood or storm was due to climate change, but calling an individual hazard event ‘climate change’ does not make it so. Better climate change attribution analysis is needed to understand where climate change has influenced a hazard-related disaster and to better anticipate changes in the climate–conflict–displacement nexus in particularly fragile contexts.

From a protection perspective, understanding all the factors that have led to movement can impact the level of legal protection granted to an individual or community (under international or regional legal and policy frameworks). Blaming a disaster and subsequent displacement on climate change may be politically expedient if it shifts attention away from the underlying vulnerability and exposure contexts. It also shifts blame away from poor local governance and resource management – which often are significant factors in why people are not protected against hazard events that have caused them to be displaced, whether seasonal, cyclical or easily anticipated.

Thus, climate attribution analysis (Otto et al., n.d.) might need to be embedded in a more systematic

1 See <https://ucdp.uu.se/>

2 See <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>

3 See <https://acleddata.com/#/dashboard>

4 See IDMC’s database for internal displacement: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database>

assessment of the linked social, economic, political and environmental conditions at the origin of displacement in order to push back and refocus attention on the real roots of the humanitarian problem. For instance, are land and water resources that were once held as customary community property being bought up by elites; are anti-grazing bans being enacted that marginalise those who practice transhumance?

A proper climate change attribution analysis as part of an overall root cause analysis can therefore help inform humanitarian agencies of the extent to which other factors such as human rights abuses and persecution underlie any displacement. It may also provide more robust grounds for seeking legal protections for certain populations when climate change is being used as a political tool to deny them, until legal protections are strengthened for all who might be partially (or fully) displaced by events influenced by climate change. This position is echoed in the UNHCR (2020) document laying out legal considerations when applying international refugee and human rights law to cross-border displacement in the context of disasters, including those influenced by climate change.

### **Overcoming data limitations**

Specific analysis on changing environmental and climate-related displacements are constrained by lack of data. This is a well-recognised problem, as recently elucidated by IDMC (2020). There is increasing recognition that the compartmentalised nature of displacement reporting – which disaggregates the primary cause for displacements as either conflict- or natural hazard-related disaster (IDMC, 2019) – neglects the complexity of the movement of many individuals and the complex interactions between displacement drivers and triggers, not least where disasters occur in conflict-affected contexts (Peters, 2019).

Data also tends to focus on capturing annual figures of newly IDPs, leaving limited understanding of patterns, duration and fluidity of displacement experiences (IDMC, 2020). To address this gap, longitudinal research is required that combines quantitative data with qualitative life histories. Such methods have been trialled already; methodologies from studies that follow migrants' journeys from Darfur to Europe (see Jaspars and Buchanan-Smith, 2018) could be adapted and applied to new research to better reflect movement patterns resulting from the intersection of climate, disasters and conflict.

The foundational limitations of displacement data also need to be addressed to support the development of insights into links between climate change, conflict and displacement. This includes, for example, continued investment in system dynamics and agent-based models to analyse slow-onset displacement and its interconnected drivers (IDMC, 2019). Such models allow for the testing of how policy responses and long-term investments could determine displacement risk in specific contexts (ibid.). Pragmatically, there is also a need to improve interoperability and coordination among data collectors, and to reach agreement on key metrics and definitions to enable greater insight and clarity on time series data and intersectional implications (ibid.).

Finally, it is critical that climate information is used appropriately and in combination with vulnerability, exposure and mobility information to better project risk profiles in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Only then will it be possible to solicit protection responses to address the conditions that lead to displacement, and to support individuals' choices in whether to stay or leave and to live with dignity wherever they are.

## 4.2 Recommendations

### 4.2.1 Advocating to close legal protection gaps

Existing legal frameworks and soft laws need to be utilised to strengthen protection. In addition, further work is required to understand the current and future legal protection gaps for people displaced in contexts where climate factors play a role.

