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PRACTICAL NOTE

Mainstreaming a climate, peace and security approach: Challenges and entry points for humanitarian action

Authors: Ginevra Cucinotta, Alessandro Pirisi, Maylina
St-Louis (UNSSC); Beatrice Mosello, Raquel Munayer (adelphi)

CONTEXT

Climate change is a top driver of humanitarian need and human suffering, particularly for the poorest countries. Its impacts threaten to deepen already wide inequalities, resulting in consequences felt by the world at large, including instability, violence and displacement. For humanitarian actors, this translates into a need for increased capacity to understand climate and environmental risks and develop evidence-based solutions at local, national and international levels, to continue delivering on their mandates and operations, while at the same time also contributing to building resilience.

Therefore, humanitarians are confronted with the need for short-term action, while ensuring long-term positive impacts – but how to combine reaction with prevention? Addressing climate and environmental change may hold the key to tackling both short and long-term challenges at once. The Climate, Peace and Security (CPS) agenda has advanced rapidly in recent years, due to growing evidence on how these areas are deeply interconnected, so that one-dimensional interventions fail to bring long-term positive results. There have been significant attempts at integrated CPS approaches in climate, development and peacebuilding work. Now there is an urgent need for humanitarian action to follow through, to increase effectiveness and do no harm, while strengthening prevention efforts. The question is how.

Reflecting the increasing recognition across the humanitarian community of the need to scale up its action and adapt its responses to the impacts of climate change, the Climate Crisis was one of nine areas of Common Concern (AOCC) for inter-network collaboration of the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week (HNPW) 2024. HNPW provides a unique forum for humanitarian networks and partnerships to meet and address key humanitarian issues. In its latest edition, which took place in Geneva and online from 29 April to 10 May 2024, more than 7,800 registered participants from the United Nations (UN), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Member States, the private sector, the military, academia and beyond gathered to discuss and solve common challenges in humanitarian affairs.

Against this backdrop, **adelphi** and the **United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC)** organized a face-to-face workshop, with special participation of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), to provide a space for discussion and exchange among practitioners, researchers and donors working at the intersection of climate, peace and security on how to enhance understanding of climate and environmental risks, and integrate them into humanitarian responses and efforts towards increased resilience, conflict prevention and sustaining peace. Through facilitated discussions and sharing of experiences and lessons learned, participants explored potential approaches and solutions to key challenges, such as reconciling short-term humanitarian interventions with the often long-term nature of climate change impacts, and collaboration across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus to address the root causes of climate-related security risks and achieve sustainable outcomes. This practical note captures key takeaways from the workshop.



KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Mainstreaming a focus on climate, peace and security in humanitarian action presents several challenges. These span operational, strategic, and contextual dimensions, requiring careful consideration and innovative solutions. At the same time, it is important to look at challenges in a constructive way, as they also indicate what entry points exist and can be leveraged for responses.

Credit: UN Photo/Mark Garten



INTEGRATED APPROACHES

Integrating risk analyses:

Humanitarian interventions must be informed by comprehensive climate and conflict risk analyses. However, the complexity of these analyses can hinder timely and effective action. Simplifying frameworks and tapping into already available analytical resources, including tried and tested tools and methodologies that can be quickly applied for context-specific analyses – as well as exchanging with climate, peace and security stakeholders – can enable humanitarian actors to integrate climate and security considerations without overwhelming their operational capacities.

Recommendation:

Start humanitarian work with a holistic climate and security risks analysis to better understand the operational context and support the development of interventions that address the root causes of crises.

Coordination across sectors:

Implementing a CPS approach necessitates coordination across multiple sectors, including humanitarian, development, and peace (HDP). This can be logistically challenging, but effective communication and collaboration mechanisms can ensure cohesive and complementary actions where possible. Moreover, institutionalizing practices away from sequential logics like 'first save lives, then tackle the climate', and towards integrative, climate-sensitive approaches to the HDP nexus can help mainstream cross-sectoral coordination.

Recommendation:

Foster top-down incentives towards integrative, climate-sensitive approaches such as embedding requirements for cross-sectoral collaboration in job descriptions and performance goals.



RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

Financial resources:

Humanitarian organizations often operate under tight budgets. Flexible and adaptable financing mechanisms that support climate- and conflict-sensitive interventions are essential but currently scarce. Securing funding that allows for dynamic responses to evolving crises is a significant challenge. It is crucial that humanitarian organizations engage with those along the CPS spectrum to look for synergies in their work and identify opportunities for co-benefits that may help streamline resources for climate- and conflict-sensitive humanitarian action.

Recommendation:

Draw upon experience in humanitarian settings to develop proposals that appeal to climate finance institutions, towards increasing their willingness to invest in fragile, conflict, and violence settings by leveraging co-benefits with CPS and HDP sectors.



POLITICAL AND POWER CONSIDERATIONS

Perceptions of climate change:

Solutions to climate and environmental impacts are frequently approached from a technical and apolitical perspective. However, climate action can influence power and societal dynamics at various levels, both positively or negatively. Humanitarian action should be impartial, but it can hardly be apolitical.

Recommendation:

Recognize and address the political implications of climate interventions to avoid unintended consequences and increase the potential for positive impacts.

