Roundtable report

People's experience of conflict, climate risk and resilience

Abidjan roundtable, 4 April 2019

Leigh Mayhew, Julie Arrighi, Cheikh Kane and Salvatore Farfaglia

About

This outcome paper was produced in support of the global series of policy-making roundtables and highlights the key areas of debate which occurred during discussions in Abidjan on 4 April 2019. **The views represented in this paper are those of the roundtable participants and do not necessarily represent the views of the authors or their agencies.**

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

The second event in the series, held in Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire, was jointly organised with the African Development Bank. It convened experts from institutions throughout West Africa and the Sahel to discuss five key themes at the intersection of climate and conflict in the Middle East: 1) people's vulnerability to climate impacts in contexts affected by fragility and conflict; 2) the relationship between climate and some of the known drivers of conflict; 3) barriers to climate finance; 4) security-centred perspectives in discussions on climate and conflict; and 5) the implications of climate and conflict for humanitarian systems.

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

The technical discussions between the expert groups showed that the initial postulate is not necessarily and universally applicable. Some speakers pointed out that 'exposure to climate change shocks and stressors is at the origin of induced economic migrations that increase social conflict in the areas of destination rather than at the origins'. Emblematic, in almost all of Sahelian Africa, are the north–south transhumance of pastoral communities and the effects on areas populated by people whose main livelihood is linked to agriculture. The inability to manage this economic competition is a significant driver of conflict, as instanced in Nigeria's middle belt and in the Central African Republic.

Humanitarian and development communities have a duty to seek proximity with these populations, recover and preserve their traditional knowledge and support social cohesion by integrating this knowledge with available technology to promote sustainable economic growth. Participants agreed on the necessity of enhancing the 'know-how to actively listen' to affected populations, as a source of understanding of their needs, and transfer lessons learned.

Theme 2: Climate and the known drivers of conflict

During discussions it was evident that climatic conditions were having an impact on societal relations between different natural resource users, which can lead to conflict. It was stressed that this conflict was not necessarily armed, but often still disrupted societal relations between communities, and at times within communities themselves. Tensions also

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

transcend national borders. For example, tensions due to the movement of cattle from Niger and Mauritania to shared resources in Mali has led to the government of Mali stating that it can no longer accommodate these cross-border movements. Tensions between farmers and herders were a recurrent theme during discussions. Some measures are already in place to try to ease tensions, but these are not always communicated with all the parties affected. For example, ECOWAS has established corridors through which pastoralists can move their herds, but this has not been communicated to farming communities.

Although these examples were mentioned, experts cautioned against linking conflict to climate change. One expert noted that, while climate change was affecting traditional ways of life, there is a history of conflict over shared resources, even in times of abundance. It was suggested that environmental degradation was a result of other factors, such as mining. More data and research is needed to fully understand the effects of climate change on conflict. Such research should not only be built on quantitative data, but should also include qualitative studies accounting for realities on the ground. Experts warned that there has been a failure to fund research.

Conflict can increase vulnerability, particularly in situations of population displacement. Experts offered the case of the ongoing conflict with Boko Haram, which has caused internal displacement and restricted people's access to resources on which their livelihoods depend – such as fertile soil and access to fishing areas – leaving individuals frustrated and dependent on humanitarian aid. As a result, people are often forced to return to areas controlled by Boko Haram.

Theme 3: Access to climate finance

Experts focused their discussions on existing obstacles and recommendations to catalyse climate finance flows to places affected by conflict. Obstacles mentioned included a lack of knowledge on available funding sources, a need for capacity strengthening to develop bankable projects and inequitable power dynamics in access to financing. Experts also felt that countries do not prioritise climate change adaptation in their development strategies, which is an additional hindrance alongside the challenge of producing reliable data on conflict-affected areas to document how funds are spent. There was also a discussion regarding whether or not it was appropriate for humanitarian actors in particular to undertake climate adaptation projects, as they are often more developmental in nature. In general, however, it was agreed that humanitarians should focus more on prevention, and not just response.

In addition to these obstacles, experts shared ideas for catalysing climate finance to conflict areas. They also recommended strengthening the case for climate finance in conflict areas by evaluating the cost of preventing the adverse impacts of climate change versus the cost of assistance after climate shocks. As in the Nairobi roundtable, experts also recommended developing simplified access criteria for conflict areas, and strengthening monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to collect data to demonstrate project delivery. One suggestion was diversifying financing options through specialised insurance products and mobilising local resources, both human and financial, rather than waiting for resources from elsewhere. Finally, experts cited a need for more cross-border interventions, and stressed the importance of involving communities in the design and implementation of climate adaptation projects.

Theme 4: Security-centred perspectives

Echoing similar concerns raised in Nairobi, experts shared the belief that debates centred around climate change and conflict within the region continue to be dominated by security perspectives. Of particular concern, discussions noted that currently there is no effective framework or mechanism to bring the experiences of local communities to the forefront of international debate. Emphasising the need for change, experts advocated a number of ways that this could be addressed, focused on strengthening the role of local actors. This should include improved mechanisms for coordination and

information-sharing between local communities and humanitarian and development actors. There were also calls for greater decentralisation of climate finance to ensure that local community groups and NGOs can access it.

