

## STRENGTHENING RESPONSES TO CLIMATE VARIABILITY IN SOUTH ASIA

Conference Report, Kathmandu, 08 July 2013

### INTRODUCTION

Climate change has been widely acknowledged as a 'threat-multiplier' of existing security risks. In particular in fragile contexts, it can exacerbate political instability and put a strain on state's capacities. With governance already stretched in certain contexts across South Asia, social disruptions driven by climate change will pose additional challenges to stability and security.

Deepening and operationalising the understanding of how to respond to climate change and security risks in fragile states is an urgent priority and one that can be advanced effectively through joint research, dialogue and knowledge sharing between the climate change, security and development sectors. To this end, International Alert and the South Asia Network on Security and Climate Change (SANSaC) have been working together for the past two years on a DfID and USAID funded research project: **Strengthening Responses to Climate Variability in South Asia**.

The research culminated in the launch of four case studies looking at dimensions of community level resilience to climate change and variability in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Each case study set out specific challenges and opportunities faced by communities at the sub-national level in responding to climate change. Whilst the issues varied from case to case - illustrating that a one-size-fits-all approach to building resilience is not appropriate - all four studies shared a strong common theme: that building resilience must involve institutions and governance.

To mark the launch of this research and catalyse the pertinent dialogue around the issues raised by the studies, Alert and SANSaC convened a roundtable discussion of regional experts from across South Asia in Kathmandu, Nepal. The event brought together experts, policy makers and practitioners from Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, UK and USA to discuss the complex interactions between climate change, development and security and to explore opportunities to promote peace-positive responses to climate change.



The roundtable agenda focused on **two deficiencies** highlighted by the case studies that hamper effective responses to the double-headed threat of climate change and security:

1. **Gaps in knowledge** about the social, political and security impacts of climate change in South Asia.

*"We need to generate knowledge on how conflict could accelerate climate vulnerability and erode adaptation capacity, and undertake research on identifying the linkages between climate resilience and human security."*

Mr Batu Uprety, Expert Member of the Climate Change Council

2. **Weak capacity** among government and intergovernmental institutions to address these issues.

*"Even though government ministries may have a stake in addressing climate change, the capacity of the government to coordinate between different ministries and departments remains a concern and challenge."*

Dr Sabita Thapa, DFID's Climate Change Advisor in Nepal.

### **"RESILIENCE IS RESILIENCE"**



The roundtable was opened by a keynote welcome from **Dan Smith**, Secretary General of International Alert. In his introduction, Dan Smith emphasized the importance of thinking about the impact of climate change on four critical systems - supply of water, food security, energy availability and natural resources.

He stressed that responding to the challenge of climate change is about building resilience not simply to specific climate hazards in isolation, but in those systems on which people everywhere depend.

"Resilience against one thing strengthens the capacity of a society to ride out other storms. If a community is resilient against the impact of climate change, then it is also probably quite resilient to the risk of conflict, to the impact of external economic shocks", he concluded.

[Dan Smith on climate change and security in South Asia - YouTube](#)

## **UNDERSTANDING COMPLEXITY: “INEQUALITY AND INEQUITY IS AT THE HEART OF VULNERABILITY”**

*“We all need to understand that adaptation to climate change is not only about specific responses to climate change. It is also about understanding levels of uncertainty, and how to make decisions in these situations which do no harm in conflict contexts.” Mr Joydeep Gupta*

The first session of the roundtable focused on understanding the complex ways in which climate change interacts with existing challenges to sustainable development and peace in South Asia.

Participants discussed:

1. The politics of **cross-boundary water sharing** in light of climate-induced increased water stresses and the importance of adopting a regional approach
2. The increased patterns of **migration**, both internally within a country and regionally across countries as a result of environmental change and the need for migration to be more comprehensively considered in climate change plans and policies.



Opening the conversation on the complexity of climate change, **Mr Ali Tauqeer Sheikh**, Director of CDKN and CEO of LEAD Pakistan, highlighted the value of such a multi-sectorial discussion given the absence of any regional frameworks dealing with climate change, development and security in a joined-up manner in South Asia.

Pertinent challenges requiring further research and dialogue were identified as: politics of cross-boundary water sharing in South Asia; the increased patterns of climate-related migration; the rising incidents of extreme events in the region and their devastating impacts on health; the challenges of food security; and South Asia’s weak voice in the global climate negotiations and processes.