Legal frameworks such as the Kampala Convention (African Union, 2009) and the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons (IGAD, 2020) are important to bear in mind in advocacy efforts around the rights of and legal protection for individuals fleeing across an international border. Moreover, directing attention to freedom of movement of persons would align with the strategic and technical expertise of NRC and likeminded protection agencies (i.e., displacement and protection of the displaced). Protection agencies' advocacy work should emphasise that there are legal structures and an enabling legal framework in place that can be critical to secure protection for those displaced in a climate change–conflict–displacement context. Furthermore, while not all who move across a border in these circumstances will meet the requirements of the 1951 Refugee Convention (UN General Assembly, 1951), many will, and advocacy should emphasise their legal rights to protection – whether refugee or other human rights protection under international law. In the Africa region, this should include reliance upon the new IGAD Protocol (2020), with its emphasis on 'orderly cross-border mobility and migration' providing a legal framework for movement in the region.

Protection agencies should also consider the importance of encouraging states to comply with their obligations under international law – in particular international refugee and human rights law – to secure the human rights of those on the move both internally and cross-border. This should include reference to international refugee law commitments, the 1951 Refugee Convention (UN General Assembly, 1951), regional frameworks for the protection of refugees and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (OCHA, 2004). Moreover, advocacy work could target governments to demand that they act in solidarity with those states in crisis and those receiving the displaced. All states must be encouraged to step up to their shared and sole obligations, as set out in the Global Compact on Refugees (UNHCR, 2018) and the Global Compact for Migration (2018).

To complement this, international funding will need to be committed to enable humanitarian responses in displacement contexts. The Platform on Disaster Displacement (PDD) will also be an important mechanism here, requiring support to advocate improved regional harmonisation and coordination of protection measures.

Finally, advocacy should steer clear of messages that endorse or dramatise the numbers of people on the move in order to seek to bring about change. Hyper and sensationalist statements about a climate displacement 'crisis' are not helpful and could backfire in terms of securing better protection outcomes through shared global responsibility for refugees. Neutral and nuanced messaging is also key to retaining the position of displacement agencies as principled actors and to prevent further politicisation of the issue.

## Recommendations

- Protection agencies – including but not limited to NRC, DRC, ICRC and UNHCR – could advocate to demand greater clarity around the legal basis for access to a country’s territory, whether that be through refugee protection or a form of humanitarian temporary leave. This would build on work already being undertaken by UNHCR that seeks to clarify the scope of existing legally binding frameworks and elaborate on existing regional frameworks of protection to better articulate how each relate and how they can be applied in contexts where climate, conflict and displacement intersect.
- Protection agencies should continue to work in collaboration with the PDD to better understand how the provisions within the Global Compact on Refugees can be upheld that articulate the need to ensure protection and humanitarian support to those forcibly displaced by natural hazard-related disasters (UNHCR, 2018: para. 63). Consideration should also be given to what this means practically given the increasing frequency of climate-related disasters and in conflict contexts. The provisions state that this should be undertaken in complement with international and regional obligations (UN General Assembly, 2018: para. 51). Therefore, further work is required across protection, climate, disaster and climate cadre to map such obligations in context- and hazard-specific ways to inform contingency and preparedness planning.
- Relatedly, collaborations – between protection specialists, humanitarians, National Disaster Management Authorities and human rights organisations – are required to accelerate the ambition to integrate displacement considerations into disaster preparedness strategies and to develop coherent approaches to support those crossing borders due to slow-onset disaster events, as articulated within the Global Compact for Migration (2018). The Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction 2022 is one of a number of high-level conferences that should be targeted to showcase the findings.
- Agencies with effective advocacy and policy advisory work, such as NRC, have a strategic opportunity to support implementation of the recommendations from the UN High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, which will report to the UN Secretary General at the end of 2021. NRC can take the lead in exploring the extent to which implementation of the recommendations helps to address the tripartite relationship described throughout this report and the remaining gaps that warrant further action beyond 2021. This could be articulated through advocacy efforts as new recommendations to be included in the Panel’s progress report.
- Humanitarian agencies should continue to engage with the processes around the Global Compact for Migration (2018), including the high-level International Migration Review Forum. This will help to ensure that climate and disaster displacement considerations are adequately reflected in the follow-up processes of the Compact and that states uphold their commitments that may address some of the protection challenges identified throughout this report. Following on from the UNHCR and non-governmental organisations’ (NGO) meeting on the High-Level Officials’ and UNHCR consultations which took place in 2021, engagement in future consultations is critical. Efforts are needed to raise awareness of the new and additional challenges presented by the climate–conflict–displacement intersection and to ensure that states are held to account for commitments made on the legal protection of refugees.
- Finally, NRC is developing its own version of UNHCR’s Strategic Framework for Climate

