

CLIMATE AND FRAGILITY RISKS: THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

LUKAS RÜTTINGER¹, JANUARY 2017

Climate change is the ultimate threat multiplier. It will aggravate fragility, contribute to social upheaval and even violent conflicts. The problem is the seven compound risks that emerge when the impacts of climate change interact with problems that many weak states are already facing. Single-sector interventions alone will not suffice to deal with the systemic nature of compound climate-fragility risks. Integrating policies and programmes in three key sectors—climate change adaptation, development and humanitarian aid, and peacebuilding—are crucial to help strengthen resilience to climate-fragility risks and achieve significant co-benefits.

Background

Climate change is one of the key global security challenges of the 21st century. It is a 'threat multiplier' that will increase state fragility, fuel social unrest and potentially result in violent conflict. Existing state fragility is simultaneously hampering adaptation efforts, particularly among vulnerable populations. This threatens to lock many societies into 'fragility traps'.

Japan, as part of the Group of 7 (G7), has recognized the resulting challenges for sustainable economic development, peace and stability. In April 2016, under the Japanese G7 presidency and following up the independent report "A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks" commissioned by G7 members, the foreign ministers of the G7 reiterated their commitment to prioritize prevention of climate fragility risks, including taking steps to integrate climate-fragility considerations across their national governments.

Against this background, adelphi has partnered with the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) to facilitate a broader discussion on climate-fragility risks in Japan and reflect and discuss the findings of the G7 report and its implications and relevance for Japan. As a first step, adelphi and IGES jointly organised two expert workshops in June 2016. The first workshop took place on June 14, 2016 and brought together 31 Japanese and international experts as well as government representatives.

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It was followed by a workshop on June 16, 2016 with 15 participants from Japanese civil society and a symposium at the 8th International Forum for Sustainable Asia and the Pacific in Yokohama on July 12, 2016 with over 100 participants.² These events focused on identifying climate-fragility risks for Japan and the region and ways to address these risks.

In addition, adelphi and IGES are jointly publishing a series of five policy papers on climate-fragility risks in Japan and the Asia-Pacific region. These short papers focus on different issues to contextualize the global discourse on the topic and show its relevance for Japan and the region. The papers are available in English and Japanese.

This paper presents the key findings of “*A New Climate For Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks*”. This report specifically took a broader look at the links between climate change and fragility than many previous reports on climate change and security. It views climate change as one among multiple pressures on states and societies that can produce a wide range of risks. It extended beyond the traditional focus on the weakest and most conflict-ridden states by calling attention to the risks posed by climate change for the stability and resilience of more developed countries.

The report was primarily aimed at foreign policy makers. The goal was to close the gap between climate-security analysis and foreign policy action by summarizing the scientific knowledge on this subject and by providing evidence-based recommendations for G7 foreign policy makers. To this end, it analyzed a broad spectrum of different policies, processes and institutions in the fields of climate change, development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding, and focuses on identifying gaps and challenges for integrated responses that bridge sectoral silos.

Seven climate-fragility risks threaten states and societies

The planet’s limited resources are under pressure. Demand for food, water, and energy is increasing, particularly where the population or the economy is growing rapidly. Widespread unemployment, rapid urbanization and environmental degradation challenge efforts to reduce poverty and increase economic development in many poor countries. In fragile regions, persistent inequality, political marginalization and unresponsive governments exacerbate these stresses, increasing the potential for instability and conflict. The added impacts of a changing climate on water, food and land will act as a threat multiplier and strain countries’ ability to meet their citizens’ needs.

The capacity of states and societies to meet these converging pressures can be measured along a spectrum of fragility, from most fragile to most resilient. Fragile situations arise when states cannot provide basic services, protect their citizens or develop mutually constructive relations with society. Even states that are otherwise stable may endure periods of fragility or harbour pockets of fragility. If not managed well, these periods or pockets can spur a downward spiral of fragility and conflict, where states are locked into cycles of repeated violence, weak governance and instability.

