

CLIMATE SECURITY DIALOGUE BRIEF



CLIMATE SECURITY DIALOGUE SERIES

CLIMATE CHANGE AND SECURITY IN THE ANDEAN REGION BOGOTÁ, UNIVERSIDAD DE LOS ANDES, 23 JANUARY 2012

Summary

The Andean countries will face a series of significant challenges posed by climate change, and will be among those most severely affected. Structural factors further deepen the region's vulnerability.

On 23 January 2012, experts from academia, civil society and public policy from the Andes met in Bogotá to discuss the interlinkages between climate and security in the region. The Dialogue was organized by adelphi, the Centre for International Studies (CEI) and the Program on Armed Conflict and Peacebuilding (ConPaz) from the Universidad de los Andes, and was supported by the German Federal Foreign Office.

The Dialogue highlighted the need to focus on adaptation and to strengthen national and local capacities. Participants underlined that climate change and variability have the potential to exacerbate already existing vulnerabilities and risks, threaten human security and fuel existing conflicts.

The Dialogue strongly recommended an integrated approach that takes climate as a cross-cutting focus and recognized the potential of the debates surrounding the topic of climate to open doors for renewed national and regional cooperation.

Background

There is little doubt that climate change poses a key challenge for global development and human well-being. As more attention is devoted to the topic, the international debate on the security implications of climate change has become increasingly prominent.

In the Andes, climate change enters the stage in a region that faces poverty, exclusion, and inequality challenges, high criminality rates in some urban areas and transnational crime coupled with on-going, though weakening, armed conflict.

The region will face major warming and precipitation variability, with rainfall decreasing in the southern part of the Andes and increasing in the northern part. Stronger heat waves and El Niño and La Niña cycles, an increasing number of hot days and a high concentration of heavy rain within short periods of time are also likely to contribute to greater threats. Glacier retreat is already affecting and will continue to affect the water and energy security of nearby communities, as well as of urban and metropolitan areas.

We know more about the impact scenarios at the global scale, but understand less to what extent climate change might affect water availability, increasing demands for energy,

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impacts on agricultural availability and food security, vulnerability of marginalised groups and migration in the region. This debate should aid us in asking what opportunities emanate from collaborative efforts within countries and across borders.

The discussion surrounding the climate regime has moved away from strictly technical spheres to encompass not only climate policy makers and environmentalists, but also practitioners from the development, foreign policy and security policy communities.

Against this background, on 23 January 2012 the regional experts mainly addressed the following key questions:

- How does climate change affect peace and stability?
- Which policies exist and are needed to address climate-induced vulnerabilities, risks, and resilience?
- How can conflict constellations be transformed into opportunities for cooperation?

“The topic of climate change deserves all efforts from the international community and global leadership.”

Jürgen Christian Mertens, German Ambassador in Colombia

The Concept of Security

The discussion on the security implications of climate change awakens some concern in the region that securitizing the topic of climate might call for its militarization and might move the debate away from the public domain and into a historically-loaded, rather closed and military-dominated policy arena.

Thus, there is a general agreement to move away from the concept of state security into a broader perspective of human security, where the focus is people-centred, resting on the resilience and livelihoods of the population.

Taking human security and human development as the starting point, the Andean region is presented with significant obstacles,

as vast segments of the society still face exclusion, lack of protection policies and incapacity to influence public policy processes and to act to change the conditions that directly affect their human security.

Until such undergirding risk factors are addressed, conditions of vulnerability will continue to generate humanitarian situations, including loss of human lives and livelihoods.

“The institutionalization of human security requires permanent proactive policies and not only reactive emergency responses.”

Pascal O. Girot, CARE International

Climate and Security Challenges

Currently, two of the major socio-environmental problems in the Andean region, which can be compounded by climate variability, are the lack of access to land for the poor, and water regulation that fails to take into account the deterioration of glaciers, wetlands and the hydrological cycle.

From the point of view of the on-going armed conflict in Colombia, an important point of intersection is the reliance of armed groups on natural resources, such as gold and illicit crops, which has affected large forest extensions with impacts on the hydrological cycle.

The increased intensity and frequency of climate variability will likely affect the distribution of ecosystems and the allocation of resources and public goods. Combined with a configuration of other igniting factors, this can exacerbate conflicts of power and interest between groups.

Climate variability and climate change could aggravate local conflicts in many ways, for example by sparking protests and altering the public order, and by isolating entire communities from the reach of state institutions. Food security can also be affected

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by the damage to farming fields or the destruction of road infrastructure.

Participating experts have also found that cultural factors can make already vulnerable communities extremely averse to risk. At the same time, low development levels, poverty and governance failure at the local level have an impact on the participation of communities in decisions affecting public environmental policies that might directly affect them.

