

How to Integrate Climate and Conflict Risks in Development Cooperation – Experiences and Lessons Learnt

There is broad agreement among practitioners and scholars that the combined task of responding to climate-induced security risks requires ‘integrated approaches’. While development organisations have started to integrate the security implications of climate change into high-level policies, there are still important obstacles to effective implementation. This policy brief summarises how development organisations in the UK, Germany and the Netherlands handle the task of integrating climate and conflict considerations in policy and practice and outlines the lessons learnt.

There is growing consensus that combined climate, conflict and fragility risks require integrated approaches. As the Dutch foreign minister recently remarked: “Climate change has a major impact on our security. We can no longer approach these two topics separately.”¹ While integrated approaches are undoubtedly required in most fields of development cooperation, in this brief we focus on two forms of integration identified as particularly relevant for effectively addressing combined climate and conflict risks: the integration of climate risks in peace-building efforts and the need to apply a conflict-sensitive approach in climate change programmes.

This policy brief summarises an analysis of *how three development organisations have addressed combined climate and conflict risks in their policies and how they have dealt with challenges to implementing these policies in their programmes*. The development organisations concerned are the Department for International Development (DFID) in the UK, the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA). So far, DFID and GIZ have the most advanced policies in this area. However, it is still a relatively new field, which means that these organisations are also in the process of developing and assessing the value of different approaches and strategies. Even so, there are important lessons to be learnt from the experiences of these organisations. Ways in which the organisations have dealt with the integration of climate and conflict risks in their policies and strategies are summarised below. As DFID and GIZ have advanced the most, the main emphasis is on those two organisations. A substantial foundation for the analysis was interviews with staff at the organisations.

Climate-resilient peace building

Increased stress on livelihoods and unequal distribution of resources are well-known drivers of conflict if local

communities lack the capacity to adapt to those changes. The core element in climate-resilient peace building is hence to take both short- and long-term climate risks into consideration in peace-building efforts as potential drivers of conflict. Some key policies and strategies and existing procedures for implementation are outlined below.

Integration of climate risks in peace-building policies

In high-level policies in both Germany and the UK, climate change is considered a factor that could increase the potential for conflicts. Despite this, neither country requires climate change and climate variability to be specifically addressed in conflict analysis, early warning systems or country strategies. In some cases, staff members reported having included climate risks in conflict analysis and country strategies on their own initiative. However, without mandatory requirements the effort to integrate climate risks is very much up to the commitment and capability of the employees responsible for such analyses. As several informants emphasised, an important shortcoming in this regard is that there are relatively few staff members who have competence on climate issues in the organisations’ Peace & Conflict units.

The most important consequence of disregarding climate risks in conflict analysis is that conflict prevention could be hampered. The risk is greatest in countries that are heavily affected by climate change and at the same time suffer from fragile governance structures, low intensity tensions and insecurities. As several informants suggested, it is precisely in these countries that it is most important to pay attention to how different impacts of climate change, such as unequal access to resources, migration and rapid urbanisation, could reinforce existing tensions or create new tensions. Hence, introducing climate risks in conflict assessments would be an important first step towards improving conflict prevention in these countries.

Climate proofing as a strategy of integration

Climate proofing has the two-fold aim of assessing to what extent a policy or a programme is exposed to risks

¹ <http://www.pbsbdialogue.org/en/new-deal/about-new-deal/>, accessed March 8th, 2016.

associated with climate change or variability and to what extent the programme in itself could increase the vulnerability to climate change. DFID and GIZ have both adopted systems for climate proofing that follow this logic. However, DFID opted to withdraw its climate-proofing system in 2014 due to the time and resources required to implement the system properly. In both DFID and GIZ, climate proofing has helped raise the awareness of climate change within the organisations' Peace & Conflict units. However, while informants from DFID described follow-up mechanisms as relatively inefficient, informants from GIZ described these procedures as rigorous and cumbersome. An important limitation regarding how climate-proofing strategies are designed in both organisations is that they only ensure compliance with the "do no harm" principle. There is no requirement for programmes to be modified in order to contribute positively to peace-building processes. Hence, while climate proofing is important, it needs to be complemented by other integration strategies.

Conflict-sensitive climate change programming

Several studies suggest that in order to address combined climate and conflict risks, it is necessary for climate change programming to take conflict risks into account. The overarching goal with conflict-sensitive climate change programming is hence that responses to climate change should not increase the risk of conflict, and in the best case even to help strengthen peace-building processes. The sections below outline key policies and strategies and existing procedures for implementing conflict-sensitive approaches.

Conflict sensitivity in resilience and vulnerability assessments

Resilience and vulnerability are the most common frameworks that development organisations use for their climate-related activities. DFID has put great effort into incorporating resilience in its work, which is clearly reflected in high-level policies. What DFID proposes is to use resilience as an overarching framework for integrating climate change with humanitarian aid, poverty reduction and peace building. In contrast, GIZ uses vulnerability assessments as the analytical tool for climate change programming and does not have the same ambition to integrate different policy areas under this framework.