Action (UNHCR, n.d.) to steer future policy and advocacy work through its ‘Greening the orange’<sup>5</sup> strategy. Efforts from such organisations should be supported internally at the highest levels, and lessons should be promoted externally to encourage uptake and accountability to action from internal and external counterparts. Protection agencies that don’t have such strategies or frameworks should consider developing their own, using the NRC and UNHCR examples as a starting point for internal discussions.

#### 4.2.2 Close knowledge gaps through new research and improved use of data and terminology

In order to move policy discourse forward, terminology and data limitations associated with the climate–conflict–displacement intersection need to be addressed. Further, new evidence needs to be garnered to support a broader understanding of the displacement and protection implications of linked climate and conflict risks across a more diverse set of contexts.

##### Recommendations

- Humanitarian, climate, peace and disaster specialists should be vocal in their backing of IDMC’s advocacy efforts which call for improved interoperability of displacement data sets, and coherence in definitions and key metrics. With regards to the former, collaboration with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) could be useful as its Global Risk Assessment Framework (GRAF)<sup>6</sup> aims to improve interoperability, as do the efforts of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Group

(STAG). Furthermore, agencies such as the NRC could consider revisiting the mixed migration terminology, to refine understanding and classification of the various reasons for forced population movements (NRC, 2020a).

- Protection agencies should publicly commit to implement the recommendations of the Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics (EGRIS),<sup>7</sup> which publishes regularly on how to improve statistics on IDPs and refugees. Most recently this has included a set of international recommendations to improve statistical analysis (EGRIS, 2020). Agencies such as NRC could consider becoming a member of the EGRIS Steering Committee alongside Norway and IDMC (and/or part of the sub-groups which shape the work of EGRIS). Together the protection-focused agencies could then call for integration of nexus issues into future work planning processes, from which new insights on collating, monitoring and analysing displacement data will derive.
- New research is required by ODI, IDMC and national research institutes that takes a longer-term perspective (at least three years) on tracking the multifaceted drivers of displacement in contexts where climate change, conflict and displacement interact. Ground truthing findings with the lived experiences of communities affected by this tripartite relationship will be critical in order to strengthen the evidence base for policy and advocacy. By pooling financial resources, protection agencies could commission mixed-methods research which offers potential to reveal novel insights on displacement trends. Case-specific evidence is also required to better articulate and validate the causal

5 This project is aimed at developing an NRC strategy for greening/sustainability and an organisational response to climate change.

6 See <https://www.preventionweb.net/disaster-risk/graf>

7 See <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/expert-group-on-refugee-statistics>

mechanisms, drivers and triggers through which changes in climate change, conflict and displacement patterns manifest in a sub-set of priority countries. Taking heed of recent criticism (see Peters et al., 2020), priority should be given to contexts that are beyond those routinely studied (i.e., contexts beyond the Sahel and the Horn and East Africa such as Somalia and Sudan).

