

Will states see more water conflicts as the climate changes?

Results of the research project CLICO

The third policy brief of the EU research project “Climate Change, Hydro-conflicts and Human Security” (CLICO) presents preliminary results on the relationship between climate change, human security, and conflicts related to water.

An interim result of CLICO is that, *within* the water-scarce countries in the Mediterranean, Middle East and the Sahel, there has been more cooperation over water than conflicts. Violent conflict over water is in fact extremely rare. The results are based on the analysis of nearly 80.000 media reports in these countries. CLICO researchers from ETH Zürich (ETHZ) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) derive from this some cautious hopes for the future: even if water resources become scarcer as a result of climate change, cooperation rather than violent conflict could prevail as the norm.

CLICO researchers also analysed relationships between states on the issue of water. A team of the Hebrew University Jerusalem studied conflict resolution mechanisms in international water agreements. These mechanisms can help find cooperative solutions to conflicts arising from e.g. rivers carrying less water as a consequence of climate change. One

finding is that trust between states, water stress, and dependency on the river’s water facilitate the adoption of these mechanisms in water treaties. Additionally, indicators were developed in the context of CLICO that measure the adaptive capacity of transboundary basins. Such indicators are useful for policy and governance purposes because they can help identify suitable policy interventions, determine priorities, set goals, and both track and communicate progress.

The role of international donors in adaptation was also analysed. While donors have, for example, been instrumental in helping develop the Palestinian adaptation strategy, CLICO research has also identified some problems with donor interventions on adaptation. For example, interviews with policy makers in Ethiopia indicated that adaptation projects should be considered carefully with regard to their interaction with existing conflicts, for instance between the government and different population groups. Otherwise, a project could run the risk of being perceived as part of the political agenda of government policies that certain population groups are critical of – thus leading to the rejection and hence lack of success of the project.

This is a summary version of a Policy Brief that Ecologic Institute (www.ecologic.eu) produced in the context of the research project “Climate Change, Hydro-conflicts and Human Security” (CLICO). This project is being developed by a consortium of 14 research institutions in Europe and the Middle East, and is financed by the EU under its 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development. The complete Policy Brief can be downloaded in English under www.clico.org. English summary: Rodrigo Vidaurre.