Forum: Environmental Commission

Issue: Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards

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Introduction

The unpredictable patterns of climate-related events have left the world in a state of complete and utter speechlessness. The detrimental effects and hazards these weather conditions have posed on the environmental communities worldwide expand beyond the capabilities of an individual, a family, and sometimes even a nation. This issue directly focuses on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13, Climate Change. The United Nations designated an entire SDG dedicated to the effects of Climate Change as it has become an increasingly important matter of our time. In addition, target goal number 13.1 aims to "strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries", which is the exact issue member nations will be aiming to solve in this committee. Therefore, it is more important than ever that international cooperation is achieved since these climate-related hazards are not only suspended to one nation, but widespread through many.

According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), "Climate-related risks are created by a range of hazards. Some are slow in their onset (such as changes in temperature and precipitation leading to droughts, or agricultural losses), while others happen more suddenly (such as tropical storms and floods). It is now widely that climate-related impacts are not just a future threat." In the past decade, the world has witnessed an unprecedented increase in the natural disasters that have resulted due to climate change and a country's inability to ensure adequate preparation for its arrival. The past and current experiences contain valuable lessons that member nations need to learn from, values that will reduce the vulnerability and threat of climate-related hazards and improve the resilience for future disasters and their impacts.

When researching this issue, it is essential to understand the importance of knowledge, safety, and education in the realm of the issue. Firstly, the ability to predict climate-related hazards is of utmost importance as it gives individuals and the government time to prepare, assess the situation and evacuate if needed. Secondly, the safety of each person is at risk when they are exposed to these hazards and therefore, we must invest effort into strategies that minimize casualties and provide civilian protection.

Finally, the educational abilities of each and every individual must be a priority. In order to truly solve this issue, the general public must be educated not only when a hazard is approaching but the ways in which they can protect themselves and keep themselves out of danger. Once the lives of individuals are dealt with, then the government can work on strengthening their ability to strengthen and fortify their resilience efforts.

Definition of Key Terms

Resilience

The term resilience refers to the ability to recover from a time of distress or difficulty. In this case, it refers to the response of governments, communities, and individuals after climate-related hazards, varying from floods to earthquakes to hurricanes.

Adaptive Capacity

Adaptive capacity is a synonymous term to resilience where a country or nation is capable of withholding the effects of a climate-related hazard or an ecological change.

Climate related hazards

A hazard is a source of danger or risk, and therefore, a climate-related hazard is a danger posed by the environment or climate. Examples of these can be as minor as heavy rainfall or excessive sunshine, to more extreme cases such as hurricanes, tornadoes, and typhoons.

Natural Disasters

A natural disaster is an event that is created due to natural processes (although may be influenced by human activity) that causes significant damage to its surrounding environments. In recent years we have witnessed an increase in these natural disasters, and this increase may be attributed to climate change.

Displaced Persons

A displaced person is a person that due to war, persecution, natural disaster, and other unforeseen circumstances have no choice but to leave their home as it is dangerous and life-threatening for them to remain in their current status.

Climate Change

Climate change is the increase in temperature the world has been experiencing since the mid 20th century. As levels of carbon dioxide have increased, the greenhouse effect (the trapping of the sun's warmth in the lower atmosphere) has taken place that has ultimately led to numerous other factors such as a change in the weather patterns, an increase in seawater level, and the influence in the field of agriculture.

Ecosystem

An ecosystem is a place where an organism lives, it is a "biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment." Narrowing in, a community is a group of populations of different species in one area, and finally, a population is a number of organisms of the same species.

Background Information

Hazard characteristics

Hazards are characterized by scientists through their magnitude (intensity), duration, speed, and the areas they cover. The more frequent the natural hazard is, the greater the magnitude of the hazard. Since some hazards do have long return periods of time, this causes some communities to have no memory of the effects imposed by high intensity hazards. A great example of this is Mount Pinatubo's volcanic eruption in the Philippines in 1991. Being the second largest eruption of the 20th century, it displaced 20,000 indigenous people because of the large mudslides created by the eruption. With the volcanic eruption, another hazard occurred which was the typhoon "Yunya". The typhoon soaked the ash aftermath of the volcanic eruption, creating heavy weight on roofs of homes and businesses which caused them to collapse, killing over 300 people. The meeting of both disasters had caused an unexpected amount of deaths, as well as negative social and economic effects that had lasted several years after the disaster. The combination of the hazards created an aftermath that the Philippines was unable to cope with, largely due to the fact that it had not prepared in advance and did not have concrete restoration programs. The government has addressed the situation through stating that they will begin to build better infrastructure that is resilient to possible occurring natural hazards and work with organizations, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for the implementation of capacity strengthening and disaster preparation projects.