- Agencies such as NRC, UNHCR, DRC, ICRC and IOM could establish collaboration agreements with climate, conflict and peace specialists.
- The collaborations should oversee exploratory research involving multi-disciplinary teams who specifically intend to broaden and deepen the analysis of displacement incidence and trends, with a view to generating novel insights to inform protection priorities for research, policy and advocacy. The teams should be open to revisiting the conceptualisation of climate and conflict as drivers and triggers of displacement over different temporal scales, given that climate impacts rarely fall neatly into one of these two categories.
- Protection agencies can use their partnerships with meteorological organisations – such as NRC through Norwegian Capacity (NORCAP) and the ICRC through the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre – to examine the relative attribution of climate change to an event that has contributed to displacement, and to push back or strengthen the empirical evidence base in situations where climate change is being used to deny legal protections. This should inform subsequent policy and advocacy messaging to the UN Security Council and related UN forums (discussed further below). A guidance note should be produced that synthesises the findings from the NRC and ICRC experiences to encourage improved technical accuracy in protection agencies' use of language related to climate change.
- NRC and the ICRC should lead the way in experimenting how climate change attribution analysis can be integrated in existing organisational tools and methods used by protection agencies to understand complex interactions which shape individual contexts. The lessons from such efforts should be documented and shared with humanitarian and protection agencies, with the aim of embedding climate change attribution analysis into overall root cause analysis processes and systems dynamics modelling (used to identify displacement drivers and the severity of impacts (IDMC and NRC, 2015)). As there is no single approach to undertaking climate attribution analysis, support will be required from a climate service provider (e.g., meteorologist or climatologist). Protection agencies should see this as a first step towards establishing formal partnerships with climate science expertise.

#### 4.2.3 Strengthen the quality of discourse by brokering new partnerships for policy and advocacy engagement

Protection agencies have a role to play in grounding truth about displacement and protection gaps and successes, and in ensuring that future policy and advocacy discussions are robust, pro-poor and pro-mobility. To do this, there is a need to engage in the emerging networks dealing with nexus issues, formal initiatives such as the Climate Security Mechanism, and partnerships such as that between ICRC and ODI that have already garnered regional insight into the implications (see Peters and Mayhew, 2019). This will require protection agencies' commitment to bridge climate change, disaster, conflict and displacement specialists, either by enhancing in-house technical capacity or by establishing the necessary partnerships to access such expertise. Only through multi-disciplinary

and cross-sectoral teams will it be possible to design and deliver suitably nuanced policy and advocacy strategies on this intersection and integrated operational programmes.

### Recommendations

- As an intentional advocacy approach, humanitarian agencies could explicitly and implicitly push back on the securitised framings of climate change. They should redirect attention to the humanitarian impacts of the intersection, focusing on attainment of rights and the varying protection needs of displacement-affected people in a changing climate, in contexts of violence and conflict. This could entail greater engagement with UN Security Council members through, for example, Norway's membership in 2021–2022 on issues such as humanitarian access, climate and hunger, protection of civilians, and 'displacement linked to extreme weather events [which] may worsen the risk of conflict' (NRC, 2020b).<sup>8</sup> Building on the work of the Group of Friends on Climate and Security, NRC could work with Norway, Ireland, Mexico, the United Kingdom and other supportive states to bring attention to the nuances of displacement related to this intersection (ibid.). In collaboration with ICRC and the PDD, technical briefings to UN Security Council members on the climate–conflict–displacement nexus must also be supported. It is also important to recognise the increasing attention this issue is receiving from across UN agencies and international organisations that could partner on the topic, including, for example, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), UNHCR and IOM.
- The PDD, as a state-led consultative process, should be promoted more strongly within the three monitoring mechanisms of the UNFCCC, the Sendai Framework (UNISDR, 2015) and Agenda 2030 (UN, 2015a). This could be achieved by establishing robust accountability processes for state and non-state actors to uphold commitments to protection actions. By doing so, protection agencies could help the PDD to strengthen its place as a unifying platform to ensure the needs of the displaced are coherently addressed across all three frameworks as well as other spaces. Furthermore, through advocacy work, protection agencies should support lessons from the PDD's active engagement in each of these three processes to be applied through systematic engagement with the UN Security Council and other conflict-, peace- and security-related convening forums where displacement is currently cited but requires more robust and nuanced engagement by displacement specialists. This would include the 2022 Munich Security Conference, among others, for example.
- Protection agencies could consider formalising a range of new strategic partnerships as avenues to explore, champion and close knowledge gaps on the climate–conflict–displacement nexus in the climate and disaster space. This could include, for example:
  - offering technical support as a capacity-building partner to the Paris Agreement implementation processes (UN, 2015b), including for selected countries through the Nairobi Work Programme and as a Non-Party Stakeholder at the Conference of Parties, to champion protection issues in the climate space
  - engaging the global STAG and regional equivalents such as the Africa STAG (AfSTAG) to encourage the inclusion of protection issues in their advisory work

<sup>8</sup> This is in line with an internal, unpublished briefing note (NRC, 2020b).

