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The Impact of Climate Change on Global and Local Security Governance: Learning from Local Experiences of the Security Sector

UNOG-DCAF Seminar

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The UNOG-DCAF Seminar at a Glance

The 16th jointly organized seminar by the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) focused on links between climate change and security sector governance, with a particular emphasis on local experiences – a topic chosen due to its considerable relevance as an emerging security challenge.

While the world was busy in 2020 with confronting the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change was not on hold, and many communities around the globe continue to feel the impacts of global warming, climate- and weather-related disasters, and environmental degradation. The international community has long acknowledged the threat posed by climate change itself to sustainable development, but there has also been growing recognition over the past decade that climate change is a threat-multiplier, which can exacerbate conflict risks and thus threaten international peace and security. This virtual seminar aimed to shed light on some of the challenges facing security sectors due to climate change, and to generate discussion about how security sectors can actively contribute to the mitigation and/or adaptation of climate security risks.

Opening remarks were delivered by H.E. Ms Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General of UNOG. H.E. Mr. Thomas Guerber, Ambassador, Director of DCAF, presented DCAF's perspective on climate change and moderated the distinguished panel of experts, which included: H.E. Ms Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and Head of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR); H.E. Mr. Chad Blackman, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Barbados to the United Nations in Geneva; Colonel-Major Mahamadou Magagi, Director of the Centre National d'Etudes Stratégiques et de Sécurité in Niger; Dr Gabriela Manea, Programme Manager at DCAF; and Dr Moudjib Djinadou, Director of Political Affairs at the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).

About the UNOG-DCAF Seminar Series

Since 2003, the United Nations Office at Geneva and the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, DCAF, jointly host an annual seminar. This collaboration is an example of how UNOG forms partnerships with external academic and research experts to draw and build on the available expertise.

This report was prepared by DCAF, the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions of seminar speakers and participants. The report summarizes some of the main themes, conclusions, and considerations of the event to stimulate further work at the nexus of climate change and security sector governance.
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Introduction

Climate change presents a global challenge that not only threatens our natural environment, but also poses a risk to international peace and security. The increasing frequency and intensity of extreme climate- and weather- related events, as well as slow-onset events such as rising sea levels or desertification, affect the lives and livelihoods of many communities around the world. Yet, while it has long been acknowledged that climate-related disasters threaten human security, it is only recently that other climate-related security risks have gained more attention. For example, its potential as a threat multiplier means that climate change poses a serious risk to the security of individuals, communities, and entire countries by further destabilizing fragile states and regions already impacted by conflict, inequality, and poverty.

Hence, while climate change might not lead directly to the outbreak of violent conflict, it has been found to play a decisive role as an exacerbator of conflict risks in many contexts.¹ Coupled with other grievances, climate change-induced resource scarcity can intensify competition within and between communities, erupting into violence in the worst cases. Evidence of this relationship between climate vulnerability and conflict fragility has grown of late. In fact, 70 percent of the countries now deemed most climate-vulnerable are also considered most fragile; and of the 15 countries identified as most susceptible to climate risks, 8 currently host a UN peacekeeping or a special political mission.

It is clear that climate change not only presents a challenge to sustainable development, but is likely to threaten peace and security, impacting the work of national security sector actors. Security sectors comprise all the structures, institutions, and personnel responsible for the provision, management, and oversight of security at both the national and local levels; including state security providers as well as security management and oversight bodies, such as civil society, ombuds institutions, government ministries, and parliaments. Traditionally, security sector actors around the world have been involved in disaster risk management and recovery, yet the indirect effects of climate-related security challenges – associated with conflict prevention and sustaining peace – may require them to take on changed or new roles. It is therefore necessary to assess how the work of security sector actors is impacted by climate change, as well as how the sector itself can contribute to the mitigation and adaptation of climate security risks.



UN Photo: Marco Dormino

Local experiences of climate security risks: What role for the security sector?

While climate change affects the development of countries around the world, its impacts vary across different regions. While some areas are primarily affected by extreme climate- and weather-related events, such as storms, floods, wildfires, and droughts, other areas are more at risk from slower-onset threats like rising sea-levels or desertification. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries have faced additional challenges to their health systems as well as to their economic, social, and political stability. Security sector actors such as armed forces have typically been at the forefront of disaster risk response and recovery operations. They play a part in coordinating or implementing efforts to distribute food and basic medical care and to restore basic infrastructure. Increasingly, armed forces are also involved in disaster prevention, such as by building or strengthening infrastructure.

