

Herrenhausen Conference October 9-11, 2019 EXTREME EVENTS – BUILDING CLIMATE RESILIENT SOCIETIES.

Report of session 3 “Climate Extremes and Security”

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There is a growing body of literature on interactions between climate extremes, human security and conflict dynamics. With extreme weather events appearing with higher frequency and intensity due to climate change, the security impacts of these extremes are increasingly relevant, across infrastructures and affected regions. Particular attention has been on agriculture (food and water security) and health sectors (life and death), as well as police and military sectors which contribute to the securitization of climate extremes.

The session “climate extremes and security” put a special focus on the broader understanding of security and on how different interpretations of security converge and/or are affected by climate change and other extreme events. Thereby a main interest lied on the science-policy interface and the setting up of the session was strongly motivated to improve the co-production process of future research activities and future actions. Therefore the outline of the session included a broad array of actors from academics and practitioners and represented several institutions that address the link between security and climate change in different ways.

Among the session organizers was the Federal German Office, which is especially interested in the nexus between climate change and security as a central part of German climate diplomacy. Indeed, as climate change is increasingly posing a threat to peace and security in many regions of the world, it is becoming a key challenge for foreign policy. Be it extreme weather events, droughts or sea level rise: through its impacts climate change acts as a risk multiplier and can put the stability of entire regions at stake. This is why Germany has defined “climate and security” as one of its priorities for the German membership of the UN Security Council in 2019/20. In this context, the Federal Foreign Office is working towards strengthening the capacity of the UN in general and of the Security Council in particular to address climate-related security risks, following a threefold approach: first, creating a solid information base for the UN, thereby paving the way for risk-informed decision-making – the exchange between policy makers and the science community is indispensable for this purpose and underscores the importance of the conference at hand. Second, providing sound risk assessments for regional hotspots and strengthening the expertise of the UN on climate-security risks in the field. Third, improving operational responses to climate change-related security risks, for instance by installing early warning systems, building up mediation capacity

in affected regions and integrating expertise on the aforementioned risks into UN peacebuilding missions.

The session structure combined several impulse talks on the broad variety of complex interlinkages between climate change on conflict, humanitarian aid, adaptation policies and governance [[Program Session 3](#)] with broader discussion rounds that focused on the questions of impacts, obstacles and future research necessities and practices.

Thereby a main consensus concerning the key research questions, methodologies and disciplines was that the linkages between climate extremes and violent conflict are contested because the very meaning and understanding of security, conflict and peace is embedded in societies, cultures and the historical context. In addition to this diversity of existing approaches and practices, another consensus among the session participants was that climate extremes undermine stability in vulnerable societies and conflict dynamics is context-specific, depending on social cohesion, where uncertainties affect the results. Controversial issues concern the degree of causality in situations of multi-causality, under which conditions affected people move or not and the role of geopolitical aspects and political power structures. Especially the broader conceptual uses of the term of security which range from conflict, peace, resilience to the Sustainable Development Goals need to be taken into account when approaching the field.

The necessary clarification of this wide array of approaches from researchers and practitioners needs to be taken into account and the improvement of these conceptually very different approaches, presenting some examples for already existing research [[IFSH-Project-Webpage UNSC-CLISEC](#)]. Different regional approaches were highlighted in the session, ranging from the Lake Chad, to Brasil, the Pacific and different mechanisms to approach these linkages.

The working process in the session lead to several formulations of future key research questions. These ranged from acknowledging the challenge of including complexity and the broader context-dependent social, political, economic and environmental factors into the analysis on climate extremes and security. Another important issue to be addressed in future research are the obstacles to knowledge access and communication from and towards different (affected) communities, such as the difficulties in measurements of the achievements and changes on the way towards societal resilience and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across sectors and regions beyond disaster management and humanitarian aid. Also several conflicting interests in the field from different actors were highlighted, distributed in different geographies and generations.

On this basis the priorities for action items and implementation for research and practitioners identified in the session were to address the obstacles facing climate extremes through knowledge building, research, education and learning to support the transformation towards the SDGs. Future priorities are to improve the exchange between science and foreign policy practice, ensure most effective flows of information between science and foreign policy and

develop a ‘best practice collection’ which politicians could use in situations of danger, to tailor and operationalize scientific input to societal needs and policy recommendations.

Among the follow-up activities planned after the session, a central purpose is to include the science-practice actors, resulting in the very engagement between the session participants. The session itself thereby could be seen as having set up a first exchange with the aim of reducing the gaps between academics working on the issues and practitioners from different fields.

This conference with several input talks etc. importantly enriched the session dynamics, and after having identified several common approaches we look forward to engaging in further discussions. One important follow-up project consists of feeding scientific findings and recent developments within the research community into the policy-making process of the Federal Foreign Office and thereby also to the Climate Security Mechanism of the United Nations. By bringing together key players from both sides, politics and science, and fostering an active exchange, the sometimes still existing gap between science and policy can be closed, an objective fundamental to finding comprehensive approaches to the issue of climate extremes and security.

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