- with states. This could help to increase discussions on displacement and protection issues in conversations with National Disaster Management Authorities and civil protection entities that are implementing the Sendai Framework (UNISDR, 2015)
- o helping to lay the foundations for greater inclusion of protection issues within the Sendai Framework monitoring process – a mechanism managed by UNDRR that allows governments to report on their progress and identify areas of weakness for further investment. This should be accompanied by sessions specifically on the displacement and protection implications of increased climate-related disaster risk, including in conflict contexts, as part of the upcoming Regional Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction and subsequent Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction 2022.
  - Following a session at the 75th UN General Assembly on the humanitarian impacts of climate–conflict–environmental risks, a range of ambitious proposals for action were proposed to which protection agencies could play a contributing role:

*The task of reforming the humanitarian sector to adequately address the links between climate change, environmental degradation and conflict, and the potential for humanitarian aid agencies – both via in situ operations and via their broader operations and supply chains – to contribute to solutions requires an international action plan with governments’ political backing and involvement, coordination at the United Nations level, and active participation by public and private humanitarian agencies. The scope of ambition and multi-stakeholder involvement should be similar in scope to – for example – the five-year Lima Advanced Work Programme*

*on Gender and Gender Action Plan in the UNFCCC process. The UN Secretary-General should consider reporting more regularly and comprehensively to Member States on the impact of climate change in a multi-risk context, and devise a Climate, Environment and Conflict Action Plan. This would require cross-agency and multi-stakeholder participation at the UN High Level Political Forum, given its relevance across the Sustainable Development Goals (Peters and Dupar, 2020: 11–12).*

To take this forward, a set of willing and likeminded protection agencies could devise a strategy for how the suggested Climate, Environment and Conflict Action Plan can be scoped further. And, if there is sufficient willingness and engagement from key stakeholders, the Action Plan could be drafted, adopted and subsequently implemented. Of course, this would need to be part of a multi-year ambition, involving all key stakeholders across government and non-government entities.

- Finally, protection agencies should actively seek to ensure that the language, terminology and discourse employed (when implementing the recommendations proposed in this report) do not replicate or reinforce the misrepresentations or oversimplifications identified throughout this paper on the complex interactions between climate change, conflict dynamics and displacement outcomes. This could be a difficult balance to achieve, given that internal advocacy will also be required to justify why this intersection requires dedicated attention by protection agencies. The normative way to do this is to seek to demonstrate that a topic is distinctly ‘new’ and possibly even has existential qualities. Taking a more nuanced approach

- is particularly pertinent for agencies such as NRC, for example, as it considers the climate–conflict–displacement intersection in the design of its ‘Greening the orange’ advocacy strategy and its 2022–2025 strategy development process.

#### 4.2.4 Sectoral responses that support humanitarian and climate ambitions

The shortcomings of taking a purely humanitarian approach to addressing repeated and protracted crises and displacements have been well documented (IDMC and NRC, 2015; Peters and Lovell, 2020). The Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria are cases in point. Over two decades of humanitarian responses to immediate impacts led to the realisation that a broader constituency of actors is required to address underlying drivers of displacement (IDMC and NRC, 2015).

Humanitarian actors have already been undertaking work around long-term solutions in livelihoods and food security, and they often work with governments to assist in building durable solutions that can reduce the risk of displacement when either rapid- or slow-onset hazard events occur. However, building climate resilience is not only about helping people build capacity to respond to and recover from today’s disasters that have contributed to their displacement (a humanitarian perspective); it is also about ensuring that whatever long-term solutions are proposed – whether these be around housing and livelihoods or other sectoral-based interventions – are more climate resilient (a climate resilient development perspective).

