



Climate change and human rights: an analysis through the Anthony Giddens' perspective

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Abstract

Climate change is among the greatest human rights threats to our generation, putting at risk the fundamental rights to life, health, food and the standard of living of individuals and communities around the world. Technology plays an important role in the moderns' societies. However, the consequences of climate change such as drought, degradation of ecosystems, rising sea levels, rising temperatures, among others, are able to affect food production, housing security, sanitation and health conditions, directly interfering with life of each citizen.

Keywords: Impacts; International Treaties; Renewable Sources.

Theme Area: Environmental Impacts

Mudanças Climáticas e Direitos Humanos: uma análise através da perspectiva de Anthony Giddens

Resumo

A mudança climática é uma das maiores ameaças aos direitos humanos à nossa geração, colocando em risco os direitos fundamentais relacionados a vida, a saúde, a alimentação e o padrão de vida de indivíduos e comunidades ao redor do mundo. A tecnologia desempenha um papel importante nas sociedades modernas. No entanto, as consequências das mudanças climáticas como a seca, a degradação dos ecossistemas, o aumento do nível do mar, o aumento das temperaturas, entre outros, podem afetar a produção de alimentos, a segurança de habitação, o saneamento e as condições de saúde, interferindo diretamente com a vida de cada cidadão.

Palavras-chave: Impactos; Tratados Internacionais; Fontes Renováveis.

Área Temática: Impactos Ambientais



1 Introduction

All the problems related to the environmental issue such as pollution, deforestation, climate change, etc. They are all symptoms of a deep and severe crisis that translates into a collision between our civilization and the Earth's ecological system, in other words, the relationship between humans and the planet Earth has changed profoundly in our lives. For example, the population explosion, scientific and technological innovations that extend our power to explore the planet and also a relatively new paradigm of thought in which we are separated from the Earth as isolated individuals who exploit it as much as we want and the core is directly in this new paradigm of thought where it really needs to be changed (AL GORE, 1992).

The developed countries along with their dominion on technology are trying at all costs to subject the developing countries to follow their ideology. So far we know, the developing countries are abundant in terms of biodiversity and this is what the developed countries want to get in order to keep their selfish, unstoppable and unsustainable way of production. Thus, the cheap oil from the South subsidizes the capitalist agriculture of the North, creating a circle where, as a consequence, a displacement occurs among the subsistence agriculture of the rural Third World, generating the loss of land and traditional knowledge. The economic growth of this cycle generates the destruction of natural wealth, and in this particular case, the increase of global warming on the planet (LEFF, 2012).

Although the countries that lack economic resources and infrastructure are the ones that less emit greenhouse gases, they are the ones that suffer the most from the devastating effects of climate change, and these effects are likely to be worse due to the low adaptability of these countries. Thus, the costs are lower for those countries that create the problem than for those countries that do not contribute to the increase of the climate problem and are considered to be innocent (INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY, 2008).

Therefore, climate change is among the greatest human rights threats to our generation, jeopardizing the fundamental rights of life, health, food, and the standard of living of individuals and communities around the world. The solutions to these problems are based on policy whose intervention is essential to propose measures that avoid or at least mitigate the spread of climatic adversities and can guarantee human rights as well (UNEP, 2015).

2 Methodology

This article will briefly address the issue of climate change on the global scenario and its consequences on human rights, proposing to analyze events involving climatic phenomena and predicting future events through the understanding of Anthony Giddens. Giddens is renowned as a British sociologist, author of 34 books, including *Climate Change Policy* (2015), which develops an expressive set of reflections, correlating the issue of climate change with the political responsibility of finding favorable solutions to cases of violation to the human rights (McMANN, 2007).

In this context, we will also address a set of measures taken to combat and/or mitigate human-induced climate change such as international treaties and projects to preserve the environment and combat global warming, the use and development of clean and renewable energies as a factor of improvement for the global climatic condition. Finally, we will establish some concepts inspired by Giddens regarding the proposals of mitigation and adaptation, aiming to reduce human interference in the climatic scenario and to adapt to the phenomena already ostensibly verified.