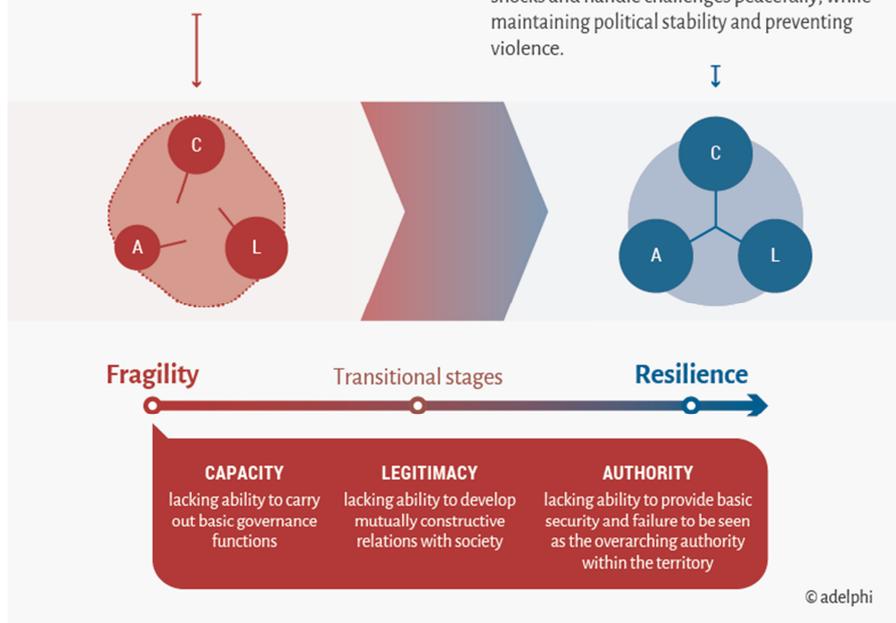
Resilient states, on the other hand, build constructive relationships with their citizens, maintain functioning institutions and provide basic services. Resilient countries can absorb shocks and handle stresses peacefully, while maintaining political stability and preventing violence (see graphic).

² http://www.iges.or.jp/isap/2016/en/session/pl_2.html

From fragility to resilience

Fragility is the inability (whether whole or partial) of a state to fulfil its responsibilities as a sovereign entity, including a lack of legitimacy, authority, and capacity.

Resilient states and societies are characterized by a stable social contract; functional, accountable, and inclusive institutions; and the provision of basic services. They can absorb shocks and handle challenges peacefully, while maintaining political stability and preventing violence.



Building on two key assumptions—one, that some of climate change’s impacts are unstoppable; and two, that some states and societies facing its foreseeable impacts are experiencing fragility—seven compound risks were identified that emerge as climate change interacts with other pressures, such as rapid urbanization, inequality, economic shocks and environmental degradation. To select these risks, state-of-the-art research on climate change, fragility and conflict encompassing both peer-reviewed research as well as more recent grey literature, field research and results from consultations in 10 countries on the threats these risks pose to human, national and international security, and their relevance and importance for foreign policymakers was analysed.

1. Local resource competition

Access to natural resources, particularly water and arable land, will be constrained in some regions due to climate change. At the same time, demand is increasing in areas with growing populations and rapid economic development. Together, these trends can spur competition over essential resources, increasing tensions and contributing to local conflicts. Competition over resources is likely to be particularly disruptive in regions that rely on a narrow resource base, have a history of conflict or are home to marginalized groups. Local competition can also trigger problems at the national and international levels. However, equitable and effective natural resource management can help reduce fragility and prevent increased competition from escalating into violence.

2. Livelihood insecurity and migration

Many people who directly depend on natural resources will find their livelihoods endangered by climate change. In some areas, climate change will reduce grazing land, dry up water sources and threaten jobs connected to climate-sensitive economic sectors. These environmental changes can combine with

other problems such as unequal land distribution, insecure land tenure, poorly developed markets, trade barriers and inadequate infrastructure to push rural populations to seek alternative livelihoods. Some will move to urban areas that already suffer from high levels of unemployment and poor living conditions, while others may be forced to turn to illegal sources of income. Climate change will alter both existing migration patterns and the volume of people likely to move. While migration can be an effective way to cope with climate stress, the increased movement of people driven by climate change impacts can, if migration and resettlement are poorly managed, lead to local and regional instability.

