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CLIMATE CHANGE AND PROTECTION: DESIGNING MULTI-DISCIPLINARY PATHWAYS TO REINFORCE PROTECTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE OUTCOMES

A Results-Based Protection Briefing Paper

*The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of IRC or the Swedish Development Agency (Sida)

CLIMATE CHANGE AND PROTECTION

Designing multi-disciplinary pathways to reinforce protection and climate change outcomes

OVERVIEW

The impacts of climate change are no longer in the future. They are here. Impacts, including erratic temperatures, increases in the frequency of extreme weather, drought, wildfires, flooding and more are being seen all over the world. A March 2023 [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\) report](#) found that a 1.5 degree increase in temperature is likely in the “near term” - meaning years and not decades; an increase that is likely to have devastating results.

There is a growing consensus that humanitarian actors must consider the increasing impacts of climate change and include adaptation and resilience measures within their life-saving work.¹ The contextual reasons are clear: 60% of countries considered most vulnerable to climate change are also affected by armed conflict,² and out of the 20 countries estimated to be most vulnerable to climate-related events in 2020, 12 contained humanitarian crises.³ Countries affected by armed conflict are disproportionately impacted by climate change, partly due to geography, and partly because conflict limits the ability for nations, institutions, and individuals to adapt to the effects of climate change.⁴ In the face of rapidly increasing impacts from climate change, we require ambitious adaptation and resiliency measures, which are nearly impossible in active conflict. Climate and environmental issues are often overtaken by questions of security for states and basic survival for individuals and families.⁵ The current scientific consensus is that there is no direct causal link between climate change and conflict. However, climate change may increase some risk factors that then contribute to conflict, including “social exclusion, a history of conflict and grievance, economic risks, environmental degradation, and tensions over the management of resources.”⁶

While humanitarian actors have begun to consider climate change and its impact on our work, the links between climate change and protection remain under-explored. This paper, using a results-based approach to protection, aims to begin to identify ways that humanitarian actors must work to understand the links between protection risks and the impacts of climate change in settings of armed conflict. Beginning with the perspective that reducing protection risk is a priority for the humanitarian community,⁷ we ask the questions: how does climate change impact that objective? What further considerations should we make in our protection analysis and strategies that incorporate context-specific and global climate change

¹ See ICRC’s report, [When Rain Turns to Dust: Understanding and responding to the combined impact of armed conflicts and the climate and environment crisis on people’s lives](#) for a call to action for the humanitarian community

² Ibid, p. 10

³ Peters, K, Davies, G. & Holloway, K. (2021 October 27), [Addressing protection risks in a climate-changed world: challenges and opportunities](#). Humanitarian Policy Group, p. 5

⁴ ICRC, [When Rain Turns to Dust](#), p.8

⁵ Ibid, p. 8

⁶ Ibid, p. 19

⁷ This commitment is enshrined in the [2013 Centrality of Protection Statement](#) and the [2016 IASC Protection Policy](#)

manifestations? What kind of collaboration do we need to address these issues effectively? And in the specific context of armed conflict, how must the behavior of armed actors be addressed?

A Results-Based Approach to Protection

The goal of a results-based approach to protection is to reduce protection risks experienced by affected populations. Identifying and analyzing risks of violence, coercion, and deliberate deprivation from the perspective of the affected population is followed by the development of strategies to reduce those risks. All components of a protection risk should be analyzed, including the threat, and the vulnerability and capacity relating to that threat. Any strategy developed should be multi-disciplinary, incorporating the actions of a range of relevant actors, including those beyond the humanitarian community and community actors themselves. Protection risk reduction strategies can often be conceptualized as a pathway toward risk reduction: what are the ways that a threat can be reduced, vulnerability to the threat can be reduced, and capacity to overcome the threat can be increased? Contributions to each of those efforts should be identified from relevant actors and sequenced to understand entry points for action, but also to help measure how the contributions of others complement or support the necessary steps needed to reduce the overall risk. Measurement of each component part of risk can help us iterate each contribution based in the specific context. This approach to protection—one that focuses on outcomes rather than activities—is one that organizations are increasingly using in field programs.

Using a results-based approach to protection helps us to consider the ways that we need to incorporate climate change into our thinking on protection. One, we must incorporate the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation into our protection analysis. These impacts might increase vulnerability, change community capacities, or change the behavior of actors responsible for protection threats. All must be considered based on a context-specific analysis. For example, in Mali risks of violence along the roads by armed groups and bandits prevented herders struggling with drought from using their normal coping strategies of traveling to other regions or countries to find work ([ICRC](#), p.8).

Second, we need to ensure that our strategies for protection risk reduction include actors knowledgeable about and working on climate change and environmental degradation, including from communities themselves. These actors may be outside those that protection actors traditionally work with—for example, development actors, climate scientists, or academics—but are necessary when protection risks are related to climate and the environment.

