DCAF
Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance

Climate Change and its Impact on Security Provision

The Role of Good Security Sector Governance and Reform

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About this policy brief

While it is clear that SSG/R must play a role in responding to climate change, a greater understanding of how to translate this into practice is required. This policy brief seeks to identify concrete entry points for SSG/R in addressing climate-related security risks, and outlines means for influencing policy in this direction.

Cover photo: U.S. Marines unload food and supplies for Pakistani flood victims in support of the flood relief effort in Pano Aqil, Pakistan, September 2010. U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Jason Bushong.

Executive Summary

The impact of climate change on human security is clear, as is the essential role of good SSG in responding to these changes. Climate-related migration and internal displacement can result from existing conditions of vulnerability, which may also entrench conflicts, contribute to new tensions, and exacerbate inequalities among and within states. The security and justice sectors thus have an important part to play in confronting climate change and its effects. However, weak or inadequate SSG in response to climate change may contribute towards or worsen the effects of humanitarian crisis, conflict, and instability, as well as the securitization of climate change. A good SSG approach to addressing climate-related security risks should therefore include support for accountable and effective security sectors, gender responsiveness with a focus on human security, and respect for human rights and the rule of law. **Four key areas represent entry points through which SSG/R can play a role on the local, national, and regional levels to address climate-related security risks:** (1) strengthening disaster risk reduction and governance; (2) developing multisectoral national security policies and climate change strategies; (3) facilitating environmental peacebuilding and sustaining peace; and (4) ensuring sustainable and climate sensitive security delivery by the security sector. Moreover, **three ways in which SSG/R can be a useful tool in shaping international policy discourse** on climate-related security risks will be by: (1) shaping international policy to integrate climate adaptation into security delivery; (2) promoting comprehensive approaches that break down sectoral silos; and (3) building an evidence base to inform programming. While SSG/R is not a panacea for all the security risks posed by climate change, it remains vital in developing the resilience required for security providers and their overseers to tackle these risks in a manner that is effective, accountable, and fully respects human rights and the rule of law.

Introduction

Climate change is a multi-faceted, cross-cutting security challenge that impacts every state and community across the world in different ways. Existing conditions of vulnerability can result in climate-related migration and internal displacement, deepen existing conflicts, contribute to new tensions, and may exacerbate inequalities among and within states. Thus, climate-related security risks can have wide-ranging and long-lasting effects on human, community, state, and international security. The security and justice sectors play an important role in responding to climate change and its effects, from security providers to management and oversight bodies.[1]

Soldiers overlook preparations underway for the Natural Fire exercise, a multi-national military partnership exercise between East African Community (EAC) Partner Nations and the U.S. military aimed at strengthening humanitarian assistance responses, Entebbe, Uganda. September 2009. U.S. Army Africa photo by Rick Scavetta.

Given the scope of impacts that climate change can have on states and their societies, security and justice sectors have seen their core mandates and modes of operation shifting in response to changing conditions.[2] Moreover, security sector institutions have large responsibilities in contributing to the climate crisis through their high level of GHG emissions. In this context, good security sector governance (SSG) is essential in ensuring that actors in these sectors are rooted in a strong democratic framework based on the rule of law, accountability, and respect for human rights. Good SSG aspires to improve security for individuals, communities, and states alike, which is particularly important in the face of climate change – a 'risk multiplier' that can exacerbate existing structural vulnerabilities, such as unequal access to resources and gender inequalities, among others.[3] As this paper will illustrate, the political and technical process that constitutes **security sector reform (SSR) provides a number of entry points for governance-driven responses to climate-related security risks.**

By integrating those responses into national security structures, governments will be better positioned to adapt to changing strategic landscapes and cope with climate change.

