

Closing the Governance Gap to Achieve Climate Security

Written by the Department for Governance

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Editorial note

The findings from this report came from a review of approximately 25 resources by the Department for Governance at the FBA. Significant editorial input was provided by Ulrika Jonsson Arén, Officer in Governance, Amber Larsen, Rule of Law Officer, Annaklara Eriksson, WPS Officer, Mila Ceban, Rule of Law Officer, Helena Vazquez Sohlström, Director at the Department for Governance, and Emma Míhlzén, Administrator at the Department for Governance.

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ISBN 978-91-88451-07-1



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Executive Summary

THE CONCEPT OF CLIMATE SECURITY is complex and has been described in a variety of ways making it a challenge to define in its entirety. However, research demonstrates levels of causal connection between the effects of climate change and conflict. In this context governance has emerged as a central response to strengthen climate security and resilience.

This brief aims to give an overview of climate security and governance, drawn from existing research and based on experiences from the work of the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA). The brief is centered around the discussion in overcoming governance gaps to achieve climate security in the context of peacebuilding.

The assumption is that governance is not only pivotal for mitigating, adapting to and coping with climate risks and state fragility, but also crucial to address existing vulnerabilities exacerbated by climate change.

Following the above assumption, weak governance structures can – and most probably will – exacerbate existing climate-fragility risks. Governance is as such, key for implementing the mechanisms needed for effective climate action.

Overlapping challenges, such as gender inequality, climate change and fragility are important factors that affect policy responses. To ensure that the governance processes focusing on climate security challenges reflect real needs, women's and men's experiences, needs and aspirations play an equally important role in articulating policy responses. To strengthen the state capacity linked to human security and climate change – and as such – the social contract, access to information, government commitment, and resources are important steps to adapt, mitigate and prevent climate insecurities.



This call, which has been referred to as the climate for peace agenda, has put renewed focus on the issues of governance and state accountability and legitimacy. Equitable and inclusive governance structures that ensure that sectors of society can participate in climate policy and decision-making should be at the core of these efforts, in particular ensuring that the voices and perspectives of women and youth are heard.¹ ”

As the negative and detrimental consequences of climate change are ever increasing, the conversation of governance and climate security is ever more urgent. This brief gives a few entry points in how to understand governance in relation to climate security.



1. Moran et al., 2019.



The Folke Bernadotte Academy

The Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) is an operational actor that builds its actions from existing knowledge and is positioned to push the climate security agenda in discussions, research and initiatives aimed at filling the governance gap, and ultimately build peace and prevent conflicts in contexts affected by climate change. The FBA has been an actor in the field of peacebuilding since 2002 and applies a holistic approach to international peace-making. The development cooperation strategies assigned to the FBA includes countries already notably affected by climate change, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Mozambique. Through international collaborations and secondments to significantly climate affected areas, the FBA strives to support the global agenda for climate security.

Introduction

Climate security has gained increasing recognition in international security discussions over the last decade and is today a central topic for research and policy development.² Yet, the concept of climate security is complex and has been described in a variety of ways, making it a challenge to define in its entirety. As Dellmuth et al. note, 'At a basic level, climate security is commonly referred to as threats to states, societies, and individual citizens, encompassing any threats and risks directly or indirectly caused by climate change.'³

Much research shows a level of causal connection between the effects of climate change and conflict, but despite the recognition that climate change and conflict intersect, a direct correlation between them has been difficult to fully establish. The causal relationship is non-linear and underscores how various dimensions involved in human security – including livelihood, natural resources, migration, food prices, economic conditions, and others – are impacted by climate change and can accentuate drivers of conflict. In 2020 the High Representative of the EEAS, Josep Borell, presented the 'Climate Change and Defense Roadmap', identifying ways for the EU to better prepare for upcoming security instability due to climate change.⁴ Additionally, the recent UN Secretary General's forward-looking common agenda reinforced the connection between political stability and environmental deterioration. The link between climate adaptation and peacebuilding was stressed and highlighted as one of three main priorities for the organization.⁵ Furthermore, the 2030 Agenda emphasizes that 'climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and its adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development'.⁶

