

Arising Potential Conflict: Environmental Threats and Forced Migration in Pacific Island States

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Abstract: Environmental Security in Pacific Island countries has been the prominent concern as it adversely impacts the livelihood of people. Threats such as natural disaster, environmental degradation, and climate change contribute to deprivation of human needs. Due to inability of inhabitant for securing their needs caused by environmental issues, they look for prospective place purposively maintain their life which triggered forced migration in massive scale. With the increasing number of population growth each year, forced migration is an emerging issue that could escalate to a potential conflict. Through this paper, we examine deprivation of needs for living caused by environmental threats in Pacific Island countries which triggers high rate of forced migration. Thus, it will create a possibility of conflict between migrant and native in recipient countries. These chain of events and the potential threat of conflict will be examined using the concept of Protracted Social Conflict proposed by Edward Azar. This paper explores forced migration and its repercussion due to the environmental threats. Vulnerability of Pacific island countries in climate change could not be ignored. The unpredictable nature of climate change and natural disasters produce a situation in which there needs to be more studies in how it affects forced migration and conflicts.

1 INTRODUCTION

Pacific Island countries located in distinctive marine environment, separating people by its ocean yet still bring significance of the Pacific peoples. Ever since 1990, the region has face range of environmental problems that gradually creates damage and harming the well-being of the Pacific island people. Pacific Island countries have been exposing difficulties to grow their economic and development.

Living as archipelago states, climate change and sea level rise are environmental conditions that Pacific Island facing every day. Climate change pose a major threat to natural hazards such as tropical cyclones (hurricanes), associated storm surge, droughts, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions. People in Pacific island are unable to manage the resources that they have due to vulnerability of their land towards natural disasters. They become difficult to maintain their basic needs as natural disaster keeps damaging their resources.

Through environmental changes, it influences the demographic, economic, social and cultural factor that encourages people to migrate. There are three possibilities that support the impact of environmental changes to migration. First, the

climate change may threaten the land security of some Pacific island communities that allows them to lose their settlement or supporting habitation. Second, human security may be affected by the climate change as people lose their subsistence livelihoods such as food, health, and their well-being. Third, even though the settlement can be physically secure, it still cannot ensure that the livelihoods is sustainable. There is still possibility where the environment could harm the people in the future. For example, there may be changing of disease vectors, loss of water supply in quality and quantity, and increasing the possibility of future natural threats. Pacific island people whose having growing economics and development, have been threaten by the impacts of these environmental changes, distress them with the damages that cost their resources. These events push them to migrate to another bigger Pacific Island Countries just to gain better livelihoods.

Migration of Pacific island people come with the purpose of attaining their basic needs that destroyed by natural disaster and land vulnerability. They migrate in the state of deprivation of needs and different environment that they may go through will change the social conditions on those designated countries. Through this, the topic will analyze the

possibility of conflict occurring through the migration of Pacific Island countries caused by Environmental threats. By using Protracted Social Conflict (PSC) as the base on analyzing the potential conflict, literature review, and mobility data of migration from Pacific island we can find how the forced migration caused by environmental threats can stimulate social conflict to be spread.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Protracted Social Conflict (PSC) emphasizes that the cause of conflict lies mainly within and across a state instead of exclusively between states. (Ramsbotham, 2005) Edward Azar elaborates four variables which are the preconditions PSC's gradual escalation in a high intensity conflict. These four preconditions are; communal content, needs, governance, and international linkage.

The frequently used unit of analysis in protracted social conflicts is identity group. This includes racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups among others. (Azar,1990) PSC focuses on the analysis of identity groups, or rather the relationship between said identity groups and the state, as the core of the problem. Azar calls this the "disarticulation between the state and the society as a whole". (Azar, 1990) PSC also focuses on individual interests and needs which are mediated through the membership of social groups. (Azar, 1985)

Azar then also identified the deprivation of personal needs as the cause of protracted social conflict. In his word, "Grievances resulting from need deprivation are usually expressed collectively. Failure to address these grievances by the authority cultivates a niche for a protracted social conflict."). (Azar, 1990) Needs are quite similar but different from interests, in which needs are non-negotiable and conflicts that are born from deprivation or needs are likely to be intense, vicious, and irrational. (Ramsbotham, 2005)

Third, governance and state's role is the critical factor in the satisfaction or frustration of individual and identity group needs. Azar stated, "Most states which experience protracted social conflict tend to be characterized by incompetent, parochial, fragile, and authoritarian governments that fail to satisfy basic human needs". (Azar,1990) Azar notes how PSCs tend to happen in developing countries that have restricted political capacity and rapid population growth with limited resources. (Ramsbotham, 2005)

Finally, the role of what Azar calls "international linkages", which is the political-economy relations between states, in particular economic dependency within the international economic system and the network of political-military linkages. Azar stated "formation of domestic social and political institutions and their impact on the role of the state are greatly influenced by the patterns of linkage within the international system". (Azar,1990)

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of forced mass mobilization and its impact have created discourses in literature. An example would be a journal written by Jillian Ash and Jillian Campbell titled "Climate Change and Migration: The Case of the Pacific Islands and Australia", that focuses more on migration. While not focusing on forced mobilization this journal also underlines that even voluntary migration may also be caused by climate change due to it affecting human security, livelihood, land security, and natural resources. However the case in the Pacific is delicate in that due to many states are atoll nations, internal migration would be difficult and in the end lack of planning to anticipate the rising mobilization across the Pacific Islands humanitarian crises may occur. One of the statement that is quite interesting however is that the journal stated public opinion has an important role and a critical factor in successful resettlement of migrants. (Ash *et al*,2016)

