

Presentation by

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Session 3: Forging Stronger Cooperation between Human Rights and Climate Change Communities

The Human Rights and Climate Change Communities rarely engage in debate or collaborative activities; this is due to several factors, including:

- the tendency of actors to remain within the formal confines of human rights institutions and/or of the negotiation circles of the UNFCCC process;
- the absence of formal agenda obligations to collaborate between actors;
- the limited budgetary allocations which constrain and make collaboration difficult;
- internal political and physical divisions either between government officials or a single country (the human rights diplomats at the Human Right Council don't work with the climate change diplomats or with staff at the Environment Ministry, working through the UNFCCC process);
- the lack of fluid programmatic activity between intergovernmental agencies (UNEP/OHCHR), or between civil society groups (where human rights and environmental groups are also divided by agenda differences);
- personal unwillingness by actors to collaborate across sectors/agendas;
- physical separation of those working in each area, deriving from the disparate travel agendas, or base locations (Geneva/Kenya);
- the geographically divergent and very charged international agendas which take negotiators around the world to negotiate within their agendas and networks, but not outside of it (when have HR officials attended UNFCCC meetings, or vice versa?);
- lack of formal mandate to do so
- “human rights” today have no place, visibility, or political support in the UNFCCC discussions;
- “climate change” is not a priority issue in the everyday affairs of human rights institutions (it's a marginal issue)

We cannot deny however, the natural linkage points existing between human rights and climate change debate and agendas. Climate change is seriously affecting the human rights of climate vulnerable communities. As such, a more collaborative effort to bring together human rights and climate change actors seems logical, and the most logical framework to advance such a collaborative effort is clearly in addressing the *adaptation agenda*.

Climate negotiations are very technical and have intense procedures, which seem unlikely to open up voluntarily to actively invite or seek out the participation of human rights actors. As such, any effort to forge stronger cooperation between these worlds must address several issues.

The first condition is that the effort take place in those areas where a collaborative approach makes the most sense and where it is more likely to take hold and evolve. Sending human rights officials to negotiate in the UNFCCC process would probably not be very constructive as it would like add greater complexity to an already intense negotiations process.

There are however, many ways in which a human rights approach could help the climate agenda begin to take assertive steps forward in the defense of climate vulnerable communities.

1. The first area is already underway, largely supported by this Human Rights Council, and this very meeting is a part of it, which is assuring that academia, research and policy debate is occurring and is up to date with the latest science and negotiations process. Substantive information about the social impacts of climate change are key to buttress and legitimize future collaborative work between the fields and to better inform the adaptation negotiations process. This work needs to be focused on clearly identifying vulnerable groups, climate trends and their likely social impacts, particularly *vis a vis* human rights. At present, the Human Rights Council should ensure that this debate continues, through the necessary renewal of resolutions and mandates;
2. Policy development. We need model policy and best practice information (where it may already exist) in order to better guide climate vulnerable States in the development of local, provincial, national and regional level climate policies, not only regarding mitigation and emissions reduction, but also *vis a vis* those climate vulnerable groups who need the most attention. This implies assisting climate vulnerable States in the setting, development and financing of priority climate investments. UN agencies should be mandated to help develop this sort of public policy and programs, addressing the social (human rights) impacts of climate change through UN agency programs and through UN development assistance (or through bilateral donor assistance) to local public and private groups;
3. Tool development. Intricately related to policy and climate-vulnerable group identification is the ability to carry out climate impact assessments, which in turn lead to the various public sector policy responses to climate change.

UN and development assistance agencies can help finance the development of proper Climate and Human Rights Impact Assessment tools and participatory processes to help climate vulnerable States address this process;

4. Program Development. Policy should lead to investments through State-funded government and other programs targeted to assist climate vulnerable communities, in such areas as disaster preparedness, crop evolution/devolution; technological adaptation to a changing climate that affected livelihoods; etc. This effort needs to be supported by industrialized States, through their various channels of aid assistance programs (common but differentiated responsibilities should apply here);
5. Human Rights awareness building for foreign ministry (et.al) staff working on climate negotiations, should be encouraged, and vice versa. The OHCHR could play an important organizational role in this process, (instead of supposing that governments will do this themselves, they won't)! The Human Rights Council, in collaboration with the OHCHR and UNEP could convene a workshop bringing together human rights staff and UNFCCC staff of foreign ministries to discuss the adaptation agenda in a more collaborative/reciprocal setting;
6. The Human Rights Council might consider a special procedure or the creation of a new Special Representative/Rapporteur on the Impacts of Climate Change on the Realization of Human Rights, whose mandate could be to identify climate vulnerable groups in a change climate;

Conclusions

The Human Right and Climate Change communities presently do not overlap or communicate, save for a small (however important) effort being made through events such as this.

There is definitely value added in thinking of ways to have these groups work collaboratively, as there are risks and barriers to achieve this collaboration.

A more conducive policy, economic, and institutional space for this collaboration to work must be forged if we are to achieve more constructive engagement between the two communities. This should be a space of exchange of information of debate, but also, and more importantly, it needs to be a space in which actual programs and projects to address climate vulnerability are designed, financed and implemented.

This space must focus on and be grounded on the adaptation agenda, identifying climate vulnerable communities, setting agenda priorities for the adaptation agenda (with formal input from HRs sectors), securing adaptation funding for developing/designing programs to address vulnerable groups, and implementing a variety of programs though State and non-state actors to address climate impacts to vulnerable groups.

The programs and projects need to be diverse in size, reach and function, with some being small grants to local communities and civil society organizations (to address livelihood alterations, health risks, disaster preparedness, technological innovations), others larger city-wide, province-wide or even national programs to address climate vulnerability (flooding, crop changes, disaster preparedness, etc.), and some could also be regional in scope. A diverse set of projects will help in the identification and development of best practice to be later replicated.

The financial commitment from key donors to place development programs on social impacts of climate change in motion, will be key.