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„Climate Change, Human Security and Environmental Ethics – The Imperative of Inclusion”

From Tahrir Square to Tottenham North via Mogadishu and Islamabad

A) The Context

1. The 21st century is witness to global social, economic and political change of tectonic proportions. There is also the emergence of new alliances and the expansion of old ones, both with the sole objective to protect the interests of their members, e.g., in the area of energy security. (1)
2. Crisis flashpoints around the world which, in the past, could be fully understood by their local specificity alone are today increasingly inter-connected, inter-woven and even inter-dependent. (2)
3. Confrontation rather than cooperation is dominating more and more international relations. Multilateralism, the pursuit of initiatives for the benefit of all 193 UN member states and all groups within individual states, remains at best a rhetorical objective even though international law demands adherence. (3)
4. Citizens around the world have more and more access to new forms of social communication. The number of people, especially youth, making use of the existence of such `communication within and across borders' is continuously increasing. (4) Citizens are discovering like-mindedness. Even though the majority have not met face-to-face, people are developing a sense of bonding and a belief that they collectively have the power to influence political decision making.
5. This innovative (revolutionary) manner of communication is creating a two-way impact on developments at the local, regional and global levels. (5) Distance is less and less an obstacle to organizing political action.

Footnotes

1. *The Shanghai Organization for Cooperation (SCO/2001) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO/1949), G-20 and BRICS are major examples.*
2. *Examples include the Lebanon-Syria-Iran triangle, the Afghanistan-Pakistan- Kashmir link and the Palestine-Lebanon-Egypt- Israel quintangle.*
3. *All UN member states have formally accepted the UN Charter.*
4. *Face-book, twitters, LinkedIn and social blogs are currently used by over 400 million individuals according to google. This number is continuously increasing.*
5. *Max Weber's anonymous 'Gesellschaft' (society) of yesterday is quickly becoming a virtual 'Gemeinschaft' of to-day (community).*

The question that needs to be answered is: *What relevance do crisis networks, confrontation and social communication have for a debate concerning the effects of climate change on human security and vice versa?*

B) Intervening Factors

6. There are two answers:

a) First of all, drought, floods, food and water shortages, loss of bio-diversity contribute to inter- and intra-state crises and intensify confrontation. Crises and confrontation, in turn, impact on environmental conditions and nature. This is well known. The direct links between climate change and people's security have been amply documented, e.g., for the past twenty years in UNDP's annual human development reports. (6)

b) Secondly, less obvious but also known, yet either not taken into account at all or inadequately, are a range of factors which have consistently and with intensifying impact influenced human and physical developments around the globe.

These include:

i) double-standards, ii) widening gaps between rich and poor, iii) corruption, iv) ethnocentrism, v) intolerance, vi) gender inequality, vii) institutionalized mis- and dis-information, viii) unfulfilled promises, ix) humiliation, x) distrust, xi) ignoring history, xii) disrespect for religion, traditions, customs and mores, xiii) disregard of international law and most importantly, xiv) the absence of accountability.

C) The Climate Change Debate

7. A review of UN climate change /environment conferences from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to Rio+5, the Johannesburg Summit (2002), the UNFCCC Copenhagen and Cancun Summits (2009/2010) to the IPCC Assessments, especially, the Fourth Assessment on Climate Change (2007), the Economics of Climate Change (The Stern Review) and the UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008: Fighting Climate Change show a seriousness of purpose. There have been painstaking scientific efforts to i) improve empirical knowledge about climate change and environmental degradation and ii) develop mitigation and adaptation models for sustainable development for to-day's and future generations. These efforts, of course, must continue.

8. Impressive as these efforts of scientists and planners have been to better understand the causes of climate change and environmental degradation and to find equitable solutions, they will not lead to a reversal of the trajectory towards deepening environment-based catastrophes and political conflicts unless the fourteen factors identified above are included in national, regional and international mitigation strategies and their implementation.

Footnote

6. UNDP has published annual Human Development Reports since 1990; see especially: UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008: "Fighting Climate Change".