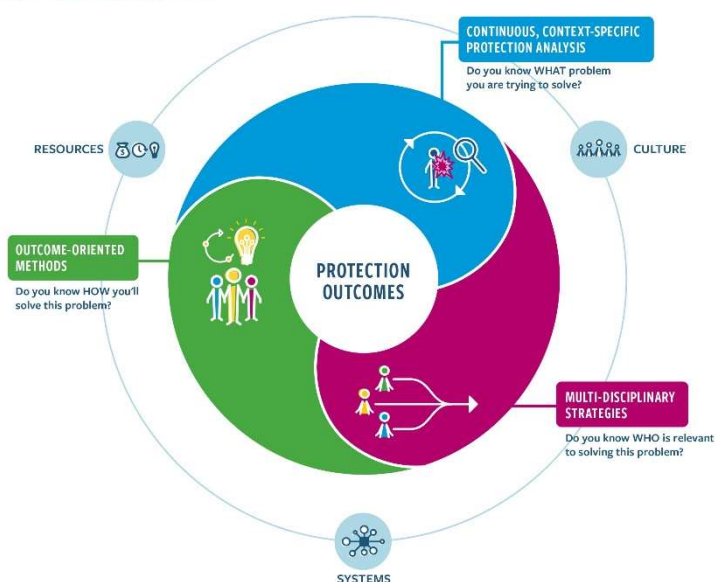
METHODOLOGY: RESULTS-BASED PROTECTION PRACTITIONERS' ROUNDTABLE AND CASE EXAMPLES

In preparation for the writing of this paper, InterAction convened a Practitioner's Roundtable on Results-Based Protection which focused on three topics: (1) how to incorporate climate change impacts into protection analysis and strategies, (2) the collaborations that are required to address protection risks influenced by climate change, and (3) how the behavior of armed actors is influenced by the impacts of climate change. The discussions in the Roundtable contributed to the discussions in this paper and the four case studies presented then are summarized here.

This paper aims to join a growing body of work looking specifically at the intersection of protection and climate change. NGOs are increasingly working to understand the links between climate change impacts and protection. **CIVIC**, **ICRC**, and **HPG and DRC** have all produced extremely useful analyses of the challenges at both global and country levels. The Global Protection Cluster has developed guidance on **Enhancing Preparedness for Protection in the Context of Climate Change and Disasters**, and the GBV Area of Responsibility has produced an overview on **Climate Change and Gender-Based Violence: What are the links?** However, discussion in the Roundtable found that, operationally, NGOs are still in the early stages of systematically working to understand, and then confront, the dual challenges of armed conflict and climate change.

In this paper we have taken a broad view of climate-induced and climate-related impacts, both slow and rapid onset. We include issues of environmental degradation as well, which can be, but are not always, influenced by climate change. While the questions of causality between climate change, environmental degradation, conflict, and protection are important, we do not want those questions to limit our inquiries into crisis contexts. Ultimately, our priority is understanding *how* all those factors influence protection risks and strategies to reduce those risks.

KEY ELEMENTS OF RBP



This report looks at four case studies of contexts where conflict, climate change, the environment, and protection risks all intersect. Each case study is based on research or programming done by an organization in that context and will be used to illustrate the themes of the paper. The paper first explores how our efforts at protection analysis must work to incorporate a better understanding of the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. From analysis, the paper then explores how collaboration and partnership can better support multi-disciplinary strategies to develop pathways to risk reduction.

CASE EXAMPLES: PROTECTION ANALYSIS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Yemen case study: in-depth research on climate change and conflict, Center for Civilians in Conflict

In-depth research done by the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) on the links between conflict, climate change, environmental degradation, and protection risks in Yemen reveals a complex web of factors that contribute to protection risks.

Prior to the outbreak of conflict in 2014, Yemen already had significant problems with water availability; the lack of regulation of water extraction had significantly depleted water basins. In recent years, Yemen has

seen a significant increase in temperature and more erratic rainfall, both of which have led to groundwater being extracted at faster rates than natural replenishment. It is understood that rising temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns can be partially attributed to climate change. Poor governance of water infrastructure and rapid expansion of agriculture has also contributed, though much of the agricultural crops are not for human consumption, but the water-heavy crop of qat. Experts are predicting the country could be functionally without water in just a few decades.

