

## Climate Change and Humanitarian Assistance – From Bad to Worse?

Looking to enrich the debate on climate change's impact on humanitarian assistance, the Permanent Representation of Germany in Rome invited Ertharin Cousin (*Executive Director - WFP*), Prof. em. Walter Kälin (*University of Bern*), Albrecht Broemme (*President - THW*) and Annett Günther (*German Federal Foreign Office*) to exchange views on the current state of climate change-sensitive programming, financing and partnering, and the respective ways forward.

### *An Urgent Need for Change*

In 2015 alone, climate change and related phenomena, such as extreme weather events, affected 280 million people worldwide. While impacting industrial and developing nations alike, climate change nevertheless disproportionately affects the poor and disadvantaged. *One person per second* is displaced due to climate change-related sudden-onset disasters; therefore, climate change-induced cross-border migration is estimated to be one of the likely megatrends of the 21st century. Humankind's vulnerability is further amplified by the poorly planned expansion of mega-cities, which often prove to be comparatively more receptive to climate change-induced havoc.

### *The Hidden Challenge: Climate Change-induced Displacement*

Climate change-related displacement is not an abstract term or future scenario – it is unfolding right now, and its impact is very likely to increase. It encompasses both internally displaced persons as well as cross-border displacement, and bears a particular risk for women and children. However, the extent of the displacement to be expected remains opaque - slow-onset disasters render precise impact forecasts challenging.

Displacement in the context of climate change is multi-causal. It comprises politics (funding shortfalls, lack of good governance and governments' responsiveness), environmental factors (disaster-proneness of regions) as well as human and social variables (poorly planned urbanisation; resilience and ability to cope with hazards). Acknowledging the human and political factors at play, the Nansen Initiative has coined the term *climate change refugees*.

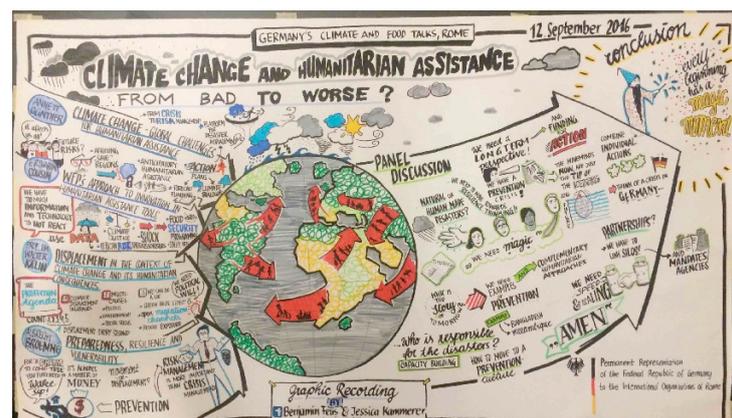
### *The Prevention Crisis and the Pattern of Humanitarian Funding*

Taking into account the magnitude of climate change's

impact and its likely increase in the future, we have to come to the realisation that sole reliance on traditional humanitarian assistance - business as usual - may force us to *save the same lives every year*. Patterns of extreme weather events are likely to affect the same regions year in and year out. As an example, climate events such as El Niño constitute a recurring risk to hard-gained accomplishments in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Climate change puts additional pressure on the humanitarian system – financially and operationally. It also renders traditional approaches, such as post-disaster relief, inadequate. Hence, from an economic perspective, it pays to invest more in prevention, rather than to respond via more costly emergency interventions after disaster has struck. Early action is *likely to save more lives* and it is also *cost-effective*.

And yet prevention is still not top of the agenda. This *prevention crisis* is based on an imbalance that favours the easiness and appeal of short-term thinking to the detriment of long-term planning. The current narrative is dominated by ad-hoc crisis management instead of considering the imperatives of effectiveness and cost efficiency by adopting a risk management approach. *Forecast scepticism* also contributes its fair share to blindsightedness and wishful thinking, resulting in likely scenarios not being acknowledged to the extent rational thinking might call for. Tightly interwoven with the prevention crisis is the broader *pattern of humanitarian funding*: after an initial, immediate crisis response, funding sharply drops – leaving only meagre resources to invest into rebuilding on the one hand and preparedness and future prevention activities on the other.



Graphic Recording of the discussion

### *Can Agenda 2030 Bring Salvation?*

The crux of the matter partly stems from the structure and organisation of the international system. Humanitarian assistance excels at an immediate response, yet longer-term support and resilience-building often lie in the field of development cooperation; a situation described as the

*humanitarian-development gap*. The term, however, purports the interpretation that the two fields interact in phases, while, in reality, they are indeed complementary. However, this differentiation still nurtures persistent silo-thinking, which too often results in a lack of cooperation between the two systems. This is further amplified by very technical challenges, such as the logics of different funding streams. In order to overcome the “gap”, *more incentives for cooperation* – also from the donors’ side – must be created, such as, for example, by providing funding that spans the humanitarian-development divide and requires collaboration between different actors. Also left to be strengthened is the cooperation between the humanitarian and development communities on the one hand, and the scientific community on the other.

Agenda 2030, with its *all-encompassing set of goals*, has the potential to resolve both the paradox of humanitarian funding and silo-thinking by emphasising inter-agency cooperation, also beyond the UN system.



Prof. Walter Kälin introduces the topic of climate change-induced displacement

### ***How to Tackle the Prevention Crisis?***

#### Action Points:

**If you want a dream to come true, you need to wake up first.** A realistic appraisal of the situation we face and the options available is paramount, especially on the parts of decision-makers. In public perception as well as policy circles, prevention must become *part of crisis-management*.