3. Extreme weather events and disasters

Extreme weather events and disasters endanger and destroy people's livelihoods, assets and health. The relationship between disasters and fragility is often mutually reinforcing: disasters put additional stress on already stretched governance systems, decrease economic opportunities, reduce resources and displace more people. A lack of safety nets, insurance mechanisms and other methods to cope with the impacts of the disasters can fuel community grievances, especially if government assistance is inadequate or inequitably distributed. Poorly designed humanitarian interventions can also exacerbate tensions and increase the risk of conflict. In already fragile and conflict-affected situations, disasters can undermine or override efforts to bolster resilience, increasing the severity of the impact. However, disaster prevention and response efforts can also provide opportunities to improve resilience to climate-fragility risks and build peace.

4. Volatile food prices and provision

Climate change is highly likely to decrease yields and disrupt food production in many areas. Combined with increasing global pressures—including population growth and changing energy demands—food insecurity is likely to increase and food prices to become more volatile. As exemplified by the 2007-9 food riots in more than 40 countries, food price volatility can heighten the risk of public unrest, democratic breakdown, and civil and local conflict, particularly when combined with poverty, poor governance and a weak social contract. States that depend on food imports and spend a significant proportion of household income on food are particularly vulnerable. However, the likelihood that food insecurity contributes to instability depends not only on local factors, such as degree of urbanization and market access, but also national policies, such as consumer subsidies and export markets.

5. Transboundary water management

While the management of shared water supplies can provide opportunities for collaboration between governments, it can also be a source of tension. Many transboundary water basins are located in regions with a history of armed conflict and significant interstate tensions. Though historical precedents for interstate "water wars" are limited, competition over water use will likely increase in many areas as demand grows and climate impacts affect availability. Managing the fragility risks posed by climate change will be particularly complicated in transboundary basins, increasing the pressure on governance structures, especially when water management is eclipsed by political considerations or affected by power asymmetries.

