

## Berlin Climate and Security Conference 2022

### The triple opportunity: Leveraging the security sector for people, planet and peace

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October 18th, 2022, - 15.00h CEST



#### Introduction

Climate change and widespread environmental degradation have a critical impact on individuals' and communities' lived experience of security; the health of local ecosystems; and ultimately on social cohesion, conflict, and peace. Human activity, including environmental crime, further undermines protective ecosystem services and destroys carbon sinks, contributing to the cycle of degradation and accelerating effects of climate change. As our understanding of the security implications of climate change continues to evolve, so too does our understanding of the roles the security sector can play not only in responding to climate security risks, but also in addressing some of the factors driving climate change.

Drawing on concrete examples from DCAF's recent field work in Colombia, Brazil, Sierra Leone and the occupied Palestinian Territory, the roundtable on the "Triple Opportunity" at the 2022 edition of the Berlin Climate Security Conference brought together experts and practitioners from governments, international organizations, civil society, and academia to explore how best to leverage the capacity of the security sector for people, planet and peace, as well as appropriate limits for security sector involvement. The discussion focused on two prominent areas of security sector involvement – disaster risk reduction and

environmental protection – and analysed risks and opportunities, as well as tensions which may be important to address in future security sector governance and reform (SSG/R) programmes.

#### Security sector responses to climate and environmental changes: perspectives from the field

Across multiple contexts, security institutions are already playing an active role in responding to climate and environmental risks. Militaries and civil protection agencies are **responding to natural disasters** which are occurring in many regions with greater frequency and severity. Police, customs, border officials, park rangers, and in some cases even the military are **strengthening efforts to detect and respond to environmental crimes** - patrolling borders and national parks, identifying and seizing environmentally harmful goods, and investigating and arresting perpetrators of crimes including deforestation, illegal mining, and waste dumping.

This central role for security sector actors is not without risk, especially in contexts of insecurity or resource scarcity. In some cases, the **heavy-handed approaches of security institutions risk strengthening the narrative of extremist groups**, particularly when high fines for harm to the environment are imposed on local community members who may have few alternatives. In others, communities have expressed frustration at what they perceive as the tendency of security forces to target subsistence farmers for environmental harm while extractive companies and criminal groups which do widespread damage to local ecosystems are allowed to operate with impunity – with negative implications for the perceived **legitimacy of security institutions**.

In many cases, different forms of criminality and their associate risks to human security are intertwined. The presence of **terrorist groups in national parks**, for example, has prompted forceful security responses in certain contexts. As illegal hunting pushes species to the brink of extinction, poachers are sometimes armed with military grade weapons, requiring more complex security responses. **Illegal shipments and disposal of hazardous waste** pollute air, water and soil, with lasting consequences for public health and agriculture. **Illegal mining** is increasingly rendering waterways in different regions unusable for drinking and fishing due to widespread contamination. Profits from these operations have been linked with the **financing of terrorist and other illegal armed groups**. As with other security concerns, fear-based narratives also play a role in expanding the space for overly securitized responses.

At the same time, important opportunities exist for institutions to respond effectively to climate and environmental issues which directly affect day to day security. Local initiatives, from **call centers to report environmental harm** to the **involvement of security institutions in reforestation efforts**, demonstrate that security sector efforts can be beneficial, particularly when guided by and aligned with communities' defined priorities. Openings also exist to **empower and resource local communities as a first line of defense** for environmental protection and disaster risk reduction; and to open new spaces for dialogue between security institutions and indigenous groups which have generations of experience observing and protecting the local environment. Many of the groups most exposed to environmental

risks also have embedded, effective and locally legitimate forms of traditional security and justice, reinforcing the need to **engage informal and customary authorities** as part of reform programmes. In each context, there is a need to think carefully about the **respective roles and responsibilities of communities and formal security institutions**, particularly when groups involved in environmental crime are linked to other forms of organized crime and pose a serious risk to local communities.

### Shifting security mindsets: from response to prevention

For years, the prevention agenda has recognized the need to address structural factors which lead to conflict, rather than simply responding when violence breaks out. The need for a prevention mindset is also clear when it comes to effectively addressing climate and environmental risks. With the accelerating effects of climate change, remediating and regenerating degraded ecosystems after widespread damage has occurred is a luxury few communities can afford - and those that experience the double burden of climate change and conflict often have even fewer resources available for mitigation. Preventing harm on the other hand has the potential to build resilience and, if approached collaboratively, to build trust between communities and the state.

Security institutions are mandated to **respond to crises**, which tends to be reflected in organizational capabilities and priorities. Regarding disaster risk reduction (DRR) and environmental crime, the current focus of most security sector engagement is on response, e.g. investigating and prosecuting crimes which have been committed or providing relief after disasters have occurred. However, security institutions are also skilled in **analysing and preparing for future risks**, which may be a helpful entry point in considering how their capacities can be brought to bear not only in responding to but also in preparing for, preventing and mitigating the risks of disasters and harm to the environment. Collaboration between the security sector, civilian officials, and community-based organizations in disaster risk reduction can also bring co-benefits of building social cohesion and recovering trust and legitimacy between the state and civil society.

**Data driven approaches** can be helpful in directing the resources of security institutions to areas of highest risk, whether this means communities most exposed to natural disasters or regions in which natural resource scarcity may be contributing to tensions or conflict. It is especially important in these contexts that there is a locally informed understanding of socio-economic impacts to avoid unintended negative consequences. **Interagency analysis and planning** in collaboration with local stakeholders can help to identify and respond to longer-term risks – for example, through the integration of border management, customs, financial intelligence, military, and law enforcement capabilities to deter transnational environmental crime. The interagency aspect of prevention is key due to the **multidimensional nature of climate, disaster and environmental risks**. Poorly regulated urban planning, for example, allows building in flood zones and protected areas. Inadequate waste management facilities increase incidents of illegal waste dumping and contribute to widespread, severe pollution, in essence a slow onset and preventable disaster.