The current war in Yemen has also *caused* significant environmental degradation, which compounds the pre-existing challenge of resource scarcity. This has happened through the deterioration of government institutions, displacement leading to strains on natural resources, and missiles, airstrikes, landmines, and other acts of war that have left land and water resources unusable to civilian populations. The conflict's effect on governance, including non-payment of salaries and decreased government capacity, has led to water and sanitation systems breakdowns that further degrade existing water sources. Internal displacement of over 4 million people has increased strains on natural resource utilization as people require water and land in places without sufficient existing infrastructure. Land mines and other remnants of war not only present a direct risk of harm to civilians but also destroy and restrict access to water, farmland, and other means of livelihood.

CIVIC's research identified two main conflict drivers that have been significantly impacted by climate change and environmental degradation. One is further natural resource constraints, predominantly around land and water availability. The other is migration and displacement, which has significantly exacerbated due to water scarcity and flooding. CIVIC's research found that these two conflict drivers contribute to protection risks. Resource conflict over water and land erupts into violence regularly. Widespread landmine use causes environmental degradation, death, injury, and displacement, and contributes to the deliberate deprivation of land and livelihoods from civilians. Landmines in Yemen have targeted schools and community gathering places, as well as agricultural land and water sources, which have been deliberately targeted in numerous locations.⁸ Water scarcity was also found to have increased specific groups' vulnerability to various protection threats. For example, women who are forced to collect water at greater distances are more vulnerable to landmines, and there are reports that adolescent boys are more vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups due to displacement and lack of economic opportunities.⁹ Addressing the environmental impacts of climate change and the governance gaps that lead to natural resource conflict are both approaches that would reduce risks to civilians.

CIVIC's work also looks at how to shore up community capacities to engage in better natural resource management which can work to reduce those risks. They also work on improving community cohesion between host and displaced communities, and reducing community conflict. CIVIC's work with security actors aims to reduce threats to civilians, including those related to natural resources and environmental management. For example, they look at how security actors can allow better access to those working on those issues in communities—water infrastructure support, land mine removal, and direct services that help to reduce competition over resources.

⁸ [Risking the Future: Climate Change, Environmental Destruction, and Conflict in Yemen](#), (2023). Center for Civilians in Conflict, p.15-16.

⁹ Luqman, M., and Al-Sakkaf, N., "[Gender, Climate and Security in Yemen: The Linkages and the Ways Forward](#)", p.6.

The Yemen case study demonstrates the influence that climate change, environmental degradation, conflict, and governance issues can have on each other. These linkages are complex and often require in-depth study or research to understand. However, without some understanding of the links between climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict, it will be difficult to identify the pathways that lead to risk reduction.

Somalia Case Study: Improving protection monitoring to account for draught in early 2022, Somalia Protection Cluster

Somalia has long been susceptible to extreme weather events and rapid onset natural hazards, which have worsened recently due to climate change.¹⁰ Temperatures continue to increase and rainfall is predicted to increase and become more erratic in coming years, which may benefit agriculture in some areas but will lead to flooding and erosion in others.¹¹ By 2021, 80% of the country was experiencing draught conditions, with some populations reaching crisis levels of food insecurity in 202¹² This is on top of long-standing protection risks due to armed conflict.

In 2022, the Somalia Protection Cluster was working with 12 partner agencies to collect protection monitoring data and compile and present the data to influence advocacy and programming. Those organizations held quarterly analysis workshops, which include community consultation on the data gathered and joint analysis with key stakeholders. As the drought escalated in 2022, protection partners worked to determine the best way to understand how drought was changing the protection risks facing civilians. Instead of changing the basic protection monitoring tool to make it specific to the drought context, protection partners decided to round out their analysis by doing deeper dives—through focus groups—to understand the components of protection risks in locations affected by drought.

The analysis found an upward trend in some protection risks in the first half of 2022 as the drought got worse. These included child recruitment, denial of access to assistance, extortion, abuse related to assistance, family separation, and sexual assault. Through the above-mentioned qualitative methods, correlatoins were found between food insecurity and a number of those risks, though the cluster is careful to state that there is no proof of causality. Family separation appears to be a significant coping strategy, where part of a family moves and part stays behind to maintain community links and livelihood options. These decisions appear to cause increases in sexual assault, recruitment of children into armed groups, and economic coping mechanisms, including early marriage. Through analysis of the components of these protection risks, particularly vulnerability and capacity, partners have sought to understand the links between the draught and specific protection risks.

This form of data gathering, reliant on the presence and capacity of operational partners, had some limitations, which the Cluster and its partners worked to address. In particular, acknowledging the lack of truly representative data while working to provide qualitative analysis of protection risks. Accepting the limitations of such operational contexts is important while working to do an in-depth protection analysis. Lessons can be learned about how to deepen existing protection monitoring systems in the context of emergent climate-related crisis.

¹⁰ [Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet: Somalia](#), (February 2021), *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*.

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² [Somalia: Drought – 2015 – 2023](#), *ReliefWeb*.