9. A major challenge is ‘how’ to go about including these factors. This will vary: a) at the level of *policy* and *strategy*, the overall conditions in the area or sector must be reviewed to determine the relevance and importance of individual factors. This review will help to decide the manner in which these factors are to be incorporated into the respective policy or strategy. b) at the *project* level, relevant factors, e.g., corruption, gender inequality and rich-poor gaps, will have to be identified and their respective local significance be defined. Project management will be held accountable by sponsoring authorities for ensuring that these factors are neither permeating the project itself nor preventing or delaying project activities. Project reporting formats must include a specific section on project developments relating to any of these factors. c) at the *programme* level, a similar approach has to be adopted with the added dimension of aggregation of the impact of factors at the sub-programme levels. Programme authorities and policy makers will be accountable to show evidence that programmes have been free from negative impact of any of these factors or show what mitigating actions have been taken to eliminate negative developments.
10. The debate on climate change also demonstrates the profound gap between those professionally involved in climate change mitigation and the public that is expected to understand and cooperate. The need to simplify language in order to make citizens around the world comprehend issues is an important aspect as it determines the extent of public involvement.

D) The Relevance of Intervening Factors

11. In the wider context of people’s support and the containment of conflicts, a wide and diverse range of factors such as those identified earlier, needs to be appreciated and taken into account. Only when this happens will scientific strategies to introduce low carbon technologies and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and “integrated approaches to concurrently advance adaption, mitigation and sustainable development” (7) have a realistic chance to be implemented!

12. The results of the search for evidence that intervening factors such as ethnocentrism, humiliation and corruption and their impact on human life and environment have been considered by governments or within the climate research community have identified a completely unsatisfactory picture.(8) The IPCC concluded in 2007 that “ a fundamental yet important step would be to identify relevant non-climate policies affecting GHG emissions/sinks...” (9). This refers to such aspects as trade, rural and urban development, water, health, agriculture and forestry but not to any of the fourteen factors identified in this paper. A 1990 IPCC report with references to education and information stresses inter alia the importance of: i) “making people more capable of dealing with the problems associated with climate change” and that ii) “education must be attentive to cultural and multi-cultural diversity” and also that iii) education and information mechanisms must strengthen an appreciation of commonality and global inter-dependence”. (10) These are pointers to the relevance of the fourteen factors. They should have been followed by the identification of some or all of the intervening factors.

A further task should have been to consider how these factors could be handled methodologically in the development of climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. These steps were not taken.

Footnotes

7. *IPCC Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2007, WG II:5.7 – Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability.*
8. *UNDP/HDR 2010 (p.83) refers guardedly to aspects of this by stating that there is a “need to assess the models of material progress that had generated some advances but are consistent with exclusionary and unsustainable political and productive practices.”*
9. *IPCC Fourth Assessment Report 2007: 12.4 Gaps in Knowledge and Future Research Needs.*
10. *Climate Change: The IPCC Response Strategies (1990), Chapter 7: Public Education and Information Mechanisms.*

13. The fourteen factors are known to affect, to varying degrees, lives across the world. Social scientists, politicians, civil servants and journalists have referred to these factors in many ways. Yet, ultimately they have not played a role in influencing the path nations and inter-governmental bodies have taken in dealing with threats to human security and environmental degradation. Is this so because most of the factors are i) intangible, ii) difficult to quantify, iii) considered too emotive and too controversial or iv) run counter to established interests? (11)

14. The public, and foremost the young, are less and less willing to accept the present governance structures and are beginning to react by calling for fundamental systemic changes. The ‘Arab Spring’ contains many of the ingredients for responsible change and so do some of the non-governmental initiatives elsewhere. “It is now evident”, stated the Greenpeace (UK) representative at the 2009 Copenhagen Summit, “that beating global warming will require a radically different mold of politics than the one on display here in Copenhagen.” A year later, at the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Bonn in 2010, a call was made for i) attacking structural causes and patterns that promote concentration and accumulation of capital, ii) ending the indiscriminate use of natural resources and iii) creating equity conditions for present and future generations.(12)

15. Whatever the reasons for non-inclusion of the fourteen factors (self-interests?, lack of courage?, ignorance?, rejection? opportunism?, etc.) are, the climate change debate can no longer afford to side-line these factors. The challenge will be to: i) accept the empirical evidence of their existence and importance and ii) analyze how to take these factors into account in adaptation strategies, mitigation models and, ultimately, in implementation.

