

THE UNDERMINING OF STATE CAPACITY BY CLIMATE CHANGE AND VULNERABILITIES

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ABSTRACT: *Climate change and vulnerabilities are presently undermining state capacities thereby posing major security threats to the survival of most sovereign states. A lot of states are heavily dependent on natural resources and it is also very crucial for individual wellbeing. A major impact of climate change is that it causes drought and its attendant consequence of famine which eventually degenerates into food scarcity, conflicts, migration and other indexes of state failure. Natural disasters are major security threats that pose major humanitarian crisis. Evidently the humanitarian crisis posed by natural disasters is surpassing those posed by armed conflict. Weak states are more vulnerable because their economy and social structure is hinged on climate sensitive resources such as agriculture, fisheries or forestry. Also they lack the capabilities to cushion the impacts of climate change. The article **recommends** that there is need for conscientious global cooperation to alleviate the impact of climate change in the international system. This is because although it impacts more on weak states, climate change would eventually degenerate into a worldwide catastrophe. Attitudinal change is required to tackle climate change hazards and the requisite change is mainly in the area of international cooperation.*

KEYWORDS: State Capacity, Climate Change, Vulnerabilities

INTRODUCTION

Climate change has the potential of undermining the capacity of states to such an extent that they can no longer provide the basic socio-economic needs and services of its populace. This makes them progressively deficient in the twelve indicators of state failure. The lack of opportunities to sustain livelihood makes citizens of such states very susceptible to crime and violence which most time metamorphose into conflicts at the interstate and intrastate levels thereby aggravating the already deplorable condition.

The article demonstrates that climate change is and will increasingly weaken the capacity of states to provide the resources, opportunities and services that will help citizens to sustain their livelihoods. Climate change accelerates the risk of state failure in African countries in particular and the international system in general. A number of indicators are used to determine state failure. Some of these include “demographic pressures, the presence of refugees and internally displaced people, group grievances, human flight, uneven development, delegitimization of the state, human rights violations, an unaccountable security apparatus, failing public services, economic decline, elite factionalizing, and external intervention.” [Saskia and Razi 2010]

Climate Change impedes development, intensifies income disparities between rich and poor and ultimately leads to state failure. This is alluded to by Sawin (2013) who said that “Climate change will undermine efforts to mitigate world poverty, directly threatening people's homes and livelihoods.... Not only could this impede development, it might also increase national and regional instability and intensify income disparities between rich and poor.” She goes further to state that “Climate change will likely trigger severe disruptions with ever-widening consequences for local, regional, and global security. Droughts, famines, and weather-related disasters could claim thousands or even millions of lives and exacerbate existing tensions within and among states” [ibid]

For the past ten years Somalia has ranked 1st in the list of failed states in the international system and is a perfect example of what a failed state looks like. Somalia has been without a functional government for nearly 20 years. According to Hoges (2010) “No country has failed more thoroughly than Somalia, so much so that it has become a warning sign for countries like Afghanistan, Yemen and Sudan”

CLIMATE AS A FACTOR OF FAILED STATES

Climate change is a major facilitator of state failure. In an International Alert publication (Smith and Vivekananda 2007) have noted that “threats to international stability associated with climate change, is placing some 40 states at risk of climate induced conflict.” Most importantly the twelve indexes of state failure listed below can be dictated by climatic factors.

State failure does not mean that a state has ceased to exist but that the state is deficient and ineffective in most of its political, social and economic obligations and responsibilities. The standard measure or basic features of a failed state is outlined by the Fund for Peace. This organization think tank uses twelve indicators as criteria for measuring the vulnerability of states. The indicators are meant to measure a state's vulnerability to collapse or conflict which ultimately leads to state failure. The twelve indicators for State Failure according to the Fund for Peace are: (1) Demographic pressures (2) Massive movement of refugees and internally displaced peoples (3) Legacy of vengeance-seeking group grievance (4) Chronic and sustained human flight (5) Uneven economic development along group lines (6) Sharp and/or severe economic decline (7) Criminalization and/or delegitimation of the state (8) Progressive deterioration of public services (9) Widespread violation of human rights (10) Security apparatus as "state within a state" (11) Rise of factionalised elites and (12) Intervention of other states or external factors.

