



Roundtable report

People's experience of conflict, climate risk and resilience

Amman roundtable, 19 June 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 Amman on 19 June 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 fourth event in the series, held in Amman, Jordan, was organised jointly with the Jordan Red Crescent Society. It convened 33 experts from 21 institutions 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

During discussions, there was agreement that the changing climate and its impacts are more pronounced in fragile and conflict-affected areas, and put additional pressure on people by increasing and exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. Fragility and conflict also lead to decreased awareness, coping and adaptation mechanisms as social, political and economic institutional systems and policies malfunction.

It was widely noted that climate change is not a sudden trigger but rather a slow-paced process. In Syria, for instance, experts argued that the drought had been developing long before the start of the current crisis. Drought conditions have driven many Syrians into urban areas in search of better livelihood opportunities, putting additional pressure on resources and increasing tensions.

Experts strongly encouraged better inclusion of the gender perspective in policy-making, as women, especially when facing the double vulnerability of climate and conflict, are often marginalised. To help reduce vulnerabilities, raising awareness and education of the affected communities is an important step and could be done through community or religious leaders as part of customary practices. Building resilience among vulnerable and affected communities requires a prior data analysis, both qualitative and quantitative, to help identify escalations or reductions in vulnerabilities. Green technologies and energy solutions were also proposed as a long-term sustainable energy supply that helps to reduce the demand for water in already resource-scarce places. However, this is not a straightforward option in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

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

Theme 2: Climate and the known drivers of conflict

While there is a strong consensus that climate change is affecting drivers of conflict, it is often the management and sharing of existing resources that causes tension. In countries in the Middle East and North Africa, such as Jordan or Egypt, one of the main issues in climate discussions is water. At the local level, scarcity or mismanagement of water resources leads to tensions among communities, especially where people are more vulnerable and dependent, for instance in refugee camps or urban areas with high population growth. On the transboundary level, water distribution can be highly politicised, and in fragile and conflict states such as Iraq or Syria water resources are being manipulated by armed groups.

It was pointed out that humanitarian actors are gradually turning their standard emergency mode of work into a more sustainable long-term approach. Yet, in order to help people build their adaptive capacities and strengthen their resilience, more preventive measures are needed. Early warning and early planning systems and needs assessments are essential when initiating support. Anticipation and a solid understanding of the causes of conflict, and whether climate change is affecting the drivers of conflict or is a driver in itself, would enable humanitarian actors to design better responses. Working more closely with scientific communities and greater use of data could help in decision-making as part of preventive measures.

Changing climate, fragility, limited or non-existent services, inequality and insecurity – all exacerbate risks, and all require policies that can help address these risks. While the voices of local communities are important, affected populations often lack knowledge and awareness, not only concerning risks and the causes and consequences of changing climate, but also how they themselves manage available resources. Humanitarian actors work closely with governments and communities and are often trusted by both. Experts suggested that humanitarians could play a role as intermediaries, helping to bridge the gap between policy-making and implementation.

Theme 3: Access to climate finance

The roundtable discussed the barriers to and opportunities for increasing access to climate finance for adaptation in areas affected by conflict. Experts cited a need to lower the requirements for accessing climate finance in conflict areas, and pointed to a number of challenges that need to be overcome. First and foremost, the existing system of international climate finance assumes stable conditions. Other issues include arduous application procedures, restrictive accreditation requirements, a reliance on national governments and lengthy proposal acceptance processes.

Experts recommended greater exchange of experience between adaptation fund managers and those with experience of implementing long-term interventions in conflict areas. They felt that a lack of operational experience among fund managers was one of the primary underlying reasons why financing systems are skewed towards areas of peace. They pointed to a need to simplify the access process for areas experiencing conflict, faster proposal acceptance times (to reflect rapidly changing situations on the ground), easier fiduciary requirements and higher levels of delegated decision-making to support adaptive programme management. Experts highlighted a need for expanded access to adaptation funding for non-state actors, such as municipal governments and non-governmental organisations; they indicated this is especially crucial in situations where a state is a party to a conflict and may channel financing to one side of a conflict.

There was also frustration with the strict rules regarding what counts as adaptation programming. One example cited was a water resource management project in the Middle East. The project was seen as ‘routine development’ instead of adaptation, despite climate change trends in the region showing a future of increased water scarcity where strengthened water management practices will be crucial. Experts felt that strict requirements do not align with the day-to-day interconnectedness of adaptation and development needs.

It was also felt that these barriers prevent climate finance from reaching areas of conflict, thus also making achieving the adaptation commitments outlined in the Paris Agreement more difficult. There is a need for special standards

and regulations specific to conflict areas, and a need to ensure practical experiences directly inform policy development. It was recommended that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) develop a position paper on its support to adaptation in conflict areas, including how to overcome obstacles to financing.

Experts also suggested increasing technical exchanges between countries and the establishment of regional sovereign funds in order to simplify application processes, programme funds more quickly, absorb the higher risks found in areas in conflict and overall better respond to the needs of the region.

Regarding private sector investment, experts cited a need for the international community and the public sector to assist in reducing investment risks through measures including insurance, green bonds and supportive legislation.

Finally, experts suggested developing studies in the Middle East looking at these challenges, and using the findings to inform evidence-based policy reforms.

Theme 4: Security-centred perspectives

From discussions, it was evident that security concerns are difficult to separate from concerns surrounding climate change. For example, disputes over transboundary water resources are a challenge to water access in the region. Rather than avoiding security discussions, it was argued that we should instead see how we can use these to pursue development concerns on the basis that security and development are often linked. One participant noted that there are three stages – conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding – and encouraged consideration of how environmental factors feed into these. For example, migration has often been presented as a security concern, which could encourage states to take preventive measures to ease tensions, targeting areas such as employment, housing and public services. The point was made that this should target not only new arrivals but host communities as well.

