Ensuring human rights in countries severely affected by future or current changes in climate

United Nations Human Rights Council

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**Introduction**

Changes in climate has and will in many cases lead to people living in the affected areas to be subject to deprivation of their human rights. The side effect of climate change in particular poses threats to the rights to life, food, water and health due to increasingly extreme weather conditions such as drought and floods leading to crop failures and difficulties to access water. The international community has time and time again called for the protection of human rights to be incorporated into global climate responses, in order to strengthen and take increasingly efficient and frequent actions to combat this issue.

**History**

When the tsunami hit in the Christmas time of 2004 it completely destroyed large areas of land, cities were flooded completely and farmland rendered useless. 11 years later, removal of almost all of the debris, reparation of destroyed houses and ruined infrastructure has lead to restoration of the previously ravaged communities. This is largely due to the fact that the worldwide community donated over 14 billion USD to help the affected areas out and restore and in turn stop human rights from deteriorating further in the area.

However, it is not possible to solely rely on international aid as the case almost was with Thailand. What is important to extrapolate from the events in 2004 is that in order to recover quickly from such a crisis, improvements in infrastructure related to the specific needs of each country susceptible to effects of climate change is imperative in order to prevent or dampen the impact of future events and threats.

**Current Challenges**

Climate changes can, and does, pose an immediate and far-reaching threat to communities and people. These changes can have an effect on the people’s enjoyment of human rights in affected areas. One of the main rights diminished as a result of climate change is the right to development, which was reaffirmed in the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action. However, development is quite difficult when the very land that the people are living on is yielding less and less food almost day by day because of the rising temperatures. Another universal right, which the climate changes can interfere with, is peace. Every human on this earth should have peace in his or her life, but when they live in fear of having a tropical storm tear away their house, or similar events, they simply cannot live a peaceful life. LEDCs are often more impacted by extreme weather for multiple reasons. Mainly, they do not have the same ability as MEDCs to handle a crisis, and recover in a quick and efficient manner. LEDCs also have a higher number of farms and farming communities, so when a flood hits a group of people heavily reliant on their own crops, their livelihood can be taken away from them in an instance.

A very recent example of a place experiencing deprivation of human rights due to climate change is Turkana County in northwestern Kenya. According to Kenyan government data, the average temperature in the area has increased between 2-3 degrees Celsius, which is quite a lot when compared to the world mean of 0,8 degrees Celsius. This has lead to rainfall patterns changing; the previously long rainy season has become shorter and dryer while the short rainy seasons have become longer in addition to being wetter than previously. Even though the patterns in the rainfall seasons have reversed, there is still an overall decrease in annual rainfall. Communities in the area heavily dependent on local produce have been experiencing increasing crop failures, thus having quite a heavy impact on the people’s ability to access food, in addition to health, water and security.



<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/bf/Turkana_County_in_Kenya.svg/250px-Turkana_County_in_Kenya.svg.png>

Turkana County marked by red, located in the northwestern region of Kenya.

**Previous UN Actions**

In March 2008, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 7/23, which in the first operative clause states: “ *Decides to request the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in consultation with and taking into account the views of States, other relevant international organizations and intergovernmental bodies, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other stakeholders, to conduct, within existing resources, a detailed analytical study of the relationship between climate change and human rights, to be submitted to the Council prior to its tenth session.*”

This has lead to very useful information being submitted that can be used for future reference when tackling the multiple issues related to deterioration of human rights in relation to climate change.

Another possible way to tackle the issue is through investment in infrastructure programs in LEDCs, funded through for example Foreign Direct Investments, which would help prevent or diminish the impact of natural disasters, droughts, floods and other potential threats to human rights.

**Sources**

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