All the twelve indicators of State Failure are predominantly predicated on climate change and environmental challenges. Climatic factors have given rise to water related hazards; lack of water causes draughts; excess of water causes floods, high tidal water causes salinity and acidity in soil etc. These impacts negatively on land causing food scarcity and energy depletion, thereby making people to migrate and spiraling into the twelve indicators of state failure listed above and consequent humanitarian catastrophes. This is subscribed to by Purvis and Busby (2004:72) who argue that preventing “large-scale humanitarian

catastrophes from climate-related droughts, floods, crop failures, mass migrations and exceptionally severe weather remains the most significant policy challenges.” Drought triggers desertification and famine with spiral disastrous consequences.

The humanitarian catastrophes compound the problems of failed states. More often than not the catastrophes of climate change degenerate into cutthroat rivalries which causes ethnic conflicts and sometimes religious crisis. This is because there is the tendency of groups bound together by ethnicity or creed to gang up against other groups with a view to protecting their interest on the negative impacts of climate change. This is most succinctly presented by Paterson (1996) who said that “as countries are hit by the negative impacts of climate change, existing ethnic, religious, or other divides may play a role in decision-making processes, and governments may favor dominant groups in decisions.”

Whatever direction the pendulum swings climate change is a major contributor to the rate of state failures in the international system. Also the weak and failing states are worst hit by the impact of climate change because of the heavy dependence on natural resources which are the most susceptible to the impact of climate change. This is subscribed to by Barnett (2008) who argues that “there are different levels of vulnerability to climate change. Those impacted most are likely to be those who depend on natural resources and ecosystem services for their livelihoods.” This underscores the fact that “the negative impacts of climate change are expected to fall disproportionately on poor countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America” (Biermann et al 2004). Let us now throw more light on some of the climatic factors that cause state failure.

The most significant indexes of state failure like: demographic pressures, refugees and internally displaced peoples, legacy of vengeance-seeking group grievance, chronic and sustained human flight and sharp and/or severe economic decline are caused by climatic factors in general and water distribution in particular. Water is indispensable in the economies of most nations because apart from drinking clean and safe water most national economies are predicated on water-intensive sectors like agriculture. This is subscribed to by Valerie (2010:11) who noted that “fragile and weak states are not only less capable of adapting to climatic change but also of managing and controlling conflicts peacefully. As a consequence, Africa is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, as its ability to cope with the adverse impacts remains low.”

Climatic factors are causing droughts, desertification and very hot temperatures which are diminishing agricultural production. Conversely hot temperatures generate excessive heat thereby resulting in more frequent heavy rains which causes floods and gully erosions. The disaster of floods causes the influx of refugees and displaced persons which is a major index of a failed state. “With many African economies heavily dependent on water, particularly hydropower, rain-fed agriculture but also irrigation... some well over 30%... this will decrease economic stability and human security.” [ibid]

Specific areas that would be greatly negatively impacted are the Nile Basin, Limpopo Basin, and the Niger Delta. “One of the key areas impacted will be the Nile Basin. The area is of particular importance because 7 out of 10 countries constituting East Africa... sharing the Nile Basin’s water, have experienced some of the most brutal social conflicts that the world has witnessed in recent years.” [op cit] Countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Uganda, Rwanda, and Sudan have seen a lot of conflicts and vulnerabilities because of climate change related disasters. The ongoing crisis in Egypt for social and political reforms may not be unconnected with the insecurities and challenges posed by climate change.