The economic impact

The impact of a large scale natural disaster can only be solved through the interference of the international community. Natural disaster cause physical damage to buildings and multiple areas of the city which directly harms the economy through causing a disruption in the workforce. Companies are

becoming less productive for many reasons that include the damage to their facilities and the inability of accessing important information. Some companies might declare bankruptcy and many people are left unemployed. The economy is also negatively impacted because of the fact that the government must deal with the aftermath of the occuring disaster additional to that governments must fund affected families through relief agencies. However, when countries are aware of the natural disaster that is going to strike before hand through taking measures that notify them of potential risks; they are decreasing the potential economic impacts that will be imposed on the country. Japan was an example of this due to the earthquake followed by a tsunami on March 11th of 2011. The 9 magnitude tsunami costed Japan around $360 billion, as the country quickly had to repair the Fukushima nuclear power plant which was damaged and began releasing radiation into the pacific ocean which went over the legislated limit by 4,000 times; appearing in milk, vegetables and drinking water.

Impact on agriculture and food

With some climate related hazards being unpreventable, this imposes a negative impact on the economic status of the countries in that climate region. Climate hazards that include; droughts, flooding and heat stresses which reduces crop yields, specifically in areas like Australia and Sahel in Africa. These climate hazards contribute to the declining of crops, which will reach 35% by 2020, according to the United States Environmental Agency. In Asia, more than 40 million people rely on the Mekong Delta as the largest fishery in the world. However with the change of climate, the increasing temperature of water has moved many species to waters outside of their normal ranges which is affecting food supply that some communities depend on, due to the increase of water levels in the sea.

The Social Impact

With natural disasters introducing economic disadvantages, these economic issues are also introducing social issues that are affecting communities on a larger scale. The immediate occurance of the natural disaster may cause the need of urgent health care, shelter and the need of food and water. These needs alongside economical issues may extend on a longer period of time causing negative social impacts.

International Airlines Group (IAG) CEO Peter Harmer revealed that the social and infrastructure impact are the longest lasting consequences of natural disasters. For example in Australia, the total cost of natural disasters, including both economic and social damage was above $9 billion dollars (0.6% of the GDP). This is expected to double by the year 2030 and reach $33 billion by 2050 due to the increasing intensity and frequency of natural disasters in the region.

International day for disaster reduction

Annually on October 13th, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) observes the International Day of Disaster Reduction, which has been in practice since 1989. Its mission is to promote risk awareness and the destruction caused by natural disasters, which includes preparing countries before the natural disasters occur and how communities should be increasing their knowledge on natural hazards. Raising community awareness on this issue involves idvisuals and ensures that people are aware of the possible consequences of this issue, which allows them to think about the issue and express their opinion publicly and possibly pressure the government or community to actually take measures in order to solve the issue.

The sustainable development goals

The issue of strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate related hazards is directly associated with 2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) set by the United Nations. Firstly it relates to the first goal: “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”. While strengthening resilience to climate hazards may not be seen as a contributor of eliminating poverty, many countries are suffering from poverty due to their geographical location that is exposed to dangerous hazards caused by climate and their inability to adapt to the hazards due to lack of preparation, resources and such.

This issue also relates to SDG 9 which states: “Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.” The issue at hand can be seen as directly related to the fact that climate hazards play a role in the destruction of infrastructure which leads to severe economic and human losses. Nations rely on annual weather reports in order to prepare and ensure that their infrastructure is protected against the expected natural hazards, however, in many situations unexpected climate hazards occur which causes economic and social complications for the nation due to their unpreparedness. Overall the issue at hand contributes to the progression of the SDGs through finding solutions for complications caused by natural climate hazards.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

WMO is a specialised agency under the United Nations that aims to look further into the Earth’s atmosphere, its behaviour and its changing climate. Out of the many aspects that WMO focuses on, its scientists have been observing climate changes that are both natural and man made which are negatively affecting the future of our world. Through WMO, its members are able to monitor the Earth’s climate in order to provide reliable information for nations to correctly adapt to the varying climates and the management of risks imposed by such hazards. WMO, being a signatory to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, has implemented measures that reduce hazards that could cause disasters

and increasing the readiness of response and recovery towards the natural hazards. WMO has integrated many methods on an international scale to decrease human and resources loss such as; improved forecast services, early warnings, risk assessments, and raising public awareness. Furthermore, WMO supports developing nations through providing meteorological training, equipment, hydrologists and climate forecasters in order to prevent losses due to natural hazards on an international scale.