Climate-Related Security Risks & Good SSG

In December 2020, the UN Secretary-General declared that "the fallout of the assault on our planet is impeding our efforts to eliminate poverty and imperilling food security [and] it is making our work for peace even more difficult, as the disruptions drive instability, displacement, and conflict."[4] It is undeniable that climate change can have disproportionate impacts in fragile contexts, especially where the ability of the security sector to adapt and cope is limited. In extreme cases, when existing security apparatuses are unprepared to deal with the reality of climate change and its impact on societies, there is a potential for outbreaks of violence, further instability, and possibly even wider conflict.[5] As the interconnectedness of climate change, natural disasters, and human conflict is increasingly recognized, **efforts to prevent and mitigate these phenomena must be multisectoral and must incorporate a broad understanding of the nature of risk and the provision of security**. Indeed, effective governance mechanisms and institutions at the local, national, regional, and international levels are all crucial in mitigating the security risks posed by climate change.[6] Successful responses to these risks therefore include an SSG/R component which aims to strengthen the effectiveness of governance mechanisms and institutions. **Weak or inadequate SSG in a state's response to climate change may contribute towards or exacerbate the effects of:**

- **Entrenched humanitarian crisis:** Changes to the environment and extreme weather events can result in a spectrum of long-lasting humanitarian consequences, impacting livelihoods, health, and migration,[7] as well as fuelling political instability.[8] Longer periods of drought, desertification, and sea level rise are examples of environmental changes that will exacerbate existing vulnerabilities such as gender inequalities, and their impacts will be compounded if security sectors are unprepared to deal with the humanitarian needs of the affected communities. Food insecurity, the outbreak of disease, and a higher risk of mortality all contribute to the long-term degradation of public health. Moreover, people whose livelihoods depend on natural resources, especially in the agriculture and fisheries sectors, face disproportionately higher risks from climate change. Gender roles and pre-existing gender-based discrimination make women particularly vulnerable by the degradation of natural resources, as well as during natural disasters and migration. While it is difficult to directly link climate change with the movement of people across international borders, climate change is a known risk multiplier for other drivers of displacement, such as food insecurity and access to water.[9]

A UN police officer looks on as trucks full of food are unloaded at a World Food Programme (WFP) warehouse, following devastating floods in Akobo, South Sudan, December 2019. UN Photo.

- **Conflict and instability:** Climate change is also a potential 'threat multiplier', meaning it can aggravate existing tensions and social instability, as well as possibly contribute to violent conflict.[10] Nevertheless, the relationship between climate change, social fragility, and conflict is difficult to pin down, as the extent to which climate change contributes to fragility is highly context-specific. In combination with existing pressures and limited capacities, climate change and its related security risks can potentially overburden states and societies, particularly in vulnerable and conflict-affected areas.[11] Yet, **research has shown that good governance is a key element in navigating and addressing the issue of climate security**, and that building the capacities of security institutions to provide for the basic needs of their populations is essential to addressing the indirect effects of climate change.[12]

- **Securitization of climate change:** In many contexts, security providers (including armed forces, police, and other civilian emergency responders) have a legally mandated role in responding to natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies, and can support civilian authorities in dealing with these calamities. However, in countries where the military occupies a dominant role in the security sector, or where the armed forces are seen as more professional

and trustworthy than police or civilian institutions, governments may be inclined to deploy the military to address climate-related security risks. On the other hand, research suggests that some governments have resisted attempts to link development and humanitarian areas with climate security due to concerns about over-securitization. Other states have also been reluctant to be seen as at risk of instability or in need of intervention.[13]

Given that effective responses to climate security risks require multisectoral coordination across all security providers, good SSG is a useful entry point to encourage appropriate, proportional, and human rights compliant responses to these risks. **A good SSG approach to addressing climate-related security risks includes:**

1. **Support for accountable and effective security sectors:** Developing a cohesive response to climate security management requires a clear delineation of the areas of engagement and responsibility of both security providers and their overseers to ensure that neither exceeds their respective mandate. Public and private sector actors should jointly focus their operational, research, and financial capacities to develop solutions to climate security problems. **Security sector actors should also review their**

own modes of operation as well as their own strategies to ensure that they mitigate their own contribution to the climate crisis.

2. **A gender-responsive approach with a focus on human security:** Climate change has well documented gendered impacts, and disproportionately affects low-income, fragile states, and has the greatest impact on women and the most vulnerable and neglected people in any society – including those in poverty, rural populations, disabled or older people, migrants and refugees, and other marginalized groups.[14] Multisectoral cooperation is vital to delivering gender-responsive security to all women, men, boys, girls, and gender minorities equally. **Facilitating dialogue between local communities, the private sector, and security actors is therefore crucial** to ensuring broad buy-in and national ownership when developing climate security action plans.

