

CLIMATE-FRAGILITY RISKS IN JAPAN AND THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

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Climate-fragility risks are a major security challenge for Japan and the Asia-Pacific region. Japan can build on important lessons learned from other G7 countries such as Germany and the USA as well as its own experiences and significant strengths in fields such as Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) to address these risks. Possible ways forward are conducting a systematic risk assessment and identifying and further exploring relevant policies to address climate-fragility risks, for example by assessing Japan's development and foreign policy portfolio. In addition, long-term resilience partnerships between the G7 and countries experiencing fragility or conflict could be established.

Background

Climate change is one of the key global security challenges of the 21st century. It is a 'threat multiplier' that will increase state fragility, fuel social unrest and potentially result in violent conflict. Existing state fragility is simultaneously hampering efforts at adaptation, particularly among vulnerable populations. This threatens to lock many societies into 'fragility traps'.

Japan as part of the Group of 7 (G7) has recognized the resulting challenges for sustainable economic development, peace and stability. In April 2016, under the Japanese G7 presidency and following up to the independent report "A New Climate for Peace: Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks" commissioned by G7 members, the foreign ministers of the G7 reiterated their commitment to prioritize prevention of climate fragility risks, including taking steps to integrate climate-fragility considerations across their national governments.

To facilitate a broader discussion on climate-fragility risks in Japan and reflect and discuss the findings of the G7 report and its implications and relevance for Japan, adelphi and the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies jointly organised two expert workshops in June 2016. The first workshop took place on 14 June 2016 and brought together 31 Japanese and international experts as well as government representatives. It was followed by a workshop on 16 June 2016 with 15 participants from Japanese civil society. The workshops focused on two central topics:

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- **Climate-fragility risks for Japan and the region:** What are the direct and indirect impacts of climate change on Japan and the region? Which climate-fragility risks might emerge for Japan and the region? What role do these risks play in terms of disaster risk, energy, food and water security?
- **Ways to address climate-fragility risks:** Which experiences and approaches exist in Japan, regionally and within the G7 to address climate fragility risks and which approaches are most relevant for Japan in terms of its climate change, development and foreign policy? What are possible short and long term solutions, actions and entry points for Japan?

This workshop documentation summarises key results of the discussion. It is the first of a series of papers in 2016 that adelphi and IGES are jointly publishing in Japanese and English to foster the debate on climate-fragility risks in Japan.

Climate-fragility risks for Japan and the Asia-Pacific region

Climate risks do not play a large role in the broader political discourse in Japan. There is some discussion on how climate change might impact other countries, specifically developing countries, but climate change impacts on Japan specifically are not well reflected. For example, although extreme weather events and disasters are frequent in Japan, the link between these events and climate change are not well reported by the media and have not been part of the broader discourse. Many stakeholders perceive that local governments in Japan are much more active in addressing climate change impacts than the national government. However, risk perception seems to be slowly changing: the media has started reporting on the link between climate change and extreme weather events in Japan and the Japanese government has developed its first national adaptation plan that is based on a comprehensive climate change impact assessment.

A central challenge for discussing climate-fragility risks in Japan is terminological in nature since there are no equivalent translations for the terms fragility and resilience, which form the basis of much of the discourse around the security implications of climate change.¹ Resilience is often understood as resilient infrastructure and not as a broad concept also encompassing social, cultural, political and governance aspects. A suitable term for fragility seems to be missing completely in the Japanese language.

With these limitations in mind, the workshops focused on discussing how climate change impacts outside Japan might affect Japan and its security. The following climate-fragility risks were identified:

- 1. Food and energy import dependency from vulnerable regions:** Japan is highly dependent on food and fossil fuel imports. These dependencies make Japan vulnerable to climatic impacts in producing regions around the world. Japan is reliant on agricultural producing regions that might experience climate change-induced water scarcity.
- 2. Increasing resource competition:** Fisheries in the Asia-Pacific region are and will increasingly be impacted by climate change. Temperature rise and shifting fishing grounds will affect competition around these resources and might exacerbate already existing conflict dynamics.
- 3. Increasing fragility and conflict in the region:** Many small island states are already considered fragile today and will face existential threats as climate change impacts increase and sea levels rise. At the same time, many of the quickly developing and industrializing countries in the region are

¹ For a definition of these terms and climate-fragility risks please refer to A New Climate For Peace (www.newclimateforpeace.org)

facing multiple pressures in terms of economic inequality, rapid urbanization, environmental degradation, political instability and regional conflicts. As its impacts increase, climate change might act as a risk multiplier pushing these states towards more fragility and conflicts. This might have wide ranging implications for security in the region, for example by contributing to migration and refugee flows.

- 4. Supply chain risks:** Increasing climate change impacts and instability in the region will entail significant supply chain risks for Japan. A past example of these risks is the 2011 floods in Thailand that impacted the manufacturing capacity of many Japanese companies.

One key conclusion of the discussion around emerging risks was that climate-fragility risks are shared across the region and the globe. Japan will unlikely be able to isolate itself from these risks and will be directly and increasingly affected if no appropriate policy responses are formulated well in time. A particularly underrated and understudied security challenge is the geopolitical risks that might be exacerbated by climate change. For example, how will the role of China change as it feels the impacts of climate change more severely or what consequences will the additional stress climate change puts on the North Korean regime have? These questions remain largely unexplored, but will be key to further assess the security implications of climate change in the region.