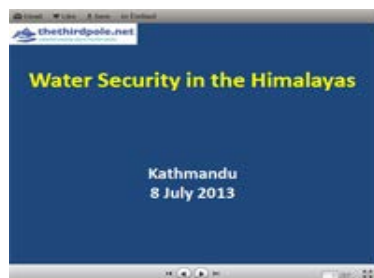
On the issue of migration, Mr Sheikh emphasised that we should not be talking about ‘climate refugees’, but rather about people who due to various reasons, including climate and environmental ones, can’t return to their homes. On cross-border water management, Mr Sheikh stressed that the issue must be seen as a cross-border political issue, not just an ecosystem issue.

Underlining the importance of understanding political-economy and social dynamics when looking at climate resilience, Mr Sheikh remarked, **“inequality and inequity is at the heart of greater vulnerability and uneven economic development and accelerated growth rates in South Asia are adding to vulnerabilities.”**

Discussing the complex interplay between climate change and security, **Mr Joydeep Gupta**, Project Director of The Third Pole pointed to the climate blind nature of cross-boundary water sharing agreements in South Asia. 1960 Indus Water Treaty was cited as a case in point that fails to account for reduced waters flows resulting from climate change. The treaty is drawn up around actual amounts of water (43 million acre feet) rather than percentages of water flow. This spells trouble in the face of fluctuating levels of water flow which we are now seeing.



"How are national and regional climate change institutions equipped and informed to address instability in fragile states?" he asked. "Very, very badly" was his candid response. As a representative of the media, Mr Gupta also used the platform to emphasise the important role of the media. Working in silos and failure to effectively engage the media often results in media stories fuelling mistrust, when they could be utilised to promote greater community awareness, understanding and trust.



He closed by reiterating that, "We all need to understand that adaptation to climate change is not only about specific responses to climate change. It is also about understanding levels of uncertainty and how to make decisions in these situations which do no harm in conflict contexts. To understand the breadth of the challenge, we need to stop preaching to the choir and reach out to people who don't think like us. This includes more engagement of the media and private sector."

**Dr Md Nadiruzzaman**, Project Manager of the Munich Re Foundation - United Nations University Project grounded the discussion in local realities by sharing his personal insights from his work at the community level with fishing communities in Bangladesh.

He noted, "When you talk about climate change, you ignore the other stressors that make life uninhabitable for people. There are different challenges in people's lives such as politics, power structures and security, and climate change is only one stressor."



**Dr Michael Werz**, Senior Fellow at the Centre for American Progress warned that business as usual cannot continue in light of declining agriculture, food security, migration, massive urbanisation and the asymmetrical nature of conflicts. He noted that the "three Ds" from the Cold War security paradigm - defence, diplomacy and development - are not sufficient to deal with climate change", making the case for innovation and new thinking to address new and complex challenges posed such as urbanisation.

Dr Werz stressed, **"We have a collective responsibility to make sure that the outcome of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is better than the outcome of the 20<sup>th</sup> century."**

## ***BUILDING RESILIENCE: BUILDING PEACE***

Session 2 of the roundtable explored the peacebuilding potential of effective adaptation to climate and environmental change.

### Three themes emerged from the discussion:

1. There is still a weak understanding of the relationship between vulnerability to climate change and to conflict and therefore this knowledge gap and evidence base needs to be further strengthened.
2. Supporting adaptation and resilience cannot be targeted on specific actions responding to specific threats.
3. Climate change can offer a political space where other stakeholders can come together to not only discuss problems but also talk through solutions on issues related to food, water, land and other natural resources that are potential areas for conflict



"For addressing climate change in a country like Nepal, which has gone through a decade-long conflict, we really need to have a balanced approach. This is about a top-down model as well as bottom-up planning. It also sometimes has to be a deliberative process. Improved governance lies at the very heart of balancing these two processes", said **Dr Sabita Thapa** DFID's Climate Change Advisor in Nepal, while discussing DFID's approach and thinking on climate change.



**Mr Batu Uprety**, Expert Member of the Climate Change Council spoke of the lack of common understanding and awareness of the concepts of adaptation and resilience. He agreed that understanding climate change required broader response analyses which factor in conflict, evidence of what works, capacity building and appropriate training to relevant national institutions tasked with adaptation actions.

Drawing on the Nepali context, he identified three practical obstacles to these which require attention. Firstly, the Ministry of Environment tends to be smaller and political less powerful than other ministries, making it harder to generate political will to collaborate across ministries. Secondly, there is insufficient knowledge and capacity at all levels of government to address these linked challenges of climate change and human security. Thirdly, there is insufficient evidenced-based research on climate change, resilience and human security upon which to base joined-up responses.



