



CARE International Humanitarian Brief

TACKLING EMERGENCIES IN AN ERA OF CLIMATE DISRUPTION: Reducing risk and building resilience for the poor and vulnerable

Summary

This brief puts forward the following key messages on the links between climate change, emergencies and humanitarian actions in the context of the World Humanitarian Summit process:

- CARE seeks a world of hope, tolerance and social justice, where poverty has been overcome. Climate change increasingly undermines this objective and increasingly erodes development progress resulting in a great injustice;
- There is an overwhelming scientific consensus that climate change increasingly brings adverse impacts to people's livelihoods, in particular those of poor and vulnerable people who have contributed least to the problem, including the ecosystems they depend on;
- The footprint of climate change in triggering prolonged humanitarian crises is also expected to grow;
- The higher the level of global warming, the more severe the impacts on people will be, which is why cutting fossil fuel emissions and preparing for and dealing with climate change impacts are central also to humanitarian missions

This brief further offers the following key recommendations on the World Humanitarian Summit process:

- Adopt a comprehensive climate risk management approach across the emergency development spectrum;
- Address the needs and capacities of the most vulnerable in climate and disaster action;
- Implement a gender equitable approach that addresses structural inequalities;
- Scale-up financial resources for humanitarian action, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and climate adaptation while avoiding double-counting towards commitments; and
- Add the humanitarian voice to the calls for a rapidly decarbonized world, and adapt its operations accordingly.

Overview

Climate Change increases disasters and its impacts

In the past decade, disasters have continued to exact a heavy toll across the world with over 700 thousand lives lost, 1.7 billion people affected and economic losses of USD 1.4 trillion. It is estimated that while 70% of deaths are caused by earthquakes, climate-related disasters now account for over 80% of all disaster events and contribute enormously to economic losses and short and long-term population displacement. UNISDR also assessed that in the past 10 years 87% of disasters have been climate-related.ⁱ The most recent Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction concluded that “through changing temperatures, precipitation and sea levels, amongst other factors, global climate change is already modifying hazard levels and exacerbating disaster risks.”ⁱⁱ

The global average temperature has already warmed by more than 0.8 degrees Celsius, with already visible impacts across the globe. In many regions, in particular developing countries, this has already triggered a higher warming level. The increasing trend in extreme weather events is consistent with what climate scientists have been predicting for many years. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report stresses that risks associated with extreme weather are increasing with rising temperatures. Heat waves are already common, and will become even more so, and dangerous floods and landslides will be triggered more intensely as storm winds become more violent, droughts intensify and rainfall increases.ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, other climatic changes such as slow-onset events (e.g. glacial melting, ocean acidification and sea-level rise) will continue to add additional stress to vulnerable communities, degrading the ecosystems they depend on. Managing ecosystems to conserve and improve their health is crucial for sustaining the various ecosystem services important to human well-being. Healthy ecosystems also act as buffers, increasing the resilience of natural and human systems to climate change impacts and disasters.^{iv}

Climate risks significantly increase at levels of warming above 1.5 degrees Celsius

Keeping warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels could significantly limit the global risks of climate change, as research points to the fact that a temperature rise between 1.5 and 2 degrees exponentially increases the risks.^v Worryingly, under the current trajectory of global emissions – putting us on a course of potential global temperature increase of 4 or more degrees Celsius – large areas of the planet will likely become inhospitable or uninhabitable due to sea level rise, desertification and glacial retreat, which in turn will all contribute to increasing the risk of human mobility^{vi} and threats for human security.^{vii} Thus, continued emission of greenhouse gases increases the likelihood of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems.^{viii}

More frequent disasters will transform societies to a reality of permanent crisis

As climate change interacts with the social, economic and political landscape, countries will risk instability and, at worst, violent conflict. Resource scarcity, such as water shortages and food

insecurity, exacerbated by climate change, will increase conflict, especially when combined with other factors, including marginalization and economic and social grievances^{ix}. Loss and damage from widespread climate impacts will increase, leading to more human migration and increasingly severe and frequent humanitarian disasters.

