Geneva Dialogue on Environment,
Climate, Conflict, and Peace:
Meeting 17

20 April, Zoom
Participants: 11 individuals from Geneva-based institutions, as well as external partners

Presentation by Catherine-Lune Grayson, Policy Advisor, International Committee of the Red Cross:

- [Link to Catherine-Lune's presentation](#)
- The consequences of climate change are felt everywhere. But its most harmful effects are borne by the world's most vulnerable communities. This includes people enduring conflict who are disproportionately impacted by climate risks.
  - How do these risks materialize in the lives of people enduring conflict?
  - Research in the Central African Republic (CAR), southern Iraq, & Northern Mali
  - Three research questions:
    - Why are people in conflict particularly vulnerable to climate risks and environmental degradation?
    - How do they cope and adapt?
    - How should we adapt our humanitarian action to help them cope better with a changing climate?

Why are people in conflict particularly vulnerable to climate risks and environmental degradation?
- 12/20 most vulnerable to climate change are also countries in conflict. Conflict harms institutions, inclusive development, social cohesion - which normally help coping with shocks
  - For example, in Northern Mali - conflict prevents herders from moving safely with their animals, as well as state or humanitarian actors providing assistance.
  - Conflict profoundly disrupts the foundation of society. All aspects of lives - safety, health, food, access, institutions.
- Climate change acts as a risk exacerbater - layers of vulnerability that compound one another
  - For example - Conflicts typically impede the work of health personnel, supply chains, etc. Climate change further exacerbates food insecurity which can contribute to diseases and malnutrition. Weather events can destroy health centers, too.
  - Another example in the Central African Republic - desertification and conflict in the Sahel is pushing herders to the CAR, which has more arable land. The state does not have control over its territory, which leads to the deterioration of local relations, food & economic insecurity, etc.
  - Example in Iraq - water scarcity is not caused by climate change but amplified by climate change
- One critical factor is the strength of governance and institutions. Climate risks may fuel local tensions and instability - like between farmers and herders, or water and land use.

How do people cope and adapt?
- The natural environment is often indirectly damaged by conflict, which limits communities' ability to cope with or adapt to climate change.

- Adapting to climate change can be fairly simple. A change in crops might be sufficient. But it often requires major changes. A whole agricultural system might need to change, or new diseases might need to be dealt with – malaria in Kenya's highlands, for instance.
- Adaptation is limited in times of war. In the absence of institutional support, people either change their livelihood, change their behavior, or move.
  - It should be noted that the most vulnerable people are sometimes trapped in place and unable to move.
  - For example, in Iraq - some farmers turned to fishing when soils became too salty. Some had money to invest in new and improved agricultural technology or methods. But many more moved to cities and did not find options or income there.
    - Lasting effects of conflicts weakened the capacity of the state to maintain infrastructure or support agriculture.

How can we respond to these challenges? How should we adapt humanitarian action?
- People affected by conflict are most neglected by climate action efforts. ICRC calls for urgent action.
  - Major global efforts are necessary to mitigate climate change by reducing emissions, but this will only limit not halt the climate crisis.
  - The ICRC already conducts activities to reinforce people's resilience, but more needs to be done.
- Recommendations
  - Refine understanding of risks and reinforce capacity to address them through programs.
  - Must work together across humanitarian sector and beyond (including the Humanitarian-Development-Peacebuilding Nexus)
    - One example in the humanitarian sector is the recent/upcoming Climate Charter for Humanitarian Organizations
  - Reduce risks and strengthen resilience to shocks. Disaster prevention and programming to promote resilience of livelihood.
    - For example, in the Central African Republic - many people had been displaced by floods - need to give/improve the early warning systems to protect assets.
  - Promote respect for International Humanitarian Law that protects the environment during climate.
    - For example, attacks on land and water are prohibited by IHL.
  - Mobilize those best placed to address issues, including state governments, local authorities, climate finance instruments, etc.
    - Countries in crisis have limited access to climate finance, so more stable countries receive more support. This is an issue.
  - Finally, we should lead by example and do no harm to the environment, too. We should make sure our own operations are resilient.

Discussion:

Q: Can you elaborate on the connection between climate change and conflict? For example, in my community climate change causes drought which impacts the water and food supply. Those people are then outside of the protection system of the government, and it's these factors that lead to conflict.

- Climate risks can fuel conflict and violent tensions. But a flood does not directly lead to conflict. Something exists in between. What's missing is often institutions that can provide support, mediate tensions, or manage resource sharing.
    - ICRC research did see increased tensions connected to floods, droughts, etc, but these were in places where characterized by fragility or governance challenges.
- One of the questions that we think needs to be further explored is whether climate risks contribute to prolonging instability. Our sense is that it can exacerbate tensions and fuel instability.