World Bank Nepal's Disaster Risk Management Specialist, **Mr Anil Pokhrel**, deliberated on the World Bank's efforts to build resilience in Nepal through the Pilot Programme for Climate Resilience (PPCR).

Since 2009, the World Bank, IFC and ADB has been supporting the government of Nepal in implementing the PPCR, which Mr Pokhrel described has five components namely: the two axes of too much water and too little water, technical assistance to bringing climate change and risk management into development programming, the private sector and endangered species.



## **A PATCHWORK OF IDEAS**



*International Alert's Dominic de Ville opens the discussion*

*"The reality is that we are divided into countries, and within countries divided into states, and for climate change we need to work within those political realities." Mr Fawad Khan*



*Anil Pokhrel, Lydia Powell, Michael Werz, Batu Krishna Uprety*

Participants identified the following themes, through lively debate and discussion, as playing a key role in addressing climate-security links.

### **1. Governance**

Good governance is essential for preventing and mitigating environmental security issues however, there are important challenges that governments face.

Ali Sheikh noted, "Whatever adaptation is happening is very autonomous. It is not a result of government policies but is in spite of government policies ...Whereas we are learning to live with uncertainties; the governments in the region have not. The institutions continue to work in a very insular fashion."

Sabita Thapa argued that overcoming the hurdles of insulation requires taking lessons from the micro-level to the macro-level in the policy area and making the institutions more porous so that they are able to talk to each other nationally and regionally.

### **2. Collaboration with the Media**

Reflecting on the role of the media in climate change, Joydeep Gupta observed that think tanks, NGOs and policymakers often complain about the limited media space granted to climate change issues. While this is partially true, there is also the case that the research communication from these groups does not have sufficient news value.

According to Gupta, "Non-journalists need to understand that the media, especially today, in this crowded media space, needs news-value information for any report to go through. The media is not an advocacy tool. The media is a news tool, a tool for news dissemination. So any information that policymakers, think tanks, NGOs want to give in the area of climate change has to have news value!"



*Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, Major General Muniruzzaman, Sabita Thapa*



*International Alert's Janani Vivekananda*

### 3. Role of the Middle class

Michael Werz asserted, "It is important to have marginalised voices in policy discussions but what is absent and essential is the middle class who are the biggest problem for climate change but can politically mobilise."

Ali Sheikh pointed out that the middle class are not sensitive enough to climate change and for decades it has been their consumption pattern that is causing resource depletion.

Lydia Powell, Head of the Centre for Resources Management at the Observer Research Foundation remarked, "It is the middle class that needs to learn how to adapt to a low carbon lifestyle."

### 4. Cross-boundary water sharing

On the controversial issue of water sharing across South Asian countries, Joydeep Gupta argued that responses would not work if we continued to think in traditional political boundary terms but instead we needed to start thinking in river basin terms.

However, "the reality is that we are divided into countries, and within countries divided into states, and for climate change we need to work within those political realities", reasoned Fawad Khan, Senior Economist at the Institute for Social and Environmental Transition (ISET).

### 5. Involvement of other key stakeholder groups

Major General Muniruzzaman, President of the Bangladesh Institute for Peace and Security Studies, argued for the increased involvement of the military in the state's response mechanisms and policies related to climate change. "The military not only has expertise and organisational capacity, it also has some of the key capacities needed to cope with the challenges of climate change particularly in terms of large refugee movements, crisis health management, and disaster risk management", said the Major General.

Ali Sheikh however cautioned, "Climate change might be a security issue, but each security issue is not a military issue." He further noted that civilian infrastructure is not strong enough to respond to climate risks and disasters, which is why the military is called in, especially for humanitarian relief operations. However, this further erodes civilian capacity."

Sabita Thapa brought in the private sector to the discussions by stating that the engagement of the private sector needs to be considered, especially in light of economic growth potentials of South Asian countries and climate-resilient livelihood opportunities the private sector can provide.