Key experiences for addressing climate-fragility risks

During the workshops Japanese and international participants shared the following experiences that can be used as starting points and to help to address climate-fragility risks:

- 1. Risk perception is key for ambitious action:** An analysis of how Japan's position on international emission reduction targets was formed in the past shows that decision makers didn't take the risks climate change poses for Japan into account, but mainly focused on the economic costs of reduction targets. The political discourse revolved mainly around what could be done and not on what should be done. This experience underlines the need for further raising awareness and deepening the discussion on climate risks in Japan. This entails looking beyond impacts that start and end in Japan.
- 2. Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is a key strength of Japan:** Japan has a wealth of experience and lessons learned in the field of DRR. National experiences underline important challenges when addressing disaster risks. Examples of typhoon-induced flooding show that the scale of disasters today often exceeds past experience and resilience has often been reduced by demographic and out-migration trends. At the same time, Japan has been continuously investing in addressing these challenges. It has developed new early warning systems and strong local and community-based disaster risk management (DRM) approaches, and is innovating new insurance approaches for crops and building more resilient infrastructure.
- 3. Adaptation is a new and quickly developing policy field:** Japan has developed its first national adaptation plan based on a comprehensive climate change impacts assessment. This has broadened the discourse on risks in Japan and provides a basis for adaptation action. In addition to national actions, it also engages in international cooperation on the topic by supporting developing countries, and international networks and platforms. JICA already has experience in supporting adaptation planning in its partner countries. These experiences underline the need to understand adaptation as a continuous process and find creative and scientifically sound ways of dealing with uncertainty, in particular regarding data and modelling.

- 4. Fragility and conflict are key development challenges in the region:** Fragility and conflict make achieving development goals particularly challenging. Compared to other regions, the Asia-Pacific region has the highest number of active conflicts, in particular sub-national conflicts. Many donors and multilateral institutions such as the Asian Development Bank have developed concepts and approaches for addressing fragility and conflict. They understand fragility as a spectrum with states and societies that experience fragility and conflict on one side and resilient and stable states on the other. To work effectively in fragile contexts, it is important to understand the specific fragility and conflict context and design projects in conflict-sensitive ways.
- 5. Political leadership is important:** Experiences from other G7 countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany show that political leadership is particularly important to prioritize climate-fragility risks. On the international level, different countries have shown leadership by putting climate security on the agenda of various international fora and institutions, such as the UN Security Council. Different decision makers have also played an important role on the national level. For example in the US, the military and defence community was among the first to bring climate-fragility risks on the national political agenda. Last year, US Secretary of State John Kerry reiterated his commitment to tackling climate-fragility risks and advised his staff to prioritize them.

The Way forward

The workshops underlined the need for raising more awareness on climate-fragility risks and broadening the risk perception in Japan. This includes closing the terminological gap regarding fragility and resilience, and taking into account how climate change impacts in the region and the globe might impact Japanese security and vice versa. Both are crucial to communicate related concepts and consequences in Japan. The risks discussed during the workshops can serve as a starting point for a **systematic and deeper risk assessment** on how a changing climate will affect Japanese security, in particular how fragility and conflict dynamics might play out in the region. This should include specific and well researched case studies that have been shown to be very effective in raising the awareness of policy makers. A particular focus should be on the geopolitical implications climate change might have in the region, for example in regard to China's foreign policy or the stability of the regime in North Korea. To show the relevance of climate-fragility risks it might also help to show the economic risk these entail, for example in terms of food and energy security or supply chain risks.

At the same time, Japan has a lot to offer to more effectively address climate-fragility risks in the region and around the globe. It is a global leader in DRR and is increasingly investing in climate change adaptation. These are good entry points for action on climate-fragility risks, for example by sharing experiences or initiating pilot projects. Japan could take a stronger leadership role by making climate-fragility risks a priority for DRR and climate change adaptation action. This could start with its own development cooperation, but also encompass its engagement with multilateral institutions such as the UN and regional institutions such as the ADB. To this end, a **systematic and thorough assessment of relevant policies** to identify and explore relevant approaches, lessons learned and entry points for addressing climate-fragility risks should be done. This should include Japan's development cooperation, its activities on climate change and the environment, and its foreign policy portfolio. Possible first regional entry points could be Japan's engagement with ASEAN and its Pacific Islands Leaders Meeting. These activities should be linked to the on-going G7 efforts in these areas, in particular the global knowledge platform.²

Another possible way forward that was discussed during the workshops was the idea of **long-term resilience partnerships**. The idea is for one or more G7 countries to engage with one or a group of

² www.newclimateforpeace.org.

countries experiencing fragility or conflict on a deeper and more long-term basis. The goal would be to increase the resilience of the affected country to a broad range of shocks and stressors by jointly identifying priority actions and on that basis provide support.



Expert workshop, 14 June 2016, Tokyo. Photo credits: Junko Watanabe



Expert workshop, 16 June 2016, Tokyo. Photo credits: Junko Watanabe

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