

The role of multilateral organisations in addressing climate change and its security risks

In recent years, academic and policy research has provided clear evidence that climate change impacts security. In today's more global world, not only states but also central international security organisations, such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and regional security organisations, such as the European Union (EU) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), are discussing climate change as a security issue. Development organisations, that seek to assess human vulnerabilities and strengthen adaptive capacities of societies threatened by climate change, are also playing a crucial role in mitigating security risks. In this policy brief, we summarise the security challenges brought about by climate change, demonstrating the promise of international cooperation spanning issue areas and organisations to address these challenges effectively.

Climate change is linked to a number of biophysical processes such as changing precipitation patterns, rising temperatures, melting glaciers, weather-related disasters and sea level rise. Already today, this is affecting the livelihood of vulnerable communities and as these developments continue, they may cause forced migration and social unrest and even increase the likelihood of violent conflict. The security implications of these challenges are multifaceted and good policy responses require knowledge about human and state-centred security implications and how they are interlinked. Climate change-related security challenges are not only brought about by climate factors, but also by non-climate factors related to the vulnerability and adaptive capacity of societies.¹ In all, climate change and security risks are linked, albeit in complex ways.

State-of-the-art in climate change and security risks

Existing research and policy reports have considered the security implications of climate change in thematic areas such as water security, food security, sea level rise, coastal degradation, weather-related disasters, migration, and armed conflict. These security challenges are often linked to one another. For instance, decreased water resources affect food security, while sea level rise interacts with extreme weather events to increase the challenges in coastal areas, which in turn has implications for water and food security. Moreover, climate change has both direct and indirect negative consequences, which is manifested through both sudden and gradual change. Despite the complex relationship between climate change and security risks, we can formulate three conclusions that researchers agree on and that cut across the above-mentioned thematic areas.

Climate change has an impact on human livelihoods and human security. Climate change and climate variability affect access to food and water, and increase the risk of natural disasters. In general, vulnerable populations are the most heavily affected. The impacts of climate change thus vary substantially across and within countries, reflecting the important role of long-term planning and adaptive capacity to manage the security implications posed by climate change. Context-based analyses are critical and it is pivotal to bear in mind that coping and adaptive capacity are features that can be strengthened, but also weakened.

Climate change has a limited direct impact on the risk of armed conflict, but contributes indirectly to increased risks of armed conflict. A large body of statistical literature has assessed the effects of climate change variables, primarily rainfall or temperature variability, on the prevalence of armed conflict. The conclusion drawn in these studies is either that the relationship is weak or non-existent. Case studies, on the other hand, have provided evidence of indirect links between climate change and armed conflict, e.g. through impacting on other known conflict drivers. Taken together, in order to prevent conflicts there is a need for more systematic research on how climate change affects different conflict drivers and how these can be mitigated.

Institutions play a crucial role in alleviating the security risks brought about by climate change. A prominent example of good governance is provided by previous research on natural resource conflicts, which demonstrates the importance of including affected stakeholders in dialogue and information sharing in order to facilitate long-term planning and peaceful cooperation. Furthermore, the existing literature emphasises that good governance must take into consideration that adaptation measures in one sector or at one place can result in increased vulnerability in another place. Thus, adequate

¹ See e.g. Steinbruner et al. 2013 *Climate and Social Stress: Implications for Security Analysis*, Washington: National Academic Press.

management of the security implications of climate change requires a 'holistic' or inclusive approach that cuts across spatial boundaries, issue areas, and that takes into account long-term challenges.

The need for an integrated approach

As a result of these cross-sector impacts and the multifaceted ways in which climate change affects societies worldwide, the climate change and security nexus has influenced a wide set of organisations engaged in development, conflict resolution and management, and humanitarian aid. These actors have to different extents and through various approaches begun to integrate the security implications of climate change into their policies and strategies. While this work has advanced rapidly in recent years, many analysts point to the strong segregation between organisations that deal with disaster, climate, development and conflict.² More integrated approaches hold the promise of addressing the security risks brought about by climate change adequately. This is the premise and topic of our research project, which will add new knowledge about the political alternatives to reach more integrated approaches at the national, regional, and global levels of government.

Our project on climate change-related security risks

A central purpose of our project, which is commissioned by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is to conduct three studies that analyse the links between climate change and security. These studies will generate knowledge about how development and security organisations have addressed climate-induced security challenges, and present forward-looking policy alternatives.

In the first study, we are seeking a deeper understanding of how and under what conditions climate change is linked to armed conflict. The study is focusing on East Africa, which is of interest owing to the frequency of different types of armed conflicts and to the projected impacts of climate change. A better understanding of the circumstances under which climate change is linked to increased insecurity is important for a wide array of actors working with conflict prevention, peace-building and climate adaptation.

The second study is focusing on national development organisations in Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, countries that have all taken leading roles in

pushing the climate-security agenda forward. The third investigation is taking a regional security perspective by analysing how the EU has incorporated climate change into its foreign and security policy. These studies will provide an overview of the policies and tools available. Since a large number of toolkits and resources for working with climate adaptation and security challenges already exist, our aim is not to develop a new one. Instead, we offer an in-depth analysis of practitioners' own experiences of working with these tools, with emphasis on the opportunities and challenges they have encountered in the implementation process.

Added value of the project

The results of the three investigations will be communicated to Swedish policymakers and practitioners through a number of workshops held in spring 2016. We will offer practical guidance and refine the current understanding of how to adequately address climate-induced security challenges in an integrated manner. Isolated interventions could undermine policy coherence and increase the risk of maladaptation, which could reinforce social tensions and instability. Our research suggests that organisations working with development, environment, and security would be more effective in securing climate resilience, preventing violent conflicts and humanitarian catastrophes if they were to develop a more integrated approach to governing the climate-security nexus.

Contact

Malin Mobjörk, PhD., Senior Researcher, SIPRI, and
Department of Political Science, Stockholm University
E-mail: malin.mobjork@sipri.org
Phone: + 46 708 38 64 66

Project team

Karin Bäckstrand, Professor in Environmental Social
Science, Stockholm University
Maria-Therese Gustafsson, PhD., researcher, Stockholm
University
Hannes Sonnsjö, MSc, assistant, Stockholm University
Sebastian van Baalen, MSc, assistant, Stockholm
University
Lisa M. Dellmuth, PhD., researcher, Stockholm Resilience
Centre, SRC
Niklas Bremberg, PhD., postdoc, The Swedish Institute of
International Affairs (Ui)

Homepage

<http://www.statsvet.su.se/english/research/environmental-politics-policy-and-learning/projects/climate-change-and-security-challenges-and-managing-options-1.255170>

² Peters & Vivekananda 2014. *Topic Guide: Conflict, Climate and the Environment*, London: International Alert. Rüttinger et al. 2015. *A New Climate for Peace*, Berlin: Adelphi and International Alert.