Food and agriculture organization (FAO)

FAO is an organization that belongs to the United Nations working to order to defeat hunger through achieving food security internationally. FAO achieves its goal through multiple methods that show direct relation to eradicating hunger. Additionally, FAO also approaches food security through helping nations to prepare and prevent disasters. Most countries already have their own methods for reducing risks of disaster whereas other countries aren't able to implement strategies (sometimes due to lack of resources), and so FAO works on providing solutions and/or support in the aftermath of the natural disasters. FAO assists countries through helping communities, governments and private sectors correctly overcome the difficulties introduced by this issue with the aftermath of natural hazards by providing adequate amounts of food and ensuring the sustainability of the agricultural field in the region of the climate hazards. FAO aided Nepal through implementing projects that strengthened agricultural systems, which was important as Nepal's economy is dependant on its agricultural activities, which were vulnerable to natural disasters at the time.

Philippines

The Philippines is a country highly vulnerable to dangerous natural hazards such as typhoons, earthquakes, cyclones, volcanoes and wildfires. Since 1990 nearly 70,000 Filipino lives have been taken away due to 565 natural disasters, as 74% of the population is vulnerable to the possible occuring natural disasters on 60% of the Filipino land. The frequent occurrence of natural disasters in the Philippines has costed more than $23 billion dollars because of damage. Over the past decade the Philippines has decided to rearrange their country's priorities and has made efforts to become resilient through establishing the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council, which works on ensuring that the members of the community and their welfare are protected during and after disasters. The council works with governmental, non governmental and private sectors in order to accomplish its goals. In 2010, the government of the Philippines changed its focus from emergency relief to the prevention and resilience to climate related hazards. The government also formulated a national disaster risk assessment plan in order to ensure it is meeting its goal, the plan included investing in risk reduction and increasing institutional capacity.

Belize

Belize is identified as one of the countries that is most vulnerable to climate change by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Belizean society and economy are highly impacted by climate related hazards due to the country's activities being concentrated in an area that is just outside a low-lying coastal zone, exposing it to possible hazards. After the hurricane that has occured in 1998, Belize has become determined to strengthen its measures towards future occurring natural hazards through investing its money in better infrastructure and implementing institutional reforms. In 2013, Belize adopted their first strategy in approaching climate related hazards to stop its negative effects on Belize's economy and society through a plan called the National Climate Resilient Investment Plan (NCRIP). The government of Belize's priorities now focus on improving road infrastructure so that it is resilient to flooding and shifting their investment into more efficient strategies to alleviate the effects of climate related hazards.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1938	Guy Stewart Callendar makes one of the first links between global warming and carbon-dioxide emissions.
August 26, 1989	The Montreal Protocol goes into effect, and works to protect the ozone and curb the use of ozone depleting substances (ODC). As of 2014, since the Protocols implementation, the use of controlled ODC has been reduced by 98%
December 22, 1989	The International Day for Disaster Reduction was designated to be on October 13.
February 23, 2009	The EU Strategy for Supporting Disaster Risk Reduction in developing countries is adopted to help address the issue in developing countries.
June 19, 2013	The Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries 2013-2020 is adopted by the EU to bring Member States together to collaborate on strengthening the resilience to climate-related natural disasters for people in need.
November, 2013	The 2013 United Nations Climate Change Conference, or Congress of Parties 19 (COP19), adopted the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, which aims to limit the loss and damage that countries face because of climate change, including climate-related natural disasters, especially for the most vulnerable countries.
July 11, 2014	The World Meteorological Organization, in collaboration with Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) and Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT), publishes the report, "Atlas of Mortality and

	Economic Losses from Weather and Climate Extremes 1970-2012" that outlines the damaging effects that natural disasters have had due to climate change, and states that natural disasters are occurring at an average rate five times higher than the average rate in the 1970s.
March 14-18, 2015	The Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction takes place, and during the conference the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is adopted.
November 6, 2016	The Paris Agreement, and it's aim to keep the global temperature from rising more than 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, is adopted by 195 countries.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Convention on Climate Change, 21 March 1994 **(FCCC/INFORMAL/84)**
- Kyoto Protocol, 11 December 1997 **(A/RES7/CP.3)**