Another Journal by Diane C. Bates classify further on the term "Environmental Refugees", stating that migration streams resulting from environmental disruptions can be categorized based on the three categories of disruptions, disasters, expropriations, and deterioration. Disaster refugees originate in acute events that are not designed to trigger migration, whether it is caused by natural events or technological accidents. Expropriation refugees involve permanent displacement of people whose habitat is appropriated for land use incompatible with their continued residence. Finally deterioration refugees come from ecosystem that has degraded to a point where people cannot survive anymore from local resources. Thus, the Haiti case study from Myers journal is an example of forced mobilization due to deterioration and the focus of this essay, forced mobilization in the Pacific island states, is a forced mobilization due to disasters. (Bates, 2002)

While both these journals tackle the issue of environmental refugees differently, it is important

to know that these journals highlight how environmental refugees occur and it has impact on the destination countries. This essay may lean more on Jilian Ash and Jillian Campbell's essay due to how it being the closest to exploring the issue this paper aims to explain, but Diane's classification of environmental refugees may also be valuable.

4 DISCUSSION

The Pacific Island may be considered as small contributor towards climate change. Yet, ironically, the Pacific Islands are one of the regions that have major loss regarding the impact of climate change. Environmental changes impacted the economic cycle in Pacific Island. Climate changes and natural disaster considered as environmental threats due to Pacific Islands Countries' susceptibility over it. There is a common economical assumption that stated any increase of economy growth will harm environmental quality or the opposite. Such assumption could jeopardize role of economic growth in enhancing environmental quality and will put stakeholder in dilemma since it's not a take-it-or-leave-it decision. Both of sectors shall be embraced.

The concept of environmental Kuznet has shown that relations between economic growth and environmental enhancement are not entirely an animosity. (Tisdell, 2008). Economic growth could bring significant changes to tackle climate changes. Since economic growth brings enhancement of capacity, they could enhance capacity to repress any climate change causes.

Chains of economic activity also could be threatened through natural disaster and climate changes. Direct damages could be happened if environmental threats hit fixed asset such as building and infrastructure; raw material and resources. Indirect damages will take place if natural disaster and climate changes hit Gross Domestic Product (GDP), opportunity cost, consumption and investment. (Noy, 2016), thus it will hamper Pacific Islands' inhabitants to achieve their needs, to some extent the inhabitants will suffer from deprivation of needs as human securities could not be secured.

In the 1994, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) issued a concept namely human security. Its concept of security is people centered, where people could live upon their freedom. In the case of Pacific Island, if environmental threats keep inhabitants away from the human security, then it will let them deprive

from needs. People shall be secured upon freedom to fulfill their needs of food, community, health, and so forth. However, environmental threats in Pacific Island jeopardize Pacific island inhabitant freedom to fulfill their needs. Susceptibility to threats is the main cause.

A total 850,000 people from Pacific countries were living in four big Pacific migrant destinations; New Zealand (350,000), Australia (150,000), USA (300,000) and Canada (50,000) by 2010. These number came significantly from Small Island such as Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Tokelau and Tuvalu, alongside with scattered atolls and reef islands in the region. These countries known as the 'drowning island' and the people came from low-lying communities. So as they are struggle to obtain resettlement in foreign countries, the entire community will be challenged with different customary owners as they also already feeling severe by environmental and social stress. Climate Change will add pressure on residents to move elsewhere.

4.1 Pacific Island Countries and Protracted Social Conflict

Edward Azar on his theory of Protracted Social Conflict elaborates four preconditions that may invoke PSC and gradually escalating it into a high intensity conflict. As such the Pacific Island States shall also be examined using these four preconditions to find out the potential of PSC.

Firstly, is there any possible disarticulation between the state and the society as a whole? As stated beforehand, there are assumptions on how economic enhancement will also bring environmental degradation. The existence of this assumption proves that there is already disarticulation between the people of Pacific Islands and those who are in charge of the economy. Pacific Islands States receives major losses due to climate change while they are not industrialized. Simply put, they are paying the price for others' progress.

And then there is the issue of deprivation of needs. It has been established that the Pacific Island States are both dependent on nature and vulnerable to natural disasters. Climate change enhances the vulnerability of these small states even further and their dependency towards nature threatened as a result. As such, without further policies designed to end this vulnerability or to find a way out of their dependency, it may lead the people of Pacific Island States to demand the fulfillment of their needs thus sowing seeds of conflict.

Thirdly, Edward Azar stated that PSC tend to happen in a developing state. This is mainly due to lack of resources and rapid population growth. Pacific Island States inhabitants lives in coastal areas and are dependent on natural resources. The degradation of environment may lead to the lack of resources thus making it harder for them to fulfill their needs, destabilizing the state and may allow further conflict.

Finally, there is the final precondition, international linkages. A case study on this precondition has been done on the journal by Ash and Campbell which focuses on how natural disasters in Pacific Island States led the inhabitants to migrate towards Australia due to the difficulty of internal migration. As such, conflict may occur if the linkage between developed states, especially in this case Australia, and the Pacific Island States are severed or damaged.

5 CONCLUSION

We've seen how susceptibility of Pacific Island Countries upon environmental threats could harm stability in Pacific Region. The Environmental threats may be perceived as growing threats as migration from Pacific Island Countries could harm other countries security. There will be needed for further research to create more awareness upon this issue. We hope this paper could be a source to create prevention policy for any related stakeholder.

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