

Climate Change and Disaster; Need for a Human Rights Based Approach to Disaster Reduction and Sustainable Development

Submission to OWG by CECOEDECON (NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC), PAIRVI, Bharat Jan Vigyan Jathha and Beyond Copenhagen

Introduction

In May 2013 carbon concentration reached 400 parts per million (ppm) at observatory in Hawaii. Global carbon concentration is supposed to reach 400 ppm soon. It was 315 ppm in 1958, 375 ppm in 2000 (UNEP, 2012). While it increased by 60 ppm in 42 years till 2000, in the last decade it rose by 25 ppm. The reasons are easy to understand. The global emission was 40 gigatonnes (GT) of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in 2000, which rose to 50 GT of CO₂ in 2011, rising by 25 percent in ten years! The current emission levels need to be brought down to 44 GT of CO₂ by 2020, to contain a rise in temperature below 2 degrees.¹

Against this rapid increase in climate change, global efforts have been lackluster. In the business as usual scenario, the total emissions in 2020 will be 58 GT. Based on the pledges that have been made by the countries in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)², and the Kyoto Protocol³ in the best case scenario the emissions in 2020 will be 52 GT, in the worst case scenario (low ambition levels) it will be 57 GT. This is only 1 GT less than business as usual (BAU) scenario and far above the threshold limit of 44 GT. Obviously, this is not enough to keep the rise in temperature below 2 degrees Celsius. This calls for wartime efforts to reduce the emissions.

Climate change and disaster

One of the manifested impacts of runaway climate change has been the increasing frequency of disasters. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) in a report released in June, 2013 year declared the decade (2001-2010) “a decade of climate extremes,” being the warmest decade for both land and ocean temperatures, and the rate of increase in global warming has been unprecedented. Every year of the decade, except 2008, was among the ten warmest years. It reported significant loss of Arctic sea ice, decline in the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets and global average sea level over the decade was 20 cm higher than that in 1880. The decade was second wettest since 1901 and eastern USA, northern and eastern Canada including many parts of Europe and central Asia were particularly wet. Floods were the most frequent climate extreme events with big floods in Eastern Europe, India, Africa, Asia (more than

¹ All data based on the UNEP’s “Emission Gap Report 2012” available at <http://www.unep.org/publications/ebooks/emissionsgap2012/>, last accessed on 13th November, 2013

² UNFCCC is the only global treaty to stabilize climate and has membership of 193 countries.

³ Kyoto Protocol obliges developed and industrial countries to reduce their emissions, however, top emitters like US and Australia have renounced KP, and China by virtue of being a developing country is exempted from compulsory emission reduction.

2000 people died in floods in Pakistan in 2010) and Australia. At the same time, many countries in East Africa and the Amazon basin and Australia were also visited by droughts. The decade saw 511 tropical cyclones, which killed more than 100,000 people and 250 million people were reported to be affected. More than 138,000 people were believed to be killed or missing due to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar alone in 2008. The decade recorded an astounding 2000 percent increase in deaths from the heat waves (mainly in Europe in 2003 and Russia in 2010) from less than 6000 in 1991-2000 to 136,000 in 2001-2010. According to the data of the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology, a total of more than 370,000 people died due to extreme climate events.⁴ In June 2013 itself Uttarakhand in India witnessed unprecedented damage, by far the worst in the year where flashfloods and landslides killed more than 10,000 people. Haiyan also killed an equal number of people in Philippines in November, and affected almost one million people. It is not only the people in poor countries who are dying; but the decade has the signature of climate extremes and deaths in all parts of the world.

Global response to disaster and disaster risk reduction

Over the past 70 years world's population has risen by 87%. The population living in flood prone river basins has increased by 114% and population living in cyclone-exposed coastlines has increased by 192%. More than half of the world's population are located in cities lying in huge seismic activities.

The economic losses from disasters now stand at \$125 billion per year and are rising at the rate of \$30 billion per decade (ODI, 2013).⁵ Hydrometeorological disasters (disasters induced due to climate change impacts) now compose 80% of all disasters and if climate change is not halted disasters are likely to increase in near future. It has the potential of reversing the developmental gains achieved over time. The disasters have a tendency to create a class of marginalized communities; worst affected are poor people in the developing and poor countries and especially marginalized groups (Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes for instance in India), women, children, aged and disabled and migrants. The experience of disasters in India have revealed discrimination against the indigenous populations and dalits, no records of migrants killed, women compelled to engage in survival sex and selling children to survive.⁶

Global response to disasters have been limited to adoption of Hyogo Framework of Action (HFA) in World Conference on Disasters (2005), which was adopted as a response to Asian Tsunami and with the commitment to reduce risk from disasters. HFA has been adopted by more than 168 countries since its adoption in 2005. The first phase comes to an end in 2015, and a lot of discussions on

⁴ All data are based on the WMO report released on July, 2013 titled "2001-2020; A Decade of Climate Extremes" available at http://www.wmo.int/pages/mediacentre/press_releases/pr_976_en.html, last accessed on 13th November, 2013.

⁵ <http://www.odi.org.uk/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8358.pdf>

⁶ The organization making the submission has worked extensively in Kosi Floods in Bihar (2008) and flashfloods and landslide in Uttarakhand (2013), and have come across many stories cited in the experiences.

successor of the Hyogo Framework of Action (HFA 2) have already taken place. While the achievements during the period has been significant in terms of adoption of policies, legislations and institutions by the countries, and increase in the coverage of people by fiscal instruments/ insurance; the challenges have been equally significant.

