

# BRIEFER

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# BREAKING SILOS: CLIMATE CHANGE, SECURITY, AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION

## ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY

By Elsa Barron, Brigitte Hugh, and Alejandra Portillo-Taylor

Edited by Francesco Femia and Erin Sikorsky

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The convergence of climate change, security, and humanitarian action, including in places affected by conflict, demands nuanced consideration and dialogue among decision makers at all levels. In response to this need for dialogue, the Center for Climate and Security (CCS) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) brought together representatives from a variety of U.S. government agencies as well as academic institutions, think tanks, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) approaching these issues from different but complementary vantage points. The discussion explored how relevant actors can work together to anticipate, mitigate, and respond to the humanitarian consequences brought on by the intersection of climate risks and conflict—both now and in the future. The purpose of this brief is to highlight key elements of that discussion—namely, challenges and opportunities for current procedures addressing conflict and climate consequences, and in developing knowledge.

# INTRODUCTION

The intersection of climate change, security, and humanitarian action is more relevant than ever. Recent unprecedented fall flooding in Pakistan, severe drought in the Horn of Africa, and other extreme climate events, are increasingly converging with security and humanitarian dimensions. The complicated and context-dependent implications of this convergence demand nuanced consideration and dialogue among decision makers at all levels.

Furthermore, there is a need to examine this intersection specifically in fragile and conflict-affected settings because these contexts present different challenges. In fact, of the 25 countries considered most impacted and least ready to adapt to climate change, more than half are enduring conflict.<sup>1</sup> The converging risks of climate change and conflict affect people's lives by threatening health, food, economic, water, and physical security. They can also prolong existing tensions and perpetuate fragility. Additionally, despite clear needs, climate financing and actors that are best equipped to support climate adaptation are largely absent from these places because of security risks. Over the last decade, data shows that the more fragile a state, the less climate finance it receives.<sup>2</sup>

The United States has championed increased attention to climate adaptation and finance through the President's Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience (PREPARE).<sup>3</sup> At the 27th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27), President Biden announced over \$150 million to accelerate PREPARE's work in Africa, including in support of the Adaptation in Africa initiative. Biden also announced that the U.S. would double its pledge to the Adaptation Fund—from \$50 million to \$100 million. These important pledges must be followed with concrete action, which has not yet occurred. In fact, at the end of last year, the U.S. Congress failed to fund meaningful increases in climate finance across the board.<sup>4</sup> This was a missed opportunity, given that strategic U.S. documents—including the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) on Climate Change, the Department of Defense's Climate Risk Analysis, and the National Security Strategy—note that climate change and security challenges will get worse. Understanding current obstacles and discussing what challenges the world may face in the (not so distant) future is crucial.

In response to a need for transversal and nuanced dialogue on these topics, CCS and the ICRC brought together representatives from a variety of U.S. government agencies as well as academic institutions, think

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1 Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative, Country Index

2 United Nations Development Programme, *Climate Finance for Sustaining Peace: Making Climate Finance Work for Conflict-affected and Fragile Contexts*, 2021

3 PREPARE is a whole-of-government effort to help more than half a billion people in developing countries adapt to and manage the impacts of climate change. PREPARE Action Plan, September 2022

4 Jake Schmidt, Joe Thwaites, and Brendan Guy, "US International Climate Finance Fails Again to Meet Moment," Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc., December 21, 2022, <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/jake-schmidt/us-international-climate-finance-fails-again-meet-moment>.

tanks, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) approaching these issues from different but complementary vantage points. The discussion, held under the Chatham House Rule, explored how relevant actors can work together to anticipate, mitigate, and respond to the humanitarian consequences brought on by the intersection of climate risks and conflict—both now and in the future. The purpose of this briefer is to highlight key elements of that discussion—namely, challenges and opportunities for current procedures addressing conflict and climate consequences, and in developing knowledge.

This briefer represents outcomes from a single foundational discussion and does not attempt a comprehensive review of the climate change, security, and humanitarian nexus.