The increasing frequency of disasters is transforming some highly vulnerable countries and communities that once experienced cyclical or isolated climatic shocks, to a state of permanent and protracted crisis where emergency becomes the new norm. Greater numbers of people in low-income countries, as well as highly poor and marginal communities in other countries, are now increasingly vulnerable to the loss of livelihoods and assets from climate-exacerbated impacts.

In conflict-affected areas, climate disasters create complex emergencies that lead to more costly and comprehensive responses. For example, some research suggests that climate change helped create the conditions for war in Syria, through deteriorating agricultural conditions caused by an unprecedented drought between 2006 and 2010, which contributed to more than 1 million farmers to flee to cities.^x Climate change poses a formidable challenge for countries to continue to deliver development, as recurrent disasters continually erode assets.

Climate change increases resource needs, but proactive investments pay off

Overall there is also a continued gap in terms of meeting humanitarian aid needs.^{xi} The costs for climate change adaptation, and the residual loss and damage in developing countries, are expected to increase significantly.^{xii} Many analyses have also shown that investing in disaster preparedness is much more effective than emergency response assistance. This can be similar for adaptation interventions, as research in a CARE programme in Niger has shown, for example.^{xiii} This underlines the crucial importance of investments in DRR and climate change adaptation as a means of crisis prevention, which has also been stressed by a report recently prepared for G7 foreign ministers.^{xiv} The fact that climate change has mostly been caused by a minority of wealthier populations in the world should also be reflected in the generation of additional resources.

Tackling the needs of the most vulnerable requires a comprehensive approach

It is estimated that by 2030 around 200-300 million people in the countries most exposed to increased incidence of floods, droughts and heat waves – mainly in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia – will fall in the extremely poor category making them particularly vulnerable to climate-related disasters.^{xv} Further, the IPCC concluded that “climate change will amplify existing risks and create new risks for natural and human systems. Risks are unevenly distributed and are generally greater for disadvantaged people and communities in countries at all levels of development.”^{xvi}

Tackling the needs of the most vulnerable people requires a comprehensive approach involving action on climate change, DRR, ecosystem management, sustainable development, resilience

and humanitarian action. The way the international community deals with the increase and severity of climate-related disasters and climate disruption must now change, as business as usual is no longer an option.

Role of 2015 policy agreements

The international agreements to be reached on the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals and the future climate change agreement under the UNFCCC, together with the new Sendai agreement on DRR and the Financing for Development (FFD) process, are an opportunity to drive forward ambitious action and a more integrated approach. For example, governments “recognize the need for the coherence of developmental and humanitarian finance to ensure more timely, comprehensive, appropriate and cost-effective approaches to the management and mitigation of natural disasters and complex emergencies” in the recent FFD outcome.^{xvii}

International agreements to be reached on the Sustainable Development Goals must be people-centered and ensure a focus on the poorest and most marginalized/at-risk people who bear the highest burden of disasters. Efforts must focus on protecting livelihoods and productive assets, as well as lives. Synergies and cooperation should also be promoted on a more technical level. One such example is the UNFCCC Loss and Damage Mechanism’s invitation to collaborate on assessing the capacities of humanitarian and disaster risk management systems related to climate change loss and damage.^{xviii}

The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, however, will also have to consider the humanitarian implications if these agreements are not (yet) sufficient to avoid catastrophic climate change and to build sufficient adaptive capacity among the poor and vulnerable.

CARE’s Position and Experience

CARE’s emergency response and adaptation to climate impacts

In recent years CARE has witnessed first-hand a tangible rise in the frequency and severity of extreme weather and climate-related disasters that directly and negatively impact the poor and most vulnerable people we work with. CARE, along with partners, has striven for decades to fight poverty and injustice, but is coming to realize that efforts to promote sustainable development will amount to nothing unless the world tackles climate change seriously. Climate change amplifies the risks facing people who are already marginalized due to inequalities, and at the centre of CARE’s concern is transforming the drivers that perpetuate vulnerability and injustice by focusing on human dignity and increasing women’s empowerment.