2. Abdenur, 2020.
3. Dellmuth et al. 2017.

4. EEAS, 2020.
5. UN, 2021.

6. Un General Assembly, 2015

The adaptive capacities of governments and governance structures are a fundamental component in equipping and preparing societies to respond to climate change and in addressing the changing conditions and insecurities that climate change presents. It is clear that similar climate hazards can affect societies differently; these divergent outcomes can largely be explained by differences in the capacities of governments to implement adaptive and coping strategies to prevent, prepare and respond to these effects.¹⁹

Natural Resources

Climate change can severely impact the availability of natural resources across the globe. Prolonged climate-driven stressors on natural resources can weaken or jeopardize nations' ability to govern. The so-called 'output legitimacy' of a state can be negatively affected when the ability to ensure access to food, employment, energy and water – is weakened. Governments will also need to ensure the long-term sustainability of incomes and livelihoods based on natural resource exploitation.

Global Governance

Global governance, grounded in cooperation and joint commitment on an international scale, is needed in order for global mitigation and adaptation measures to be taken in response to the deteriorating security landscape shaped by a changing climate. Climate change affects human security and the overall international security landscape and therefore necessitates further efforts and commitments to establish mechanisms to manage its effects.²⁰ Researchers, practitioners and others alike need to continue to fill the knowledge gap regarding the link between governance and climate security. The paths identified will require broad support and action among peacebuilding, climate change and governance actors.

The Interrelation Between Climate and Conflict

The fifth assessment report of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) devotes a specific chapter to discussing the impact of climate change on human security. This report reaches the conclusion that although a strong and direct correlation between climate and conflict cannot

be confirmed, climate change can exacerbate existing conflict drivers.²¹ This highlights the importance of further investigation on direct and indirect risks from climate change and its potential impact on conflict drivers, with potential consequences to the peacebuilding landscape.

Some scholars²² argue for an indirect causal link between climate change and conflict, pointing to human security factors affected by climate change that can lead to an escalation of existing conflict risks. Researchers interested in this connection are examining the link between climate change and factors that can exacerbate conflict, such as migration, rising food prices, reduced agricultural yields, inequality and deteriorating economic conditions. Thus, while some scholars question a direct correlation,²³ others are identifying associations between outbreaks of armed conflict and climate-driven social ills.

In other words, climate change may affect dynamics, act as an accelerator of ongoing conflict and increase the likelihood of conflict recurrence. These effects can be seen in places such as Somalia, Afghanistan and the Sahel region.

Multifaceted Aspects Linking Climate to Conflict

Droughts, heat waves, floods and other climate stressors put pressure on people's wellbeing and livelihoods. In vulnerable contexts this may cause insecurity and potentially result in conflict. The international community therefore need an increased understanding of the underlying and multifaceted aspects linking climate to conflict, such as:²⁴

1. Disruption to livelihood through phenomenon such as drought and competition over water.
2. Displacement due to flooding and competition over grazing lands and fishing rights.

In Somalia, recurring droughts and floods are threat multipliers in a country already wearied from decades of conflict that have left 2.6 million people internally displaced. Further impacts from climate change increase the population's vulnerability, as financial hardships create a fertile recruiting ground for violent extremist groups such as Al-Shabaab.²⁵ Across the Sahel, change in climate patterns have led to disputes over land and governance of this, including involvement of extremist groups. The rest of West Africa, meanwhile, has also seen a shift in the tactical approaches used by violent groups together with growing popular support.



Climate change affects human security and the overall international security landscape and therefore necessitates further efforts and commitments to establish mechanisms to manage its effects.²⁶



The Role of Gender Equality and Inclusivity in Climate Security

Women are key supporting actors in societies and communities that seek to build resilience and adapt to climate change. Although this fact is well-known, women are nevertheless often marginalized and excluded from climate-related decision-making processes. The absence of gender perspectives in climate policy, research and governance and failing to consider the differing experiences of women and men in how they are affected by climate change will harm efforts aimed at mitigating climate-related fragility.²⁷ Women's participation at the frontlines of climate change, adaptation and planning is therefore vital. The social issues that women face should be treated as inherent human security issues in general and thus be a central concern at the policy-making level.