## PROCEDURES

### ROLES AND COORDINATION

As climate change impacts intensify, a coordinated response across sectors is critical to ensure community resilience and human security. Current divisions of resources and labor among humanitarian, security, and climate actors create gaps in response and can leave impacted populations falling through the cracks. As disasters multiply, humanitarian response actors are increasingly stretched thin, widening these gaps.

Given these gaps, military actors are increasingly asked to respond to climate hazards in some countries, raising questions about their appropriate role in disaster response. Participants acknowledged that it is important to avoid the securitization of climate responses that might exacerbate power imbalances or vulnerabilities for local communities. However, at times the expertise of military institutions may be well-positioned to strengthen climate resilience. For example, one roundtable participant involved in disaster response identified that the infrastructure developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in foreign locales is some of the most resilient in times of crisis, and has become a place of shelter for impacted communities.

A careful approach to interagency coordination that recognizes the unique strengths of different actors is important to the development of both responsive and preventative strategies, leading to better outcomes for communities facing climate change and conflict impacts.

### TIMEFRAMES

Analysis of the threats and complications facing both security and humanitarian actors is often restricted to limited temporal windows—usually 2-5 years depending on budget and election cycles. For local communities, and the humanitarian organizations working with them, planning is chiefly concerned with the next growing season,

perhaps the next year, and in the scientific community, models target the short term impacts (less than 2 years) or long term impacts (greater than 20 years) of climate change. However, policy decisions regularly need to be made for the medium term, where there is a lack of climate change projection data and policy development.

Climate change will more frequently and intensely challenge the long-standing humanitarian and development processes which have been successfully implemented by government, non-government, and private industry organizations, thus operations must evolve and adapt. Doing so will require enhancing long-term strategic planning which integrates assessments of climate change impacts. Additional investment and engagement in foresight analysis—which challenges assumptions, incentivizes creative problem-solving, reduces post-disaster needs, and provides a valuable process-based learning experience—will be necessary to achieve thorough and successful planning.

In order to bring interagency actors on board for better medium- and long-term planning, it will be important to showcase examples where medium- and long-term planning has also created short-term benefits for resilience. Successful examples which illustrate co-benefits of investment in adaptation for both climate resilience and security priorities will help align the interests of decision makers who are incentivized by short-term progress (e.g. for political messaging).

## FUNDING

Among roundtable participants, there was a general consensus that current funding structures for climate finance in conflict-sensitive and affected settings are not fit-for-purpose and that risk-tolerant financial mechanisms are needed to effectively support communities affected by the double vulnerability of climate risks and conflict. While frontline humanitarian action is a vital stabilizing factor in fragile environments, humanitarians alone cannot respond to the multitude of challenges necessary to achieve sustainable peace. This becomes further complicated by constraints that arise from how international financial institutions (IFIs) approach risk. Conflict settings are volatile and therefore present a higher degree of risk than stable ones. Most IFIs have rigid funding processes which are not appropriate for places experiencing conflict or fragility, and a clear policy on how to address climate change and conflict is absent in most of these institutions.<sup>5</sup> This can prevent climate funding and action from reaching some of the most vulnerable.

Further examples demonstrating how climate financing mechanisms can work in fragile contexts are needed to persuade relevant actors to revise their approaches. Indeed, in some cases, funding can only be “unlocked” by a particular set of evidence or data, which can be difficult to identify and collect in areas already facing conflict or humanitarian disaster. While this takes time and funding, there are encouraging initiatives already underway. For example, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), with the recognition of their stake in the climate crisis, is conducting case study research on the continent that could inform future investments in climate security interventions.

<sup>5</sup> “Who gets what: how to get climate finance working for the people who need it most,” Namita Khatri, ICRC, November 2022

# KNOWLEDGE

## DATA

Data is at the crux of every discussion about investment in programs and interventions that target the nexus of climate change, security, and humanitarian work. There is at once a plethora of data and a dearth of the right data. Failures to effectively leverage data are compounded by the tendency for each organization to create new models through which to interpret the existing data rather than share and refine existing models.