Mozambique Case Study: Studying the overlap between insurgency and natural disaster, Red Cross Red Crescent Center

In partnership with the World Bank, the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Center conducted an in-depth study on the dynamics of conflict and climate in Mozambique. Mozambique is a country with copious natural resources, including land, water, and mineral resources, but it also faces significant climatological risks. In the province of Cabo Delgado, armed conflict has led to significant protection risks for civilians, including forced displacement, killings, abductions, and destruction of civilian objects.¹³ In 2019, Cyclone Kenneth made landfall, leading to the mass destruction of homes and fields, dramatic flooding, displacement, and destruction of infrastructure.

The study found that while they could not find a causal link between the cyclone and conflict, it was clear that climatological vulnerability can influence the dynamics of conflict and protection risks for specific groups of civilians. The study team used **innovative mapping techniques** to simultaneously map out conflict incidents, displacement, and environmental risks such as flooding, allowing a stronger cross-sectoral analysis of civilians' various risks. For example, we can see that the number and location of incidents of conflicts varied before, during, and after cyclone Kenneth in Cabo Delgado. Conflict incidents increased sharply immediately after cyclone Kenneth and moved into different geographical areas. The mapping also shows that many civilians displaced by conflict have temporarily settled in areas with greater exposure to the impacts of flooding and cyclones, increasing their risks to natural hazards.

The study also identified how different groups of people are vulnerable to specific protection risks. For example, women and girls' vulnerability to sexual exploitation and early marriage increased as (negative) coping mechanisms for families. People who lost livelihoods are potentially more susceptible to recruitment into armed groups, as well as moving into work in the illicit economy. There was a particular vulnerability identified for youth who lost years of schooling due to destruction of schools, who then had challenges in finding formal employment and were more susceptible to extremist messaging and recruitment. In addition to the direct impacts on civilians, the natural hazards in Mozambique have led armed actors and illicit networks to change their habits and the geographic routes they use for their movement and to move contraband. This led to increased contact between armed groups and civilian populations in urban areas, and increases in the risk of recruitment and involvement in illicit industries, such as artisanal mining and logging which further contribute to environmental and ecosystem damage.

INCORPORATING CLIMATE IMPACTS INTO PROTECTION ANALYSIS

These case studies demonstrate some of the ways that climate change and environmental degradation influence protection risks and how we can incorporate them into existing methods of protection analysis. Climate change impacts some areas known to be potential contributors to protection risk: land use, limited resources, change in movement patterns, and displacement. However, they may also impact components of protection risks in ways we cannot predict, which requires context-specific analysis to understand. Slow-onset crises are particularly challenging from an analysis perspective because they require a longer-term perspective, which many humanitarian organizations struggle with due to the structural emphasis on short-

¹³ [“What I saw is death:” War crimes in Mozambique’s forgotten Cape](#), (2021), Amnesty International.

term programming.¹⁴ One Roundtable participant who shared their organization's experience of struggling to formulate a longer-term view into their protection analysis said that incorporating climate change impacts requires an understanding of historical patterns as well as modeling of potential future changes due to current impacts, which could take years to unfold. For example, civilians in some parts of Iraq trace their water issues to the cutting down of date palms in the Iran-Iraq war for military purposes.¹⁵ Many of our analysis tools are focused on the here and now and are not sufficiently continuous.

In-depth research helps us understand the complex webs of causality that can ultimately lead to protection risks. Looking at the three case studies above helps us to see the variety of methods that are available for better understanding protection risk, from in-depth research to ongoing monitoring embedded in operations. Both are crucial to add to our understanding and ideally can be used in concert with one another. Periodic in-depth research, as the CIVIC Yemen example provides, can help us understand the nuances of how conflict and climate change can interact with each other and impact protection risk. The Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Center study shows us how innovating mapping techniques can be used to overlap climate and conflict analysis. In addition, given that in-depth research is not always feasible, the Somalia example shows how existing monitoring mechanisms can be tailored to understand changes in protection risks due to climate or environmental issues. Periodic in-depth analysis can help us understand the underlying patterns of protection risk and help identify priority areas for ongoing monitoring and analysis.

Bringing a results-based approach to protection analysis means we must analyze each component of protection risks: threat, vulnerability, and capacity. Within each specific protection risk, we must consider how climate change impacts and environmental degradation might influence each component. Roundtable participants discussed some emerging patterns of indicators that must be included in analyses, including the nature of natural resource shortages, impacts on specific livelihood sources, the kind of conflict that develops over natural resources, movement patterns, and urbanization patterns and impacts. Tracking these factors over time can help explain changes along the pathway to protection risk and therefore help identify actions we can take to influence the intermediate results we want to see.