3 Results and Discussion



For some scholars, the planet Earth is seen as fragile thing and the human activities are responsible to create impacts in detriment to the planet. For others, who try to explain climate change by another conception, the planet is like a wild beast and we as humans are constantly poking it with a stick, and the consequences of it would be violent and inevitable. This last one would be a more disturbing view from the implications of climate change and even a direct view of ecological damage. Climate change can be considered irreversible, because we actually don't have technologies that are capable of removing pollutants and greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. This fact has consequences for the planet's destiny (GIDDENS, 2015).

Among all the technological advances of mankind, the use of fossil fuels from the Industrial Revolution can be considered the most expressive for the economic development, being responsible for remarkable progress in many parts of the world. However, it is one of the main sources of emissions that create and potentiate climate change (RIFKIN, 2009).

Therefore, it is now up to mankind to develop skillful and satisfactory proposals and measures to minimize and prevent the release of the elements that cause the greenhouse effect - given that such elements, once disposed of in the atmosphere, they can't be easily removed – and also the causes of climate change, before they become uncontrollable

3.1 Climate change and its consequences for human rights

Overall, the impacts of global warming phenomena bring risks throughout the planet such as rising sea levels, coastal storms, coastal flooding, sloping landslides, droughts, changing on the pluviometric regimes, air pollution , among others (DIEHL; SPINOLA; AZEVEDO, n.d.).

For Giddens (2009, p.20), some of the consequences observed in the global climate scenario are reflected in catastrophes such as:

[...] mountain glaciers are retreating in both hemispheres and snow cover is less than, on average, it once was. Sea levels rose over the course of the twentieth century [...]. Warming is likely to intensify the risk of drought in some parts of the world and lead to increased rainfall in others. Evidence indicates that the atmosphere holds more water vapour than used to be the case even a few decades ago, a major influence over unstable weather patterns, including tropical storms and floods. Over the past 40 years, westerly winds have become stronger. Tropical cyclones in the Atlantic have become more frequent and more intense over that period, probably as a result of warming.

Evidently, authors with divergent positions question the causes of climate change, and consider them as simple future natural possibilities. Among the critics is the position of Fred Pearce, who states that the global climate has undergone the most varied changes in the past, long before human beings appeared in the world and well before the advent of modern industrial production. For him, such phenomenon is just part of the planet's intrinsic configuration process. Such theories are minority, but they have some scientific subsidy inasmuch as they extol the obligation of every scientist to make his own self-critical conclusions (GIDDENS, 2009).

The authority with the greatest responsibility for monitoring climate change is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – IPCC -, which has the rigorous role of studying climatic changes, submitting their research to a demanding revision, and reaching global conclusions among the scientific opinion. Several official reports have mapped climate change in detail, demonstrating the potential consequences in terms of disasters (GIDDENS, 2009).

On the human rights, the impacts of climate change are related to the right to water and sanitation, the right to health, the right to life, the right to food and the right to a dignified life paradigm (UNEP, 2015).



Research shows that climate change is responsible for the reduction of subsoil surface and water sources, and for intensifying and increasing the frequency of droughts in arid and semi-arid subtropical regions, as well as the loss of arable land by rising sea levels and changes in the water regimes. These phenomena amplify competition for water in agriculture, settlements, industry, and for energy production. The consequences have to do with the direct threat to water supply, access to sanitation, energy and food security (UNEP, 2015).

Plant species also already show evidence of migration of their populations and, in many regions, climate change has contributed to the death of trees. Impacts on biogeography are not yet predictable and increases in the average temperatures will also interfere in the agricultural crops. In production systems, corn, rice and wheat plantations are most affected by climate change. Events such as storms and floods have negative impacts on the cultivation of those cultures, and they consequently affect the fundamental rights to food, life and health (UNEP, 2015).