**Tell the story of tomorrow.** Preparedness and resilience-building activities often stay *below the public radar* – they are difficult to explain and do not easily render themselves to positive and eye-catching media coverage, as do post-disaster interventions. Examples of successful prevention efforts must, hence, be actively showcased to facilitate an awareness shift to long-term risk management, its potential and gains, in order to prevent further underfunding. The imperative must be to *continuously remind policymakers and public* alike that a

failure to act now may (and likely will) lead to more severe impacts of climate change in the near future. In the social media age, it should become increasingly easier to showcase failures of early action and their respective consequences. *Decision-makers will listen when their populations want them to.*

**It's always about money.** Investing in prevention is much more cost-efficient than reacting after disaster strikes. This is especially important as the humanitarian system is already faced with underfunding and, subsequently, ever-demanding capacity needs. The *cost card* must be effectively dealt to encourage increased investment in preparedness and resilience-building.

### ***Not All is Doom and Gloom: How to Address Climate Change-Induced Displacement***

#### Action Points:

**Reduce the likelihood of hazards** by taking ambitious action to reduce global warming, notably by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

**Reduce exposure**, which may require different approaches for different communities, with actions ranging from building more adequate habitats to allowing people to migrate regularly or temporarily.

**Reduce vulnerability** to climate change by investing in people's resilience.

Paramount for the implementation of all three action points is *political will*. Until recently, the international community's reaction to these challenges has been slow, especially on the policy side, and little funding has been allocated to recovery and rebuilding efforts. The Nansen Initiative's *Protection Agenda* of 2015 has been a welcome step forward, yet more remains to be addressed, especially in the realm of open and flexible immigration policies, which would allow for sufficient preparation for an increase in disaster-induced displacement and dignity in moving, while also addressing protection requirements. Supporting countries in doing so is the *Platform on Disaster Displacement*, a global intergovernmental initiative that contributes to developing related policies and seeks to enhance the use of effective practices.

### ***Adapting Humanitarian Assistance to the Challenges of Climate Change: How It Can Be Done***

#### Action Points:

**Move to a prevention culture.** Adapting to climate change, notably through early action and investment in resilience through additional capacity-building before disasters strike,

would, thus, constitute the major departure from traditional approaches that we need. Capacity-building in resilience should also include governments themselves, as the majority of people affected by climate change live in contexts wherein governments are constantly challenged. *Integrated approaches* are key and require the dovetailing of prevention, early warning and early action.

**Make use of available information and technologies.** Information and technological opportunities are available aplenty - we have too many capacities at hand to not use them more extensively. This includes exploring new opportunities in forecasting and financing. Existing innovative programming can serve as basis for further expansion and scaling-up.

**Incorporate resilience-building measures into food assistance programs.** As a case in point, WFP's R4 Rural Resilience program provides micro-insurance schemes to food-insecure farmers, with the requirement that they invest in climate-sensitive farming, e.g. in the diversification of crops. R4 provides finance for risk reduction (asset creation), risk transfer (insurances), prudent risk taking (microcredit) and the building of risk reserves (savings).

**Invest in anticipatory humanitarian assistance.** Forecast-based financing programs, such as WFP's FoodSECuRE, combine early warning mechanisms with early response by triggering actions based on climate forecasts, while, at the same time, providing for post-disaster multi-year resilience-building measures. Another case study, the African Union's African Risk Capacity, functions as a macro-insurance pool, and has already seen three successful payouts.

**Partner up.** Partnerships which are able to bundle actors' different and complementary capacities will prove crucial in adapting to climate change. As climate change creates more *protracted* crises, an adequate response must be sought at the level of partnerships, while also involving actors beyond the humanitarian realm. No one, not even major governments or donors, can inform the necessary outcomes on their own.

**Act now!** Climate change doesn't wait. There is need for speed in taking action and investing in the scaling-up of successful initiatives.

### ***Act now - Opportunities for Rapid Deployment and Rapid Action***

While improved policies to tackle climate change's impact on humanitarian assistance are paramount, so is the imperative of rapid reaction and the ability to swiftly deploy experts to the field. With its special organisational structure – a volunteer basis – the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW) has a broad pool of capacities at its disposal, which allows for much needed flexibility in its deployments: it is a

structure worth having a closer look at.

*Think of a crisis in Germany...* However, national relief agencies see certain boundaries to the support they can provide, even in industrial countries. If a major crisis in Germany was to break out, THW would not be able to provide support to 80 million people. One of their principles, beyond working with volunteers, is, hence, *training people in helping themselves* - a longer-term form of preparedness and resilience-building.



From left to right: Alexander Carius, Annett Günther, Walter Kälin, Ertharin Cousin, Albrecht Broemme, Hinrich Thölken

### ***The Way Forward - It Can Be Done!***

Beyond the first cautiously positive signs, a more paradigmatic change is needed. This will particularly involve more systematic investment into climate-sensitive programming. Up to now, the response has been haphazard, and neither predictable nor harmonised.

However, in retrospect, we can detect a major improvement in international awareness and action when compared to the international response to major crises a couple of decades ago. The atrocious droughts of past decades do not occur anymore and major improvements in taking appropriate prevention measures are being made, with Bangladesh as a case in point.

It is, hence, left to us to start with the first necessary steps towards an awareness shift to a more pronounced prevention culture – *we all need to become evangelists for what is possible.*

The Climate and Food Talks are a conference series organised by the Permanent Representation of Germany to the UN Organizations in Rome. The biannual events aim at fostering policy dialogue on topics related to climate change and food security outside formal agendas. For more information, please contact [germanrepfao@rom.diplo.de](mailto:germanrepfao@rom.diplo.de).