

Humanitarian Policy and Practice in a Changing Climate

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New and innovative thinking is needed to link short-term emergency humanitarian responses to longer-term sustainable adaptation to climate change. Climate change is expected to cause an increase in extreme events such as droughts, floods and cyclones. Traditional humanitarian assistance has primarily focused on short-term relief and recovery in the immediate aftermath of disasters. However, this approach neither addresses the underlying causes of vulnerability nor sufficiently supports adaptation to a changing climate. The project “Courting Catastrophe? Humanitarian Policy and Practice in a Changing Climate” addresses this gap.

The project draws on experiences and lessons from seven countries in Africa and Asia, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan. It has been carried out with collaborating partners at the Norwegian Red Cross, the Development Fund, the Red Cross Climate Centre (the Netherlands), Mekelle University (Ethiopia), Comsats Institute of Information Technology (Pakistan) and the Institute for Development Studies in Brighton (United Kingdom).



Kenya

Bangladesh

Nepal



Zambia

Ethiopia

Pakistan

A study of social protection was also carried out in **MALAWI**.

Diversity of approaches examined:

- Food Aid /Food for work
- Resilience: Integrated food security and livelihood building
- Livelihood recovery
- Participatory games
- Forecast based financing
- Productive safety net/social protection
- Disaster risk reduction/disaster risk management
- Preparedness

Key findings across case studies:

First, vulnerability is complex, dynamic and specific to each situation, and may vary greatly between individuals within the same villages. Thus, our approaches need to integrate a sound understanding of the environmental, social and political factors shaping vulnerability in each particular context.

Second, the root causes for vulnerability must be addressed. This implies that humanitarian interventions must be conceived as a part of, and contributing to, ongoing development processes and this must be reflected in their planning and design.

Third, power relations are important drivers of differential vulnerability patterns at the local level. This underscores the importance of socio-political factors in determining local vulnerability and how these shape humanitarian policy processes and their outcomes.

Fourth, poorly designed humanitarian interventions risk reinforcing local vulnerability patterns. Importantly, such interventions are never neutral but interfere with the pre-existing social and political structures by which some people may benefit more than others. In consequence, also programs that are primarily designed to respond to acute humanitarian needs, need to take possible implications on longer term vulnerability patterns into account.

Fifth, preparedness and planning are key for avoiding protracted crises and ensuring early response. Investing in crisis prevention and preparedness pays off, and knowledge about the local vulnerability context before the crises hits buys time and is key when designing a humanitarian response.

These lessons are being used to help develop guiding principles for future humanitarian interventions that can better contribute to climate change adaptation by using information about the complex climate and local vulnerability contexts in operational decisions.

Project objectives:

The objective is to critically examine the scope and practical ways in which humanitarian responses may contribute to adaptation to climate change.

Specifically, the project seeks to:

1. Enhance our understanding of the long-term implications of humanitarian interventions for efforts to build long-term resilience and sustainable adaptation to climate change.
2. Identify lessons from current interventions and policy approaches, in particular regarding discrete humanitarian policy approaches that empower the voices of the vulnerable in decision-making and address long-term vulnerability.
3. Develop guidelines for how humanitarian interventions can better contribute to climate change adaptation in terms of use of information about complex climate and vulnerability contexts in operational decisions.
4. Build capacity among Norwegian research and humanitarian actors to collaboratively engage in action-oriented knowledge production regarding climate change adaptation.

Research questions:

RQ1: In what ways have past humanitarian interventions contributed to or undermined sustainable adaptation outcomes?

- What adaptation and climate knowledge do different actors have and how do power relations and conflicts of interest affect which knowledge and problem understandings are acted upon?
- How do these relations affect long-term resilience and disaster risk reduction, in particular the politics of adaptation, including equity and the negotiation of adaptation options between different groups?
- Are there aspects of promoting sustainable adaptation, which might conflict with existing humanitarian principles and practices?

RQ2: What lessons exist where current policy tools and interventions have successfully linked anticipation/early recovery and adaptation (or failed to do so)?

- What types of vulnerability information (climate, conflict, migration) is needed for planning interventions that take climate risk and vulnerability contexts into account at an early point during a disaster so that the short-term responses also contribute to sustainable adaptation in the long term?
- How have such interventions captured the differentiated vulnerability context and adaptation interests beneficiary groups (varying by age, gender and socio-economic status)?
- What is the role and limitations of humanitarian actors in advocacy and policy dialogues regarding social and political structures generating vulnerability and how do humanitarian actors contribute to policy and practice debates around adaptation and disaster risk reduction??
- In particular, are there best practice examples of interactions between humanitarian institutions, development organisations and host governments that enable addressing the principles of sustainable adaptation and in particular empowering vulnerable groups?

RQ3: How can lessons identified under RQ2 be developed in terms of general principles for staying ahead by managing climatic uncertainty and preventing related socially generated risks?

- How can guidelines best focus on soft (knowledge, social capital) and hard (infrastructure and laws) components in order to strengthen sustainable adaptation?
- How can information about the multiple stressors creating disasters (climate information, conflict, migration) be developed that is good enough to be factored into operational decision-making (and what sorts of information is relevant but not operational)?
- What modalities exist for dialogue (or are new modalities needed) to ensure that information that exists is used in humanitarian decisions?

“How we do interventions may be more important than *what* we do.” - Siri Eriksen.



**COURTING
CATASTROPHE?**

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of Life Sciences