In coastal areas, the impact will be in the form of floods, erosion and saltwater intrusion. Likewise, there will be changes in the coastal composition, increase of the temperature of the waters, acidification of the ocean. This last one will contribute for the declining of biodiversity in ecosystems along the coast. It will also contribute to an increase in the intensity of tropical cyclones, posing a major threat to the population close to the coast, who will have violated their rights to life, health, housing, food and property (UNEP, 2015).

In rural areas, the risks are concentrated on water supply, food security and financial security. Also, farmers depend on climatic conditions to achieve their success, a success that is threatened by the impacts of climate change, such as droughts, rains, storms, and other extreme events caused by the climate (UNEP, 2015).

Likewise, climate change and global warming also contribute in a very profound way to the increase in suicide rates. According to a statistical data gathered by the University of California (USA), it has been estimated that in India about 59,000 Indian farmers have committed suicide in the last 30 years due to global warming. This study found that the increase in temperature and consequent drought directly interfered with the country's agricultural production which, therefore, left producers indebted and this in itself became the main reason for these people choose suicide (GALILEO, 2017).

When we predict such risks in urban environments, we can anticipate serious negative impacts. For example, in places where people set dwellings on steeper terrain, the potential for sliding becomes much higher. These risks are amplified for those living in hazardous areas, with poor infrastructure and lack of capacity and institutional organization to deal with those problems. More vulnerable individuals are also more seriously threatened by the age criteria, financial conditions, educational deficiencies, and other factors (UNEP, 2015).

3.2 International agreements and the responsibility of States

Most international human rights treaties don't clearly recognize the right to a clean environment. However, it's well known that an environment in inadequate conditions can jeopardize the effective exercise of other rights. And once again we mention the rights related to life, health, water, and food. By this context, some human rights treaties already explicitly recognize the importance of the right to a clean environment so that adequate living conditions may come to exist.

Jeffrey Sachs (n.d.) questions about how to take one of the international agreements and do something to make it real on a global scale, and also if it the international agreements are beneficial in some aspect of they're just a kind of show business. For him, first of all, we have to do the ideas disposed in the agreements in order to make it real because this is not an option. And the reason that this is not an option is given because the environmental challenge is different from almost every other human challenge that we know so far. For most



challenges such as for example, ending poverty is a more normal challenge, it could happen now, it could happen later, we should hurry and because that's the moral and right thing to do, the slower we go the more people suffer, the more people die, but if it's delayed it doesn't preclude achieving the goal later on. Whereas, when it comes to the environmental crisis we're facing irreversibility and sharp nonlinearities.

The first international agreement that explicitly came to recognize the interference of climate change as a detrimental factor to human rights was the Male's Declaration on the Human Dimension of Global Climate Change, adopted in 2007, which confirms that "climate change has clear and immediate implications for the full enjoyment of human rights." (UNEP, 2015, p. 12).

In 2009, a report by the Office of the Higher Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), has verified how the impacts caused by climate change have implications for the full enjoyment of human rights and the States' obligations under the International Human Rights Law. The report has shown that a global temperature increase of about 2°C will negatively affect ecosystems around the globe, as well as the goods and services they provide and will exacerbate the damaging effects of environmental pollution, which also have implications for the wide range of human rights. The report also highlights the effects on specific groups such as women, children, and indigenous peoples (UNEP, 2015).

In addition, the OHCHR also concluded that the States have a duty to protect the human rights against climate change regardless of whether any State has contributed or not to climate change phenomenon. This is because, according to John H. Knox (p. 13, 2015), quoted by UNEP: "human rights law requires each State to do more than merely refrain from interfering with human rights itself; it also requires the State to undertake due diligence to protect against such harm from other sources."

When a State becomes part of an international treaty, it has a duty to assume three positions on human rights, that is, to respect, protect and fulfill human rights. In this sense,

The duty to **respect** human rights, a negative obligation, which requires states to refrain from taking actions that would interfere with or curtail the enjoyment of human rights.

