



PERMANENT MISSION OF SOLOMON ISLANDS TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Solomon Islands National submission on Climate Change and Possible Security Implications towards the United Nations' Secretary General's report to the United Nations General Assembly 64th Session

Introduction

The adoption of UNGA Resolution entitled "Climate Change and its possible security implications" referenced A/63/L8 allows the international community to examine emerging security threats confronting member states including Small Islands Developing States in particular the least developed small island developing states and Pacific SIDS.

For the last twenty years, SIDS has been calling for global attention on the impact of climate change. Today many developing countries in particular SIDS within the Pacific have seen a reversal of their development status from developing to least developed countries. Five of the Pacific SIDS are classified as least developed countries others have slide into conflict. Two of the Pacific SIDS are emerging from the ravages of conflict.

Climate change for Solomon Islands is a threat multiplier; it creates new threats and exacerbates existing threats that fuels tensions and instability.

Today Solomon Islands under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter is a recipient of regional support, commonly referred to as the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands involving members of the Pacific Islands Forum led by Australia and New Zealand, and complimented by other international support.

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To examine the security implications of climate change on Solomon Islands, one will need to understand the country's diverse geographical and population's characteristics in relation to current climate change induced threats.

Climate change, a security issue

The persistent global inaction on mitigating and adapting against the negative impacts of climate change has seen the reversal of development status of many developing countries, poverty and internal instability is now a major global threat. Today while development and security are two sides of the same coin, the security aspect has become more pronounced, only through development will the growing security threats can be addressed.

Solomon Islands agreed during High-level segment of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Poznan, Poland, that 'climate change is a humanitarian concern that has security implications for Solomon Islands. Food security is a major concern and climate change exacerbates human vulnerability and increases the risk of disaster among Solomon Islanders.

Climate change impacts affect the total physical, economic, social, political and cultural space of our populations and their existence. The country is merely coping with the increasing demands of meeting daily subsistence of populations affected by climate change related disasters. The frequency of natural disasters over the years and more recently have increased and is placing strenuous demand on limited resources that are further exacerbated by multiple global crisis that continue to erode our national capacity to invest in sustainable development efforts.

It is anticipated that in the not-too-distant future the fight for access to scarce resources would increase internal migration. Inevitable would be the insurgence of internally displaced persons, more specifically climate change refugees from atoll islands, artificially built-up islands will resettle in bigger islands. In a country emerging from conflict, resettlement of climate change refugees in bigger islands is a recipe for future tensions and insecurity.

Climate change security impacts is an intrinsic component of development that it has to be addressed in terms of investments of adequate resources in mitigation and adaption activities in order to secure a sustainable development base for our populations. Solomon Islands recognized that, climate change is the security issue of the 21st century and will continue to affect humanity and even more disproportionately on our country, and other small island states. The dichotomy to the climate change security issue is that it is a silent war on humanity that has no sense of borders, direction, or sovereignty and cannot be fought with conventional

weapons except by making concrete investment resources and technology transfer to mitigate and adapt to the impending impacts on populations, ecosystems and their sustainability. In other words, addressing climate change security is a prerequisite to securing our national development efforts. We believe also that it is a moral obligation on the part of developed and developing countries to strike a common balance on climate change security and preserve the longevity of humanity in small islands states.

Vulnerability of Solomon Islands economy

Solomon Islands has a narrow agricultural based economy, and in many ways ill prepared to adapt and mitigate against climate change impacts. With the ongoing impact of climate change and the country's dependency on export of its primary commodities has placed the economy in a precarious economic position and continue to be heavily reliant on overseas development aid (ODA). Moreover, a third of the county's national budget is spent on importation of fossil fuels for national energy supply. The geographical isolation of the country from major international trading markets and shipping routes contribute to the high transaction costs of business activities and escalating domestic prices of imported good and services.

The current financial and economic crisis coupled with energy and food crisis have placed more stress on a country that is still picking up the pieces from an internal conflict, recovering from the devastation of the 2007 tsunami, today confronted by flash floods and king tides and currently preparing for a season of predicted prolonged drought.

The state's security institutions are being propped up by a regional arrangement led by Australia and New Zealand together with members of the Pacific Islands Forum. The Regional Assistance Mission continues to provide military, police and civilian support to Solomon Islands.

Solomon Islands general features

Solomon Islands is made up of more than half a million people speaking some 87 different languages. The major ethnic groups are Melanesians which make up the bulk of the population with a small Polynesian and an even smaller Micronesian community beside those from other parts of the world residing in the country.