Also Valerie (2010:14) noted that “[b]oth Niger and Nigeria border the Sahel zone and have witnessed increasing desertification in their impoverished Northern regions, which may serve as a further driver of migration towards coastal areas.” He added that this is “accentuated by the risk of sea-level rise, which may increase salt-water intrusion and degrading ground water in coastal areas, thus creating multiple challenges. The Niger Delta has and continues to witness low-level violent conflict, among others over environmental degradation as a result of oil exploration.” [ibid]

The fluctuation between droughts and floods caused by climatic change is intriguing. The floods are always swift with devastating consequences but within a short duration. The alternating droughts and floods poses crucial challenges as both cases are extremes. “An additional challenge, particular to Mozambique, will be sea-level rise, as more than 60% of the population lives within 50km of the coast, and salt-water intrusion may degrade groundwater.” [op cit]

The consequence is food scarcity, hunger and strife which ostensibly weaken a state that is already failing. “Long-term changes in the patterns of temperature and precipitation, that are part of climate change, are expected to shift production seasons, alter productivities, and modify the set of feasible crops...the consequences are wider and more persistent food insecurity.” [Leslie 2010:18] Like Sudan, most of the worst hit failed and failing states are Third World countries in general and Africa in particular. These states survive on the intervention or goodwill of other states. They are overwhelming dependent on importation of commodities from other countries. “Currently, most African countries are net importers, with over 50% and between 25 and 50% of the food requirement of North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa imported.” [ibid]

Inability of providing public services is another major index of a failing state. Provision of power or energy is a good example of such public services. Developed countries provide sustainable, diversified, affordable and secure energy for its populace. Failed and failing states are unable to supply renewable and non-renewable energy and this is now compounded by climatic changes. According to Fiott 2010:23 “Increased climate volatility through floods, droughts and storms can impact on the functioning of key energy infrastructures (e.g. refineries, rigs, hydro-electric plants) within countries.”

Even the ordinary firewood (biomass fuels) which is the common means of energy for cooking, boiling and roasting is being threatened by climatic factors. This is because desertification and other climatic factors have depleted wood reserves. “Approximately 90% of African households use biomass fuels (e.g. wood and vegetation) for cooking and water heating...climate change (including unpredictable rainfall levels, drought, and flooding) threaten this high rate of biomass...” [Fiott 2010:23]

All the failed and failing states aspire to grow and develop but climate change is not helping the issue. Natural disasters that are becoming very prominent as a result of climate change are compounding the situation. Most of the failed and failing states are in Africa and they are facing multiple stresses including natural disasters. More pathetic is the fact that these states have very low adaptive capacities. According to Clover (2010:37) “While the number of major natural disasters in the world increased from 100 to more than 400 per year, from 1975 to 2005, it is Africa that has experienced the fastest rate of increase in the incidence of natural disasters over the last three decades, and a threefold increase in such disasters has been experienced in the last decade alone.” He goes ahead to state that “In sub-Saharan Africa, drought and floods account for 80% of loss of life and 70% of economic losses linked to natural hazards; other hazards include tropical cyclones and strong winds, storm surges, extreme temperatures, forest fires, sand or dust storms, and landslides.”[ibid]

The situation is worsening by the day but compounded by low levels of preparedness, resilience and adaptability of failing states as evident in the volcanic eruptions of Mount Nyiragongo, Goma in Democratic Republic of Congo. The UN Habitat report on disaster facts for human settlements has it that more people were “killed or affected by volcanic eruptions in Africa than in any other region between 1996 and 2005, despite only five eruptions. The continent’s low resilience was demonstrated in the 2002 volcanic eruption of Mount Nyiragongo, which destroyed 40% of buildings and displaced 250,000 persons in Goma (Democratic Republic of Congo)”.[op cit] Climate related disasters are aggravating the failure rate of states as it threatens the economic recovery efforts and development gains. Most of the failing states are constantly ravaged by tropical cyclones, flashfloods and storm surges.

Refugees and internally displaced peoples is a major index of failed state which is caused by climate change as it pertains to natural disasters, drought and desertification. These normally take the shape of citizens of the affected states migrating to other states. The UN predicts that there will be millions of environmental migrants by 2020 with climate change as one of the major drivers of this phenomenon. According to Flavell (2010:29) “In the early and intermediate stages of environmental degradation, migration can represent a logical and legitimate livelihood diversification option. It is an adaptation strategy for affected populations to help them cope with the effects of environmental degradation and climate change.” He goes further to state that “when environmental degradation becomes severe ...migration can become permanent and may require relocation of affected populations, either internally or in another country.” [ibid] Also according to Schultz (2013:2) “climate change impacts abroad could spur mass migrations, influence civil conflict and ultimately lead to a

more unpredictable world.” He goes further to state that “Change in weather patterns is causing drought and famine leading to food shortages. Water scarcity and competition for resources are exacerbated by the rural-to-urban migration of populations....” [ibid]