Women and men play equally necessary roles in all types of societal processes, and women's participation in governance processes in general, and in climate governance processes in particular, is essential if decisions are to be representative and sustainable. Given that climate change and insecurity affect women disproportionately due to differing norms, roles, and power distribution, it is important that climate security initiatives include proper gender analysis. Failure to address gender leads to a risk of reinforcing inequalities.²⁸

Natural Resources in Relation to Gender Equality

Those who are the most socio-economically vulnerable are particularly at risk, as climate-related issues such as water shortages, soil degradation and natural disasters can worsen existing vulnerabilities.²⁹ Women, together with other marginalized groups, rely on natural resources as their livelihoods find themselves most at risk for climatic variabilities. The adaptability of these societal groups is lower as they often lack the necessary resources, such as financial means, adequate housing, drought resisting crops, sufficient education and decision-making power to develop resilience to the effects of climate change. 'Further, cultural and religious norms on respective gender roles sometimes limit women's abilities to make quick decisions in disaster situations and, in some cases, the clothes they wear and/or their responsibilities in caring for children could hamper their mobility in times of emergency'.³⁰

Overlapping Challenges

The correlation between gender inequality, climate change and fragility present overlapping challenges.³¹ Therefore, inclusive climate action is one key starting point to accelerate social progress, resilience, and gender equality and can strengthen peace and security in settings characterized by fragility, conflict and violence.³²

Inclusivity and representation of societal groups is a central aspect of good governance.

19. Mobjörk et al. 2016.
20. Krampe 2019.

21. Gleditsch, 2018.
22. SIPRI, 2022; Moran et al. 2019; Schleussner et al. 2016.

23. USAID 2019.
24. International Crisis Group, 2021.

25. Krampe, 2019.
26. Ibid.

27. Smith, 2022.
28. Worker, 2017.

29. Ibid.
30. UNDP, 2017.

31. Ibid.
32. World Bank, 2022b.



‘Representation is the ability of different groups to participate in the political processes that establish procedures and influence outcomes, which is crucial for human security in the face of climate-related stressors.’³³

The women, peace and security agenda serves as a cornerstone of the Folke Bernadotte Academy’s approach to peacebuilding.

Conclusion

Effective response to the risks associated with climate change necessitates additional efforts – examining both how climate hazards impact conflict dynamics and how conflicts impact communities coping with climate change. The research literature points to a non-linear and indirect causal link between climate change and conflict, a finding that calls for the peacebuilding architecture to adopt a more climate-sensitive approach.

A state’s governance and institutional capacity for resilience in coping with and addressing the negative effects of climate change is a key variable in the societal dimensions of climate impacts and human security. Strengthening state governance and capacity through access to information, commitment and resources designated to climate change adaptation and mitigation will increase societal resilience. The governance gap is thus one vital approach for ensuring climate security, in which human security dimensions are at the center. Contextual variables for achieving good climate governance and refining our understanding of the interactions between climate change and conflict will require further research and lessons from different contexts to fully comprehend what works, which are the pitfalls and how to mitigate risk.

Further efforts and actions are needed at the national, regional and global levels to address the dimensions of insecurity related to climate change. As climate change knows no borders, multilateral collaboration and action is vital to address climate security challenges. The climate adaptation efforts, governance structures and coping mechanisms that governments and state institutions put in place can reduce the human security risks generated by climate hazards.

33. Kimberley et al, 2018.

34. Werrell and Femia, 2019.



‘Without committed, well-resourced institutions regularly delivering and translating climate information to decision-makers; without climate information being better integrated into the tools for predicting state fragility or conflict; and without entities dedicated to interpreting climate-related risks and issuing warnings to decision-makers in a systematic and compelling way, governments and intergovernmental institutions will continue to be underprepared for these risks.’³⁴



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The Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) is the Swedish government agency for peace, security and development.

FBA supports international peace operations and international development cooperation. The agency conducts training, research and method development in order to strengthen peacebuilding and statebuilding in conflict and post-conflict countries. We also recruit civilian personnel and expertise for peace operations and election observation missions led by the EU, UN and OSCE. The agency is named after Count Folke Bernadotte, the first UN mediator.

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