**Joint analysis, training and awareness raising** for government institutions and civil society organizations in areas such as disaster preparedness can also contribute to prevention and mitigation by sensitizing stakeholders to practical steps which can be taken, as well as actions to avoid, and creating space to develop collaborative solutions. Training community volunteers in disaster risk reduction, for example, is a promising approach which can also give underrepresented groups, including youth, a greater stake in local security. Ultimately, investing in prevention requires a recognition of the serious threat posed by climate and environmental risks and a willingness to **scale up and mobilize resources** across government institutions (including the security sector) and society before harm occurs.

#### Law enforcement & livelihoods: the need for holistic approaches

As demands to protect local ecosystems increase, security officials in different regions have observed that **focusing only on law enforcement is unlikely to offer a sustainable solution to environmental harm**. Incentive structures for doing harm to (or conversely safeguarding) the local environment must be well understood. For some communities, engaging in legal or illegal forms of harm is the only means of generating income; without viable alternatives, harmful practices are likely to continue, and strict enforcement of the law may only increase resentment of security institutions. It is essential to develop different approaches to conserving protected areas, such as implementing negotiation processes and the signing of conservation agreements with communities, considering economic incentives (payment for ecosystem services), and ensuring the necessary coordination between security forces and environmental authorities.

There is a need for **differentiated and carefully sequenced approaches**. Tackling organized criminal groups involved in widespread destruction of ecosystems obviously necessitates an approach different to what may be required to address possible violations of environmental regulations linked to community survival. The two are not unrelated; in some cases, corporations or criminal groups take advantage of economic pressures at the local level to engage communities in environmental crime. Where a focus on livelihoods has been paired with law enforcement to produce positive change, a key lesson learned is to ensure alternative livelihoods are developed before strengthening law enforcement, even in cases where the environmental harm would seem to call for a swift response on the part of local authorities.

Focusing on **local governance** is also important, particularly in contexts in which the national government may be inclined to centralize development resources. Local officials and communities often have a very clear understanding of incentive structures and the security implications of environmental harm, as well as entry points for effective solutions. Security institutions may offer only part of these solutions, but their participation in local dialogue around causes of environmental harm can be an important part of **building an open and cooperative relationship with local communities**.

## The way ahead: security sector governance & reform in an era of climate change

At the heart of security sector reform (SSR) and good security sector governance is a need to ensure security institutions (1) respond effectively to evolving human security needs and (2) use their resources transparently and accountably. Growing climate and environmental risks have implications for both of these goals.

While acknowledging the [risks associated with security sector engagement in climate security](#), there is also increasing interest in **finding creative ways to leverage security institutions' operational, logistical and planning capacities** to contribute to reducing risks, protecting vital (natural) assets, and even improving food security. To be effective, such contributions must be rooted not only in good data on climate security and environmental justice needs, but also in an understanding of the **pathways on which local communities themselves prefer to rely for security and justice**. Here, significant opportunities exist to involve vulnerable groups, with a particular emphasis on **youth**, who can serve as a bridge between communities and authorities and already have a record of making concrete contributions to both environmental protection and disaster risk reduction.

Security institutions are regularly faced with difficult decisions regarding the **allocation of scarce resources** in the face of multiple threats and risks – and may understandably be inclined to prioritize combatting more traditional forms of criminality and violence. Future reform efforts can help to inform decision making processes by **sensitizing security institutions** to the wide-ranging security and socio-economic implications of climate change and environmental degradation and ensuring related risks are adequately reflected in national security policies and strategies. **Regional cooperation** can also play a role in identifying and addressing areas of greatest risk, to include instances in which environmental crime is linked with other forms of organized and transnational crime. Furthermore, **multi-level coordination** is needed to ensure that regional and national security policies are in line and coordinated with local realities.

Good security governance also requires **embedding security responses in whole-of-government efforts** which analyze risks over a longer time horizon, tackle root causes of environmental harm, and reduce and mitigate risks through awareness raising and joint, risk-informed planning. Finally, **accountability and oversight** must be prioritized in any SSR efforts which aim to tackle climate and environmental risks, in order to identify and address instances where security actors are complicit in or profiting from environmental crime, and to ensure security responses do not harm local communities.

The role of the security sector in responding to climate change and environmental degradation also plays out at the center of the **triple nexus of the humanitarian, development and peace sectors**, with relevant implications for donors. Humanitarian assistance should be accompanied by longer-term efforts to **strengthen the capacity of local security institutions to respond to humanitarian emergencies** including disasters. Approaches to tackling environmental crime will be more effective

and sustainable if **law enforcement is integrated with development programmes** focused on alternative livelihoods. More can also be done to ensure **SSR initiatives contribute to social cohesion and peacebuilding** through dialogue, awareness raising and joint efforts to address the environmental risks which matter most to communities.

The triple opportunity of focusing on **people, planet and peace** may provide a useful framework for **mapping current donor investments in climate security** and addressing gaps where needed. It is also important for donors to recognize the roles the security sector already plays in addressing climate and environmental risks and to **review SSR and stabilization strategies and programmes** to ensure these roles are prioritized and resourced wherever possible. **Integrated funding instruments** will be needed to support approaches which combine elements of stabilization, peacebuilding, development and climate change adaptation. The [Climate, Environment, Peace and Security Initiative](#) launched at the [Berlin Climate and Security Conference](#) in 2022 could be a promising step in this direction.