Small island states, which are commonly among the countries contributing the least to global greenhouse gas emissions, particularly face the brunt of climate change. Indeed, for low-lying islands, climate change itself presents an existential threat that requires urgent action at all levels. In regions like the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin, on the other hand, climate change acts as a threat multiplier that exacerbates conflict risks. In the Sahel, characterized by a harsh ecological environment, around 70 percent of the population relies on rain-dependent agriculture. Similarly, Lake Chad, which serves as an important freshwater source in the region, has been shrinking since the 1960s; and in recent years, increasing pressure on already scarce land and water resources has led to a higher incidence of conflict between farmers and herders.

On top of this, non-state armed groups have exploited the strain created by climate change-induced resource scarcity on people's traditional livelihoods, to recruit members. These groups aim to increase their activities in the region and

challenge state institutions.² As a result, security forces in the Lake Chad Basin region are asked ever more frequently to respond to rising conflict risks by increasing their presence and patrols in order to prevent an outbreak of violence.

Links between climate security and the security sector itself are marked by mutual dependencies as climate-related risks gradually re-shape the mandate of security providers, affecting everything from operations to equipment. But the security sector has the concurrent potential to re-shape and mitigate climate security risks, through active engagement in responding to these emerging challenges.

Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/R)³ and climate security risks

It is often impossible to disentangle environmental factors from other security threat drivers, but climate-induced resource scarcity and the intensification of natural hazards each create different pathways of interaction with the security sector.⁴ As discussed above, security actors often play a pivotal role in disaster risk prevention, management, and response. With the escalation of climate change, however, security sectors are increasingly taking on new roles to address climate security risks.⁵

Climate change contributes to worsening the natural hazards, environmental degradation, and resource scarcities that threaten lives and livelihoods worldwide, and at times even renders entire regions uninhabitable. This leads to increased climate change-related migration and displacement, which in turn intensifies the need to manage migratory flows – a task in which security actors, including border guards and police, often play a key role. These same climate-induced resource scarcities and natural hazards can also exacerbate the risk of conflict by increasing competition over resources such as water, land, or firewood; sometimes fueling local, regional, or even interstate disputes that escalate into violence.⁶

Importantly, climate change can not only amplify existing conflict risks but can also make it much more difficult to resolve ongoing conflicts, potentially threatening peacebuilding efforts in post-conflict contexts and even contributing to relapses into violence.⁷ The probability that climate change will serve as a threat multiplier of conflict risks across the conflict cycle necessitates comprehensive involvement by the security sector in the prevention, management, and resolution of climate change-related conflicts.⁸ This requires that security sector actors are better prepared to operate in harsh ecological environments, and also that they are trained to identify potential risks and mitigate their own contribution to the problem.

Finally, it must be noted that criminal networks, insurgency groups, and terrorist networks may exploit the negative impacts of climate change to generate opportunities to recruit members and engage in illegal activities. Climate change-induced pressures on people's livelihoods and ecosystems tend to disproportionately affect women and children, and can especially contribute to the radicalization of youth, especially young men, increasing the likelihood for extremist violence and again demanding sustained involvement by the security sector.⁹

The role of the security sector vis-à-vis climate change can thus be conceptualized in two ways: 1) national security sectors represent an intervening variable in the climate-security nexus, such that poorly-governed security sectors are likely to be unable to respond to climate security risks and are likely to increase the probability that climate change amplifies existing security risks, whereas national security sectors that are based on 'good governance' principles will likely enhance the resilience of communities and states to deal with climate security risks; and 2) national security sectors represent a dependent variable, meaning that security sectors themselves are (and will continue to be) affected by climate change, and must therefore adapt by anticipating and planning for new and additional tools, at all levels of activity and organization within the sector.

Adapting security sectors to climate change challenges: the need for accountability and transparency



REUTERS: Andreea Campeanu

Security sector governance and reform (SSG/R) has been internationally recognized as a policy tool that can strengthen state legitimacy and support sustainable peace. In fact, UN Security Council resolutions 2151 and 2553¹⁰ emphasize the integral role of SSR in peacebuilding. In the context of climate security, SSG/R can not only build resilience in communities and among security actors themselves but can play a decisive role in preventing climate-induced conflicts.

