



THE FUTURE OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION: DELIVERING JUSTICE IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Hilton Humanitarian Symposium New York

Keynote Address by Mrs Mary Robinson 30th September 2016

I am delighted to come back to the annual Hilton Humanitarian Symposium and give the keynote address. This year's theme 'the future of humanitarian action' has been in the forefront of my mind since I was appointed, last May, as the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy on El Niño and Climate, together with Ambassador Macharia Kamau of Kenya. At the time I was not aware of how bad the impacts of El Niño were because this was a slow onset crisis and an invisible one.

The reality is that the 2015/2016 El Niño event has adversely affected the lives and livelihoods of over 60 million people in every region of the world, with the most severe impacts in East and Southern Africa, Central America and the Pacific. The El Niño event itself has concluded, however humanitarian needs due to drought and flooding will endure for many months, and the broader economic and social impacts could ripple through generations. While forecasts for a La Niña event in late 2016 have weakened in recent weeks, if it occurs La Niña may further impact communities whose coping capacities have already been overwhelmed by El Niño.

The fundamental changes already taking place in our climate due to human activity will interact with future El Niño and La Niña events in ways that cannot be fully predicted. We must expect and prepare for future events to be more frequent and more severe. Those most impacted are among those least responsible for climate change.

My visits to Ethiopia in June, Honduras at the end of July, Southern Africa at the end of August and Vietnam earlier this month, have brought home to me the level of human suffering and the clear gender impacts of climate change, as it is women who have to go further for water and try to hold their families together. In Honduras I sat with women under a tree in the heat. They were brought together by a Honduran Women's Group. One woman spoke on desperation about the lack of water "how are we to live without water?"

I also saw striking examples of community resilience and adaptation. In Vietnam I travelled two hours outside of Hanoi to visit a community project which captured beautifully the message of resilience.

A local NGO, CERDA, led by a visionary woman, Vu Thi Hien, had encouraged the formation of local self-help groups in Thai Nguyen Province, because that was the level at which women would be confident to participate. She then persuaded the local authority to grant them the rights to protect and then sustainably exploit the benefit of the local forest.

The approach is explicitly rights-based, with a strong gender equality dimension, including local indigenous DAW women in their traditional costumes.

Six co-operatives have been formed and protect over 4000 hectares of forest. Illegal logging is a real problem in Vietnam, but not in this district.

One woman spoke about what the project meant to her. She had been too shy to speak initially, but now she feels empowered and strengthened because she is involved in the decisions that are being made. The trees will be allowed to grow for another four years, but already the communities are benefiting from fruits and traditional medicines, and the forest cover is helping local agriculture and livelihoods.

I will come back to this need for resilience, but first let me look at the broader picture.

The future of humanitarian action is something which has taken the world's imagination of late. And it is a discussion that cannot come soon enough. At the world humanitarian summit in May of this year, countries came together and recognised that humanitarian assistance alone will not adequately address nor sustainably reduce the needs of the world's most vulnerable people - a category that is currently estimated to include over 130 million people. Participants, including world

leaders agreed that a new and coherent approach is required based on addressing root causes, increasing political diplomacy for prevention and conflict resolution, and bringing humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts together.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, agreed last year provides a practical and tangible bridge between the development and humanitarian communities, as well as an important rallying point for Governments and key stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector, to reduce disaster and climate risk.

The framework foreshadowed the conclusions from the Humanitarian summit. It noted that enhanced work to reduce exposure and vulnerability, thus preventing the creation of new disaster risks, and accountability for disaster risk creation are needed at all levels. And most importantly, I believe, it identified that there has to be a broader and a more people-centred preventive approach to disaster risk. Disaster risk reduction practices need to be multi-hazard and multi-sectoral, inclusive and accessible in order to be efficient and effective.

The moral imperative and need for increased capacity to undertake preventative action within human-centred frameworks is nowhere more stark than in how we respond to climate change.