PROTECTION ANALYSIS: UNDERSTANDING CLIMATE CHANGE TO BETTER DEVELOP PATHWAYS TO RISK REDUCTION

When we develop pathways to risk reduction, we develop them by identifying contributions to risk and then understanding how to prevent, reverse or mitigate those contributions. Investigating risks related to climate change tells us that we must allow for complex routes of causality in risk reduction pathways. For example, in Yemen, the effects of the conflict (loss of government capacity) has led to an increase in environmental degradation (inability to maintain existing water systems leading to less clean water), which has then led to increased conflict and protection risks (violence from outbreaks of conflict over resources). This is just one example. Each component of risk could have a causal path with several twists and turns. Climate change adds complexity because climatic and environmental systems are complicated,

¹⁴ See in-depth discussion on the impact of slow-onset crises in [Addressing protection risks in a climate-changed world: challenges and opportunities](#), p.9

¹⁵ ICRC, [When Rain Turns to Dust](#), p.17

only more so when interacting with social and political ones. Our analytical tools—and ourselves—must become more comfortable with working in complexity in order to meet this current challenge.¹⁶

Generally, protection analysis is focused on local, sub-national, or country-level analysis. However, climate trends sometimes requires a regional approach. For example, desertification in the Sahel and Lake Chad regions has contributed to changing patterns of movement into the Central African Republic, leading to increased tensions and violence between armed groups, herders, and farmers. Iraq's water supply largely depends on rivers that originate in Turkey (and, to a lesser extent, Iran) and run through the country's Kurdish region, all of which requires a regional lens and, ultimately, regional negotiations over damming and water infrastructure.¹⁷ While we must maintain the focus on context-specific analysis, it is important to invest time and resources to understanding regional dimensions.

Another analytical question is attribution. It is a two-fold question: (1) how much can we attribute components of specific protection risks to climate change, and (2) does it matter? The first question is one of science and analysis. Climate scientists are becoming more precise about attributing specific weather events, patterns, and environmental impacts to climate change.¹⁸ This can help us understand how climate change contributes to a chain of events that create or exacerbate protection risks. Some of this detailed analysis will be useful. However, for most operational actors, requiring a nuanced understanding of the level of attribution climate change has to specific humanitarian crises, much less particular protection risks, is unrealistic. Protection actors must balance the two: investing in better understanding of climate change impacts, while not getting hung up on which contributing factors to protection risk are caused directly by climate change in order to address them. Ultimately, our priority is understanding *how* all factors influence protection risks and strategies to reduce those risks.

¹⁶ See ALNAP's work [Systems thinking for humanitarian: An introduction for the complete beginner](#) and [Systems Thinking Handbook for Humanitarians](#) for an in-depth discussion how systems thinking can be used to confront complexity in humanitarian operations.

¹⁷ ICRC, [When Rain Turns to Dust](#), p.30.

¹⁸ [Addressing protection risks in a climate-changed world: challenges and opportunities](#), p. 4.

Questions to add to your protection analysis

Threat: We need to understand how changes in climate and the environment affect the behavior of actors responsible for protection threats, including armed actors. Some questions to consider could be:

- Have decreased or changed natural resources changed incentives for state and non-state actors or individuals?
- Have military strategies and tactics changed due to climate change or environmental degradation?
- Do armed actors attempt to control access to resources or resources themselves?
- Have the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation changed community power dynamics in a way that affects protection threats?

For example, in Mozambique, armed groups changed their supply routes and geographic patterns after Cyclone Kenneth. In a number of locations, armed actors took advantage of climate-induced food insecurity to increase recruitment into their ranks, including children. In Yemen, flooding has washed landmines into areas they weren't placed in, expanding the impact of that particular protection risk.

Vulnerability: We need to better understand how people's vulnerability to specific threats has changed in response to changing environmental conditions. Some questions to consider:

- Are people who are already vulnerable to a specific threat made more vulnerable by the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation? Are they made less vulnerable?
- Do changes in movement patterns, displacement, or migration change who is vulnerable to a particular protection threat? When people move to a different place does their vulnerability change?
- Do changes in livelihoods due to climate change create new vulnerabilities or exacerbate existing ones?
- Has urbanization exacerbated or changed vulnerability to specific threats?

For example, farmland in Iraq drying up has made children more vulnerable to child labor and girls more vulnerable to denial of education, as families are forced into different economic decisions. In South Sudan, dowry becomes an ever more important economic factor for families when they lose cattle or are displaced, making girls more vulnerable to forced marriage. In Nigeria, where travel to gather food and firewood is already dangerous, deforestation means that women and girls must walk further, increasing their exposure to abduction, killing, and rape from non-state armed actors.

