Roundtable report

People's experience of conflict, climate risk and resilience

Manila roundtable, 1 August 2019

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About

This outcome paper was produced in support of the global series of policy-making roundtables and highlights the key areas of debate which occurred during discussions in Manila on 1 August 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 intersection of climate and conflict risk*, which summarises the existing state of knowledge on the intersection of climate, conflict, and resilience.[1]

The roundtable series, which ran throughout 2019, included 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 voice and experience 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 experience; 2) to foreground humanitarian perspectives of the climate and conflict nexus; 3) to explore how climate finance can increase people's adaptation and resilience to the double vulnerability of conflict and climate; and 4) to gain insights from key stakeholders in order to develop the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's knowledge, networks and policy on conflict and climate risk.

The fifth event in the series, held in August 2019 in Manila, the Philippines, was organised jointly with the Philippine Red Cross. It convened 32 policymakers, practitioners and experts from across the Asia-Pacific region to discuss five key themes on the intersection of climate and conflict in the Asia-Pacific: 1) people's vulnerability to climate impacts in contexts countries or regions 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 current 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

There were many differences of opinion over the extent to which conflict was a main driver of vulnerability to climate-related disasters in the region. Some participants gave examples of areas affected by climate change, which were also those dealing with insurgencies characterised by a call for greater autonomy, independence, and enhanced access to resources. All of these factors contributed to a complex political landscape, compounded by the current and predicted impacts of climate variability and change and climate-related disasters. Participants also highlighted examples where people living in such contexts were often under subnational governance structures, which might lack the capacity of national governments and were often in remote areas. In such cases, where climate and disaster-risk governance were a function of non-state armed actors or local leaders, local communities could suffer from poor governance; in other cases, more effective and tailored support was provided than at the national level. Many felt that communities politically and geographically isolated by conflict were often ignored in climate- and disaster-risk management efforts.

Some participants stressed that vulnerability within the region was driven by other factors, which were not linked to conflict. In the Solomon Islands, for example, which was not affected by conflict, vulnerability was driven by island size, different kinds of natural hazards, and the remoteness of the islands from the capital. Regarding the latter, remoteness could place populations out of the

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

reach of government services, meaning that it was difficult to access finance, and there were often poor transportation and communication links, which had a negative impact on disaster-response efforts.

Criticism of how agencies responded to populations affected by both conflict and climate risk was expressed during the discussions. This focused on the lack of finance to address preparedness, compared to funding for disaster response. It was, however, not only a question of funding, but also of whether organisations had the technical knowledge to respond in these difficult situations. In countries where communities were displaced by conflict and then affected by disasters, the communities could find themselves side-lined. While host communities and internally displaced people could experience the same shocks, in the aftermath their needs were often seen as secondary, owing to the fact that they were not citizens and did not enjoy the same legal status. Despite the criticisms raised, in countries affected by conflict many felt it was also a question of what was achievable. While programmes focused on longer-term aims – such as climate adaptation – that might be achievable in peacetime, in times of conflict this was not always feasible. Therefore, it was important to match levels of expectation to the realities on the ground.

How agencies defined and raised awareness of vulnerable populations was also raised. Like previous roundtables, the issue of how vulnerability was experienced differently by separate sections of society, such as women and children, was again highlighted. Concerns were raised that certain locations might receive greater attention in the media, which had knock-on effects in terms of which areas received a greater humanitarian response. In terms of small island developing states, one participant noted that the needs of larger islands often overshadowed the needs of smaller islands or those that were more accessible and closer to the capital. Interestingly, one participant argued that certain communities might not perceive themselves as vulnerable, despite being viewed as such by outside actors. Therefore, it was

noted that outside actors must be sensitive to the actual needs of the community, and not impose standards on communities.