Failed and failing states already suffer from unemployment, social exclusion and other deprivations which make them vulnerable to the effects of climate change. The major alternative is to migrate to other countries with it attendant consequences. The case of Fulani herdsmen is a perfect illustration of such migrations. Because of persistent droughts and desertification in the Northern part of Nigeria, most Fulani herdsmen have migrated South in search of green pastures for their cattle. “In terms of migration, the influx of migrants into new areas has been a significant factor in many ‘environmental conflicts’ ...large migrations have at times lead to violent conflict, and large migrations may be a consequence of climate change” (Van1996). This is also the case with Fulani herdsmen whose migration has been causing a lot of violent conflicts for the host communities.

Natural disasters are major security threats that pose major humanitarian crisis. Evidently the humanitarian crisis posed by natural disasters is surpassing those posed by armed conflict. The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) a United Nations body for monitoring international disasters, say that “natural disasters are already a major security threat: between 1990 and 1999, an estimated 188 million people per year were affected by natural disasters, 6 times more than the 31 million annually affected by armed conflict.” [Purvis and Bursby 2008:68]

Natural disasters become wider security challenges when a country lacks the capability or willingness to help affected populations, undermining the government’s legitimacy and increasing popular grievances. Conditions of drought, disease, and economic stagnation may reach critical levels or tipping points beyond which state failure becomes more likely. Least developed and weak states are most vulnerable because they lack palliative and adaptive capabilities. They lack the mechanism and resources to predict, prevent and handle climate change related disasters. “Drought, crop failure, and subsequent state failure led to tens of thousands of deaths in Somalia in the 1990s.” [Nigel and Purvis 2008:69]

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE UNDERMINING OF STATE CAPACITY

The hazards of climate change are not the exclusive preserve of weak states or failing states. What is rather the case is that weak and failing states are more vulnerable as they lack the capabilities to cushion the impacts of climate change. Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans, USA in 2005 and destroyed properties worth “more than \$80 billion in damages, killing more than 1,800 people, and displacing in excess of 270,000. More than 70,000 soldiers were mobilized, including 22,000 active duty troops and 50,000-plus members of the National Guard” (Busby 2007:1) Evidently climate change is responsible for extreme weather events such as Hurricane Katrina, the fires in Greece, and floods in Africa and Asia.

Surely if Hurricane Katrina struck any of the weak or failing states it would have been unfathomable disaster with cascading consequences. The United States of America was able to absorb the impact of this disaster because of her very buoyant and resilient economy. The underlining factor here is that severe climatic-change disasters abound in the international system but impacts more on vulnerable states thereby causing state failures. Invariably, climate change undermines the capacity of states to develop and aggravate their deplorable conditions and their potential to promote human security and peace. It has direct effects on individual livelihoods and collective effects on state functions which causes retrogression.

This is the case because climate change is “a macro-driver of many kinds of environmental changes such as coastal erosion, declining precipitation and soil moisture, increased storm intensity, and species migration... and in some cases frequency of floods, droughts, storms and cyclones, fires, heatwaves, and epidemics.” [Barnett 2008:14] Barnett goes further to state that there is “every reason to worry about the impacts of these changes on human systems given that the rate of change is unprecedented in the past 10,000 years, and that climatic variations have triggered large-scale social disruptions in the past.” [ibid]

Ostensibly, weak and failing states would deteriorate because of climate change. This is because of their over dependence on wood and other natural resources which are highly susceptible to climatic change. The “vulnerability of people to climate change depends on the extent to which they are dependent on natural resources and ecosystem services, the extent to which the resources and services they rely on are sensitive to climate change, and their capacity to adapt to changes in these resources and services.” [op cit]

