

»»» The interrelationships between climate change and fragility

One Pager

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The consequences of climate change are particularly evident in the increase in extreme weather events and the rise in sea levels. However, not all countries are exposed to the same risks, nor are they impacted to the same degree: the 20 countries that are most vulnerable to climate change also have the highest warning levels for fragility. The following article analyses the interrelationships between climate change and fragility discussed in research and outlines what effective action might look like.

Climate change as an amplifier of fragility

Climate change can act as a multiplier for existing forms of fragility in conjunction with sociopolitical or economic deficits.

The population has a high degree of vulnerability: climate-related extreme weather events occur to an above-average extent in fragile countries. At the same time, extreme poverty is particularly widespread in these countries – 40 of the countries classified as “fragile” by the OECD are also on the list of Least Developed Countries, states in which the population is particularly exposed to the effects of climate change and often has little opportunity to protect itself against them. This can further increase poverty and vulnerability.

Low resilience and limited capacities of government systems: due to a lack of government resources and capacities, the governments of fragile countries have very little scope to effectively protect their populations from the effects of climate change. In particular, inadequate social security systems reduce the possibility of mitigating the social and economic consequences of climate change to any meaningful extent. This

increases the risks for the population and can promote social unrest and conflicts – both on a domestic and international level.

Displacement and migration: climate change will lead to entire regions becoming uninhabitable or no longer offering the possibility of securing a livelihood. The local population would then be forced to move to other neighbouring regions. According to the IMF, climate-related displacement already affects fragile countries twice as much as all other countries. The resulting increase of pressure on natural resources and the infrastructure supply, which is often already inadequate to start with, can exacerbate local conflicts in host communities.

Fragility as a brake on climate policy

Existing fragility can further increase the risks of climate change, or complicate measures to protect against or adjust to climate change.

Prioritisation dilemma: fragile countries often face a variety of serious deficits in the provision of basic services to their populations. Measures to immediately safeguard livelihoods therefore tend to have a higher priority here than climate policy measures that are only effective in the longer term.

Inadequate implementation of climate policy: due to deficient state structures, many fragile countries are unable to enforce climate and environmental legislation and meet their international commitments. An inability to sufficiently adapt to climate change increases these countries' risks of negative economic, social and environmental consequences.

Difficult access to climate finance: fragile states are also often characterised by low public revenue and a lack of international debt capacity, which reduces their options for financing climate change mitigation measures. Complex national contexts and weak implementation structures further contribute to difficult access to climate finance funds.

Conclusion

The analysis shows that climate change can have a negative impact on fragility, conflict and displacement through many different and independent channels. Conversely, fragility can also have a very negative impact on governments' abilities to effectively curb climate change. In this respect, the effects amplify each other.

In view of negative global trends, both in climate change and fragility, it is clear that we should view both of these developments as being intertwined and tackle them together. Understanding both issues in isolation carries significant risks: a sole focus on the challenges of climate change could lead to the governments of fragile states taking less responsibility for fragility; moreover, unless there is sufficient understanding of conflict, climate programmes in fragile contexts run the risk of unintentionally contributing further to fragility and conflict. ■