In this context, the question arises whether public officials, including local police and disaster workers, are sufficiently trained to deal with the environmental dimension as well as with conflict mediation. There is a dire need to strengthen national and local capacities and to develop in vulnerable communities plans to make them able to better adapt and to transform vulnerability into capacities.

The assurance of human security and the level of vulnerability are in large part the product of the capacity of institutions to provide safe living conditions for the population. In the face of climate change challenges, the institutionalization of human security will require permanent policies that are proactive and embody a strong preventative culture against conditions that threaten communities well beyond their control, in addition to adequate episodic emergency responses.

“The implications of the relationship between climate change and security are still to be explored in the region, including the political economy of resource competition and the spillover effects of the Colombian armed conflict.”

Angelika Rettberg, ConPaz/CEI, Universidad de los Andes

Domestic Approaches

In the Andean region, there is a fundamental realization that climate change risks and vulnerability are foremost national and local problems, specific to local environments and calling for local action. The vulnerability of communities has been evidenced in recent months and years by the heavy human and

economic toll caused by La Niña floods in Colombia. The awareness increased by these events has been the engine behind the adoption of a new overarching policy that places climate change as a cross-cutting topic that permeates the country's planning and investment processes.

The increased public resources destined to an adaptation fund in the country are welcome by the different sector ministries. But the capacity of the implementing institutions must also increase accordingly.

“Current development policies in the region are increasing the countries' vulnerability to climate change. We could even say that we have a policy of de-adaptation in place.”

Manuel Rodríguez Becerra, Universidad de los Andes

Under the current model for development in the region, many sectoral state institutions that traditionally have little to do with security policy can take decisions, albeit not purposefully, that might contribute to threats to human security. For example, favouring transportation solutions that contribute to emissions, or permitting constructions in vulnerable areas, might later turn into risks.

In this multi-sectoral setting, institutions face the challenge of foreseeing and effectively acting on all the intertwining conditions that might affect long-term well-being. Existing adaptation strategies in the countries should also be probed and maladaptation actions sieved through. Failure to address climate change as an issue permeating all sectors of development could generate processes of “maladaptation” and exacerbation of existing vulnerabilities and conflicts.

Countries like Colombia have increased in the past decade their attention to international markets, accelerating mining activities and hydrocarbon exploration and exploitation, activities characterized in the past in the region by creating large scale environmental damage.

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Regional Cooperation

Climate change brings along a myriad of uncertainties which cannot be addressed by the usual rigid command and control style of policy implementation. A regional cooperation approach should bring stakeholders from the private sector and civil society—as well as sovereign governments—to the dialogue table, so as to diversify the interests, needs and resources that are represented.

Because the climate change agenda is no longer strictly technical, but a global and multisystemic topic in international relations, participants from the region recognize the importance of projecting the internal interests of nations in international fora. The Latin American position would be better represented in the presence of increased regional cooperation around climate change.

At the same time, globalized risks, such as climate change, are increasingly ubiquitous, delinked from local causes, incalculable and non-compensable, and many times not appropriately factored in by national policy or by the current international regime.

“The regional cooperation approach should bring stakeholders from the private sector and civil society to the dialogue table.”

Stephen Bender, Senior Environment Consultant and former Head for Sustainable Development at the Organization of American States

Given the eco-regional dimension of climate change, there is the need to think and act in terms of regional opportunities and needs. But eco-regional cooperation is often limited by political and natural constraints, with the Amazon and the Andes often making cooperation difficult for mere physical conditions.

The eco-regional focus in the region does not translate into the creation of new institutions. There exist a range of regional institutional mechanisms and organizations in Latin America. Mercosur (Southern Common Market), SICA (Central American Integration

System) and CARICOM (Caribbean Community and Common Market) already foster regional cooperation on natural resource management and are well positioned as a starting point for cooperation on the issue of climate change.

The topic of climate change can present immense opportunities to modify, strengthen and broaden the current global and regional governance system in a post-Kyoto stage, into one that articulates climate with the topics of competitiveness, innovation and trade.

The central challenge of managing cross-boundary resources and adapting and responding to climate change based in eco-regions is to look beyond the Westphalian system of sovereign territory and interest, and to apply a focus of cooperation in three integrated areas: human security, trade, and official development assistance.

Discussions around security and climate change should be compatible with on-going discourses on trade, investment and international aid, which already attract significant attention in the region. To establish a separate track for this discussion could decrease its relevance in the region.

Exploring this aspect and further cooperation within association agreements between Europe and Latin America can be fruitful and can strengthen the Latin American position in relation to climate. Further opportunities for interaction between the two regions include energy and a low carbon economy, in which Europe has been a leader.

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