Capacity: We must understand how communities are adapting to climate change, including negative coping strategies. Some questions to consider:

- What mechanisms are currently in place at local, regional, and national levels where communities are addressing both climate change and protection?
- What community methods for resolving conflict over resources exist? Do those mechanisms still exist? If not, what would be needed to strengthen or support them?
- Are there negative coping mechanisms from other protection risks that might exacerbate environmental degradation?
- Are there existing community strategies that might address environmental issues that contribute to a particular protection risk?

For example, in the Central African Republic (CAR), communities have mechanisms to negotiate peaceful migration which they could bring to bear in the face of changing migration patterns. After the tsunami in Sri Lanka, community leaders negotiated with the LTTE to ensure that civilians could move to areas of greater security.

MULTI-DISCIPLINARY STRATEGIES FOR PROTECTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

South Sudan Case Study: working with communities on multiple kinds of risks

South Sudan has experienced increased climate-related events, including the worst flooding in 60 years. Rising temperatures and unpredictable variability in weather events affect agriculture and influence the movement patterns of pastoralist communities.¹⁹ While there was already regular conflict over land, cattle, and movement patterns, the current conditions increase the risks of such conflict, leading to direct violence against civilians. Flooding has led to increased displacement, including in areas that have already seen significant forced displacement due to conflict. Some communities have also seen increases in forced and early marriage as families' economic needs increased, causing families to use that coping mechanism to bring in more resources. NGOs also see increased child labor due to children dropping out of school from greater economic pressures on families or destruction of schools by floods.

Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) has worked to integrate planning for flooding into its existing Conflict Early Warning Early Response (CEWER) programming. The program works at a community level to support the development of mechanisms to anticipate outbreaks of conflict and to develop plans to reduce the protection risks that emerge from conflict. Some examples of the plans that are developed to reduce protection risks are related to safer displacement routes, maintaining access to humanitarian services, and reducing inter-communal tensions. The recent years of severe flooding have caused significant disruption for communities, in particular, new patterns of displacement where communities are not able to return home and where livelihoods are disrupted. This displacement has led to an increase in a number of protection risks through an increase in economic vulnerability, including forced marriage and child labor. There is also an increased risk of violence breaking out between communities (a pre-existing risk) due to changes in displacement and migration patterns from flooding. Given the inter-relatedness of the protection and climate issues, and the urgency of the flooding and commensurate displacement, NP and its community teams decided to integrate early warnings for protection risks and climactic risk. Climactic shocks were added to the community-developed action plans; mitigation measures for flooding include identifying high ground and building dykes in flood-prone areas to reduce the impact of flooding and digging water channels to direct rain to the river. Similar to a dynamic in CEWER work, frequently it is older people in communities who remember what they used to do when flooding was bad 60 years ago. Their experience can help younger members of the community plan their mitigation measures.

MOVING FORWARD WITH COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

A long-standing tenant of our understanding of effective pathways to protection risk reduction has been that they require a wide range of actors from the analysis of particular risks in particular contexts. Protection risks linked to climate change are a great example of why this is necessary. If some of the causes of protection risks are related to the impact of climate change and environmental degradation, then part of the solutions are likely to come from those actors working on climate issues. While the act of mitigating global climate change is not within the remit of humanitarian operations, smaller-scale and more localized action can help mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change *and* be a key part of a holistic protection strategy. In addition to development and climate change actors specifically—including

¹⁹ [Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet](#), (March 2021), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

scientists, NGOs, social movements, and financial institutions—other key stakeholders are governments and communities themselves.

Humanitarian organizations are beginning to incorporate specific work on climate mitigation into their programs, although much of this initial work has been linked to livelihoods and food security work. The larger recognition that this is something humanitarians can and should be addressing can lead to better collaboration with protection actors specifically. A Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) [briefing note](#) found that “a growing number of climate specialists are keen to engage with the protection community; this should be harnessed.” Discussion at the Roundtable centered around good practice from the field and continued barriers. One Roundtable participant shared their experience in working to develop a relationship with a national research institute that focuses on climate change, which has developed programmatic recommendations for its humanitarian and protection programs. Others shared that, in their experience, core protection concepts such as safety are easily understandable for those working on Disaster Risk Reduction and climate change, as well as the concepts of vulnerability and capacity within the protection risk equation. Equally, protection actors must commit to becoming more “climate literate.”²⁰ This will begin to happen naturally as we integrate contexts facing armed conflict and climate risk, but even in those circumstances, it requires us to be open to expanding our own scope of interest, as we work with others to expand their scope to protection risks.