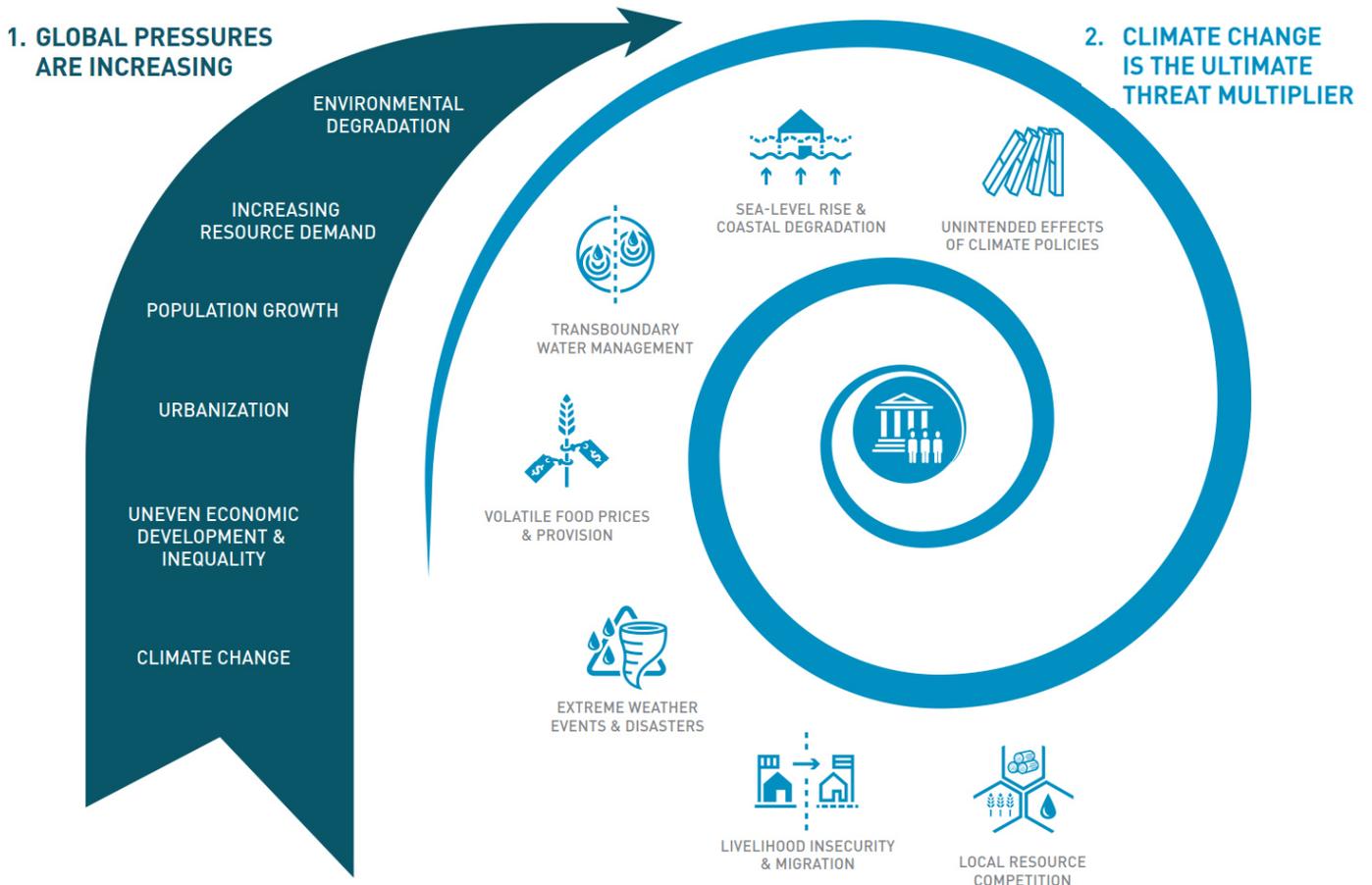
6. Sea-level rise and coastal degradation

Rising sea levels already threaten the economic and physical viability of low-lying areas. Current estimates of sea-level rise suggest that no country will be entirely submerged during this century. However, as land is gradually lost, the economic and agricultural viability of many coastal areas will significantly decrease; damage from storm surges will become more severe; and the risk of future land loss will become more pressing. These changes will push people to migrate and increase the risk of fragility in threatened areas. As seas rise, changing coastlines may also alter border demarcations and trigger disputes over maritime boundaries, territorial seas, sea lanes and ocean resources.

7. Unintended effects of climate policies

To reduce fragility and prevent conflict, we need mitigation and adaptation policies. However, if designed and implemented without considering broader impacts, these well-intentioned policies could impair economic development, undermine political stability and exacerbate insecurity. As climate adaptation and mitigation policies are more broadly implemented, the risks of unintended negative effects—particularly in fragile contexts—will also increase. These unintended consequences may include increased insecurity of land tenure in poor countries, marginalized minority groups, increased environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity, and accelerated climate change. These unforeseen effects often arise due to the lack of cross-sectoral coordination and conflict-sensitive planning.

Seven compound climate-fragility risks threaten states and societies



These seven compound climate-fragility risks are not isolated from each other. They interact in complex ways, frustrating the development of effective responses at all levels. For example, local natural resource conflicts and livelihood insecurity are primarily local challenges, but they can have significant knock-on effects, such as increased migration, economic disruption or social tensions, that can spur instability across a wider area. Conversely, transboundary water conflicts can disrupt local livelihoods and access to natural resources, while market instability and extreme weather events can impact global supply chains, with serious local repercussions.

Climate change is simultaneously increasing the complexity of a range of global challenges, including fragility. If strategies fail to take into account the interdependent and systemic nature of these climate-fragility risks, they will fail or, in the worst case, exacerbate the risks they try to address. Interdependent challenges need integrated answers.

Building resilience through policy integration

The best way to diminish the threats posed by the compound climate-fragility risks is to mitigate climate change. However, climate changes are already underway, so we must take steps to manage and minimize these risks today.

