DCAF

Geneva Centre
for Security Sector
Governance

Protecting People, Planet and Peace: Shaping the Future of the Security Sector

Chapeau report of a stocktaking study on security sector roles in climate and environmental security

Introduction

The impact of climate change and environmental degradation on security is the subject of a growing body of research and is increasingly prominent on international policy agendas. From sudden onset disasters to the more gradual but equally serious problems of deforestation, pollution, and other forms of harm to the environment, **climate and environmental risks are affecting human security**. The combination of rising temperatures, less predictable rainfall, more frequent and severe natural disasters, and the degradation of protective ecosystems affect the availability of food, water, and arable land, leading to **humanitarian and health crises and displacement**. The associated loss of lives and livelihoods and the growing costs of recovery from disasters further undermine human development. Increasing resource scarcity can also become a driver for communal and interstate **conflict, violent extremism,** and radical narratives. All of these effects amplify and enlarge existing vulnerabilities and inequalities, including those based on gender, age, ability, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

Over the past several years, much of the research[1] on climate security has focused on better understanding the complex ways in which climate and environmental factors interact with other risks to become "threat multipliers", exacerbating existing risks and tensions and potentially giving rise to new conflicts. Many organizations are now turning to identifying solutions to these problems, from conservation projects to peacebuilding approaches which address climate and environmental risks. Comparatively little has been done to fully explore how the capacity of security institutions (often on the front lines of responses to these risks) can be leveraged to protect both people and planet, and how their contributions can be better integrated with the work of other sectors.

Tapping into the potential of the security sector **to protect people, planet and peace** is a powerful, yet currently undervalued, instrument to achieve positive impacts along the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. In a context of rapidly accelerating climate change, institutions including the military, police, border guards and civil protection forces are already playing an active and perhaps underappreciated role in responding to risks to local communities, ecosystems, and biodiversity. Their contributions include responding to natural disasters; tackling environmental crimes including illegal logging, mining, and waste disposal, as well as wildlife trafficking;

Photo: DCAF

and occasionally supporting efforts to restore degraded ecosystems, through reforestation campaigns for instance. These contributions are not without risk, as demonstrated by reports of members of security forces being implicated in environmental crime or abuses of human rights, for example, when evicting indigenous communities from protected areas.[2] At the same time, **the potential capacity of security institutions to address climate and environmental risks is considerable** and could be strengthened through improved management and oversight.

Strengthening governance and addressing questions of transparency, accountability and responsiveness are at the heart of security sector governance and reform (SSG/R), but security sector reform processes have historically focused more on traditional threats to human security, including criminality, violence, and conflict. And yet, in many settings responses to climate and environmental risks are one of the most common points of contact between security institutions and vulnerable populations. At a time when the impact of the climate crisis is increasing,[3] it is worth considering how security sector reform processes can play a more meaningful role in protecting communities and the planet from a broader spectrum of risks.