Collaboration can take place at different levels. We have a tendency to focus on global- and national-level institutional collaboration, and indeed, these are sorely needed. But we can also begin at a community level to test out practical ways to collaborate based on context-specific protection analysis. Can a program focused on watershed management have regular meetings with a program focused on GBV to share the changes they are seeing in the community? Can a livelihoods program integrate support for efforts in environmental management as well as targeting a reduction in vulnerability to specific protection risks? Roundtable participants agreed that barriers to collaboration continue to exist, including short-term humanitarian funding cycles, our own internal structures that continue to be built in sectoral siloes, and especially the practical separation of humanitarian work from disciplines that focus on climate change.²¹ However, several Roundtable participants expressed hope that the urgency and intrinsic multi-disciplinary status of climate change work will force us to become better collaborators in the future. Other disciplines we can learn from, such as the peacebuilding community, work on the links between conflict dynamics and climate change and the contribution of peacebuilding to environmental efforts.²²

Two key stakeholders in climate change adaptation work are national and local governments. In several contexts with humanitarian crises, conflict has broken down measures of effective governance necessary to implement basic environmental functions, much less the ambitious adaptation measures that are needed. Roundtable participants acknowledged that this kind of collaboration can bring both challenges and opportunities for humanitarian actors. In situations of armed conflict, humanitarian relationships with governments can be difficult, especially where governments are a party to the conflict. This can be further compounded when access and bureaucratic impediments take precedence over issues related to climate

²⁰ See [Addressing protection risks in a climate-changed world: challenges and opportunities](#), p. 22 for an in-depth discussion of needed collaborations

²¹ For a more in-depth look at the challenges of multi-disciplinary strategies, see [Embracing the Outcomes Mindset](#), pages 11-15.

²² This body of work is too large to cleanly cite here, but see for example SIPRI's [Environment of Peace](#), the [Environmental Peacebuilding Association](#), and the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office's [Climate Crisis and Peacebuilding Working Group](#)

change. However, a number of Roundtable participants said they think that building relationships over climate and environmental issues is an opportunity to create more collaborative relationships, particularly when compared with the sensitivity of protection issues. Investing more into supporting government agencies working on climate change adaptation may in fact enable a stronger relationship when it comes to protection concerns.

Working from the perspective of the affected population also helps us to integrate our analysis of protection risks alongside climactic risks, and communities themselves are a crucial actor in a multi-disciplinary strategy. For example, NP was able to integrate flooding risk into existing conflict early warning early response systems because the process that communities use to think ahead and plan for conflict events is similar to other forms of risk. These groups had effectively reduced tensions and, therefore, prevented violence when natural resource conflicts emerged and successfully pivoted their leadership on those issues to incorporate climate risks. Just as our protection analysis must consider the perspective of the affected population when we consider threat, vulnerability, and capacity, the community's perspective on climate change and environmental degradation is important too. Community members will bring a different set of knowledge about the changing climate and environment to the discussion. ICRC found that the people they spoke to in CAR, Mali, and Iraq had a strong understanding of the changes in their environment, but not necessarily an understanding of the science of climate change or the links that exist between global warming and their own situation.²³

MUTUALLY REINFORCING OBJECTIVES?

As protection actors, we are focused on reducing protection risks. However, once we understand the complex interplays between climate change, environmental degradation, and armed conflict, we can not only see how actors working on addressing the effects of climate change can influence protection risk, but also how actors working on protection risk may also be able to contribute to the reduction of climate risk. Averting and remediating environmental degradation may support a community to reduce the risk of dangerous travel, and adaptive livelihoods opportunities may prevent the separation of families. Conversely, reduction of protection risks, such as violence, can increase social cohesion and better the implementation of climate change adaptation activities. NP's work with community protection groups in South Sudan began to focus on both protection risks and risk due to flooding. The groundwork already laid in their community-based protection program was brought to bear to address an emerging priority for the community themselves.

The impacts of armed conflict can also exacerbate climate change. For example, if large forested areas are deforested, it can lead to more carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere, and the destruction of oil and natural gas infrastructure, or industrial facilities, can contribute to the release of greenhouse gases.²⁴ This adds to the fact that militaries globally are significant carbon emitters.²⁵ There are growing opportunities for protection actors to contribute to climate work. In working to ensure considerations of protection risk are included, our own objectives can be better met, but improved protection outcomes can also support a community's ability to confront climate and environmental challenges.

²³ ICRC, [When Rain Turns to Dust](#), p.23

²⁴ ICRC, [When Rain Turns to Dust](#), p. 17

²⁵ Rajaeifar, M. et al, (November 2022), [Decarbonize the military – mandate emissions reporting](#), *Nature*.