3. **Respect for human rights and the rule of law:** The relationship between people and their environment is at the heart of several human rights, including the enjoyment of health, access to water, and even the right to life itself.[15] Thus, enforcement of environmental legislation and regulation is not only vital to underpinning the reform of environmental law and governance,[16] but also to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to both climate action (Goal 13), gender equality (Goal 5), and peace, justice, and strong institutions (Goal 16).[17] Responding to complex development challenges and accelerating progress towards the SDGs demands integrated solutions,[18] and **strengthening good SSG can facilitate a positive cycle of reinforcement** between accountable security provision, the rule of law, and sustainable development.[19]

An Arab woman collecting water in the parched wetlands of the Central Marshes of Al-Chibayish, Iraq, November 2018. Shutterstock photo by John Wreford.

Supporting National Actors

SSG/R can play a role in addressing climate-related security risks on the local, national, and regional levels through four entry points:

1. **Strengthening disaster risk reduction and governance:[20]** The 2030 Agenda recognizes an urgent need to reduce the risk of disasters, for disasters and extreme weather events directly and indirectly affect the enjoyment of a range of human rights, including the right to development. Hence, international policy documents such as the 2015–2030 Sendai Framework emphasize the importance of strengthening disaster risk governance in prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery, and rehabilitation by fostering

collaboration and partnership.[21] In this vein, **good SSG can play a key role by increasing national ownership of disaster risk reduction (DRR) planning,** and **clearly delineating roles and tasks** in the national and regional security and disaster management architecture. **Good SSG is also vital in building capacities** among public security sector institutions, private organizations, civilian actors, and local communities, including women, to work together in strengthening the resilience of societies to deal with climate-related security risks and other natural disasters. Specific entry points to combine efforts may include joint planning, foresight, and logistics exercises, as well as capacity building for protection activities and community risk assessments, among other mechanisms and processes by which persons with different gender identities can express their needs and exercise their legal rights and obligations.[22] Decision-making must adhere to relevant legal frameworks, and the security sector must be held accountable to human rights standards and the rule of law, particularly in cases where emergency powers are invoked.

2. **Developing multisectoral national security policies and climate change strategies:** While climate change adaptation and mitigation is increasingly included in national development strategies, it remains imperative that climate and environment-related considerations are integrated into national security strategies and risk assessments, together with other crisis management and early warning processes at both the local and national levels. By 'climate-proofing'[23] domestic policy and programming through periodic assessments and public reporting, governments can promote public scrutiny and encourage institutional dialogue, and can ensure there is follow up on the progress of national and local plans. **As good SSG involves a participatory, gender-responsive, multi-stakeholder process,** this approach would not only facilitate the more effective and efficient delivery of security **by identifying cross-sector**

synergies, but would also keep climate security decisionmakers accountable to their constituents.

3. **Facilitating environmental peacebuilding and sustaining peace:** Environmental peacebuilding integrates natural resource management in conflict prevention, mitigation, resolution, and recovery in order to build resilience in communities affected by conflict.[24] The primary challenge posed by climate change to peacebuilding is its systemic, multidimensional nature[25] – which can have a multiplier effect on factors that impact the provision of security, access to governance and justice, and social and economic development.[26] Despite many pilot programmes, policy guidance on how to apply a 'conflict-sensitive' lens in climate change adaptation policies or projects remains limited.[27] Integrating climate change considerations into peacebuilding activities faces similar challenges. Thus, especially in fragile and post-conflict contexts, **SSR can play an important role in integrating climate adaptation into humanitarian responses and DRR programmes** by working with environmental experts, local communities, and security institutions to discuss climate-security concerns. While peacekeeping missions in contexts affected by climate change may build upon existing activities, such as those addressing resource conflicts, this requires that climate security is mainstreamed into programming; the interconnectedness of humanitarian, development, and peace actions is enhanced; and training and support are provided to mission personnel.[28]