Participants in the roundtable underscored the following important points on data:

- **Do not reinvent the wheel:** Models and data may never comprehensively encapsulate the whole issue, but the tendency of organizations to invest in the creation of new models, or explore new vehicles for interpreting data instead of reinvigorating older, functional models, can mean that unnecessary energy and resources are being spent on reinventing the wheel. Climate change is augmenting old problems, so old models, with some updates, can be useful. Additionally, much time and effort could be saved by increasing collaboration between organizations and sectors to share and improve existing models.
- **Disaggregate data to identify at-risk communities:** Without disaggregated data, there is a possibility that analysis and interventions miss differentiated impacts on distinct communities (e.g. gender, race, religion, geography). This need also underscores the importance of case studies and qualitative measurements of risk and intervention success. In concert with the quantitative data, qualitative measurements provide a greater understanding of what is actually happening on the ground.
- **Enable greater transparency and collaboration between data users and data providers:** When government roundtable participants noted the need for better data, an NGO participant asked, “What data do you need?” This underscored the need for greater transparency and communication between government and non-government partners, especially on issues of climate security. Models are a function of the data used to create them, so ensuring quality data for quality modeling should be a highly collaborative and transparent process.
- **Establish feedback loops with local populations:** In addition to developing better relationships between government and NGO actors to improve data, there needs to be active conversation between policymakers and policy implementers, especially those who are working in local communities. This feedback loop is important to ensure the right data is being gathered for analysis, but it is even more crucial to ensure that interventions created at the policy level do not lead to maladaptive efforts.
- **Invest in effective communication methods for new and emerging data:** Even the best data-informed intervention will not achieve desired outcomes without effective communication with the target community. An understanding of the scientific basis for changes to traditional methods or the introduction of new technologies is necessary to ensure buy-in and understanding of the benefits. Lack

of effective communication can result in widespread mis- and disinformation which makes further implementation a difficult undertaking. Targeted communication of new knowledge can and should work through local, traditional contexts. For instance, in Kenya, early warning information was purposefully channeled through local leadership so that it was disseminated in a way that created trust and rapid response amongst the community.

Ultimately, identifying, using, and communicating data for developing and funding interventions is crucial, but it cannot be accomplished by one sector alone. And, while data is often the purview of quantitative researchers and assessors, qualitative case studies (discussed below) are just as critical for communicating change. Data models so often focus on what may be when it comes to weather, but it can neglect to assess the impacts. As one participant highlighted: communities need to know what the weather will **do**, not what it will be. Examples of successful data communication stories will be absolutely paramount in translating information to action.

## CASE STUDIES

It is important for policymakers and practitioners to have access to more case studies that highlight contexts affected by a combination of climate change, conflict, and humanitarian crisis, and also to highlight effective (or ineffective) interventions to these intersecting risks. Furthermore, it is also crucial that these case studies are inclusive. Inclusive case studies are essential to ensure that the needs of diverse demographics are provided space to voice their perspectives. It is not enough, however, to simply listen to affected communities. Their perspectives must then be factored into program planning and implementation. This can be an effective method to draw out contextual nuances and avoid maladaptation. Thorough and inclusive case studies can help make the case to relevant stakeholders that not only does risk need to be thought about differently when it comes to issues like climate financing in conflict areas, but they can also provide concrete guidance to stakeholders on how to do so.

It is also important that case studies of effective interventions are conducted at multiple levels of strategy and governance, including local, (sub)national, and international. Demonstrating effective bridging of the humanitarian/development/peace nexus in conflict settings, and that projects are feasible, is critical. To be sure, examples do exist, but more and continued research is needed. One such example is the ICRC's Goma West Resilient Water Project which aims to bring clean water to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) city's residents by 2026. The project brings together humanitarian and development funding with private sector participation and investment. While this is not specific to climate efforts per se, it does provide a strong example of cross nexus collaboration in a conflict-affected setting. Therefore, there are lessons to be drawn from such an initiative that can feed into future work to address the convergence of climate and conflict.