Footnotes

11. *It reflects the difficulties UNDP has had over the years in constructing its human development index. UNDP resorted to three quantifiable variables: longevity, education and income. The question is whether the length of life, the duration of education and the quantity of money really are adequate indicators to identify living standards or whether they were chosen to avoid the more complex and more controversial issue of ‘quality’ of life.*

12. *See World People’s Conference, WG 9: Shared Vision, Bonn (Germany) 16 April 2010.*

16. In summary, an overview is herewith presented of the fourteen factors and their relevance to the climate change and human security debate:

E) The Case for Inclusion

(Note: It is stressed again that all of these fourteen factors are internationally widely known. What is new and significant is that 'individual' public awareness of these factors is turning into 'group' awareness and with it comes an awareness of the power of joint involvement. There is a growing public belief that this constitutes an opportunity to bring about systemic and structural changes leading to more equity, justice, sustainable socioeconomic progress for all, environmental healing, conflict reduction and a move towards UN Charter based multilateralism.)

a. Double standards (factor i) in international relations involving all fields of human security from trade to defence, human rights, especially, education, health and gender-based rights, etc. is the single most significant factor weakening human security. Governments must understand that unless they begin to tackle this major cause of global confrontation, the climate change debate will not progress! A 'no-hidden agenda' commitment to begin a process of dismantling double standards (13) at national and international levels will concurrently build trust and facilitate anti-poverty initiatives. This will reduce the gap between rich and poor (factor ii).

b. The wide gap between the rich and the poor (factor ii) is deepened by corruption (factor iii) and institutional (planned) dis- and mis-information (factor vii) (14). As the gap narrows many forms of corruption, especially petty corruption, will weaken or even disappear. Large scale (usually urban) corruption, however, will have to be dealt with in more rigorous ways referred to elsewhere in this paper. Dis- and mis-information, as a tool used by institutional authority is a practice which should be considered a punishable offence. Poverty reduction, the elimination of deliberate mis- and dis-information and reduced corruption will contribute to the enhancement of trust in international and national relations and thereby facilitate complicated international negotiations in areas such as climate change mitigation.

Footnotes

13. These double standards would need to be identified in some detail and a process of dismantling be defined. This is not utopian but doable unless the dangerous status quo reality remains the preferred alternative.

14. Institutional mis- and dis-information is a device used by official authority to disseminate wrong or misleading information to influence public opinion.

c. Globally, *ethnocentrism* (factor iv) is on the increase. Unilateralism (e.g., PNAC) and alliance formation (e.g., NATO and SCO) are connected with this development. Unfulfilled commitments to improve governance and un-kept promises for enhanced development assistance (15) have aggravated this trend. *Intolerance* (factor v), *ignoring history* (factor xi) and *disrespect for religion, tradition and customs* (factor xii) are major causes for an increase in ethnocentrism. All of these factors contribute to complicating international cooperation in tackling global issues. Climate change is no exception.

d. 'Gender inequality' (factor vi) remains a reality in low as well as in high income countries. This has nothing to do with individual moral failing but with discrimination and injustice. The social, economic and political costs for this are high. Gender inequality, and inequality of any kind, have their impact on how global concerns such as climate change and human security are handled. They must therefore be included as important aspects in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

e. Pride and dignity are attributes of great importance in any culture. Ignoring these, or, worse, practicing 'humiliation' (factor ix) has grave consequences, whether at the personal, group or state levels. The insensitivity with which 'humiliation' (factor ix) is often over-looked or disregarded in the conduct of international relations has to become a concern of paramount importance, for pragmatic and ethical reasons. (16) The UN Charter – particularly in its preamble and article 1 – refers to the "dignity and worth of the human person". Included in the UN Charter this value obtains a legally binding context. The relevance to conflict resolving efforts at any level, including the international climate debate, appears obvious.