To support security sectors in responding to emerging security risks associated with climate change, it is imperative that the engagement of these sectors is based on specific mandates and guided by clear legal frameworks. The principles of good governance, including democratic civilian control, rule of law, and respect for human rights by security sector actors, are crucial to enhancing the effectiveness and accountability of national security provision in the face of climate change. Transparent and accountable institutions ensure that security sector actors operate within their mandates and do not abuse their power. This requires oversight institutions that are determined to be part of the solution in dealing with climate security challenges and which seek to ensure that the provision of security benefits communities and individuals, not just the state. Ultimately, resolving climate security risks should entail broad cross-sector consultation that engages civil society, epistemic communities, human rights bodies, NGOs, and the media.

Key Recommendations:

- Scale up research on climate security risks, to inform evidence-based policymaking. Climate change has different effects on peace and security in different regions, and security sector structures, actors, and processes also vary from country to country. To gain a contextualized understanding of the links between climate change and security risks, as well as the impact of climate change on security sector governance, more research should be conducted on individual cases, to unpack the context-specific mechanisms at play.
- Integrate climate change considerations into security sector governance. Security sector actors are increasingly confronted by new tasks that pertain to climate security risks. These risks should therefore be integrated into security sector governance, to ensure that security sector actors are prepared to tackle them while at the same time ensuring democratic control over the sector itself. The security sector, including oversight bodies, civil society, and ombuds institutions, must (re-)define the mandate of national security sector actors and provide a clear legal basis for engagement with climate security challenges. Further, security sector actors must be appropriately resourced and equipped to address climate-related security risks, and simultaneously prepared to ensure that security operations do not exacerbate environmental degradation. Given their traditional role in disaster risk prevention, management, and response, security sector actors should also be more systematically included in the planning and implementation of national DRR strategies. Finally, security sector actors should work proactively to build joint frameworks of cooperation and consultation with local communities and civil society, to ensure a basis of trust for cooperation in the case that climate change disasters occur.
- Ensure that good governance principles are applied when dealing with climate security risks. This is a key to accountability and transparency in security sector governance. Hence, policies aimed at strengthening the capacities of security sectors to deal with climate change challenges must include a role for parliament, external oversight bodies, and civil society. In addition, collaboration between different actors working on the intersection of climate and security should be strengthened.

Speakers:

Her Excellency Tatiana Valovaya, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG)

Tatiana Valovaya is the 13th Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva and the first woman to occupy this position. She has more than 35 years of experience in public service, diplomacy, and journalism, and was a Member of the Board and the Minister in charge of integration and macroeconomics of the Eurasian Economic Commission. Valovaya began her career with the Government of the Russian Federation in 1989 and served in various capacities, including as the Third and Second Secretary at the Russian Permanent Mission to the European Union in Brussels, and Deputy Director and subsequently Director of the Department of International Cooperation of the Russian Federation. Before joining the Government of the Russian Federation, she worked as a reporter for The Economic Gazette in Moscow.

His Excellency Thomas Guerber, Ambassador, Director of DCAF

Ambassador Thomas Guerber has served as the Director of DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance since 1 July 2016. He has extensive experience in multilateral diplomacy and policy development relating to human security, human rights, and sustainable development. From 2010 to 2013, Ambassador Guerber was Switzerland's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York. Prior to this, he worked as a Counsellor at Switzerland's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York and held various functions within the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs' Human Security Division, including as Head of Section for Peace Policy and Human Security. Thomas Guerber holds an LLM degree in public international law and international economic law from the University of Berne, a master's degree in European integration and economics from the Institute for European Global Studies (Basel), and a master's degree in history and literature from the University of Basel.

Her Excellency Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for DRR

Mami Mizutori is the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, and head of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. She assumed her role in 2018 and brings extensive public sector leadership expertise with more than 25 years of experience in international affairs and security. As SR of the SG, Ms Mizutori ensures the strategic and operational coherence between DRR, climate change, and sustainable development agendas as well as with the UN Secretary General's prevention agenda and humanitarian action.