There is more common ground between humanitarians, specialist protection agencies and climate actors than is currently being exploited. To elucidate, as discussed previously, when hazard

events trigger a disaster that displaces people, it is frequently because of underlying socioeconomic, political and environmental vulnerabilities. These same vulnerability factors influence how resilient individuals are to climate variability and change. Although the intersections are grossly under-researched, we know that these same vulnerability factors (weak governance, unequal access to services, systemic political marginalisation, etc.) often feature in conflict analysis (Harris et al., 2013; Peters, 2019). Thus, sectoral interventions that seek to achieve combined humanitarian, climate and protection outcomes are not only feasible (given the linked vulnerability drivers), but they will be increasingly necessary, as climate change becomes a more direct driver of displacement in the absence of mitigating actions and given what we know about the complex interactions between climate–conflict–displacement risks.

A varied selection of sectoral examples are provided below, although the recommendations necessarily avoid naming specific agencies to take these forward (as this is heavily context-specific). We recommend, therefore, that UN Country Teams in collaboration with protection agencies present within a given context take each recommendation as an illustration of what can be done. Country-specific action plans could then be devised to ensure that sectoral interventions consider how combined humanitarian, protection and climate outcomes can be achieved through adjustments to current approaches.

#### Recommendations

- Climate resilient adaptation needs to be mainstreamed into humanitarian and protection agencies’ interventions that have multi-year lifespans in conflict contexts. For example, one of NRC’s strategic response areas has been to provide shelter to those displaced, including ‘facilitating access

to homes and communities, ... housing reconstruction and to integration by increasing the local housing stock' (NRC, 2019a: 7). Whether retrofitting existing stock or building new shelters or houses that are likely to last years, agencies such as NRC need to construct shelters that are multi-hazard resistant, but particularly against the hazards that are most common to a particular area and that are being exacerbated by climate change.<sup>9</sup> Building houses that are not repairable increases the risk of people being displaced again.<sup>10</sup> In short, any shelter that is likely to be used for more than a few months needs to be designed to be multi-hazard and climate change resilient.<sup>11</sup>

- Related to the above, facilities for settlements (e.g., water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); electricity; health care services and facilities, and schools) need to be designed to withstand hazards, including those that are climate-related. This is particularly pertinent for camps, for example, in terms of ensuring that latrine placement and design enables adequate soak pits and that these are away from water points. WASH platforms can be raised to protect facilities against future flooding, and water supply and quality need to be considered as they shift with the seasons (see Akhter et al., 2020; and Krishnan, 2020, for example).
- When working on issues related to food security, NRC has a goal of 'promoting climate smart agriculture production practices to reduce the risk of production loss due to the adverse effects of climate' (NRC, 2019b: 14); and other agencies have similar goals. Such an approach is desperately needed, whether it is facilitating access to more drought- or flood-tolerant seed varieties or promoting a 'One Health' approach to livestock systems. Humanitarian agencies should continue to strengthen their work in this area and in working relationships with organisations like Mercy Corps, the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and others in the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR).<sup>12</sup>
- Moving beyond cash, humanitarian agencies' use of mechanisms such as shock-responsive social protection would be worthwhile as an avenue to pursue linked to humanitarian, climate and protection outcomes. Shock-responsive social protection<sup>13</sup> can minimise negative shock impacts, including crisis as a result of conflict-/ climate-induced displacement, and can reduce the need for separate humanitarian responses over the long term. Advocacy should promote the inclusion of displaced persons into national social protection systems where possible.

9 For instance, in many areas, heat waves and extreme heat are causing significant health problems; those in informal housing suffer particularly as poorly ventilated and insulated homes exacerbate heat stress and stroke. Where severe storms occur and/or are projected to increase because of climate change, shelter design needs to ensure that the homes can protect people and their assets, withstand damage, and that materials for repair are readily available and affordable.

10 If a home is being built in an area where flood risk is increasing, home plinth height should be raised to keep flood waters out of the house, and a second floor and/or flat roof considered (dependent on local climate conditions and culture) so that people can move assets like seeds, livestock, etc. up and away from flood waters; earthen floors can be replaced with brick or concrete as they withstand floods better.