f. There has been impressive progress in creating 'international law' (factor xiii) since the founding of the United Nations in 1945. Besides the UN Charter and two human rights covenants, many conventions and resolutions have been adopted by a majority of member states but also frequently ignored by many or even violated by member states when specific national interests were involved. International law has not enjoyed the respect and adherence law demands. Instead international law is used whenever it is convenient. This attitude towards international law has had a serious and deleterious effect on the conduct of international affairs. Military confrontations of recent years are pertinent examples. There is an urgency of reform needed for the present international security architecture. Reform must also deal with the fact that there are legal loopholes, e.g., with regard to multinational corporations and the deployment of mercenaries which need to be closed. The international climate change debate certainly would benefit significantly from greater adherence to international law.

Footnotes

15. *The commitment of OECD countries to contribute .7 % of their GDP to development financing in 2010 amounted to .33% only!*

16. *Yacine, a character in Yasmina Khadra's (real name: Mohammed Moulessehoud) book "Les Sirènes de Bagdad" (Éditions Julliard, Paris, 2007) exclaims: "I may not have much of an education but I have pride!" (p.73). Another voice adds: "Dignity is nothing with which one can bargain!" (p.141); "In all protests (in the arab world) are references to 'dignity' and 'a life in dignity' without interference, without bowing and bakshish, without fear of police brutality and torture." This quote is taken from: "Die arabische Revolution" (the Arab Revolution), a book edited by Frank Nordhausen and Thomas Schmid, Ch.Links Verlag, Berlin, 2011, p.11*

17. All the factors (i-xiii) identified above converge in the call for '*accountability*' (factor xiv). Whatever governance system nations have adopted, the rigour of accountability, whether political, financial, economic, social, legal and crime-related, is unquestionably inadequate. Double standards, poverty, ethnocentrism, gender inequality, intolerance, mis- and dis-information, dis-respect for religion, dis-regard for international law, etc. are nourished by an impaired accountability regime and an absence of ethical considerations. The victims are people, institutions and problem-solving initiatives, such as the international climate change debate. Under these circumstances, there is little hope for a return to principled political action. Trust will not be strengthened. Ethics will remain an unknown. Current global conditions demand leadership that i) recognizes the importance and relevance of the issues identified above, ii) distinguishes between symptoms and causes of the global turmoil and iii) on that basis grasps the opportunity to re-calibrate and implement systems of governance which have long been recognized as needed but are consistently ignored.

18. Complexity, intangibility or likely resistance to change are no acceptable reasons for the exclusion of any of these factors in the national or international debate of climate issues.

19. Conclusions: a) First and foremost, at the end of 2011, citizens around the world demand fundamentally different approaches to life than the ones which have dominated politics since the end of WWII. The Arab Spring and Occupation Wall Street are just the most visible manifestations of this demand.

b) A pre-condition for sustained implementation of climate change and adaptation programmes is the consideration of the factors identified above in the planning of any of the various stages of climate programmes and projects.

c) A systematic and transparent effort to take these factors into account will i) increase trust; ii) facilitate public acceptance of climate mitigation and adaptation programmes and iii) contribute to more human security.

d) Current global conditions need leadership that i) recognizes the decisive relevance of the factors identified, ii) is able and willing to distinguish between symptoms and causes of the global turmoil and the deterioration of the environment and iii) has the courage to re-calibrate and implement systems of governance that are recognized as needed but have been consistently ignored.

20. What does this mean for the climate change project? It could:

a. confirm the relevance of any or all of the 14 factors and possibly others for the climate change project;

b. collect for each factor, it considers significant, examples to document the impact on the climate change project;

c. identify a matrix showing individual factors and their specific relevance to components of the climate change project;

d. develop a strategy for the reduction of the negative impact of the factors on the climate change project.