The populations are all scattered amongst the more than 1000 islands that make up the country stretching over some 1, 800 km wide. Land area is more than 28,000 square kilometers. The

country has unique geographical features from having the world's largest atoll with fresh water lake; and also has one of the largest saltwater lagoons.

The country lies within the Asian belt that makes up the world's largest coral triangle known as the "Amazon of the Seas" and is the epicenter of marine life and diversity. The coral triangle has more than 75% of all known coral species, more than 30% of the world's coral reefs, 40% of coral reef fish species and the largest mangrove forest in the world. Many of these marine biodiversity and ecosystems that exist in the country are threatened by the climate change impacts. Each country presents its unique diversity and contribution to the world's biodiversity and to medicine.

The nearest Islands of Papua New Guinea is just a few kilometers from Solomon Islands border. The country shares common borders with Australia, France (New Caledonia), Vanuatu, Fiji and Papua New Guinea.

Climate Change and the stress it places on nation building

More than 80% of the general populations are located out in the rural areas, a similar percentage of the country's land are customary owned. The same numbers of people rely on subsistence farming hence erratic changes to the climate continue to trigger human, food, water and health security.

This year sea level rise and king tides, have hit various parts of the country which has destroyed food gardens, dwellings and water sources. Those impacted are mostly populations residing on low laying islands (atolls), Malaita outer islands including those occupying Malaita artificial islands since time unmemorable. Larger Islands has experienced heavy rainfalls resulting in both land slides and flash flooding. Flash floods have claimed have a number of lives. The frequency of these weather events have drastically increased and is becoming a daily phenomenon that these populations is coping with.

To day the government is informing the population of expected drought, again in a rural based economy this may trigger increase of land disputes and drying up of water sources.

The impact of climate change is diverting scarce development resources from investing in sustainable peace to coping with daily impact of climate change induced natural disasters.

Internally Migratory Movement of Populations

Migratory movement from low lying and artificial islands to high raised islands is an ongoing activity. Relocation of internally displaced populations have seen such populations moving away from ancestral land into customary land with a very different land tenure system; this applies to Polynesians with a structured social system to an egalitarian Melanesian setting. The challenge will come when fixed allocated land to settlers will have outgrown allocated land. Those moving to urban centers have also seen an increase in non-communicable diseases as their lifestyle takes a drastic turn of relying more on imported foods.

Secondly the United Nations does not recognize environmental refugees; these gaps within the UN system will need to be close. We could review the mandate of UNHCR to cover those populations that are and will be displaced due to environmental disasters relating to climate change even more so those from small island developing states who will be faced with the daunting reality of having to negotiate possible relocation options for their entire populations to another sovereign country.

Land disputes

Low lying islands in Solomon Islands are basically on the forefront and center of climate change's negative impact. As the climate change continues to impact adversely on the atolls, a bleak future is becoming more certain for these displaced populations that could push these portions of the populations to the edge. Secondly shrinking land on atolls means tribal boundaries also shifting which could trigger tribal disputes over resources.

Non recognition of Sustainable development Vulnerability of SIDS

Vulnerability of small islands developing states continue to be an issue that is not recognized explicitly and systematically within the UN system. The unique challenges coupled with smallness of sizes of the SIDS continue to be sidelined by the international community particularly in this respect various frameworks that highlight SIDS concerns are not implemented by the UN wider system. Much of these developments are not featured in international papers, there is a UN Policy of not collecting data on countries with populations less than 100,000 thresholds. In many cases countries with populations more than this threshold but are small tend to miss out. Much of the data are available but will need a real shift in approach to effect change in this direction.

Conclusions

For Solomon Islands, climate change is an everyday day challenge for a population that is largely subsistence farmers. There is enough UN support to turn things around only if it begins within and refocus its support to on-the-ground investment, community based and people centered development approach to compliment national efforts and priorities. The UN is the only multilateral institution that can ensure that climate change assistance given has sustainable on-the-ground impact at the country level.

Recommendation

1. Increase UN Country presence in Solomon Islands, by upgrading UNDP Deputy Resident Representative to Resident Representative, currently all UN programmes are managed externally.
2. Establish UN Climate Change Portfolio in the up-scaled UN Country Office in Solomon Islands to accommodate climate change adaption, climate change mitigation and climate change security issues. The existing UN Environment Portfolio is insufficient to tackle these emerging threats on climate change.
3. Need to see UN move away from spending country funds on consultancy, workshops and reports to on the ground mitigation and adaptation activities.
4. Request the Secretary General to make annual reporting on the Security implications of climate change on states
5. Close the gaps within the international system including having a defined policy on climate change refugees
6. Request the UN Security Council to recognize climate change impacts as the new global security threat of the twenty first century and that a concerted UN system wide approach be put in place to address this new global security threat.