## **CONCLUSION: SOLUTIONS AS COMPLEX AS THE PROBLEMS**



*Click to listen to podcast of the event*

*"One-time solutions will not work as they lack in complexity. The solutions have to be as complex as the problem." Dr Michael Werz*

**Participants identified the following as key areas to frame the argument for action on risks linked to climate change and security:**

1. **Governance** – Understanding and factoring in governance into climate change adaptation policy and practice is a priority. Governance within South Asian countries is a key area for action, given that government departments and institutions continue to work in silos. There is also limited capacity for coordinated action at the local level. Capacity-building for better communication and cooperation among government and intergovernmental institutions is therefore important to strengthen responses to climate change and security.
2. **More research and dissemination** – There is wide consensus that there remain significant gaps in knowledge about the social, political and security impacts of climate change in South Asia – especially at the local and subnational levels, and around areas where progress is being made. Knowledge generation and evidence on the links between climate change and security is therefore still relevant and essential for those working in the areas of climate change and security. More emphasis needs to be laid on the mechanisms by which research findings are communicated and disseminated.
3. **Incentives for political will and cooperation** – Political interests in South Asia are predominantly sovereign rather than regional. However, the nation-state is not the appropriate way to tackle climate change, especially in light of the conflict potential of shared regional resources such as water. Political will that considers these regional security issues is therefore necessary for effective action.

## **NEXT STEPS**

**International Alert and SANSAC will continue to explore and raise awareness around these complex issues of climate change and security through ongoing dialogue**

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**REGIONAL EXPERT MEETING**

**Understanding Complexity, Building Resilience:  
Strengthening Responses to Climate Variability in South Asia**

**Event Agenda**

<b>10:30-11:00</b>	<b>Coffee and Registration:</b>
<b>11:00 – 12:00</b>	<b>Welcome and Keynote by Dan Smith, International Alert</b>
<b>12:00-13:30</b>	<b>Session 1: Understanding Complexity</b> <b>Chair: Major General Muniruzzamun, Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies</b>  <b>Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, Leadership for Environment and Development Pakistan</b>  <b>Joydeep Gupta, The Third Pole</b>  <b>Sabita Thapa, Department for International Development, Nepal</b>  <b>Md Nadiruzzaman, International Centre for Climate Change and Development</b>
<b>13:30-14:30</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>14:30-16:15</b>	<b>Session 2: Building Resilience, Building Peace</b> <b>Chair: Lydia Powell, Observer Research Foundation</b>  <b>Anil Pokhrel, World Bank, Nepal</b>  <b>Michael Werz, Centre for American Progress</b>  <b>Batu Uprety, Climate Change Council</b>
<b>16:15-16:30</b>	<b>Coffee Break</b>
<b>16:30-17:30</b>	<b>Plenary Discussion and Wrap-Up</b> <b>Chair: Johann Rebert, International Alert</b>

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

#	Name	Organisation	Position
1	M. Ali T. Sheikh	Asia Climate & Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) and LEAD Pakistan	Director (CDKN) and Chief Executive Officer (LEAD)
2	Dr Anand Kumar	Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses	Associate Fellow
3	Mr Anil Pokhrel	World Bank	Disaster Risk Management Specialist
4	Dr Arvind Kumar	India Water Foundation	President
5	Dr Batu Krishna Uprety	Climate Change Council	Expert Member
6	Mr Daniel Oakes	PACOM / US Embassy	Civil Affairs Planner
7	Mr Dominic de Ville	International Alert	Country Manager
6	Mr Fawad Khan	Institute for Social and Environmental Transition (ISET) - Pakistan	Senior Economist
9	Ms Geetha De Silva	South Asia Policy and Research Institute (SAPRI)	Director of Research
10	Hannah Morrill	Harvard University	Environmental science and public policy
11	Ms Janani Vivekananda	International Alert	Manager, Climate Change and Security Programme
12	Dr Janpeter Schilling	International Alert	Programme Officer
13	Mr Johann Rebert	International Alert	Country Director
14	Mr Joydeep Gupta	China Dialogue	Project Director (South Asia)
15	Dr Lydia Powell	Observer Research Foundation	Head, Centre for Resources Management
16	Dr Michael Werz	Centre for American Progress	Senior Fellow
17	Major General Muniruzzaman	Bangladesh Institute for Peace and Security Studies	President
18	Dr Md Nadiruzzaman	Munich Re Foundation - United Nations University (MRF-UNU) Project International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD)	Project Manager
19	Ms Netra Sharma	United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	NRM and GCC Programs Specialist
20	Ms Nisha Pandey	International Alert	Senior Programme Officer
21	Dr Ramji Neupane	International Alert	Director of Programmes
22	Dr Sabita Thapa	Department for International Development (DFID)	Climate Change Advisor
23	Mr Shanker Khagi	United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	Development Program Specialist
24	Ms Shreya Mitra	International Alert	Programme Officer
25	Ms Stephanie Borsboom	The World Bank	Operations Officer