His Excellency Chad Blackman, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Barbados to the United Nations (Geneva)

His Excellency Chad Blackman is the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Barbados to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva. He has worked in the international development sector for over fifteen years, as an international trade law specialist and development consultant, respectively. He has served as a youth development consultant with the Commonwealth Secretariat in London and was Senior Partner at an international law firm specializing in tax, trade, and data protection laws. Ambassador Blackman is currently the Chair of the Trade and Environment Committee in the World Trade Organization (WTO), having previously chaired its Trade and Development Committee as well as the SIDS Group in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). He holds an LLB in Law and LLM in International Trade Law at the University of Essex in the United Kingdom.

Colonel-Major Mahamadou Magagi, Director of the Centre National d'Etudes Stratégiques et de Sécurité, Niger

Senior Colonel Mahamadou Magagi is the Director of the National Centre for Strategic and Security Studies at Niamey, Niger. He is an active-duty Army officer who has served in various positions, notably as Director of the Military Engineers Corps and Aide de Camp to the Niger President. He took part in the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire and the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Senior Colonel Magagi has a Bachelor of History from Paris I University, a Civil Engineer Diploma from Angers Military Engineers School, and a Master of Arts in Strategic Security Studies from the National Defense University, Washington DC.

Dr Gabriela Manea, Programme Manager, DCAF

Dr Gabriela Manea is a Programme Manager in DCAF's Policy and Research Department, where she leads two projects – “Climate Change and Security Sector Governance/Reform (SSG/R)” and “Knowledge Products on SSG/R”. Prior to joining DCAF in January 2020, she was a post-doctorate lecturer and research fellow in international relations at the University of Freiburg (Germany), where she obtained a PhD in political science. She has published peer-reviewed articles and contributed to edited books on comparative civil-military relations, military reform, and parliamentary oversight of the militaries in Indonesia and Nigeria, as well as on the regional and interregional diffusion of human rights norms, EU-Southeast Asia interregional relations, and regionalism in Asia Pacific. Her particular focus is on ASEAN states.

Dr Moudjib Djinadou, Director of Political Affairs, UNOWAS

Holder of a PhD in International Public Law, Dr Moudjib Djinadou is currently the Director of Political Affairs at the United Nations for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) in Dakar, Senegal. He has worked for the United Nations in the areas of peace, security, and governance, notably in Sudan, Haiti, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. He is also an author.

Endnotes

- 1 ICRC, *When Rain Turns to Dust: Understanding and Responding to the Combined Impact of Armed Conflicts and the Climate and Environment Crisis on People's Lives* (2020).
- 2 For example, see Janani Vivekananda and Camilla Born, *Lake Chad Region: Climate-related security risk assessment* (Adelphi, 2018); and Steve Brock et al., *The World Climate and Security Report 2020* (IMCCS).
- 3 Security sector governance (SSG) describes the formal and informal processes, actors, and values that shape the provision of security. Good SSG is characterized by accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation, responsiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency. Security sector reform (SSR) describes the political and technical process of improving state and human security by applying good governance principles to the security sector.
- 4 “Implications of Climate Change for Security Sector Governance and Reform (SSG/R)”, DCAF PRDiv Reflection Paper, 2020.
- 5 Van Schaik et al., *Ready for take-off? Military responses to climate change* (The Hague: Clingendael Institute, 2020); and *Managing Cascading Security Implications of Climate Change*, FP Analytics Special Report (2020).
- 6 Malin Mobjörk, Florian Krampe, and Kheira Tarif, “Pathways of Climate Insecurity: Guidance for Policy-makers,” SIPRI Policy Brief, November 2020.
- 7 Adriana Erthal Abdenur, “Closing the Governance Gap in Climate, Security, and Peacebuilding: UN75 Global Governance Innovation Perspectives,” Stimson, Issue Brief, September 2020; and Florian Krampe, “Climate Change, Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace,” SIPRI Policy Brief, June 2019.
- 8 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).
- 9 General (ret.) Tom Middendorp and Reinier Bergema, “The Warning Signs are Flashing Red: The interplay between climate change and violent extremism in the Western Sahel,” Clingendael Policy Brief, September 2019.
- 10 See UN Security Council Resolution 2151 on *Security Sector Reform*, S/RES/2151 (2014) and UN Security Council Resolution 2553 on *Maintenance of international peace and security*, S/RES/2553 (2020).

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