To some extent humanitarian action will always have a reactive element, we cannot necessarily predict a natural disaster or a surge in civil strife. However this is not the whole picture, when we look at the future of humanitarian action it is very difficult to foresee a scenario in which climate change does not play a significant part. Climate change is a threat multiplier. Climate change not only increases the likelihood and severity of a range of sudden onset natural disasters, from hurricanes to wildfires, as well as driving slow onset events such as drought, which increase the risk of social dislocation and conflict. In 2015 the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction conducted a ten year review of the Economic and Human Impact of Disaster and found that 87% of disasters are climate related. This is a figure that needs to be both acknowledged and addressed in the planning for any future humanitarian action.

The impacts of climate change often affect the most vulnerable first and hardest. The most vulnerable who have done the least to contribute to greenhouse gas

emissions. This then represents not just a question of humanitarian action, or responding to disasters as they happen, but also of justice.

I would like to warmly congratulate this year's prize winners THE TASK FORCE ON GLOBAL HEALTH, and borrow from their vision. One of their values is "Consequential Compassion" - empathy for those who are suffering must be linked to effective actions to alleviate their suffering. This also applies to Climate Justice.

Climate Justice is a concept that I have championed for some time. It links human rights and development to achieve a human-centred approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its impacts equitably and fairly. Climate justice is informed by science, responds to science and acknowledges the need for equitable stewardship of the world's resources. These too need to be the goals of humanitarian action, particularly when engaging climate related impacts.

Men and women are affected by climate change in different ways, because of the societal and cultural roles and responsibilities made on them by families and communities. For example, in many communities women are the primary food producers and providers of water and cooking fuel for their families, so changes in climate or disasters that affect these roles not only impact on women's ability to provide but on the community as a whole.

UN Women recently published a collation of data entitled 'facts and figures on Humanitarian action and conflict', it provides for some sobering reading. It found 60 percent of preventable maternal deaths take place in settings of conflict, displacement and natural disasters; that 1 in 5 refugees or displaced women in complex humanitarian settings are estimated to have experienced sexual violence, and that this was likely an underestimation, and Girls are almost 2.5 times more likely to be out of school in conflict-affected countries than their counterparts in conflict-free countries.

The disproportionate impacts on women and girls of humanitarian disasters are not new developments in humanitarian crisis. They have been clear throughout our collective history. Yet despite this evident fact only 4 per cent of projects in UN inter-agency appeals were targeted at women and girls in 2014 and only 0.4 per cent of all

funding to fragile states—most impacted by disasters—went to women’s groups or women’s ministries from 2012 to 2013.

In humanitarian action we are failing women and children.

This needs to change, not just in the field of humanitarian funding alone, but also across all aspects of disaster response and risk reduction, as well as in related climate change adaptation.

A key to the solution is enabling women to participate in decision making. Evidence demonstrates that the participation of women in decision-making processes and management roles lead to legal and policy reforms that advance the interests, rights and well-being of women and girls as well as gender equality in general. Women are best placed to identify the needs and vulnerabilities of their communities and should be consulted and involved in decision making in humanitarian preparedness and response.

Women and girls also face increased risk when undertaking journeys to escape the impacts of climate change, or situations which have been exacerbated by climate change.

This has become increasingly clear in Europe in the last few years as we work on responses to a movement of humanity unseen since World War 2. In February, a report from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees indicated that 55% of those undertaking dangerous sea crossings and arriving on the Mediterranean shores of Europe are now women and children - compared with 27% last June.

We cannot claim ignorance of the grave risks faced by women and girls seeking sanctuary at a time of great upheaval. We know that women are disproportionately vulnerable when forcibly displaced from their homes. Existing social inequalities based on gender roles are exacerbated as traditional support structures and formal justice systems break down. We know that women face increased risks of violence, sexual assault, exploitation and trafficking.

Again we see the need to incorporate gender based considerations and women’s leadership into the policy responses to migration flows, particularly in relation to displacement.

Indeed the realities of climate change will see displacement and mobility becoming key elements of humanitarian policy and decision making. It is up to us to ensure that this is well planned and is people centred.

Climate displacement is an issue in which my Foundation, have gained increasing attention. It is an issue that is being recognised by world leaders and international processes as one that requires a response, not least by humanitarian actors.