## MOVING FORWARD

This bridging conversation between security and humanitarian actors should be one of many to come. As climate change impacts become more frequent and intense, state and community fragility will be adversely affected. Engaging in cross-sector dialogue and problem-solving now is a key part of long-term solutions.

Opportunities for continued work and discussion include:

- **Exploring co-benefits between gender and climate interventions:** Gender equality is not a distinct goal, it is an integrated component of community resilience. Inclusion of both a gender lens and a climate lens in security and humanitarian work will create more robust and resilient initiatives in the face of conflict and instability.
- **Proactive use of foresight exercises in planning:** As one participant put it, “uncertainty is the norm,” and will remain so well into the future. This makes engagement in probabilistic planning and decision making a necessity for humanitarian and security actors alike at a strategic leadership level as well as on the ground. Where possible, these activities should also be pursued across silos and disciplines for more robust preparedness actions.
- **Engaging under-represented stakeholders in planning and intervention:** There is a need to bring under-represented and under-resourced communities—including but not limited to women, LGBTQIA+, Indigenous, disabled, and youth representatives—together to explore the opportunities and risks to people and security brought on by climate and conflict, now and in the future. This should occur during foresight planning processes, and during development of on-the-ground policies and actions.
- **Integrating demand signals from humanitarian actors into climate security analysis:** Demand signals from humanitarian actors, such as increasing requests for food aid, are useful indicators of climate security risk, and should catalyze more holistic policies and procedures. In protracted crises, participants noted that we “can’t see climate action as a luxury.” Demand for humanitarian intervention should provide the needed push to involve other actors who can work on pre-crisis planning and take necessary actions to prevent the worst impacts of climate change.
- **Exploring new methods of mobilizing funding through a loss and damage framework:** Loss and damage discussions gained momentum at COP27, culminating in the announcement of a new loss and damage fund. More research and planning is needed to determine how these additional investments will be distributed as the fund takes shape. It will be important to consider the role of humanitarian actors in addressing climate-induced loss and damage for the most impacted populations and avoid replicating current gaps in climate finance to conflict-affected settings.

Conversations between diverse actors now will aid each community (climate, security, and humanitarian) to better work together to anticipate, mitigate, and respond to the humanitarian consequences brought on by the convergence of climate and conflict—now and in the future.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Elsa Barron** is a Research Fellow at the Center for Climate and Security (CCS), an institute of the Council on Strategic Risks (CSR).

**Brigitte Hugh** is a Research Fellow at the Center for Climate and Security (CCS), an institute of the Council on Strategic Risks (CSR).

**Alejandra Portillo-Taylor** is a Policy Advisor at the International Committee of the Red Cross' Regional Delegation for the United States and Canada.

## ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

**Daniel Abrahams**, United States Agency for International Development

**Julie Arrighi**, Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Center

**Elsa Barron**, Center for Climate and Security

**Elizabeth Bellardo**, United States Agency for International Development

**Annalise Blum**, Department of Defense

**Chris Collins**, United States Institute of Peace

**Daniel Dieckhaus**, National Security Council

**Patrick Hamilton**, International Committee of the Red Cross

**Chris Haynie**, International Committee of the Red Cross

**Brigitte Hugh**, Center for Climate and Security

**Trevor Keck**, International Committee of the Red Cross

**Chris LaFargue**, United States Agency for International Development

**Dani Newcomb**, United States Agency for International Development

**Kayly Ober**, United States Institute of Peace

**Alejandra Portillo-Taylor**, International Committee of the Red Cross

**Luna Ruiz**, United States Department of State

**Erin Sikorsky**, Center for Climate and Security

**Jessica Smith**, Georgetown University

**Jocelyn Trainer**, Center for a New American Security

**Michael Werz**, Center for American Progress