Theme 2: Climate and the known drivers of conflict

The key points that emerged all supported the position that the climate affected known drivers of conflict. Participants cited examples of the consequences of climate change aggravating existing inequalities and power differentials in society, which were already drivers of conflict. Disasters (both sudden or slow onset) could knock entire communities back into poverty, and many cited poverty as a key driver of conflict. The point was made that tensions linked to climatic conditions could compound other sources of frustration, hardship and a sense of inequality such as livelihoods, poverty, access to resources, etc., which together could 'tip a society into conflict', though in and of themselves they might not seem significant consequences.

An important example was the Philippines, where both climate-induced disasters and conflicts further marginalised the already vulnerable (e.g. indigenous people who were relocated to allow for the building of Kaliwa Dam, intended to serve the urban metropolis of Manila). An important gap in planning for climate-change adaptation and conflict prevention was the need for multi-stakeholder planning solutions based on a robust assessment of vulnerabilities and needs, and the need to be willing to eschew the cheapest financing model in favour of tailored solutions. For the humanitarian community, there was a need to be able to provide nuanced responses to the layered vulnerabilities (e.g. post-disaster evacuation centres for mixed populations of civilians and armed groups). Weak governance could be exacerbated by climate-induced disasters, and in conflict zones these could have significant humanitarian consequences. There were already examples in the region, including in the Pacific, where slow onset long-term consequences had led to internal movements and contributed to conflict over scarce land and economic resources in areas receiving such populations. One example was the Malaita-Guadalcanal conflict in the Solomon Islands.

Theme 3: Access to climate finance

Experts noted that those with the least capacity to adapt to climate change were already doubly vulnerable to its consequences because of poverty and conflict. The lack of direct funding mechanisms for climate-related projects in Southeast Asia, especially for adaptation, was a major concern. Feeling that adaptation was underfinanced compared to mitigation, experts argued for a stronger narrative around the multifaceted role of adaptation in supporting social, economic, and just peacebuilding in the region. In order to access a wider range of resources, one suggestion was to make the links between climate and disaster funds stronger.

Experts identified major policy and governance barriers to climate financing, and many governments did not have easy access to climate financing. Experts also discussed the significant influence of national policies on fund distribution and community reach, as current financing was not perceived as responding to local challenges. There was concern over whether finance mechanisms would remain at the national level, or be brought down to effective, locally-led levels. One suggestion was decentralising climate finance in order to promote inclusivity of vulnerable groups and those in hard-to-reach conflict areas. Another was to create direct finance links to local communities, as well as incorporate local and indigenous knowledge. In particular, experts emphasised the need to elevate subnational voices by financing locally-led adaptation projects. Finally, experts noted the importance of sharing knowledge and good practices, as well as promoting climate financial literacy to scale up projects.

Theme 4: Security-centred perspectives

Participants were familiar with the security framings of climate change, through the inclusion of climate change in national security strategies and discussions at the UN Security Council. While it was broadly recognised that there was a valuable contribution to be made by foreign policy and military actors in understanding and acting on climate-change impacts, participants felt that security framings should not 'hijack the debates or dominate the framing of climate and conflict risk'. Instead, there was a preference for human-security framings and those which stress concepts of vulnerability, resilience, and risk management.

There were divergent opinions on the question of whether humanitarians had a responsibility to contribute to adaptation and mitigation efforts. Many felt that humanitarians had a role to play in responding to climate-change impacts, namely climate-related disasters – which they already did, including in conflict-affected contexts. In Asia and the Pacific, the military had a role to play too with a long history of proven logistical capacity and capability in emergency response. Some representatives felt that any actions beyond life-saving and responding to immediate needs would be going beyond the humanitarian mandate – and that was not desirable. In contrast, examples were provided of humanitarian interventions that contributed to longer-term resilience building. Some did see a role for humanitarians in areas where development agencies were not present – owing to conflict risk – and in such situations they had a role to play in adaptation and mitigation as part of a broader resilience agenda. This might not necessarily take the form of designing or implementing adaptation or mitigation programmes but in 'greening' responses through low-carbon operations and in supporting adaptation outcomes.