4. **Ensuring sustainable and climate sensitive security delivery:** As a starting point, security actors should refrain from undertaking any activities that contribute detrimentally to climate change. While some states have integrated greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets into defence sector planning,[29] many have not, and armed forces are often exempt from publicly reporting their GHG emissions.[30] **Good SSG is therefore vital in the effort to work towards more transparent reporting,** and **to ensure effective**

oversight of overall GHG emissions by the security sector. Further, research indicates that climate change often acts not only as a threat multiplier in security operations, but also has direct implications for security sector capabilities. For example, extreme weather events can present substantive challenges to an armed forces' overall capacity to act.[31] States should thus adopt climate-sensitive security policies to reduce GHG emissions and other forms of pollution that exacerbate climate change. In addition, security sector planning, budgeting, and operational activities should appropriately reflect any changes in capabilities required to respond to the evolving environment.[32]

Engaging with International Actors

There are three important ways in which SSG/R can be a useful tool for shaping international discourse on climate-related security risks:

1. **Shaping international policy to integrate climate mitigation and adaptation into security delivery:** It will be crucial to harmonize the various existing approaches to security delivery used by international, regional, and local actors, to ensure that no one is left behind.[33] To that end, policy frameworks must begin to integrate climate mitigation and adaptation into humanitarian responses. In addition, the effectiveness and accountability of the security sector must be understood as key to ensuring effective and sustainable security delivery. As a policy tool, **SSG/R provides a tried and tested framework through which climate change can be mainstreamed into different policy agendas.** Hence, the importance of integrating climate change at all levels of security delivery must be highlighted, perhaps through policy debates in different fora, such as the Peacebuilding Commission. One way to clearly draw the link between climate change and SSG/R may be to push for the inclusion of climate change and its related security risks in upcoming UN Secretary-General reports on SSG. Moreover, future high-level policy fora (e.g., the UN Security Council) on climate-related security should emphasize the role of good SSG.

2. **Promoting comprehensive approaches to break down sectoral silos:** Multidimensional coordination across the triple nexus of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors is vital to addressing climate-related security risks. By **mainstreaming climate issues into joint funding instruments and context-specific programming of all relevant actors,** an inclusive and cohesive response to climate change and its related security risks can be achieved. This will allow actors in different sectors to learn from each other and exchange best practices to facilitate the development of integrated strategies and mechanisms that foster more efficient and effective planning. Programmes for cooperation and capacity development to address common and transboundary climate-related risks, such as cross-border flooding, at the local and regional levels can also be conducted.

3. **Building an evidence base to inform programming:** This paper has highlighted the overarching role that good SSG can play in responding to climate-related security risks, but there is a gap in practice-based knowledge regarding what works best. **Further studies and policy guidance on the direct links between climate change and SSG/R will be crucial** in order to develop informed, context-specific, integrated programming that addresses the needs of all segments of society. Indeed, facilitating inclusive, participatory, and gender-responsive research on how the security and justice sectors can best respond to climate-related insecurity will be essential to devising future policies and strategies on the local, national, and regional levels.

Next Steps

The impact of climate change on human security is clear, as is the crucial role of good SSG in responding to climate change. Good SSG is fundamental to the delivery of responsive security that meets the different needs of women, men, boys, girls, gender minorities, and the most vulnerable populations in society, and is key to ensuring that responses to climate-related security risks are efficient, effective, legal, and framed within full respect for human rights and the rule of law. Looking ahead, it should be a priority to develop new insights into the impact of good SSG on responses to climate change. This will involve conducting empirical research, launching pilot projects, and providing advisory field support to clarify relevant frameworks as well as produce further knowledge products and operational guidelines. Additional entry points to facilitating effective and accountable responses to the challenges posed by climate change will also need to be identified. Innovative partnerships should thus be encouraged, in particular those that combine expertise in SSG/R with the work of local and international experts in the fields of climate change, disaster response, and environmental protection. On top of this, existing knowledge about the ways good SSG intersects with climate change should be emphasized in various fora to encourage their incorporation into international policy agendas and to facilitate discussion and coordination among multilateral and local actors. SSG/R is vital in developing resilient security sectors which are capable of addressing climate-related security risks in a manner that is effective, accountable, gender-responsive and fully respects human rights and the rule of law.