11 See, for example, the 'Sheltering from a gathering storm' project on climate resilient shelter designs at <https://www.i-s-e-t.org/sheltering-from-a-gathering-storm>

12 See <https://www.cgiar.org/>

13 Shock-responsive social protection is about how social protection systems can scale up to respond to shocks in low-income countries, and fragile and conflict-affected states. See more at <https://www.opml.co.uk/projects/shock-responsive-social-protection-systems>

- More broadly in crisis and non-crisis settings, comprehensive social protection responses to address climate-related hazards are required which actively incorporate the promotion of social cohesion between displaced and host communities within their approaches. The benefits of managing climate risks through social protection can include reducing vulnerability and negative coping strategies, providing a steppingstone towards climate resilient livelihoods, and supporting inclusive disaster preparedness and response (FAO and RCCC, 2019). From a protection perspective, effective social protection mechanisms can help realise the economic rights of the most vulnerable and can enhance economic empowerment to increase community resilience against climate and conflict shocks.
- More focus is also required on advocating the financial inclusion of crisis-affected people in order that they can sustain their livelihoods and rebuild their lives. This includes advocating access to bank accounts, credit and other mainstream financial services for displaced populations in order to pave the way to self-reliance and economic independence. Protection agencies should join forces to advocate at a global level for improved financial services for displaced groups in host communities. At the same time, advocacy should recognise the need to enhance humanitarian support to host communities who may also be impacted by conflict-/climate-related crises. Messaging should be built on a clear evidence base, demonstrating the benefits of servicing refugees and enabling them to overcome policy constraints and access barriers.
  - Whilst addressing the long-term economic needs of those affected by the interplay of climate, conflict and displacement, agencies can advocate and facilitate social cohesion between displaced and host communities in conflict-/climate-triggered displacement crises through shelter projects. Protection agencies should identify strategic advocacy partners including development and peacebuilding actors in a sub-set of priority locations as pilots. Building cohesive societies starts by responding to the needs of the displaced and host communities, and making host communities aware of the potential benefits of migration on their lives and societies. Developing a set of test cases for greater cross-disciplinary/sectoral engagement would provide useful examples for others in this field.
  - Finally, despite the evidence on the magnitude of climate-related disaster impacts in conflict contexts, disaster risk reduction adapted to conflict and post-conflict contexts is negligible (see Peters, 2019). Humanitarian agencies with specialisms in conflict and peace, in collaboration with development counterparts specialising in disaster risk, should design and deliver genuinely conflict- and displacement-sensitive disaster risk reduction interventions. These should be documented through robust empirical research to fill a much-needed niche on the climate–conflict–displacement intersection. It is also worth noting that the National Disaster Management Authorities in many countries (not the Ministry of Climate Change/Ministry of Environment) continue to deal with sudden-onset climate and other natural hazard events, and thus their engagement remains critical to address the current and near-term risks from this intersection.
  - Relatedly, there is a need for protection agencies to join the Risk-informed Early Action Partnership (REAP) to champion displacement issues within early action and to enhance REAP’s ambition of ‘making 1 billion people safer from disasters by 2025’ (REAP, 2021: 1). Specifically, protection agencies could encourage REAP to

conceptualise ‘safer’ as instrumentally including issues of displacement and the intersection with climate-related disasters in conflict contexts. As an intermediary or alternative step, the ICRC could harness the IFRC’s current membership to increase inclusion of protection and displacement issues.

#### 4.2.5 Getting one’s own house in order: greening operations

Finally, in order to ensure humanitarian agencies take responsibility for their own carbon emissions, commitments are required to ‘green’ operations, to set targets for emissions reductions and to ensure robust monitoring processes are in place for tracking the environmental footprint of our actions.