Experts argued that the immediate security concerns of individuals may also be a barrier to addressing long-term vulnerability. The point

was made that, particularly among displaced populations, the safety of family members, the availability of food, and access to education and medical care often take priority over long-term concerns. One expert noted that individuals must feel that they are living in a secure environment before considerations of climate adaptation can be introduced. Experts noted that an important first step could be to help communities consider the broader picture and realise that their immediate security concerns are often affected by natural hazards such as droughts.

It was agreed that humanitarians have an important role to play in acting as mediators between the communities where they work and policy-makers. It was argued that actors such as the ICRC have access to the highest levels of decision-making, including the UN Security Council. However, experts warned that consideration must be given to the fact that solutions emerging from local communities may end up undermining their resilience. Being effective in this role will also depend on the availability of data. Similar to previous roundtables, the point was made that more evidence is needed to identify how climate change is having an impact on conflict, enabling humanitarians to create an effective ‘narrative’ to influence policy-makers.

Humanitarians were encouraged to think more systematically in post-conflict areas, where infrastructure reconstruction provides opportunities to consider longer-term development needs. Furthermore, experts argued that humanitarian interventions need to consider, not only vulnerability, but also the environmental impact on surrounding areas.

Theme 5: Implications for the humanitarian system

Experts were prompted to begin discussing the ways in which humanitarian systems hamper climate adaptation and resilience-building in areas affected by conflict. They cited the ‘goal-limiting’ mandate of humanitarian aid agencies, which focus on saving lives in the short term, rather than long-term resilience and adaptation needs. The culture of humanitarian agencies also tends to limit them to what they know and what they usually do, rather

than encouraging analysis of longer-term trends such as changing climate risks and identifying how to reflect these in humanitarian operations.

It was noted that many humanitarian operations across the Middle East essentially focus on delivering commodities and do not promote longer-term resilience or adaptation.

Experts also noted the importance of recognising that warring parties often destroy or expel crucial sources of resilience – assets, infrastructure, institutions, markets and skilled labour. As such, humanitarian operations often take place in a very degraded environment (natural and human), making it highly challenging to focus on adaptation measures when people are barely coping.

Even so, humanitarian systems can be bolstered for sustainable impact by ensuring that long-term trends and needs are incorporated into planning a ‘short-term’ response. Humanitarians should focus on systems, infrastructure and services, alongside responding to immediate needs. It is necessary for humanitarians to carefully and explicitly reconceptualise humanitarian action as a longer-term approach of accompaniment in conflict, recognising the protracted nature of many conflicts.

Humanitarians should work with indigenous knowledge experts to identify effective traditional adaptation approaches (e.g. rainwater catchment), and carefully test new exogenous adaptations with communities.

Increasing the use of unconditional cash transfers in conflict areas was also suggested as a good way for humanitarians to enhance the decision-making agency of the people they are supporting. This form of aid allows recipients to prioritise short- and long-term needs, such as education, housing, asset recovery and business continuity. Similarly, humanitarians should more consciously work with governments and other institutions to develop and integrate safety net approaches into their work.

Finally, experts also felt that politicians dictate policy much more than humanitarian operations, and that their policies often run counter to resilience or adaptation. In particular, many governments have policies that discourage displaced people from settling

and integrating into new locations. Similarly, financial support for adaptation and resilience-building in fragile and conflict-affected areas is very limited, as donors prefer lower-risk investments, and thus channel funding towards more stable contexts.

Conclusions and next steps

Throughout the day’s discussions several key cross-cutting themes emerged. First, the importance of inclusive policy-making processes to ensure effective local action at the intersection of climate, conflict and resilience. Policy processes must include, on an equal footing, the perspectives of people impacted by conflict, humanitarians responding to needs in conflict settings and fund managers working to meet the commitments outlined in the Paris Agreement.

Second, people often experience changing climate risks through their natural environment. The natural environment is key to buffering against the impacts of climate extremes, and when the environment has been degraded climate shocks are often felt more acutely. There is a need to avoid ecosystem degradation in situations of conflict, and to restore the natural buffering capacity of ecosystems in places where this degradation has already occurred. This needs to be integrated into humanitarian action; adaptation funding can play an important role here.

Third, humanitarian action must be framed and practiced with a view to the long term – it is very important to ensure that humanitarian action is understood as legitimately including resilience and adaptation, especially given the increasingly protracted nature of conflict. The current divide between humanitarian and development finance is one of the main barriers to meaningful, holistic action in places affected by conflict. Strict divisions between development and climate adaptation finance further exacerbate this problem.

Fourth, while experts agreed that climate change is likely to be a threat multiplier to known drivers of conflict, they felt that the primary challenge faced in the Middle East is managing existing resources, rather than changing climate risks. For example, water

scarcity results from inadequate water policies and management, both within states and across boundaries between states, rather than the impacts of climate change on water availability. However, climate change is projected to exacerbate water scarcity in the future.

Finally, experts argued that the separation of climate change from issues of security is difficult to avoid, and that energy should instead focus on how we can use these discussions as an opportunity to highlight the risks faced by vulnerable communities. In addition, if we are to get communities to consider their role in addressing long-term development concerns, then they will need to feel that their immediate security is protected. Respected organisations such as the ICRC should use their position within the international community to ensure that concerns such as these are at the centre of discussions.

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. Amman was the fourth roundtable in this series. The fifth roundtable, focused on perspectives from Asia and the Pacific, was held in Manila in August 2019. Subsequent roundtable discussions will be held in Washington DC and Geneva. A report of insights gained from the discussions will be prepared after the series concludes.



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