A member of the Argentinean battalion of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) carries a baby to a UN helicopter to be evacuated to Port au Prince for the medical treatment in the aftermath of the floods caused by the tropical storm "Hanna", 3, September 2008. UN photo.

Endnotes

1 Security providers include, among others, the armed forces, civil defence, public law enforcement, border guards and customs authorities, intelligence services, penal and corrections institutions, and private security companies. Security overseers include, among others, independent oversight mechanisms, executive and government ministries, parliaments or legislatures and specialized committees, judicial authorities, civil society, the media, and the private sector. More on the actors that constitute the security sector can be found under "The Security Sector", SSR Backgrounder Series (Geneva: DCAF, 2015).

2 For example, see Michael Brzoska, "Climate change and the military in China, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States" Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists 68, no. 2 (2012): 43–54; and Louise van Schaik, et al., "Ready for take-off? Military responses to climate change," Clingendael, March 2020.

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5 UN Climate Security Mechanism, "Toolbox: Briefing Note" (New York, 2020), 1.

6 UN General Assembly, "Climate change and its possible security implications: Report of the Secretary-General," 26.

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9 Tim Gaynor, "Climate change is the defining crisis of our time and it particularly impacts the displaced," UNHCR, 30 November 2020, https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2020/11/5fbf73384/climate-change-defining-crisis-time-particularly-impacts-displaced.html

10 A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks – an independent report commissioned by members of the G7 (adelphi, International Alert, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, EUISS, 2015), vii.

11 Ibid., 5-6.

12 Adam Day and Jessica Caus, Conflict Prevention in an Era of Climate Change: Adapting the UN to Climate-Security Risks (New York: United Nations University, 2020), 12.

13 Adam Day, Climate Change and Security: Perspectives from the Field (New York: United Nations University, 2020), 6.

14 Day and Caus, Conflict Prevention in an Era of Climate Change, 13.

15 UN Environment Programme, Environmental Rule of Law: First Global Report (Nairobi, January 2019), 138.

16 Ibid., 9–10.

17 UN General Assembly, "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," A/RES/70/1 (21 October 2015).

18 UN Development Programme, "Integrated Solutions for Sustainable Development," https://sdgintegration.undp.org/

19 UN Environment Programme, Environmental Rule of Law, 180.

20 See UN Development Programme, "Issue Brief – Disaster Risk Governance: Crisis Prevention and Recovery" (2012), 1: "Disaster risk governance refers to the way in which the authorities, public servants, media, private sector, and civil society coordinate in communities, and on regional and national levels in order to manage and reduce disaster and climate related risks. This means ensuring that sufficient levels of capacity and resources are made available to prevent, prepare for, manage and recover from disasters. It also entails mechanisms and processes for citizens to articulate their interests, and exercise their legal rights and obligations."

21 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, 17. The four priorities for action in the Framework, to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks, are: (i) Understanding disaster risk; (ii) Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk; (iii) Investing in disaster reduction for resilience, and; (iv) Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to 'Build Back Better' in recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction.

22 UN Development Programme, "Issue Brief – Disaster Risk Governance, 1.

23 UN Development Programme, "Policy Brief: Climate Security" (2020).

24 Environmental Peacebuilding Association, "About Environmental Peacebuilding," https://www.environmentalpeacebuilding.org/about/

25 Jake Sherman and Florian Krampe, "The Peacebuilding Commission and Climate-Related Security Risks: A More Favourable Political Environment?" SIPRI-IPI Insights on Peace and Security, no. 2020/9 (September 2020).

26 Florian Krampe, "Climate Change, Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace," SIPRI, June 2019, 3–7.

27 A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks, 107.

28 Cedric de Coning, Florian Krampe, and Jake Sherman, "Emerging Lessons from Implementing Climate-Related Peace and Security Mandates," IPI Global Observatory, 20 April 2021, https://theglobalobservatory.org/2021/04/emerging-lessons-implementing-climate-related-peace-security-mandates/

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