As one of the world’s largest development and humanitarian organizations, CARE works in 90 countries around the globe supporting 880 poverty-fighting development and humanitarian aid projects that have reached over 72 million people in 2014. In 2009, a CARE report mapped emerging trends and risk hotspots in the context of the humanitarian implications of climate

change.^{xix} The report [“In Search of Shelter”](#) investigated the linkages between climate change and migration and displacement.^{xx}

CARE’s experience in [community-based adaptation \(CBA\)](#) across different sectors and regions is well documented and provides important lessons learned.^{xxi} Tools such as the [Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment \(CVCA\)](#) or Participatory Scenario Planning (PSP) also provide useful approaches in the context of preparing for and responding to disasters.

CARE has also developed climate change policy positions which, in line with a comprehensive risk management approach and pursuing climate justice, cut across the areas of cutting emissions, increasing efforts for adaptation and DRR, addressing climate change loss and damage and promoting a human rights-based and gender equitable approach.^{xxii}

Example: Integrated DRR and adaptation plans reduce risks in Bangladesh

CARE Bangladesh, has been working on improving the adaptive capacities and resilience of char dwellers to disaster and climate change impacts. An integrated CBA/DRR approach that combines traditional knowledge with innovative strategies has been adopted to address current vulnerability while building adaptive capacity to face new and dynamic challenges. In Char areas, the project promotes low-cost measures centered on building the resilience of both households and communities, through simple agricultural technologies/tolerant crop varieties, infrastructure development, energy efficient technologies and local/traditional resource management practices.

Policy Recommendations:

- **Comprehensive climate risk management approach across the emergency development spectrum by**
 - Making mandatory climate- and disaster-proofing programs against risks, including “build back better” in concrete disaster/emergency responses (e.g. through protecting ecosystem and environment functions that are critical to livelihood adaptation); and rebuilding infrastructure and housing in a climate-resilient manner;
 - Promoting multi-risk planning frameworks cutting across ministries and sectors involved in humanitarian response, DRR, climate change and development planning;
 - Increasing the coordination and cooperation among policymakers and practitioners in humanitarian work, DRR and climate change adaptation, and longer-term development, across all levels, including assessing the capacity of humanitarian and disaster risk management systems for emergency preparedness and response; and explicitly increasing resilience during post climate-related disaster recovery, rebuilding and rehabilitation;
 - Improving and increasing the use of innovative crisis modifier approaches in development programmes in climate risk hotspots; and

- Improving effectiveness and collaboration on early-warning systems for humanitarian crises (including climate-related scenario analyses and stress testing) between humanitarian, development and climate experts, including through the UNFCCC Loss and Damage Mechanism’s work in this regard, and in approaches such as the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) system.
- **Address the needs and capacities of the most vulnerable in climate and disaster action by**
 - Prioritising climate change adaptation and DRR finance for the most vulnerable populations and community-based approaches that address their critical livelihood needs;
 - Strengthening resilience of social safety nets against increasing climate-related disasters;
 - Promoting the use of comprehensive participatory vulnerability and capacity assessments, and monitoring and learning tools;
 - Strengthening climate information services as part of an improved package of information provision to the most vulnerable; and
 - Strengthening ecosystem management policies and practices in order to increase the resilience of natural systems and human societies to climate change impacts.
- **Implement a gender equitable approach that addresses structural inequalities¹ by**
 - Promoting gender sensitive analyses of capacities and vulnerabilities to climate related disasters;
 - Addressing the causes of women’s vulnerability, including access to basic services, natural resources, social protection and insurance, and opportunities to make a living;
 - Initiating adaptation planning needs that will be led by communities and promote gender-equitable, rights-based and participatory action; and
 - Using the gender marker tool along the programming cycle to assess and increase the level of gender considerations in humanitarian action.
- **Scale-up financial resources for humanitarian action, DRR and climate adaptation by**
 - Mobilizing significant additional resources to respond to humanitarian emergencies, as well as DRR and adaptation needs, including the use of mechanisms that can generate true additional finance (such as revenues from international sea and air transport), while avoiding double-counting towards distinct commitments;
 - Increasing the flexibility of humanitarian funding to better cut across the near-term emergency and longer-term development perspective; and
 - Increasing the ability for domestic civil society actors (national and local) to access humanitarian aid, DRR and CCA fund.

¹ CARE International UK, 2014: A call to action on gender and humanitarian reform
<https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/node/468286>

- **Humanitarian organizations should add the humanitarian voice to their calls for a rapidly decarbonized world, and adapt its operations so that they**
 - Engage in the growing advocacy and action movement that is pursuing fossil fuel emissions phase-out to keep global warming within the limit of 1.5 degrees;
 - Develop organizational and business models that significantly reduce emissions and integrate climate change.

