



Panel I on Environmental Security:

Climate Change as a Security Threat: Why, When, and for Whom?

Final Report

By Beatrice Mosello (Panel Moderator)

The panel's focus of discussion was primarily put upon climate change, especially because of its salience in view of upcoming climate negotiations in Copenhagen. Moreover, climate change risks acting as a 'threat multiplier' worsening current and future environmentally-related problems, and transforming them into security threats to both human beings and nature.

We first observed that climate change can impact security in two different ways, depending on what our understanding of security is:

- 1- Climate change will further exacerbate problems such as resource scarcity (particularly of water and energy), the contraction of livelihood opportunities, and pressures from a growing number of climate refugees. On this line, its impacts are likely to give rise to a politics of resentment within and between countries, eventually resulting in inter and/or intra-national conflicts. Traditional security, or security intended as the mere absence of war, can hence be gravely threatened by climate change.
- 2- Climate change will also represent a security threat for human beings, and for the communities and societies they live in. It will cause an increased death toll due to diseases, water scarcities, floods and other extreme events with devastating consequences, droughts and food insecurity, and significant losses of many species of fauna and flora. If we look at climate change from a human security perspective, therefore, we are encouraged to consider such catastrophes as well, and not only the potential impacts of climate change in terms of acting as a trigger for war.

Of course, the way we conceptualise the problem defines the possible solutions we can envisage for solving it. For this reason, we asked ourselves what the concept of human security adds to our understanding of climate change. We agreed that adopting a human security perspective on climate change would be beneficial especially for raising the awareness of policy-makers and the public opinion on what the human impacts of climate change are and will be. In fact, oftentimes, the scientific language that is used to talk about climate change renders it obscure to the majority, thus impeding rapid and effective action to be planned and implemented against it.



Saying that “climate change will cause wars over resources in the future” may not be as effective as saying that “300,000 people die every year as a consequence of climate change” in order to encourage mitigation and adaptation initiatives. Framing climate change as a threat to human security may hence help catch the attention of the public opinion and of policy-makers on the issue, both in the North and in the South. Climate change has traditionally been framed as an environmental issue, and therefore, its impacts on human beings and societies have, at least until recently, failed to be included in the debate.

At this point, however, we also noted that a human security perspective should make it clear that impacts will be highly differentiated according to the region of the world we consider. Northern countries and peoples, the ones that with their economic and industrial development have been the ones responsible for causing the problem in the first place, will be paradoxically less impacted by the devastating consequences of climate change. Southern countries and peoples, on the contrary, will be hit harder, despite the fact they have not really contributed to climate change. A human security perspective should help highlight the diverse and more negative toll that climate change will have on developing countries, as well as their reduced capacity to adapt and minor responsibility to mitigate. As such, it could drive solutions taken, for example, in the framework of the negotiations in Copenhagen, towards a fairer and more equitable direction than one only motivated on the basis of geo-strategic considerations.

We observed that framing climate change in terms of human security should also be a more effective strategy for raising the awareness of citizens on the problem at stake. If the average person thinks of climate change as something that is ‘scientific’ and, as a natural consequence, difficult or impossible to understand, he/she will never realize that it is *actually* a problem that affects his/her daily life *now*. And this will translate into the perception that it is not up to us to act. If instead, the individual person is aware of the fact that climate change will, for example, increase the likelihood that a flood brushes away the city he/she lives in, he/she will probably become aware that action needs to be taken, and needs to be taken now. Thus, while it is primarily governments that will be negotiating in Copenhagen, citizens should and must play a fundamental role in lobbying them towards a sustainable deal.

Nevertheless, even if it is clear that a human security approach can be extremely beneficial to our understanding of climate change, we also agreed that such an approach should be refined and a common definition and stand need to be agreed upon. Furthermore, we pointed out that human security alone is not sufficient, but needs to be complemented by a thorough knowledge of what climate change itself is, as there is still a lot of ignorance on the issue.

In the second part of our panel, we shifted discussion towards possible solutions to climate change as a human security threat, also considering at what level they should be decided and implemented. We concluded that there are two fundamental steps that need to be undertaken



before discussing about any eventual strategy. First of all, individuals, societies and governments need to be educated about climate change and its impacts: there is still too much ignorance on the issue, which impedes people to imagine creative and sustainable solutions to the problem. In this sense, the media plays a fundamental role in throw the message to the world, together with schools and civil society organisations. The second important question is one of leadership: effective solutions need a strong leadership that implements them. Governments need to start acting concretely towards combating climate change, possibly within an institutional and legislative framework provided by regional and/or international organisations such as the European Union or the United Nations. The latter, in particular, play a fundamental role in encouraging states and governments to cooperate with each other, by giving them coherent rules for ensuring that nobody defects, or, if this is the case, that defectors are adequately punished. Cooperation is, in turn, the only possible response to a global issue such as climate change: we all know that global problems require global solutions!

We also considered the role of the private sector and observed that it has the potential to become a crucial one if only the environment starts to be read as, and indeed becomes, a business opportunity. Multinational companies, by having a tremendous financial and, in some cases, political power can strongly lobby governments to take the decisions that are needed to solve the global environmental crisis.

It is crucial that we ALL understand that we cannot negotiate with nature: climate change is already occurring, and acting now means granting human beings of today and tomorrow a possibility to survive. We are all on the same boat: not only must rich countries and wealthy people in these countries cut back on consumption, they must also help, support and promote (and not impede) the rest of the world in adapting to a planetary system that is rapidly changing. A timely and adequately funded combination of adaptation and mitigation efforts needs to be encouraged, despite limitations and difficulties that may have been posed by the current financial crisis, itself a symptom of the unsustainability and wrongness of our past living standards.

Ironically, climate change offers humanity an opportunity for a quantum leap in sustainable development and in peace making. If international cooperation, and not competition, is strengthened in response to the threats discussed, international stability, governance, and development can also benefit. There is an important role for governments, civil society, the private sector, research institutions, and regional and international organisations in furthering our understanding of what kinds of resilience and adaptation strategies will work most effectively within and across regions if both devastating human insecurities and the potential for climate-related conflict are to be avoided.