For many attendees the roundtable was the beginning of a conversation about the intersection of climate change, conflict, and security risk, and signalled a need for the

humanitarian community within Asia and the Pacific to think through and articulate their approach to the threats. It was commonly agreed that that role should include a strong focus on human security and protection of rights – especially of displaced and migrant populations in the low-lying Pacific islands – and for humanitarians to be part of longer-term strategies for enabling safe and dignified human mobility.

Theme 5: Implications for the humanitarian system

In places of conflict or disaster, humanitarian systems often played an important role but lack preparatory and preventive mechanisms. Proper risk analysis and risk assessment were mentioned by the experts as a prerequisite for the implementation of all planned interventions as well as a way to avoid the knowledge gap. Coordination between national and local governments also played a crucial role as information-sharing allowed for smoother work when disaster or conflict struck. Similarly, trust and coordination between all humanitarian actors involved were essential to achieve progress and effectively and efficiently address any shock. Trust was also crucial to help prevent the instrumentalisation of humanitarian aid.

Many participants felt that international humanitarian assistance was essential as countries often had very limited human and financial resources to tackle disasters or conflicts. Yet, given the context-driven nature of disasters and conflicts, localisation and involvement of the affected population in identifying sustainable and long-term solutions was needed to tailor the response to local realities. Experts also argued that the current financing mechanisms of humanitarian assistance were outdated and needed to use more innovative financing models as well as allow local communities to be involved in making decisions about the distribution of funds.

The humanitarian–development nexus was mentioned, and participants suggested that moving from a humanitarian emergency setting to longer-term developmental work would be one possible way of finding sustainable solutions.

While it was understandable that humanitarians responded to emergencies, development action could happen simultaneously.

Within the humanitarian system, experts noted the existing 'generational gap' between the 'old-timers' and 'young' humanitarians. The gap needed to be addressed and a better balance struck between the traditional and newer, more innovative ways of working.

Experts also suggested the possibility of a 'pre-agreement' between humanitarian actors and parties to the conflict that would enable smoother delivery of humanitarian assistance. Examples of obstacles given were the Philippine military preventing the delivery of humanitarian assistance in conflict areas in the southern Philippines and the applicability to NGO activities of the anti-terrorist Human Security Act.

Conclusions and next steps

In contrast to previous roundtables in other regions of the globe, the discussions were dominated by concern for the impact climate variability and change are having on the number and magnitude of disasters across countries affected by conflict in the region. Participants' understanding of issues of conflict centred on subnational conflict, primarily between state and non-state armed groups.

There was consensus among the group around the need to better understand the impact that climate variability and change would have on poverty dynamics, particularly in highly exposed contexts, and of the need to more strategically advocate for directing climate finance to conflict-affected areas. Differences in opinion were apparent in some topic areas, such as the value of bringing a security lens to the discussions, and of the specific role of climate variability and climate change in exacerbating existing tensions in subnational conflicts, or of the role of humanitarian actors in pursuing conflict-sensitive responses to disaster impacts. These differences reflected policymakers and practitioners' different experiences of the links between climate, conflict and disasters; the different definitions employed (particularly of 'conflict' and 'security'); and different perceptions of the role of the state

in building climate and disaster resilience in countries affected by conflict.

What was clear from the discussions was that further investment is required to help policymakers and practitioners to better understand the existing evidence base regarding the links between climate, disaster, and conflict, and to bolster gaps in the evidence base with specific examples from the Asia-Pacific region. There is also a need to better understand the extent to which climate variability and change are attributable factors in the empirical examples of disaster–conflict tensions cited. Finally, space is required to think through and strategise how best to channel climate finance in contexts where subnational armed conflicts prevail.

About the roundtable series

The first roundtable in this series was held in January 2019 in Nairobi, and it explored these themes from the Greater Horn of Africa perspective. The second roundtable was held in Abidjan in April 2019, with a focus on the West African perspective. A third took place in The Hague in May 2019, and a fourth in Amman in June 2019. The Manila roundtable, focused on perspectives from Asia and the Pacific, was the fifth in the series. Subsequent roundtable discussions were held in Washington DC and Geneva.

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