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EMG

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Topic Proposal to the Environmental Management Group (EMG) for 2022 by OCHA

Understanding the consequences of a 1.5°C temperature rise on United Nations' programming

Background

According to the *Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change*, at current rates of temperature increase, global warming is likely to reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052¹. However, recent analysis of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), conducted by UN Climate Change indicates that the world is likely to far surpass 1.5 degrees of warming if Member States do not drastically increase their mitigation efforts.

As is widely reported, the impacts of climate change are already felt in many places. The mean air temperature over land has already increased by 1.53°C compared to a global mean of 0.87°C over land and oceans². Under current NDC pledges, changes in emissions by 2030 may only be reduced by 1% when they, according to the targets of the Paris Agreement³, need to decrease by 45%, compared to 2010. Given this, we must start preparing for a 1.5 °C world.

A world that is 1.5°C warmer is a world in which peace and security, development, human rights and humanitarian objectives are jeopardized. Climate-related risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth are all projected to increase. Communities in drylands will be subject to water scarcity while others will face wildfire damage, permafrost degradation and food supply instabilities⁴. In addition to this grim scenario, of 105,000 species studied, 6% of insects, 8% of plants, and 4% of vertebrates are projected to lose over half their ranges.

Climate change acts as a risk multiplier by compounding upon fragilities already existing. This will be more pronounced in fragile contexts as the convergence of climate, conflict and fragility add to existing food and economic insecurity and health disparities. Importantly, for fragile contexts, this also limits “access to

¹ <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/spm/>

² <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/chapter/summary-for-policymakers/>

³ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/nationally-determined-contributions-ndcs/nationally-determined-contributions-ndcs/ndc-synthesis-report>

⁴ <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/chapter/summary-for-policymakers/>

essential services, while weakening the capacity of governments, institutions and societies to provide support”⁵. According to OECD’s 2020 States of Fragility report, of the 22 conflict-affected fragile contexts, 12 are also among the most exposed to climate change and together are home to 669 million people⁶. As a result, adapting to the effects of climate change is a necessary component of planning and operating in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

For example, the Sahel is heating up at an alarming rate. Environmental assets are literally evaporating, and rainfall is increasingly erratic, undermining access to water, fisheries, livestock, and agriculture. This fuels intercommunal tensions, and Governments are struggling to establish fair and transparent land and resource management strategies to contain the situation. The symptoms of these problems have been visible for over a decade, in the form of large-scale displacement and growing hunger. (OECD DAC).

The UN through its Sahel’s initiative (UNISS) promotes building resilience to climate change, improving management of natural resource, and decreasing malnutrition and food insecurity. Further, regional programs such as the Climate-Smart Agriculture and Resilient Pastoralism Programme builds resilience and adaptive capacities of rural women and their communities to the impact of climate change, empowers them, and contributes to social cohesion. But what will a Sahel that is 1.5 degrees warmer mean for the communities living there? What will a 1.5°C increase mean for the work of UNISS and the Climate-Smart Agriculture and Resilient Pastoralism Programme? These are just two of the many UN programmes and initiatives that will be affected by a 1.5°C increase.

Purpose

The *World Climate and Security Report 2021* noted that the global governance system is ill-equipped to deal with the risks posed by climate change.⁷ Further, recent analysis indicates that global elites, including those with political influence such as policy makers, contribute to a large and rising share of emissions.⁸ Thus, not only is the UN potentially badly equipped to deal with climate change, but its representatives may be disproportionately contributing to the problem.

The purpose of this proposal is to request the EMG to conduct a climate risk analysis to:

- Review how crossing the 1.5°C threshold will influence United Nations’ operations, including the ability to maintain peace and security, achieve development goals and meet increasing humanitarian demands
- Identify measures that need to be implemented now to ensure the entire United Nations system can operate more effectively and efficiently to fulfill its mandate in a changing climate
- Identify how the United Nations can transform ways of working to reduce its own emissions and ensure our work does not harm the environment.

⁵ ICRC, 2020, p. 8[82]

⁶ OECD. STATES OF FRAGILITY, 2020. P. 38

⁷ <https://imccs.org/the-world-climate-and-security-report-2021/#:~:text=June%20%2C%202021%20%E2%80%94%20Today%20the,%2C%20such%20as%20COVID%2D19.>

⁸ <https://www.rapidtransition.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Cambridge-Sustainability-Commission-on-Scaling-behaviour-change-report.pdf>

Added value of the EMG

Should the EMG decide to take on the initiative of a climate risk analysis, we stand to gain a collective UN system understanding of the consequences of crossing the 1.5°C threshold. A consultative process and enhanced exchange of knowledge and collaboration among the UN agencies will help the UN system define a coherent, proactive approach to our programming that will contribute to mitigation, adaptation, and resilience.

The EMG is already working on the Environmental and Social Sustainability Strategy. We believe a climate risk analysis will complement this work by offering baseline projections. The EMG affords the system the opportunity to bring all UN actors to the table from those focusing on mitigation through to adaptation, resilience, and sustainable development. Integration of these perspectives, which requires a system-wide approach, has been identified as a key approach in the IPCC special report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C⁹. Furthermore, contributions from the Regional Economic and Social Commissions would allow for integration of unique regional economic and social considerations for the climate risk analysis.

Expected Deliverables

Although the EMG itself can decide on the exact desired deliverables, we suggest the IMG take on a climate risk analysis to identify potential operational impacts from climate-related events, trends, forecasts, and projections. Only with this understanding will the UN system be able to work cohesively in implementing our Environmental and Social Sustainability strategy and develop plans to avoid or manage climate risks. In doing so, the UN will be better able to:

- Maintain peace and security, achieve development goals, and meet increasing humanitarian demands through mitigation, adaptation, and resilience
- Identify measures that need to be implemented now to ensure the United Nations can continue to operate in a warming world
- Transform our ways of working to reduce emissions and lessen our impact on the environment.

⁹ <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/chapter-5/>