Invariably, advanced industrialized countries may not be easily dragged down for climatic change reasons because unlike the weak and failing states they do not predominantly depend on climate sensitive forms of natural capital. Weak and failing states depend less on economic or social forms of capital and more on natural capital which are very sensitive to climate change. What this means is that climate change in itself does not cause state failure but does so with the combination of a multiplicity of economic factors and social dynamics. Climate change causes state failure with a combination of factors like: “poverty, the degree of support (or conversely discrimination) communities receive from the state, their access to economic opportunities, the effectiveness of decision making processes, and the extent of social cohesion within and surrounding vulnerable groups.” [Barnett 2008]

In contrast with most advanced industrialized countries where agriculture represents only about 2% of the workforce, most weak and failing states have as much as 85% of their population as employees in the agricultural sector which is prone to climate change. A good example of this assertion is East Timor. “In East Timor some 85% of the population are dependent on agriculture as their sole or main source of income, and the majority of the population are engaged in subsistence farming so that 46% of rural people live below the poverty line of US\$0.55 per day (UNDP, 2002).” [ibid]

A major impact of climate change is that it causes drought and its attendant consequence of famine which eventually degenerates into food scarcity, conflicts, migration and other indexes of state failure. Nevertheless, the tendency of degenerating into a failed state is not just a factor of climate change, rather the “risks of climate change to social systems is as much about the characteristics of those systems as it is about changes in environmental systems.” [op cit]

State capacity is greatly undermined when the economy and social structure is hinged on climate sensitive resources such as agriculture, fisheries or forestry. The robustness of advanced and highly industrial economies makes them more resilient because of the social institutions on ground to cushion impacts generally. In time of climate change disasters such states can support their citizens with food, water, finance, housing, medication, energy and other vital resources necessary for survival. This is what differentiates a weak or failing state from a strong and developed state. “When all these functions are extensive and effective states are legitimate, people have opportunities to develop and have less anxiety about the future, conflict resolution mechanisms tend to be effective, and economies tend to grow and poverty levels tend to fall” [Sen1999].

As opposed to weak states susceptible to failure even with minor climate-change induced hazards strong states have “effective administrative hierarchies, control the legitimate use of force, can mediate impending conflicts before they turn violent, and are more capable of managing environmental degradation and change” [Kahl 2006]. The crux of the issue is that although climate change is a great facilitator of state failure, this potential is to a reasonable extent determined by the capacity of the impacted state.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has argued that climate change undermines state capacity and this can degenerate into state failures. It does so by destroying and depleting natural resources of citizens. A lot of states are heavily dependent on natural resources and it is also very crucial for individual wellbeing. Climate change has the potential of undermining the capacity of states to such an extent that they can no longer provide the basic socio-economic needs and services of its populace. This makes them progressively deficient in the twelve indicators of state failure.

The article **recommends** that there is need for conscientious global cooperation to alleviate the impact of climate change in the international system. This is because although it impacts more on weak states, climate change would eventually degenerate into a worldwide catastrophe. Attitudinal change is required to tackle climate change hazards and the requisite change is mainly in the area of international cooperation. The cooperation may be in the area of complying with the dictates of the Kyoto Protocol with respect to reducing the emission greenhouse gas and other harmful emissions. There is need to have an all encompassing global consensus that would create and encourage the use of an energy system that is based on renewable energy resources like wind and solar energy. This clean and efficient energy system should be affordable for weak and strong states.

The technology may take the shape of: solar panel factories, wind turbine plants, green buildings etc. It should however be designed to create new employment prospects and broaden the tentacles of business and economic opportunities to alleviate poverty worldwide. This is because poverty undermines state capacity. A major policy initiative that would enhance the development of a vibrant global economy with efficient climate friendly energy technology is required.

To achieve this there is need for the international community to set dynamic targets that would make climate-friendly initiative very lucrative. Another major policy initiative that would mitigate the hazards of climate change is the initiative to grossly subsidize and support the production and distribution of early warning systems for impending climatic hazards. Also evacuation and relocations schemes, coastal defenses, building codes, emergency response plans, water conservation systems and drought-resistant crops should be encouraged to avert or mitigate climate change related hazards.

Advanced industrialized countries in particular and indeed the international community in general should conscientiously draw out plans and policies to mitigate the effects of climate change. This is the only way to improve the stability and prosperity of failed and failing states and restore the social contract between citizen and government in such states.

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