

Thematic Readings

Disasters, Climate Change and Conflict July 2015

Overview

Natural disasters, conflict and fragility interrelate in complex ways. Conflict and fragility amplify the impact of natural disasters by increasing vulnerability and limiting response capacities. While disasters can open political space for building trust and negotiating an end to violent conflict, they can also aggravate conflict by deepening grievances, providing economic or political opportunities, or increasing the feasibility of engaging in violent conflict. Risk factors such as poor governance are common to both disaster vulnerability and violent conflict. These are likely to coincide more in the future, particularly in light of climate change impacts on disaster risk.

Key Reading

Overseas Development Institute, 'When disasters and conflicts collide: Improving links between disaster resilience and conflict prevention'

This report provides the most comprehensive analysis of the evidence base on the disaster-conflict interface, and is focused on generating specific recommendations for implementing a risk-reduction agenda. It notes that existing systematic analysis on how disasters affect conflict is limited in quantity, highly context-specific and sometimes contradictory. However, the authors conclude that the combination of disasters and conflict can compound the impacts of both, impair recovery and increase the risk of future crises.

In addition to examining how disasters and conflict are interrelated, this report offers recommendations for addressing vulnerabilities in a joined-up way. It notes the need for developing interventions that do not aggravate conflict or disaster vulnerabilities, but rather systematically integrate disaster risk reduction with peacebuilding and statebuilding frameworks. Toward this end, it recommends elements for a conceptual framework to integrate these hitherto separate fields, along with specific policy, programming, finance and research objectives to strengthen interventions that increase resilience to multiple shocks and stresses.

While acknowledging that more work is needed in this field, the authors overlay indices from a number of sources to generate a ranking of the top 20 countries considered to be fragile and/or conflict-affected with high disaster risk, high levels of poverty and high levels of vulnerability to climate change. The report also grounds its analysis in case studies from the Sahel, Karamoja, Nepal and Afghanistan.

>> Peters, Katie, David Keen and Tom Mitchell (2013): ['When disasters and conflicts collide: Improving links between disaster resilience and conflict prevention'](#), Overseas Development Institute, London.

Additional Reading

United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 'Disaster-conflict interface: comparative experiences'

This study examines the disaster-conflict interface with a focus on how this dynamic impacts poverty and inequality. It highlights the need for holistic and integrated responses to 'conflict-disaster complexities', noting that development interventions that are not sensitive to the linkages can worsen tensions and increase risk.

UNDP's report is in a position to evaluate the relative success of in-country program responses, and has a particular focus on improving the Country Offices' development programming in crisis contexts, although the findings are relevant to other stakeholders. Analysis is based on case studies that illustrate the range of possible interactions between disasters and conflict, in Bolivia, Haiti, Indonesia (Aceh), Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Zimbabwe. This grounding helps illustrate the context-specific impacts of disasters on conflict risk, which have both exacerbated and helped to resolve conflict. It highlights drought as particularly exacerbating conflict risk.

The report includes analysis of the unintended negative consequences of inappropriate or unsustainable conflict or disaster assistance, the impact of the disaster-conflict interface on gender-related vulnerabilities and violence, and the potential space for conflict transformation created by capacity-building and the disaster recovery process.

>> United Nations Development Program (2011): ['Disaster-Conflict Interface: Comparative Experiences'](#), United Nations Development Program Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, New York.

***Natural Hazards*, 'Extreme events and disasters: a window of opportunity for change? Analysis of organizational, institutional and political changes, formal and informal responses after mega-disasters'**

This article provides an in-depth examination of how disasters can lead to changes in social and organisational systems at different scales. Although the primary case study is of a geological rather than a climatic disaster (the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and its opposite effect on the conflict trajectories of Aceh and Sri Lanka), the findings are oriented towards the risks that climate change presents. It notes that the high levels of uncertainty associated with climate impacts make understanding the ways in which post-disaster change takes place important, if strategic policy and methodological lessons are to be successfully learned.

>> Birkmann, J., Buckle, P., Jaeger, J., Pelling, M., Setiadi, N., Garschagen, M., Fernando, N., and Kropp, J. (2010) ['Extreme events and disasters: a window of opportunity for change? Analysis of organisational, institutional and political changes, formal and informal responses after mega-disasters'](#), *Natural Hazards*, 55: 637-655.