

It's the climate change blues

With natural disasters becoming more common, a new legal framework is needed to protect the planet



Analysis

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WITH natural disasters becoming more common around the world, we need to take a serious look at the profound impact climate change has on human security.

We also need to focus our attention on climate change, conflict and human mobility, which are all linked to human security.

Recently, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its fifth Assessment Report on Climate Change (AR5), which highlights the risks climate change poses to human and natural systems and the additional pressures it could impose on various aspects of human security, including environmental migration.

Climate change and climate variability have the potential to multiply existing threats to human security, including food, health and economic insecurity.

It is a multiplier of existing health vulnerabilities, including insufficient access to safe water and improved sanitation, and limited access to health care and education. It may also increase the burden of a range of climate-relevant health outcomes.

While these and other effects of climate change will become more widespread across the globe, Africa, in particular, will be the hardest hit. It is one of the most vulnerable continents due to its high exposure and low adaptive capacity.

There is increased evidence of warming over land regions across Africa, consistent with anthropogenic climate change.

African ecosystems are already being affected and future impacts are expected to be substantial.

Climate change will amplify existing stress on water availability in Africa and will interact with non-climate drivers and stress factors to exacerbate vulnerability of agricultural systems, particularly in semi-arid areas.

While the global pursuit of profit continues to contribute to the exploitation of the eco-

system in an unsustainable manner, environmental damage, in turn, leads to more human mobility, even displacement of people who are forced to migrate because they lack the most basic resources for survival.

Although progress has been made on managing risks to food production from climate variability and near-term climate change, it will not be sufficient to address the long-term impacts of climate change.

So, what can we do to avoid a potential humanitarian and ecological disaster? A good place to start would be to translate our existing climate knowledge into decisive action.

It is crucial we create and utilise opportunities for smart decisions and policies aimed at minimising risks, strengthening resilience and addressing the underlying causes of human vulnerability that result in increasing human mobility and displacement.

This is precisely what individuals, communities, policy-makers and governments around the globe are called upon to do on World Meteorological Day, marked on March 23 to commemorate the establishment of the World Meteorological Organisation in 1950.

KEY POINTS

» We need to take a serious look at the profound impact climate change has on human security

» We also need to focus our attention on climate change, conflict and human mobility, which are linked to human security

» Climate change and climate variability have the potential to multiply existing threats to human security

» Africa, in particular, will be the hardest hit

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On Monday, the theme for 2015 was Climate Knowledge for Climate Action.

This underlines the importance of using climate knowledge to mitigate risks. It also shows while debating issues on



DISASTER BREWING: To prevent the threats and impact of climate change on humanity is to translate our existing climate knowledge into decisive action. PICTURE: SHUTTERSTOCK

change is important, concrete actions are needed.

The law can play an important role. Unfortunately, however, until AR5, the IPCC – with perhaps few exceptions – has avoided making normative statements.

Yet, in order to address the social dimensions of its impacts, climate change must permeate the law in many ways, creating new intersections of law in its diverse fields.

Normative claims are inevitable to give societal meaning to the empirical findings generated by the IPCC and societal values.

Science and law need to be brought together to make a significant (and timely) difference.

Our words and deeds need to be more coherent because adaptation to climate change will be increasingly linked to development, disaster risk prevention and reduction as well as climate and disaster-induced human mobility.

Bringing climate change more into the legal and mainstream planning of all development sectors is key for development in Africa.

Law and policy are not only essential for sustainable development, but also to provide a bulwark against the devastating effects of climate change.

Although existing international legal frameworks may apply to populations affected by the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation in certain instances, various gaps still exist.

International law lacks an effective set of status rights, particularly for those migrating as a measure of adaptation to climate change, and needing food, shelter, education and health services and protection against exploitation.

More than ever, it has become necessary to call for effective regulation in order to address the impact of climate change and to prevent the worst case for the future.

Subsuming the IPCC's findings under legal structures is no doubt a challenging task due to the endless ramifications of climate change and particularly due to its interdisciplinary nature and countless impacts on various (if not all) segments of our planet.

In this respect, the IPCC, in the common interests of humanity, should become more normative in future when addressing necessary reforms in response to climate change.

With this in mind, it is hoped that this year will pave the way forward in developing new strategies and political, legal and scientific frameworks that can help us address climate change effectively, enhance human security and protect the most vulnerable.

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