



# Human Security at the United Nations

Newsletter - Issue 3 (Spring 2008)



United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Human Security Unit

## Focus on climate change

This is the third issue of "Human Security at the United Nations," a newsletter produced by the Human Security Unit of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

This issue focuses on the interactions between climate change and human security, and outlines some steps to tackle the human impacts of climate change.

Previous issues included "Building Peace – A challenge that rests on achieving human security" (Issue 2 – Winter 2008), and "Human security: towards an integrated approach" (Issue 1 – Fall 2007).

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## The human costs of climate change – a challenge for human security

Different from other problems facing humanity today, climate change and its interactions with human security challenges us at numerous levels. First among its consequences is our growing vulnerability to natural disasters, which have claimed more lives and affected more people in recent years than ever before. Moreover, climate change threatens to trigger setbacks for human development and will deepen human insecurities. Rising sea-levels, mounting temperatures and land degradation are already disrupting harvests, undermining food security, increasing the spread of diseases and causing competition over natural resources. In rural areas, the ripple effects of climate change mean millions of people will face growing hunger, ill-health, loss of opportunities and displacement. Meanwhile, crowded conditions and rapid population growth in the world's cities mean millions more will be at greater danger from natural disasters.

Today climate change is a harsh reality for the world's poor and tomorrow it will grow into longer term dangers for humanity as a whole. A potentially overwhelming issue, climate change stands to be among the defining challenges of our generation. Yet, it also provides us with an opportunity to come together to protect our environment and to ensure that we can deliver on our commitments to advance sustainable development, peace and security.

## Mainstreaming human security in responding to climate change

In addition to protecting our environment, tackling the human impacts of climate change is an urgent priority. Strong commitments will be needed to better shelter people from natural disasters, strengthen livelihoods and to prevent potential conflicts.

*Mobilizing people and reducing risks:* Responding to climate change must start with a strong commitment towards reducing risks. Risk reduction however begins at home; in schools, at work and across communities through better disaster education, safer building techniques, improved agricultural practices, community-driven early warning systems, and disaster response plans. The most effective tools to reduce risks will be those grounded in local knowledge and tested in the crucible of local experience. Risk reduction must therefore start from the bottom up to help save lives and build disaster resilient communities.

*Strengthening resilience and protecting livelihoods:* Reducing risks must go hand in hand with protecting and investing in



A self-help group planting trees in Timor-Leste's countryside. For local communities deforestation is one of several closely linked threats, along with land degradation, crop failure, malnutrition and poverty. © UNDP/Kym Smithies, 2005

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development. It is indeed crucial to combine disaster reduction with plans to develop sustainable livelihoods. Today vast and untapped opportunities exist in supporting more community-based land conservation and reforestation projects. Restoring lands and planting trees not only offset the carbon emissions that contribute to climate change but they also help restore natural defenses against disasters, strengthen the resilience of local communities, and benefit the poor by protecting their livelihoods and opening their opportunities for development.

*Building local capacities and preventing conflicts:* Finally, commitments towards reducing risks and protecting livelihoods will be most needed where climate change threatens to exacerbate existing grievances. In these hot spots, it is paramount to avert tensions over resources and to reduce social stresses that emerge when state institutions are over-stretched and the delivery of basic services is inadequate. Promoting cross-community dialogue on land and water management, supporting better equipped health systems, and strengthening emergency response mechanisms are just a few, among many, effective tools to help build local capacities and to prevent potential conflicts from emerging as a result of climate change.

Following through on these commitments can transform the potential downward consequences of climate change and may even help change the climate crisis into an unforeseen opportunity to consolidate human security and advance sustainable development.

## **From risk reduction to sustainable development in Peru - an example from the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security**

Looking at activities in the field, perhaps a key contribution of the UNTFHS has been the emphasis on addressing the root causes of vulnerability to disasters and environmental changes. Among many initiatives, the Fund has notably been supporting multi-sectoral efforts in Peru's remote and vulnerable mountain regions where recurring natural disasters and relentless erosion of lands and livelihoods is threatening to trap entire communities into permanent poverty, malnutrition and ill-health.