Two reflections from the group
- Institutional capacity is a crucial conversation, and not just limited to situations of conflict.
    - What other situations weaken institutional capacity?
- It would be really interesting to have a space where the different legal groups and actors and meet and articulate/identify commonalities. For example, environment, human rights, International Humanitarian Law, disaster risk reduction, etc.
    - Certain strong knowledge seems to belong to certain groups of people, but we do not always connect the dots between groups.
    - For example, ICRC recently connected to a major International Organization - The IO saw they had a blind spot in fragile and conflict-affected settings.
    - Could we create an alliance for strengthening climate action in conflict settings?

Q: Are you able to talk more about some examples the ICRC would consider when looking at disaster prevention tools?
- In Yemen, building protective walls for floods or tree planting for floods.
- Also working with climate modeling to try to see where they could have protected areas where people's harvests could be properly protected and less exposed to risks.
- Could also connect to UNEP's STRATA project/data, or PAX has some mapping tools.
    - Stay tuned for a potential early warning climate security tools panel session coming up in May 2021. Annika will send a note to the ECCP list.

Q: Good governance in fragile countries requires financing, and as you mentioned these are the countries that are less "eligible" for financial support, so how do we get to stronger institutions that are able to adapt to changing environments?
- This is a big question without a clear answer. ICRC is trying to flag it, and to work with actors who have influence on climate financing to shape solutions.
- The challenge is that development funding & climate finance funding is similar - both try to invest where there can be a good return on investment
    - In conflict settings, there's a much greater level of risk and there needs to be acceptance of that level of risk from donors
- In some cases, the right way to channel money is not through institutions, but to communities themselves - local NGOs, microloans, etc.

- This requires a major rethink and willingness to work in new ways
- Trying to bring the donors on board and engage them in finding new solutions of disbursement modalities
  - Beyond ICRC's mandate, but we all need to work together to address these challenges
- There is a chapter on financing in this IFRC report - why climate finance is not reaching the most vulnerable, with element of fragility
  - There are recommendations in there about how to navigate beyond just strengthening institutions
- Climate finance is often received as development funding
  - One idea is to funnel it more as humanitarian funding, because there is way more risk involved in humanitarian work

Q: Have you seen examples where climate finance has started to have humanitarian benefits?
- It's actually hard to say which inputs *are* climate finance.
  - Instead they see more programs on climate adaptation that are having positive benefits: Seeds, irrigation, water systems, etc.
- A question of scale - in the case of Northern Mali, if you want to look at how communities can adapt to a changing climate, it's about helping people diversifying income
  - Income diversification can be quite a puzzle, particularly in areas where access to basic services and infrastructure is limited and education is challenged
  - How do we navigate the need for income given the fact that there are not many livelihood options that are not weather dependent?

Q: Are there nature-based solutions to engage in the livelihood question? Or are people driven to industrial jobs?
- Regenerating vegetation in Niger (Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration) - using what's on the ground to find ways to help nature regreen and reroot - is of great interest
- Most of these lower income countries are not responsible for the bulk climate change
  - Resource management is also quite weak
- A lot of the solutions we try to find are rooted in local practice and what already exists
  - There is a recognition within organizations like the ICRC - we need to relearn a number of things, this is a new and essential way to assess and address problems
  - We need to build on indigenous knowledge
    - We also need to make sure science and innovation is made accessible to some communities
- There is a great MOOC on nature-based solutions

Q: How/to what extent do you see the HDP nexus engaging these issues?
- We think about how we complement one another
  - Development actors tend to operate much more long term so we need to have dialogue to identify different kinds of expertise
  - For peace, we have different ambitions. Humanitarians are trying to alleviate suffering, but aren't necessarily working on the foundations of peace.
- Concern around peacekeeping or hard security
  - There are adequate responses around mediation, resource sharing

- - - But we are not convinced that hard security responses need to be present as well
      - It's more those consolidating peace & social cohesion that we see the added value
  - The frame of climate change and security
    - We actually don't want to see a securitization of climate change
    - DCAF is working on - how can security sector actors engage meaningfully with the subject, and are they aware of climate security risks
      - Training security sector actors to operate under a framework of good governance, respect for human rights, local inclusion and cohesion
      - In an exploratory stage, ways to strengthen and support these actors
      - Trying to build an evidence base of what good practices actually do exist
    - Awareness is not strong for a lot of security actors in this moment
      - Working to prevent a securitization/militarization of the issue