

Land degradation as underestimated conflict risk



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Climate Change as threat multiplier

- Increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events
- **Pressure on food production and water supply (link with land degradation!)**
- Migration (*mainly regional*)
- Increased spread of diseases
- Low laying islands ceasing to exist
- Arctic region: oil and sea lanes, contested territory

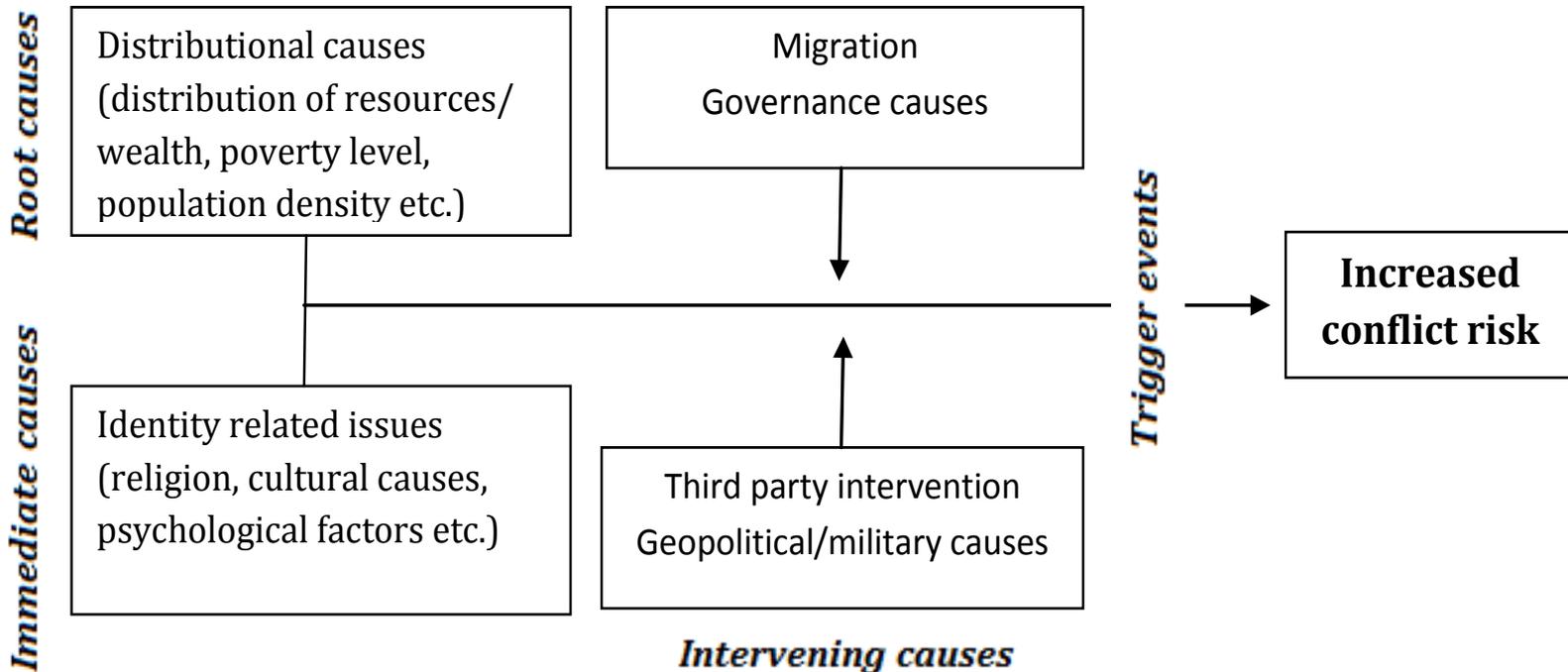
Pressure on security architecture/ international rule-based system (*equity*)



Conflict

- Sub-Saharan Africa and MENA region most conflict prone
- Dynamic, complex and (historical) context specific character of conflict
- Debate about (root) causes, elements, etc. of conflict

Causes of conflict; tentative overview



Different Perspectives

- Climate change and related water scarcity have been related to recent conflicts, including in Syria
(Werrell, et al., 2015; Kelley, et al., 2015)
- Climate change should not be blamed too easily for the recent water scarcity situation in Syria
(Jaegerskog, 2016)
- Climate-induced water scarcity is not a dominant conflict risk factor, or may just be a *(small)* contributing factor
(Gleditsch, 2012; Barnaby, 2009; Bernauer, et al., 2012)
- Climate change may increase food price, which may cause riots, part. in Arab world/ cities
(Breisinger et al., 2012)

Different Implications

- Climate change widely acknowledged as ‘threat multiplier’ (*in UN, EU, G7/20*), but no consensus on how it relates to conflict
- Statistical relationships don’t say much about factors (*e.g. water/food scarcity*) through which climate change might induce conflict (risk)
- Global conflict risk indices (*e.g. GCRI, INFORM*) are not water scarcity-specific; are more focused on direct disasters (*e.g. floods*), rather than slow onset events (*e.g. water scarcity, land degradation*)

Terra incognita study on land degradation & conflict risk (2014)

- Food and water scarcity have many causes; land degradation is not given enough attention
- Scientific evidence on “food riots” somewhat stronger than on “water wars”
- Local effects: link between land degradation, scarcity and conflict most likely in countries with high poverty, high population density and weak institutions (e.g. Mali, Kenya, Rwanda)
- + indirect global effects of land degradation (e.g. Tunisia)!

Links with conflict risk factors

- Population growth; youth bulge and insufficient prospects
 - Key factor both to aggravating food and water scarcity & conflict
- Migration
 - Mainly a result of conflict; to a lesser extent also a result of environmental degradation; only people who can afford will migrate
- Poverty
 - Can be result of land degradation threatening livelihoods/ food production
- Effective governance
 - Weak institutions as cause of bad land management and decrease ability to resolve conflicts peacefully
 - No consensus on benefits of democracy

Policy action on land degradation

- Int objectives to counter land degradation in place, but a realistic overview of the scale of the problem and restoration efforts is lacking
- Policies (e.g. food aid, rural development) may mitigate or aggravate relationship between land degradation and conflicts
- Fostering collaboration on land restoration might be an effective element of peacebuilding

5-6 December 2016: 2nd edition of Planetary Security Conference, Peace Palace, The Hague



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Thank you!

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