The central role of humanitarian actors in ensuring that credible evidence from the ground reaches donors, and informs political dialogue at the national and international level, was also raised. This should include identifying credible and legitimate sources within local communities and interrogating the evidence collected to ensure that it represents the actual experience of the local population. Speakers also highlighted that there needs to be a revaluation of the importance humanitarian organisations place on collecting quantitative over qualitative data. It was argued that, too often, success was judged by numbers, rather than data highlighting the lived experience of local communities.

Donors were also identified as having a key role to play. Experts stated that donors need to do more to involve humanitarian actors – which are closer to realities on the ground – in high-level discussions, in order for them to be able to share their experiences and sensitise policy-makers on the lives of people facing the double threat of climate and conflict risk.

Theme 5: Implications for the humanitarian system

Experts also discussed how humanitarian systems contribute to and detract from climate adaptation goals in places of conflict, as well as how they can be bolstered for more sustainable long-term impact.

Experts indicated that, in order to achieve meaningful climate adaption in conflict areas, it is necessary to ensure human dignity is central to all interventions. Humanitarians also need to work across timescales, considering the long-term impact and sustainability of their interventions rather than focusing solely on emergency response. This is especially relevant in situations of protracted conflict. In managing climate shocks, it is important for humanitarians to consider the full disaster management cycle in their interventions. Interventions should include multi-year risk reduction programmes, disaster preparedness and early warning mechanisms that draw on local-level risk monitoring. There is also a need to incorporate anticipation mechanisms into disaster response strategies to ensure that humanitarian relief is more timely and impactful.

Interventions need to be contextualised and grounded in the day-to-day realities of people's lives, and should be guided by an overarching, long-term strategy, defined by relevant community structures rather than outside interests. Through coordination, interventions should build on each other. It is necessary to ensure that strong monitoring and evaluation systems are in place, and that key lessons are documented and shared across interventions, regardless of the intervening agency. Strengthening knowledge sharing can assist in creating a chain of projects that builds on the lessons of each other, leading to long-term sustainable impact. Expert dialogues that bring together a wide variety of stakeholders involved in working at the intersection of climate, conflict and beyond can help to facilitate this knowledge sharing.

At the national level, experience on climate risk management and conflict needs to be integrated into strategic planning in order to ensure resource allocation to reduce risk. The fragility of a county also needs to be considered more systematically in humanitarian and development interventions to inform project risk mitigation strategies. The broader constraints resulting from fragile contexts are often not adequately considered, leading to a high risk of project failure and lack of lasting impact. Experts also debated the challenges associated with protracted emergencies. They indicated a need for an earlier transition to more traditional development approaches, including incorporating existing community resources (human, technical, financial and in-kind) as necessary contributions for successful interventions.

Another challenge facing climate adaptation in conflict areas is the destruction of weather and climate monitoring systems to support evidence-based programming and early warning early action interventions. Humanitarians can play a role in collecting this information during a conflict to plug gaps in data records and help to ensure that early warning systems for natural hazards remain functional.

Conclusions and next steps

In bringing the discussion to an end, the following key points were identified.

First, people living with the double vulnerability of climate and conflict risk face difficult decisions around movement. While a key entry point for discussions was that those living in areas affected by conflict are the most vulnerable, those who are forced to migrate or who are displaced also face climate-induced vulnerability, particularly in the context of conflict. Finding long-term, sustainable solutions for these populations is critical, especially if tensions with host communities are to be avoided.

Second, we are seeing increasing tension between and within communities over natural resources, which are also transcending national boundaries within the region. However, while climate change is seen to be impacting livelihood strategies, experts urged caution when identifying climate change as a factor in driving conflict. Conflict over natural resources has long been a feature of the region, even in times of abundance. To fully understand the relationship between climate change and conflict, both qualitative and quantitative research must be prioritised.

Third, more work is needed to ensure that government policies and systems are able to absorb and optimise climate finance. This includes addressing barriers in terms of lack of knowledge on available funding sources; addressing power dynamics which prevent equitable access to funds; and simplifying access criteria. Data collection will also be critical, particularly in documenting how funds are spent in conflict-affected areas, and monitoring and evaluation processes to record project delivery.

Finally, humanitarian action is not fit for purpose in areas like the Sahel, where it is not enough 'simply' to save lives in areas facing constant crises. Humanitarians need to work across timescales, factoring in both short- and long-term objectives. Coordination efforts must be stepped up to ensure that programmes build on one another, rather than undermining work already implemented. Interventions must be governed, not by outside aims, but by the needs of the most vulnerable, and draw on existing community resources if they are to be sustainable.

About the roundtable series

The first roundtable in this series, held in January 2019 in Nairobi, explored these themes from the Greater Horn of Africa perspective. Abidjan was the second roundtable in the series. The next two roundtables took place in The Hague and Amman in May and June 2019, respectively. The fifth, which focused on perspectives from Asia and the Pacific, was held in Manila in August 2019. Subsequent roundtables will be held in Washington and Geneva. A report of insights gained from the discussions will be prepared after the series concludes.

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ODI
203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ

+44 (0)20 7922 0300
info@odi.org

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