The following is a list of recent Resolutions and Treaties from the Human Rights Commission of the UN:

- Human rights and climate change, March 2008 **(A/RES/7/23)**
- Human rights and climate change, March 2009 **(A/RES/10/4)**
- Human rights and climate change, September 2011 **(A/RES/18/22)**
- Human rights and climate change, July 2014 **(A/RES/26/27)**
- Human rights and climate change, July 2015 **(A/RES/29/15)**
- Human rights and climate change, July 2016 **(A/RES/32/33)**

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

As has been previously mentioned, there have been many conferences and agreements that have addressed the issue of climate-related disasters, such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage. Individual countries are also taking action to protect their citizens from the effects of these natural disasters. For example, in Pune, India, a region that has suffered from many floods in the area, the city implemented an action plan to reduce flooding. The city assessed flood risks, restored natural drainage and improved their own drainage, encouraged households to recycle rainwater, among other actions to help reduce the impact of floods on the community. Pune is still suffering from floods, but the city's information gathering systems

which find areas of higher risk are allowing them to find out what areas are at the highest risk, and what they need to do to keep people safe.

The Maldives, another high-risk area, has similarly taken action to develop a Strategic National Action Plan (SNAP) to combat the effects of natural disasters on the area. The SNAP encourages collaboration between experts on risk reduction and policy makers to develop their plans, and work to keep the country's citizens safe. The plan stretches from its inception in 2010 to 2020, so as of now there are few concrete results that have been reported, but the country is working closely with the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) to make the country more resilient and to implement the plans found not only in SNAP but in other agreements like the SDGs and the Sendai Framework. While it's great that such action has been taken though, many others have been unable to follow in these footsteps due to a lack of the resources to do so. The people living in the areas most in need of assistance, usually find it the hardest to get.

Possible Solutions

Prevention is always better than treatment, and this is completely true for this issue; the root of this issue is climate change, and we have the ability to take action against it. Many countries have already begun to do so, with the signing of the Paris Agreement and other climate related treaties and agreements, but it's still not enough. Nations need to take more responsibility, and understand the severity of this issue - signing documents isn't enough, we need to tackle the issue of climate change head on and with more vigour than currently. Solving the issue of climate change can be approached in a multitude of ways, from reducing greenhouse gas emissions, to forgoing the use of fossil fuels for renewable energy sources. Government regulations are also extremely important, as a less spoken factor about climate change is, according to the Carbon Disclosure Project working in collaboration with Climate Accountability Institute, that 71% of carbon emissions come from only the actions of only 100 companies, many of them residing mainly in MEDC's. Companies and corporations need to be held accountable and face consequences for their actions or else little will change.

Working towards solving climate change though, while being a long-term solution, won't bring about immediate results, and we do also need solutions that will protect those affected by climate-related hazards. One tactic could include monitoring high risk zones, and working first in those areas, then spreading out to areas of lower risk, to build hazard-resistant structures like shelters and housing. Education on how to act when disaster strikes should also be of high priority, especially in LEDC's, as many are unaware of what to do and how to prepare for natural disasters. It would also be beneficial for nations with high risk zones to improve their early warning systems, to give the country and its people more time to prepare. Hazard buffers, such as forests and coral reefs are also quite important, but

environmental degradation has left areas like this quite weak in the places that need them; the cultivation and protection of these areas not only helps in major situations like these but in the race to solve the effects of climate change.

In LEDCs, where populations generally suffer the most from climate related natural disasters, solving the issue becomes a bit tougher, as they usually lack the resources to do much that will help. But one solution, most notably brought up during the Paris Climate Agreement negotiations, is climate insurance. Climate insurance programs aid developing nations in their work to protect people from the effects of climate change, especially from climate related natural disasters. Within these programs, NGOs, climate experts, and insurers, or member states, help nations in need so that when disaster strikes, it doesn't take as much a toll as it has in the past.

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Appendix or Appendices

I. https://www.gfdrr.org/en / (Global facility for disaster reduction and recovery)

This website is useful because it expands on multiple countries regarding climate related hazards and explains how governments are approaching the issue at hand based off of how it is affecting each country differently.

II. https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/climate-impacts/international-climate-impacts_.html (United States Enviromental Protection Agency)

This website is useful because it provides a detailed report of different factors which play a role in climate related hazards, it expands on; how this is a global issue, its effect on basic necessities, vulnerable populations, national security and regional impacts