



REGIONAL DIALOGUE ON CLIMATE SECURITY IN NORTHERN CENTRAL AMERICA (GUATEMALA, HONDURAS, EL SALVADOR)

SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

On 1 December, **adelphi**, the **UN University's Centre for Policy Research**, and the **UN's Climate Security Mechanism** co-hosted a **Regional Dialogue on Climate Security in Northern Central America** (NCA). The event was attended by experts from UN offices and NGOs in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, as well as international climate-security experts.

The event was an opportunity for experts to highlight specific and highly localised dynamics in NCA, but also to compare experiences across different cases. It was divided in a session identifying climate-security risks, and a second session focusing on potential solutions.

CROSS-CUTTING CLIMATE-RELATED SECURITY RISKS

A series of input presentations from in-country and regional experts from UN agencies, regional organisations, NGOs and academia described the following cross-cutting risks deriving from the interlinkages between climate change impacts and the nexus of poverty, social conflict, violence and migration in NCA:

- **Livelihoods:** the overwhelming consensus was that climate change is having a dramatic effect on livelihoods, with secondary impacts on conflict risks. In some contexts, the agricultural sector was most directly affected, in others the impact was predominantly on fishing or land tenure. Generally, however, addressing the loss of livelihoods was seen as a crucial aspect of the climate-security challenge.
- **Population movements:** NCA already has high rates of displacement and migration. Climate change impacts in the form of extreme weather events, loss of land, and erratic rainfall exacerbate these trends. These not only create tensions over scarce land in some areas, but also contribute to rapid urbanisation across the region. Cities are growing very quickly, and are home to some of the most violent criminal groups.
- **Criminality:** large-scale criminal networks pose serious risks to the social fabric, stability and good governance across the region. In many ways, climate change is affecting livelihoods further by threatening young people's prospects, driving people into informal economies, and strengthening criminal networks. In turn, criminal organisations tend to strip state institutions of authority and resources, creating a vicious cycle that can reinforce violence.
- **Lack of investment in human capital:** Deeply rooted social divides, especially around access to land and natural resources, can be exacerbated by gaps in institutional capacities and uncontrolled extraction of resources. This also contributes to prolonged humanitarian needs, the drivers of which are not tackled.



ENTRY POINTS FOR RESPONSES

The second half of the event focused on entry points and possible solutions to the above risks:

- 1 Inclusivity/participation:** the event highlighted the extent to which marginalised voices, particularly those of indigenous people, youth and women, can be even more left out as climate change creates new risks. At the same time, climate change also offers an opportunity to draw attention to problems of inequality, marginalisation and basic rights. Bringing more viewpoints (including from rural areas) into the discussion was seen as crucial for getting a full picture of climate-driven risks.
- 2 Resource governance:** planned and proactive responses by national governments are crucial in reducing the risks posed by climate change. Governance plays a key role in addressing livelihood losses, protecting vulnerable populations, and devising climate-sensitive approaches to agriculture and disaster response. The reactivation of economy after Covid-19 is an opportunity as it will touch rural, urban, energy, mobility and across other sectors.
- 3 SDGs:** while governments may wish to avoid securitising climate change via direct climate-security discussions, the SDGs' "leave no one behind" agenda can offer a more palatable entry point to get to the key issues as it allows to focus on the inequalities resulting from climate-driven changes and governance responses.
- 4 Data and Systems approach:** several experts from NGOs and UN agencies demonstrated the extraordinary data they collected at the local level, which showed the differential impacts that climate change is having across the region. The key challenge of how to gather and synthesise local, national and regional data within a common system, however, remains. Isolating climate-driven risks is not helpful but understanding how climate contributes to a broader set of systemic changes promotes more realistic policy responses. As an example, the Secure Salvador plan developed a highly localised mapping of risks, thus also giving a sense of how these interacted at a country level.
- 5** As responses are developed, considering the full spectrum **across Humanitarian - Sustainable Development - Peace** will capture the various response mechanisms and consider the short, medium- and long-term timescales related to the drivers of humanitarian need and root causes for instability.
- 6 Investing in communities:** many participants agreed that viewing climate security risks from a human-centric angle would be key to provide lasting solutions. Investing in the capacities of marginalised communities, among others by responding to the education needs of young people in a targeted way and capitalising on existing knowledge and ample natural assets, will allow them to build livelihoods and resilient local economies in the long term.
- 7 Differentiated view of security:** while climate-security risks are evident in the region, with a look at political realities, participants pointed towards the need of contextualising security. Finding an appropriate narrative should avoid unintended consequences such as opening additional gateways to criminalising community groups or framing challenges for young people primarily as a public security issue.

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The **Climate Security Expert Network**, which comprises some 30 international experts, supports the **Group of Friends on Climate and Security** and the **Climate Security Mechanism of the UN** system by synthesising scientific knowledge and expertise, advising on entry points for building resilience to climate-security risks, and helping to strengthen a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities of addressing climate-related security risks.

www.climate-security-expert-network.org

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