Resilience and vulnerability methods are intended to identify risks and strengthen adaptation and development planning. While both approaches include socio-economic conditions, neither incorporates the conflict dimension. There are various explanations for this. First, as some informants suggested, the resilience framework is already complex and including additional dimensions such as

conflict would make it even more difficult to operationalise. Second, resilience approaches are primarily designed to address disaster risks or external shocks and since conflict is an internal social process in a society, the basic idea in resilience approaches of "bouncing back from [external] shocks or stresses" is difficult to apply. Instead, sustainable peace requires some kind of transformation of internal conflict structures.² Adopting 'resilience' as a framework for implementation of integrated approaches raises important questions regarding how to adapt this methodology in order to ensure that conflict and fragility are addressed properly. The vulnerability assessment approach used by GIZ is also a tool completely separated from conflict analysis and thus suffers from similar problems. Without integrating conflict risks into their assessments, the two organisations are thus unlikely to be able to address combined conflict and climate risks in a consistent manner.

Conflict proofing climate programming

Besides the importance of including careful analysis of the conflict dimension in resilience and vulnerability assessments, there is also a related debate regarding the risk of *maladaptation*. Simply put, the argument goes that if climate programmes are not conflict-sensitive, they could themselves have negative impacts on land tenure and marginalise certain groups, with negative impacts on their propensity for conflict. In both GIZ and DFID, there are guidelines regarding how to assure the conflict sensitivity of development programming in conflict-affected and fragile states. While these procedures are very important, staff members reported that they often need to balance many different priorities. Hence, without support from help desks or expert groups, it could be challenging for staff members to employ these tools and develop entirely conflict-sensitive projects.

Implications for policy

As demonstrated above, translation of high-level policies into strategies and programming has proven challenging for development organisations. Lack of knowledge and internal organisational structures and priorities are important obstacles to effective implementation. An important question is how implementation could be improved. A number of lessons for policy makers and practitioners are presented below.

² McCandless & Simpson (2015) "Assessing Resilience for Peacebuilding: Executive Summary of Discussion Document" Geneva/Stockholm: Interpeace and Sida.

Improve coordination across policy areas

Climate and security threats span various policy areas that are in many cases strongly separated. If these policy areas are managed within the same department or by a specially created new steering group, coordination becomes significantly easier. The Dutch MFA has, for instance, positive experiences of working with interdepartmental groups regarding water diplomacy. Our analysis also showed that external expert units could play an important coordinating role and contribute to coherence and sustainability over time.

The importance of knowledge

When responding to climate-induced security risks, information about how climate change may affect food, water, migration and humanitarian disasters is crucial. Our analysis showed that development organisations often lack the knowledge needed to respond efficiently to combined climate and conflict risks. It is therefore important to create help desks or specialist units, internal or external, providing expertise on these matters.

Modify resilience and conflict analysis

Various studies have suggested a need to assess compound risks. Within both DFID and GIZ, climate programming and peace-building efforts are largely dealt with using separate analytical tools that are unlikely to be able to capture how complex risks interact with each other. It is therefore important to develop new analytical tools that can address both conflict risks and climate change vulnerability. To avoid reinventing the wheel, it is also important to review the methods that exist today or are currently under development.

Limitations of mainstreaming strategies

Mainstreaming strategies have the advantage of raising awareness of an issue, but mainstreaming requires time, capabilities and commitment by staff. It is therefore important to set up help desks or expert groups that can provide staff members with support, particularly during programme development and, if necessary, assume a monitoring role during the life cycle of the project. However, it is important to emphasise that climate risks are not relevant in all kinds of projects, which was a major reason why DFID decided to retract mandatory climate proofing in its programmes. This indicates the importance of the initial phase, since if climate risks are not considered properly, then subsequent steps will certainly be affected.

A general limitation of mainstreaming strategies is that they follow the “do no harm” logic, which means that they only ensure that proposed projects have no obvious

negative impacts on e.g. climate change. However, mainstreaming does not necessarily contribute to more profound forms of integration where positive effects are achieved. Hence, mainstreaming strategies by themselves are not sufficient to effectively address combined climate and conflict risks and need to be complemented by integration strategies.

About the policy brief

This policy brief is a summary of the report *How do Development Organisations Integrate Climate and Conflict Risks? – Experiences and Lessons Learnt from UK, Germany, and the Netherlands*. The report analyses how development organisations address combined climate and conflict risks in their policies and how they deal with challenges to implementing those policies in their programmes. The analysis is based on documents, such as thematic policies, analytical tools, geographical strategies and interviews with staff members. The report was produced within a project funded by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

For the full report, see Gustafsson (2016) *How do Development Organisations Integrate Climate and Conflict Risks? – Experiences and Lessons Learnt from UK, Germany, and the Netherlands*. Stockholm: Stockholm University

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