ⁱ UNISDR, 2015: The economic and human impact of disasters in the last 10 years.

http://www.unisdr.org/files/42862_economichumanimpact20052014unisdr.pdf

ⁱⁱ UNISDR, 2015: Global Assessment Report 2015. Making Development Sustainable: The Future of Disaster Risk Management. http://www.preventionweb.net/english/hyogo/gar/2015/en/gar-pdf/GAR2015_EN.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). 2011. Special Report on Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation (SREX). Summary for Policy Makers, Kampala: IPCC.

^{iv} UNEP, 2009 *Copenhagen discussion series: The Role of Ecosystem Management in Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction*

^v UNFCCC, 2015: Report on the Structured Expert Dialogue on the Review 2013-2015.

<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/sb/eng/inf01.pdf>

^{vi} Henry, K. 2015: CARE, Human Mobility in the Context of Climate Change. (unpublished)

^{vii} Adger, W.N., J.M. Pulhin, J. Barnett, G.D. Dabelko, G.K. Hovelsrud, M. Levy, Ú. Oswald Spring, and C.H. Vogel, 2014: Human security. In: *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Field, C.B., V.R. Barros, D.J. Dokken, K.J. Mach, M.D. Mastrandrea, T.E. Bilir, M. Chatterjee, K.L. Ebi, Y.O. Estrada, R.C. Genova, B. Girma, E.S. Kissel, A.N. Levy, S. MacCracken, R. Mastrandrea, and L.L. White (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, pp. 755-791.

^{viii} IPCC, 2014: Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report. Summary for Policymakers.

http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/syr/AR5_SYR_FINAL_SPM.pdf

^{ix} Harris, Keen & Mitchell, 2013. When Disasters and conflicts collide. Overseas Development Institute

^x Kelley, C.P., S. Mohtadib, M. A. Canec, R. Seager, Y. Kushnir, 2015: Climate change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the recent Syrian drought. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

<http://www.pnas.org/content/112/11/3241.abstract>

^{xi} See e.g. Lattimer, C., 2015: Think Piece: Humanitarian Financing.

http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Final_Financing_Think-Piece_20140116.pdf

^{xii} UNEP, 2014: The Adaptation Gap Report. <http://www.unep.org/climatechange/adaptation/gapreport2014/>

^{xiii} Vardakoulis, O. and Nicholles, N. 2014: Managing Uncertainty: An economic evaluation of community-based adaptation in Dakoro, Niger. *Adaptation Learning Programme (ALP)*.

http://www.careclimatechange.org/files/Managing_Uncertainty_CARE_nefc_email_version.pdf

^{xiv} Adelphi et al., 2015: A new climate for peace: Taking action on climate and fragility risks.

<http://www.newclimateforpeace.org/>

^{xv} IPCC, 2014: Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report. Summary for Policymakers.

^{xvi} IPCC, 2014: Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report. Summary for Policymakers.

^{xvii} UN, 2015: Outcome document of the Third International Conference on

Financing for Development: Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/CONF.227/L.1

^{xviii} UNFCCC, 2014: Report of the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage associated with Climate Change Impacts. FCCC /SB/2014/4.

<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2014/sb/eng/04.pdf>

^{xix} CARE, 2009: Humanitarian Implications of Climate Change. Mapping emerging trends and risk hotspots. http://careclimatechange.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/CARE_Human_Implications.pdf

^{xx} CARE, 2009: In Search of Shelter. Mapping the Effects of Climate Change on Human Migration and Displacement. http://careclimatechange.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/CARE_In_Search_of_Shelter.pdf

^{xxi} CARE, 2014: Community-based adaptation in practice.

<http://careclimatechange.org/publications/community-based-adaptation-in-practice/>

^{xxii} See e.g. a recent policy position on the 2015 G7 summit: http://careclimatechange.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/CI_position_G7_May_15.pdf; Expectations towards UNFCCC COP20: <http://careclimatechange.org/publications/cop-20-building-a-fair-and-just-climate-deal-for-the-worlds-poorest-people/>