On the ground, the project is specifically intent on linking risk reduction with capacity-building and support for sustainable development. First, disaster prevention training has helped mobilize people to reduce risks, while district municipalities and public health systems have been empowered and have been able to strengthen their emergency response capacities. Meanwhile, rural households have also been trained to use improved farming techniques that not only boost incomes but that also roll back the effects of land degradation and help preserve water resources.



Improved farming techniques to help boost incomes, consolidate lands and reduce risks in Ayapata, a remote mountain village in Peru.  
© FAO/WFP 2007

So far the project has reached over 700 communities and has seen UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, WHO and WFP band together with local authorities in an effort that has proved instrumental to reduce risks, strengthen prevention and reinvest in sustainable livelihoods.

### **Bibliography on Climate Change**

- **Overview of United Nations activities in relation to climate change – Report of the Secretary-General**, United Nations, 2008.
- **The Humanitarian Implications of Climate Change**, special focus and online resource guide prepared by ReliefWeb, 2008.
- **Before the next disaster strikes: The humanitarian impact of climate change**, by Margareta Wahlström, UN Chronicle, 2007.
- **Climate change and international security**, European Union High Representative and European Commission Report to the European Council, 2008.

### **Actors and Institutions**

- **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change**, United Nations.
- **United Nations Environment Programme**
- **International Strategy for Disaster Reduction**, United Nations.

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## Climate Change in Focus – The Greek Chairmanship of the Human Security Network

The Human Security Network (HSN) is a group of like-minded countries including Austria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Norway, Switzerland, Slovenia, Thailand and South Africa as an observer that, since 1999, has served to highlight the added value of human security in the UN and other multilateral frameworks. By focusing on human security challenges in numerous situations that threaten human lives, livelihoods and dignity, such as those pertaining to abject poverty, health pandemics, protection of children, armed conflicts, landmines, among others, the HSN continues to raise the human security agenda as a focus for international efforts in addressing concrete issues of common interest for the well-being of all peoples. With strong links to civil society and academia, the HSN has played a catalytic role in energizing political processes that are aimed at preventing or solving conflicts as well as promoting peace and development.

Governed based on an annual rotation among members, the Government of Greece is the current Chair of the HSN. As one of its main priorities, the Greek Chairmanship has focused its attention on raising political and public awareness on the human security implications of climate change with special emphasis on its impact on the vulnerable population groups of children, women and persons on the move. A series of side-events and in-depth studies have been supported during this period and will culminate in the 10th Annual Ministerial Meeting of the Network which is to be held in May 2008 in Athens.

For more on the Greek Chairmanship of the Human Security Network, please click [here](#).

### Latest News and Events

- **High-Level Conference on Human Security in the Arab States**, to be held in **summer 2008** in Cairo, Egypt. Jointly coordinated by the Human Security Unit, OCHA, the League of Arab States, and UNESCO the conference aims to deepen the understanding and acceptance of human security at the policy, operational and academic levels in the region, as well as among civil society actors.
- **Tenth Ministerial Meeting of the Human Security Network**, to be held on **29 and 30 May 2008** in Athens, under the Chairmanship of the Government of Greece.
- **General Assembly Thematic Debate on Human Security**, to be held on **22 May 2008** at United Nations Headquarters. In preparation for the meeting, a compilation of human security related initiatives and activities by Member States and UN agencies, funds and programmes was prepared and is made available under UN Document [A/62/695](#).
- **Fourth Meeting of the Friends of Human Security**, to be held on **15 May 2008** at United Nations Headquarters. During the meeting, Member States plan to discuss developments since the Third Meeting held in November 2007 as well as consider possible areas for future cooperation, including responding to climate change, achieving the MDGs, addressing peacebuilding, and supporting the protection of children and human rights education.

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