Experience and Lessons learned from implementation of Hyogo Framework of Action

The implementation of the HFA has showed that despite increasing number of countries adopting HFA and creating national frameworks to disaster reduction, disaster reduction is yet to be recognized as a core development policy and it often ends up at a losing end in competition of larger development goals such as poverty reduction, economic growth, health and food security concerns. Some of the lessons learned are listed as below

1. Challenges of translation of priority areas of HFA into targets internationally and into national programmes
2. Focus on *ex post* responses, rather than *ex ante* measures
3. Lack of capacity for assessment, preparedness and responses and lack of data
4. Lack of role for communities in preparedness and responses and lack of community based institutions, which are generally the first to come to the rescue of affected populations

Some of the overarching concerns arising from the experience of almost a decade of HFA are as below;

1. It's only the disaster communities who own HFA, it's not owned by countries or international community, and therefore, actions have been limited to creating a national platform for disaster reduction, without essential priorities of HFA being woven into DRR framework. It must address power imbalances and political dynamics within the communities and countries, and have to be seen in the context of stronger accountability framework
2. HFA looks only into the environmental/ hazard impact while social, economic, and psychosocial aspects remain unaddressed. Experiences show that 90% of the losses in disasters arise out of low intensity high frequency events, which underline that social, economic and psychosocial aspect, need to be addressed in an adequate manner.
3. Disasters have been mainly approached to reduce development/economic losses, while the current paradigm of development continues to create unacceptable levels of risk and exposure.

Opportunity that lies ahead

In the last few years there has been increasing discussion on climate change and disasters in the context of increased risk from climate change impacts. It has been significant part of the discussion in the climate change negotiations since Conference of Parties in Cancun (2010), which adopted a Cancun Adaptation Framework (composed of a adaptation committee, adaptation fund, and a Work Programme on loss and damage from climate change induced disasters). Recent Conference of Parties in Warsaw, Poland (Dec, 2013) reiterated that Loss and damage is an integral part of climate change adaptation and resolved to set up a mechanism to look into loss and damage. The developing countries are

increasingly asking for a prominent place for disaster and loss and damage in the future global agreement, which is supposed to be ready by 2015.

There has been significant discussion on successor of HFA in the World Conference of Disasters, Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction (2009) as well as in reports like Commission on Climate Change and Development (CCD, 2009) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report on Managing the risk of extreme events and disasters to advance climate change adaptation (IPCC 2009).

However, the biggest opportunity lies in the series of discussion and responses in the post 2015 development agenda of the United Nations and the follow up of the Rio+20 Conference and formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The report of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons⁷ which was entrusted by the United Nations Secretary General to look into post 2015 development agenda of the United Nations, recognized “Sustainable Development at Core” as one of the major transformational shifts desired, and also recognized climate change as one of the global challenges and reiterated the link between climate change and sustainability and poverty and inclusion. The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals⁸ (OWG) set up to follow up on the outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference looks at climate change and disaster as one of the important areas of discussion in the context of sustainable development goals. The OWG is exploring to include goals, targets and indicators to address and climate change and disaster within sustainable development goals. These current proposals on the table include having a stand alone goal on climate change and disaster, or having specific targets related to climate change and disaster woven in larger development goals such as economic growth, poverty reduction, gender empowerment, education etc. yet another proposal is an integration of climate change, energy and disaster and have double goals on energy and climate change, climate change and disasters and so on.

Recommendations on fundamental principles in addressing climate change and disaster in the SDGs

While the proposals are still being vetted, it is important that the OWG goes beyond having climate change and disaster in the narrative. Formulated in any manner, it is extremely important that some important principles arising from the overarching concerns in the implementation of the HFA are woven into the proposed framework. These include

⁷ In July 2012, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon announced the 27 members of a High-level Panel to advise on the global development framework beyond 2015, the target date for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Panel was co-chaired by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, and Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom, and it includes leaders from civil society, private sector and government. The Panel submitted its report on 30th May 2013.

⁸ The Open Working Group was established on 22nd of January 2013 by decision 67/555 (see [A/67/L.48/rev.1](#)) of the General Assembly. The 30-member (OWG) of the General Assembly is tasked with preparing a proposal on the SDGs and will submit its report by the end of the 68th session (September 2014) of the United Nations General Assembly.

1. Recognition of goal of keeping rise in temperature below 2 degrees Celsius and to progressively reduce this target to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
2. Recognition of Common but Differentiated Responsibility based on Respective Capability (CBDR-RC) and equity as foundational principles in climate change responses.
3. Reduce risk and exposure (besides economic losses) and significantly increase resilience of communities through strategies integrating poverty reduction, employment and livelihoods, education, health, urban development, transport and human security with climate change adaptation and disaster.
4. Recognition of disaster reduction as a development policy, removing conflict between development policies and disaster reduction.
5. Incorporation of human rights based approach in disaster reduction, and focus on marginalized populations, IDPs, physically disabled, women and children, poor and migrants.
6. Recognition of the fact that people in disaster have same rights as citizens and human beings and measures to remove discrimination in disaster responses, and state having the primary responsibility of protect, promote and respect rights of affected people and assist them in rehabilitation and reconstruction, affected people must be able to access information related to disaster risk, improving early warning systems, and improving coverage of people with insurance. Rebuilding should be looked as an opportunity to remove discrimination and promote rights and equity.
7. Focus on preparedness and ex ante measures.
8. Convergence of climate change adaptation and disaster reduction strategies as sustainable development practices.
9. Strengthening community based disaster reduction approaches, with involvement of communities and vulnerable populations in all phases of disasters including preparedness, response, prolonged displacement and relocation and recovery and reconstruction.
10. Increased policy and budgetary support to facilitate rights based disaster risk reduction frameworks.

Incorporation of these principles in the SDGs will create a mutually reinforcing agenda and integration of human rights dimensions in climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and sustainable development. However, this would not be achieved without a robust global cooperation framework on climate change and disaster.

Concluded.....

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