Three key policy sectors stand out in terms of strengthening the resilience of states and societies to climate-fragility risks:

- **Climate change adaptation** programmes help countries anticipate the adverse effects of climate change and take action to prevent, minimize and adapt to its potential impacts.
- **Development and humanitarian aid** programmes help states and populations build their economic, governance and social capacities and improve their resilience to shocks.
- **Peacebuilding and conflict prevention** programmes address the causes and effects of conflict by reducing tensions and creating an environment for sustainable peace.

The compound nature of climate-fragility risks means single-sector interventions are not enough to prevent climate change impacts from increasing fragility, or fragility from undermining climate resilience. By integrating efforts across the climate change adaptation, development and humanitarian aid, and peacebuilding sectors, the international community can mitigate the interconnected risks while achieve significant co-benefits.

Integrating policies throughout key policy stages—early warning and assessment, planning, financing and implementation—will be a complex, though essential, endeavour. Existing programmes, however, show gaps that when addressed offer opportunities for developing a policy agenda that can respond to climate-fragility risks.

- **Climate change adaptation:** Despite significant progress, climate adaptation plans rarely address fragility and conflict comprehensively. Countries with situations of fragility are often less well positioned to access climate finance due to the limits of their internal capacity.
- **Development and humanitarian aid:** Some progress has been made in “climate-proofing” development work by mainstreaming climate into development programming, but this is not yet standard, especially in fragile situations where vulnerability to climate-fragility risks is high.
- **Peacebuilding:** While leading security actors have called for a better understanding of climate and fragility risks, climate change is not yet sufficiently incorporated into fragility or peace and conflict assessments. Additionally, few financing instruments for peacebuilding and conflict prevention earmark funds for addressing climate and fragility risks.

Recommendations

To address these gaps, the G7 governments should commit to designing and implementing integrated responses at several levels:

1. Integration begins at home: Make climate-fragility risks a central foreign policy priority
G7 governments can begin by integrating climate-fragility responses into planning, implementation and evaluation processes across their departments. This requires new capacities within departments and new cross-sectoral policy processes.

2. Come together for a new dialogue: Enhance G7 cooperation
Problems that do not respect national borders can best be addressed by inter-governmental action. A G7 task force of senior officials can jump-start closer coordination between G7 members and foster concrete and joint action.

3. Set the global resilience agenda: Inform multilateral processes and structures
Acting together, G7 governments can help break down the sectoral barriers and siloed approaches that have kept multilateral processes and institutions, such as the post-2015 development agenda, from comprehensively addressing climate-fragility risks.

4. Partner for resilience: Engage widely to ensure global actions produce local results
Strengthening links between partners will help ensure that global initiatives improve local resilience to climate-fragility risks. In particular, the G7 should partner with governments and NGOs in countries facing fragile situations and provide support for addressing climate-fragility risks.

In order to pursue action and implement this new cooperative approach, five specific areas to build resilience against climate-fragility risks could serve as starting points:

- **Global Risk Assessment:** G7 governments should establish a unified, shared and accessible risk assessment methodology for identifying climate-fragility risks and generating actionable conclusions.
- **Food Security:** In addition to developing resilient food systems, the risks posed by food insecurity can be mitigated by better information, by keeping markets operating during crises and by market access.
- **Disaster Risk Reduction:** Development partners should work together to invest in crisis prevention by integrating disaster risk reduction, peacebuilding and climate change adaptation.
- **Transboundary Water Disputes:** A three-pronged approach can help ensure that transboundary waters become points of peaceful cooperation: stronger institutions, better sharing of knowledge and information, and encouraging cooperation between governments in transboundary river basins.
- **Building Local Resilience to Climate-Fragility Risks:** G7 governments can embed support for resilience throughout their aid programmes and encourage others to do the same.

Responding to the global strategic threat posed by climate change is too great a task for any single government. The G7 have started by committing to respond to one of the great challenges of our time and taken first steps by deepening cooperation amongst themselves and the national level.

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