##### **Recommendations**

- The ICRC has committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2020 (compared to 2018 levels) (ICRC, 2021), while NRC has committed to becoming carbon neutral in its 2030 ambitions (NRC, 2021). Both are worthwhile ambitions that will require significant changes to operations, strategies and approaches. Other humanitarian and protection agencies should follow suit with similar commitments, including becoming signatories to the Environmental Charter for Humanitarian Organisations (ICRC, 2021). A clear internal advocacy and awareness-raising
- campaign will need to be developed and rolled out within ICRC, NRC and any agencies making similar commitments to ensure staff understand what this means in practice and are motivated to make changes in their personal as well as professional decision-making processes to reduce carbon emissions.
- Beyond a headline commitment towards greening operations, each agency’s department or programme area will likely need to develop implementable Plans of Action in line with set minimum standards. Agency-specific ‘green’ targets could be set as part of a longer-term pathway towards truly climate compatible and environmentally sustainable relief. Establishing an environmental footprint baseline and tracking progress to which departments and programmes are held accountable in annual reports would be a good starting point.
- Beyond this, further consideration is required around greening supply chains, prioritising eco-friendly suppliers, shifting to renewable energy technologies and the environmental impact of all operations globally (Peters et al., 2020). It is strongly recommended that this is not a solo endeavour, but that protection agencies work with a broader constituency of humanitarian agencies and/or establish pro-bono arrangements with eco-friendly private-sector partners that have already made headway in this regard and can offer templates and processes which can be adapted to suit different business practices, norms and structures.

## 5 Conclusion

Protection agencies are at a crossroads. Dealing with climate change could exacerbate current trends where displacement drivers and triggers are treated separately – as has been seen with the separation of work on conflict displacement and disaster displacement. Alternatively, this crossroads could be seen as an opportunity to enhance our understanding of the complex interactions between displacement drivers and triggers. The different temporal impacts of climate change currently mean that it is considered as both: a displacement driver in terms of longer-term underlying climate and environmental stress, and a displacement trigger with regards to sudden-onset climate extremes such as flooding.

The interconnectivity between climate change, disasters, environmental degradation, conflict and displacement is of growing concern for policy, advocacy, research and operational agencies. This reached the highest levels of decision-making in 2020–2021, featuring on the agenda of the UN General Assembly and UN Security Council. Indeed, the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council have discussed these new pressures in relation to the capability of the humanitarian system to respond, but they concluded that the collective system (encompassing humanitarian, development and climate actors) is largely underprepared for current crises and future trajectories of risk.

Decision-making and action on the complex interactions between climate change, conflict and displacement are impeded by the fact that the specific causal mechanisms by which changes to one variable affect another are insufficiently developed. Moreover, detailed context-specific

or comparative analysis remains challenging due to improper climate change attribution to events and inconsistencies in defining conflict events, along with foundational limits in displacement data reporting.

The current evidence base tends to frame the intersection of climate change, conflict and displacement from only one of these three stances (e.g., climate change alone). And it goes on to explain how the other two (e.g., conflict and displacement) fit within this discipline's perspective on complex risk. Yet, throughout the late 2010s, our collective understanding of risk changed and there has been a move away from single-threat approaches towards 'the interrelatedness of risk factors which make it difficult to distinguish between cause and effects of instability' (NRC, 2020a: 1). With this knowledge, we need to stop worrying about whether what we do is classified as humanitarian, development, climate or 'nexus', and start to focus collectively on what it takes to achieve durable protection outcomes.

A subtle shift in emphasis in recent years has seen increasing effort to elucidate points of commonality rather than difference between those displaced by disasters (including those that are climate-related) and conflict from a vulnerability and a protection perspective. This, in part, paves the way towards thinking not only about complex interactions between risk factors, but joint responses to complex problems; responses that span those traditionally focused on climate, on conflict and on displacement impacts. Collaborations between formerly disparate agencies are beginning to emerge, but remain

embryonic, as do any assessment of the value-added of thinking and acting on the tripartite relationship rather than each of the three elements in isolation.

Focusing on collective outcomes must be the way forward – and doing so will hopefully lead to more comprehensive actions and responses, and enhanced protections for those

contending with combined climate, conflict and displacement risk. Humanitarians have a crucial role to play in bridging the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding nexus to mitigate the impacts of compounded climate–conflict–displacement crises and reduce harm and protection risks. This paper provides initial ideas on the path to be taken to achieve this goal.

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