Long-term vs. short-term goals:

Humanitarian interventions are often designed to address immediate needs, while climate change impacts and peacebuilding require long-term strategies. Balancing short-term humanitarian objectives with long-term CPS goals can be challenging, requiring humanitarian organizations to align their priorities strategically, looking beyond project-driven responses and towards collective outcomes.

Recommendation:

Strengthen preparedness to reduce the need for short-term action. Early warning and early action systems must be given particular importance, as they significantly reduce the loss of lives and livelihoods by anticipating risks and enabling proactive measures.

Local dynamics:

Local power dynamics, historical grievances, and social structures can significantly impact the success of interventions. Humanitarians must navigate these complexities to avoid exacerbating existing tensions. Understanding and integrating local political, social, and environmental dynamics into CPS approaches is key, and when this is done in close consultation with local stakeholders, it may bring opportunities for building peace and enhance the success of interventions.

Recommendation:

Conduct context specific integrated risks analyses and engage with local and affected populations in order to inform interventions.

Policy and advocacy:

Mainstreaming a CPS approach requires strong policy support and advocacy efforts. Humanitarian organizations must engage with policymakers to influence legislation and secure commitment to CPS principles. This involves navigating complex political landscapes and advocating for integrated approaches at national and international levels.

Recommendation:

Advocate for integrated approaches at national and international levels.



MONITORING AND EVALUATION & LEARNING

Defining Success:

Measuring the success of CPS interventions involves identifying appropriate indicators that capture the multifaceted impacts of these approaches. Consistent measurements are also essential for increasing the appetite among donors and climate finance institutions in investing in humanitarian action. Collaboration between humanitarian, climate, development, and peacebuilding communities of practice can support in developing integrated monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

Recommendation:

Define and measure success of climate- and conflict-sensitive interventions by collaborating with development and peacebuilding communities. Identify appropriate indicators to measure success in an integrated manner.

Adaptive Learning:

Humanitarian contexts are dynamic, and the effectiveness of CPS approaches must be continuously assessed and adapted. Humanitarian actors need specialized knowledge and skills to effectively incorporate CPS approaches. Training and capacity-building initiatives are essential but can be resource-intensive and require sustained investment.

Recommendation:

Establishing mechanisms for adaptive learning and real-time evaluation is essential for improving interventions and achieving sustainable outcomes. For capacity-building, there are many free and readily available resources produced by experts and organizations on CPS-related topics, such as frameworks, case-studies and best practices which can help inform action until more structured capacity-building formats for humanitarian action are also available.



ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION

Grassroots Leadership:

Involving local communities, including women, youth, traditional leaders, and indigenous groups, in humanitarian and CPS interventions is essential for their success. However, this requires overcoming barriers to participation and ensuring that these groups are genuinely involved in dialogue and action. Humanitarian and CPS interventions working in and with communities should also look at what is already taking place at the grassroots level, as oftentimes there are advocacy and leadership processes already in place, which get overlooked and hence undermined by external actors. Instead, it is key to understand the context, leverage and support constructive processes and structures rather than creating new ones.

Recommendation:

Engage grassroots leadership, including women, youth, traditional leaders, and indigenous knowledge in response efforts, without perpetuating exclusionary power dynamics.

Building Trust:

Trust-building with local partners and civil society organizations is a lengthy process that requires accountability and transparency. Especially, in protracted crises where displacement becomes permanent, fostering sustainable development approaches and rebuilding trust with affected communities are critical challenges. Humanitarian actors must put in efforts to understand what issues are perceived by both displaced and receiving communities as most pressing, including practical matters such as facilitating the flow of remittances into most affected settings, and integrate these into their interventions. This can help ensure community buy-in and hence contribute to rebuilding trust in the long-term.

Recommendation:

Foster accountability and sustained engagement in order to build trust and partnerships with local partners and civil society organizations.



ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

Environmental Impact:

Humanitarian interventions must consider their environmental impact to avoid exacerbating climate and conflict risks. Interventions that contribute to deforestation or unsustainable resource use can undermine the long-term resilience of local populations. Examples of impacts include the provision of food aid without cooking fuel or the provision of tents without building structures, both of which can lead to deforestation around refugee camps. Incorporating environmental sustainability into humanitarian planning is challenging, but essential. Approaches must involve thorough logistical planning that goes beyond essentials like food and water, but considers also aspects such as required utensils, tools and storage. Many of these will have a low cost but offer high positive impact, reducing the need for people to look for adaptation strategies with potentially detrimental impacts to climate and environment, as well as, ultimately, their own security.

Recommendation:

Plan humanitarian interventions comprehensively, considering all aspects needed for the implementation of response approaches, particularly those that concern the appropriate use of food, construction and hygiene provisions, aiming to reduce the need for harmful adaptation strategies and increase human security and well-being.

CONCLUSION

Many of the issues faced by humanitarian practitioners in understanding and integrating climate and environmental considerations in their interventions, as well as avoiding harm, come from climate and environmental considerations often being an after-thought, rather than part of a holistic approach. Essentially, understanding how climate and environmental change impact security and conflict can fundamentally strengthen and enable humanitarian interventions to avoid exacerbating root causes of insecurity, and even promote peace and security. Yet, the severe time, financial and material resource constraints that permeate humanitarian responses often mean that the integrated risk analyses and inclusive processes needed to inform these interventions are hard to obtain. To this effect, collaborating with the climate, environment, development and peace communities of practice can help bridge gaps and find co-benefits that support integrated approaches while minimizing the need for additional resources.



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