INFLUENCING ARMED ACTORS

In armed conflict, armed actors are often—though not always—directly or indirectly responsible for protection risk and therefore require particular attention. Often an under-examined component of protection analysis, we must work to understand how climate change affects conflict dynamics, the behavior of armed actors, and civilians, and how civilians themselves respond to those changes. Holistic protection strategies must also include efforts to change the behavior of those responsible for the protection threat, including armed actors.²⁶

In situations of armed conflict, climate impacts—such as changes in the environment, weather patterns, and livelihoods—can affect the behavior of parties to conflict. For example, armed actors may seek to control the changing availability of natural resources and livelihood opportunities, which can exacerbate vulnerability to a wide range of protection risks. Military restrictions on fishing and farming in the Lake Chad Basin area have driven civilians to take up other living situations and livelihoods, including joining Boko Haram affiliated groups as fighters or wives.²⁷ In Iraq, climate-driven destruction of livelihoods has increased recruitment into state and non-state armed groups, increasing the number of weapons in communities and likelihood of violence.²⁸ Armed groups' behavior can be complex and contradictory. In Somalia, al-Shabab has provided services to drought-affected communities, benefitted from increased recruitment within communities where livelihoods were destroyed, and been accused of controlling civilian access to water resources and destroying water infrastructure.²⁹ Understanding affected communities' reaction to these changes and, more broadly, their relationship with conflict parties, is a crucial area to consider.

Our analysis should consider the relationship between conflict parties, climate change, and the environment. There have long been portions of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) that outline how parties to conflict are required to act in regard to environmental protection. Specific rules mandate treatment of the environment as a civilian object, prohibitions on the destruction of the natural environment as a weapon of war, and prohibitions on weapons that may cause long-term, widespread, or severe damage.³⁰ While the updated Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict do not have specific provisions on climate change, protection of the environment is more important in the face of climate change as environmental degradation has become more dangerous for civilian populations.³¹ The framework of IHL can be useful in negotiations with conflict parties over their behavior. ICRC's guidelines seek to support this and they are working to further incorporate this into their ongoing work on upholding IHL. Other protection actors, particularly ones that already engage with armed actors, should consider incorporating this into their engagement.

²⁶ See [Embracing the Outcomes Mindset](#), p.6

²⁷ [Shoring up Stability: Addressing Climate and Fragility Risks in the Lake Chad Basin](#), (15 May 2019), p. 63

²⁸ Vivekananda, J., Wall, M., Sylvestre, F., Nagaranjan, C. [“If I leave....I cannot breathe”: Climate Change and Civilian Protection in Iraq](#), (July 2022), Centers for Civilians in Conflict.

²⁹ [Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet: Somalia](#), (February 2021), *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*.

³⁰ See full ICRC guidance document, [“Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict”](#) for a more detailed discussion

³¹ This can affect discussions of issues such as proportionality, as the impact of an act may be worse if the environment has already been significantly degraded due to climate change.

CONCLUSION

Participants in the Roundtable agreed on two things: climate change as it relates to protection risk is a priority and we need to do more. The growing literature and practitioner experience points us to a few priority areas which can be encapsulated within the theme of opening ourselves up to other perspectives, sectors, and approaches. We must include climate knowledge, analysis, and history into our protection analysis through asking the right questions, increasing our knowledge and skills, and engaging with other areas of expertise. We must collaborate more, but more importantly, better identify actors who work on those areas of climate impacts that trigger, drive, and exacerbate protection risks. We need to interrogate our own ways of working that limit such collaboration and be willing to contribute to other outcomes as we ask others to contribute to ours.

Priorities for improving our protection analysis:

- ▶ We must be more comfortable with complexity in our analysis and response because climate change and protection risks come with complex webs of causality.
- ▶ While incorporating community perspectives and understanding on climate change, we also need to look at national and regional questions to ensure our understanding is holistic.
- ▶ Ongoing monitoring and analysis should be complemented by in-depth research on the complex causal pathways between climate change and protection risk.

Priorities for improved collaboration:

- ▶ Protection specialists must grow our own climate literacy to enable stronger collaboration with those working on climate change and environmental degradation.
- ▶ We must be open to finding mutual objectives where reduced protection risk, mitigation, and adaptation to climate change impacts reinforce one another. This will not only lead to better holistic outcomes at a community level, but will also encourage collaboration.
- ▶ We need to understand connections between our conception of protection risk and that of Disaster Risk Reduction, and identify opportunities to connect our efforts on early warning and prevention.

A results-based approach to protection is one that is set up to incorporate issues like the impacts of climate change. A focus on context-specific analysis and multi-disciplinary strategies means that we must take into account community experience and perspectives, localized analyses of climate impacts, and engagement with climate actors where relevant. Increased understanding and focus on climate will strengthen results-based protection as it brings us closer to a holistic and context-specific understanding of the protection risks people face. As we move forward in our efforts to achieve protection outcomes, results-based approaches that incorporate climate change impacts will be a crucial part of the humanitarian community's commitment to support people in the increasingly complex crises they face.