

Climate Change, Social Stress and Violent Conflict
State of the Art and Research Needs
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Abstract

**Disaster prevention as a tool of sustainable peace-building –
suitable concept or Western paternalism?**

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Climate change is responsible for approximately two-thirds of all natural disasters. However, natural disasters are not solely the result of natural events. Rather, vulnerability to their potentially negative outcomes – human, material, economic, and ecological losses – is strongly determined by ‘upstream’ social and political processes that have led to increased exposure and less adaptive capacity of individual and community units in the first place. At the same time natural disasters themselves have an impact on social and political dynamics within a society - they put socio-economic parameters under stress and push the conflict- and problem-solving capacities of political systems to their edges. Especially those political units that are among the less consolidated and developed ones are further threatened by these processes. Hence a research unit of International Alert identified 46 countries that are likely to experience violent conflict as a result of climate change – not least menacing also regional stability. The following factors are discussed to have conflict-promoting influence in the context of a natural disaster:

- (undemocratic) regime- and governance-forms;
- little economic development;
- unequal distribution of income;
- food insecurity;
- weak functional governmental capacity in relation to other actors;
- political instability/ conflict proneness;
- strong migration and urbanisation (demographic change);
- male youth bulge.

Against this background institutionalized and coordinated disaster prevention that aims at strengthening resilience of individual and community units, and that furthermore takes into account possible side-effects on the mentioned conflict-promoting factors seems to be an important element of sustainable peace-building. In this vein the international community is increasingly turning away from exclusive post disaster relief and instead promotes preventive measures of disaster risk reduction/ adaptive capacity building (i.e. GFDRR of the World Bank).

My conceptual paper, however, wants to shed a critical light on this cross-sectoral policy field, elaborating on the following aspects: Firstly I will follow on the concept/ idea of a ‘disaster’, that is not known in many indigenous languages at all. Hence, what kind of human/ social-ecological relation, which potentials and responsibilities hide behind that term, and how did it evolve over time? Secondly, and related to the first aspect, it is stunning how the disaster (prevention) discourse resembles discourses on democracy/ democratization and development. In the end it seems to be a matter of (hegemonic?) North-South relations – following the concept of ‘securitization’ not least with view to the question whose security seems to be at risk and at what point political action is finally triggered.