Currently the average number of people displaced by disasters each year is 24.5 million¹. However this is not the full picture, it does not account for slow onset events such as droughts or the more insidious aspects of environmental degradation. It also fails to account for voluntary migration driven in part by changes in climate. Climate change is a threat multiplier when it comes to displacement. It is linked to increased rural urban migration small hold farmers are forced off land that is affected by drought or ruined by tidal surges. There are linkages to conflict where populations struggle for dwindling resources and it is linked to wider migration and refugee flows, where displacement leads to a breakdown in social cohesion where new minorities created by internal displacement face persecution.

Clearly the most fundamental action that we can take to protect the rights of people at risk of climate displacement is to limit the impact of climate change as much as possible and thereby reduce the threat to populations in high risk areas. This is the responsibility of all countries, and was affirmed in the Paris Agreement's commitment to keeping temperatures at well below 2°C above preindustrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above preindustrial levels.

Humanitarian actors have a responsibility to highlight this imperative, as without action we have no hope in responding to future humanitarian crisis as climate change makes the planet a much more dangerous place.

President Tong, the former President of Kiribati, has named his countries response to the threat of climate change as 'migration with dignity'. Kiribati has purchased land in Fiji, with the intention of migrating there should the impacts of climate change submerge their small nation.

¹ IOM Atlas of Environmental Migration NOT YET PUBLISHED

This is an event that I hope will not come to pass. However the example shown by the government of Kiribati in preparing for the worst is something the humanitarian community can take away as a lesson in climate preparedness.

Communities at risk of displacement as a result of climate change have a lot to lose. It isn't just the material and economic impacts that we often see taking centre stage in policy documents. It is the social fabric that binds communities together, their culture, their identity or, as my friend Ursula Rakova once told me, they leave behind the bones of their ancestors. Ursula lives on the Carteret Islands in the Southwestern Pacific. Her community is undertaking the long process of moving to Bougainville as it has become clear that their home islands are no longer able to sustain them due to rising sea levels and related climate impacts.

Climate change also prevents vulnerable populations from moving, even where this may be in their best interest. This in turn worsens humanitarian disasters when they come. Vulnerability to extreme events and the ability to move are both related to social, economic and political status. The IPCC acknowledged this in last year's report in which they state 'vulnerability is inversely correlated with mobility, leading to those being most exposed and vulnerable to the impacts of climate change having the least capability to migrate'. These so called 'trapped' populations are areas which require the attention of humanitarian organisations when assessing risk and identifying protections.

Let me conclude by indicating how Ambassador Kamau and I propose to address the future of humanitarian action in the context of future El Niño/la Niña events. We propose to develop, in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, a 'Blueprint for Action'. The aim of the Blueprint for Action will be to significantly mitigate the future El Niño/La Niña episodes by catalysing and guiding the development of robust multi-stakeholders commitments, at the national and regional levels, to build resilience and embed an approach based on prevention and early action in the most vulnerable countries. We want to begin to work in El Niño affected countries in March 2017.

The Blueprint for Action will not attempt to impose a 'one size fits all' solution to climate resilience efforts in diverse national and regional contexts. Nor will it seek to replace or recreate existing global planning processes. Rather it will seek to advance the implementation of these frameworks by providing a guide to the most

critical actions that need to be taken, and offering a framework to bring together and to catalyse the necessary investments. The Blueprint for Action is intended first and foremost as a tool to support the development of integrated plans, at the national or regional levels, in those Member States most affected by El Niño and La Niña episodes. The Blueprint for Action could also provide a platform to bring together critical stakeholders including donors, international financial institutions, civil society and private sector partners into shared commitments in support of these plans.

I hope this blueprint example will encourage us to think about other more integrated, holistic approaches which emphasise prevention, preparedness and resilience in order to reduce the scale of the humanitarian responses, where possible.

It is the responsibility of the humanitarian community not just to focus on the figures, costs and donation flows when looking for solutions to these challenges, but to remember the people to whom the aid is being rendered. Including them in decision making and the shaping of outcomes will lead to better and more equitable results for all as we face the oncoming challenge of a warmer world.