Photo: DCAF

Efforts to improve the contributions of the security sector in these areas are also relevant to a range of international policy agendas. In recent years there has been an increasing focus on the **right to a clean and healthy environment** as a fundamental human right.[4] **Environmental fragility** now appears as a dimension in the OECD's framework for analysing fragility, underscoring the ways in which environmental risks can undermine resilience and security.[5] Considering growing concerns regarding the impact of climate change on conflict, integrating an understanding of climate and environmental risks in future SSG/R programmes offers a different and potentially promising pathway for contributing to **conflict prevention** and peacebuilding. Effective security sector responses to disasters, as well as support to disaster risk reduction, can play a role in global **climate adaptation** efforts. Finally, the work of security institutions in responding to climate and environmental risks has implications for humanitarian affairs, development, and peacebuilding, which means tapping into the potential of the security sector to protect people, planet, and peace can also achieve positive impacts at the heart of the **triple nexus**.
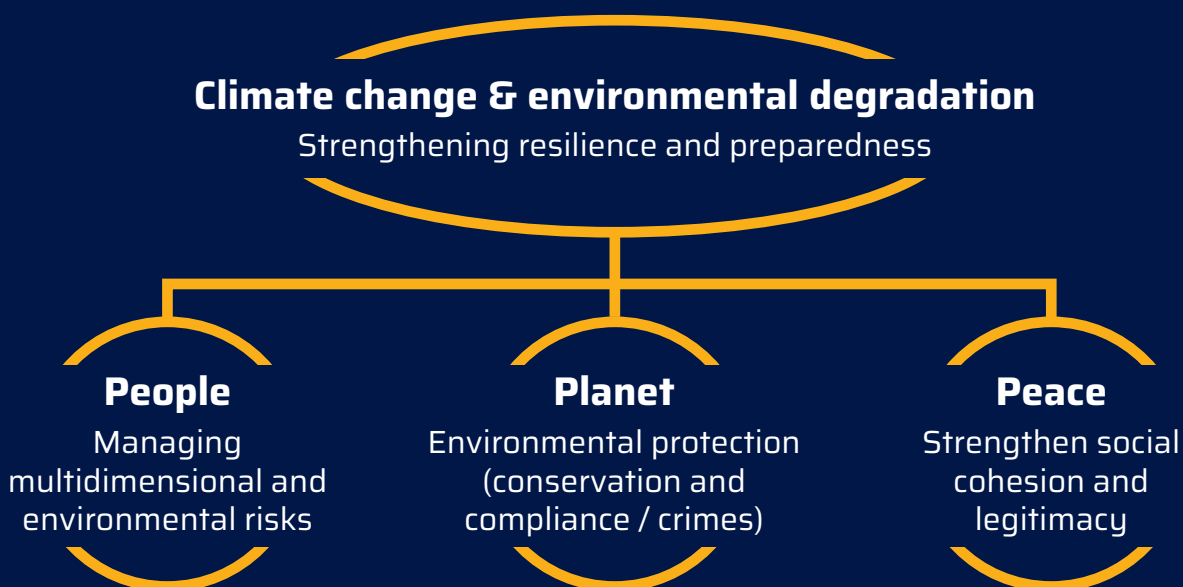
The need to better understand the current and potential contributions of the security sector to addressing climate and environmental risks led four members of DCAF's International Partners Group to request a **stocktaking study on the role of the security sector** in responding to these risks. The primary objectives of the study were to:

➤ Explore the role the security sector is currently playing in responding to climate change and environmental degradation;

➤ Identify opportunities, challenges, and entry points for future SSG/R programmes; and

➤ Identify limitations and risks associated with security sector involvement in this space.

This report is based on field work done in **Brazil,**[6] **the occupied Palestinian territory**,[7] **the Philippines**,[8] **and Sierra Leone**,[9] and provides a snapshot of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for international partners in the area of security and justice. The stocktaking study focused on two main areas in which security institutions already have a relevant legal mandate: **disaster risk reduction** and **environmental protection**, with an emphasis on responses to **environmental crime**. Additionally, it looked at the potential for **peacebuilding** and **social cohesion** dividends through exploring the role of the security sector in a space in which communities and the state collaborate for preventing, mitigating or responding to climate and environmental harm.

Figure 1: Three pillars of action for the Security Sector in relation to climate change and environmental degradation.

Climate change & environmental degradation
Strengthening resilience and preparedness

People
Managing multidimensional and environmental risks

Planet
Environmental protection (conservation and compliance / crimes)

Peace
Strengthen social cohesion and legitimacy

A mixed methods approach was applied, combining desk research with field research that included key informant interviews, focus group discussions and direct observation. The study included the perspectives of formal security and environmental institutions, civil society organizations, and communities to explore how national stakeholders and their international partners can realize the full potential of the security sector to contribute to disaster risk reduction, environmental protection, and climate change adaptation.

This report provides a summary of the main climate and environmental risks in each of the four contexts, with an emphasis on those which have the clearest impact on security, as well as the range of stakeholders, legislation, and international commitments which shape the work of the security sector. The report also summarizes key findings from the case studies and describes implications for SSG/R as well as priorities for future programmes.

The findings and recommendations describe the ways in which **climate and environmental security are inherent dimensions of people-centred security**. They emphasize the complex nature of **working across sectoral boundaries** and the need for approaches which better integrate security, environmental and development objectives. They also highlight the importance of including a wider range of stakeholders in future SSG/R programmes and developing a broader definition of what is required from the security sector to **keep communities safe in a future shaped by climate change**. As described below, the ability of security institutions to respond effectively to climate and environmental risks can directly affect community perceptions. Failure to protect communities from this broader spectrum of risks has long-term implications for **social cohesion** and the legitimacy of the state.

SSG/R needs to mainstream climate and environmental risks so security sectors can help protect people, planet and peace

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