The duty to **protect** human rights against violations by third parties.

The duty to **fulfill** human rights, a positive obligation, which requires states to undertake measures to ensure the realization of rights for all members of society. (UNEP, 2015, p.15).

According to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in its Article 19 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), also in Article 19, all persons have the right to "[...] seek, receive and to transmit information [...]", thereby facilitating information to the public and, in the same way, public participation in decision-making on environmental issues. In this sense,

It is particularly important to invite and facilitate public participation in decisions that affect vulnerable groups, and for decisions concerning the displacement or resettlement of certain groups. OHCHR emphasizes that adequate and meaningful consultation with affected persons should precede decisions to relocate people away from hazardous zones. (UNEP, 2017, p.18.).

Therefore, the States have the imperative duty to adopt legal and institutional structures aimed to protect their citizens against possible damages that could result from environmental issues, inasmuch as guaranteeing the fulfillment enjoy of the human rights as well as preventing their violation.

It is well known the duty that the States have to keep the population informed, as it has already been pointed out when we mentioned previously about the right to information, when imminent risks are foreseeable, there is then a need to provide early warning and through risk notification systems as well as providing infrastructure improvements to reduce the risk of floods and other hazards, and also establishing emergency care planning.



Some proposals that could be taken by States when climatic phenomena occur are: urban planning and warning systems, risk assessments in urban planning, rural development projects, housing planning (with particular focus on vulnerable areas); establishment of infrastructure and services that can help to prevent extreme climatic events from becoming disasters; access to weather forecasts, allowing residents to seek protection and reduce risky actions; provide access to safe areas (UNEP, 2015).

In the case of displacement and resettlement, there is an inescapable importance of risk assessments, safeguarding the full protection of rights for all migration and displacement programs and ensuring adequate resettlement opportunities for those who have been hit by climate disasters and who are temporarily homeless, requiring, therefore, assistance and providing temporary relocation as well (UNEP, 2015).

Besides, it is predictably known that in cases of climatic disasters, there are populations that are affected by shortages of potable water and food. In such cases, the States have the obligation to ensure the access to food and water in order to nourish and to hydrate all those who have been hit by climate catastrophes.

Similarly, the States need to discuss the issue of gas emissions, requiring the reduction of these emissions into the atmosphere. Considerable investments will be required, whether in developed countries or in developing countries, to adapt to climate change.

Some measures are already being taken by the International Community on Climate Issues. One of them was The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992), which in its principle 10 says that,

Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level. At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including information on hazardous materials and activities in their communities, and the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. States shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making information widely available. Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided.

By this principle, it is intended to emphasize the fundamental importance of making information available to the public, allowing public participation in decision-making regarding the environment, and in this context, information and decisions involving climate change are embedded in the same way.

3.3 Fighting against the problem

For the American political thinker Jeremy Rifkin (2013), the main source of renewable energy would be hydrogen, just because this element is the most ubiquitous in the world and does not produce greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, fuel cells that use hydrogen are already being introduced to the market for domestic and industrial use.

However, many authors disagree the Rifkin's theory about the hydrogen stuff. They argue that hydrogen can't be used from natural resources, that is, it has to be developed from other sources, such as other fuels or electricity. Also, its degree of complexity is more costly and unlike other fuels, hydrogen has to be stored at very high pressures, where simple leaks can become dangerous. However, some scientists believe that in the future such problems will be solved with the support of technology. Besides, no one knows for sure which functions specific energy sources such as hydrogen could play, since technologies never operate on their own, but are always incorporated and/or driven by broad political, economic and social structures (GIDDENS, 2009).

Another measure to mitigate the greenhouse effect is geoengineering, which can be conceptualized as:



Geoengineering refers to a set of emerging technologies that could manipulate the environment and partially offset some of the impacts of climate change. It could not be a replacement for reducing emissions (mitigation) or coping with a changing climate (adaptation); yet, it could supplement these efforts. (THE KEITH GROUP, n.p., n.d.).

In addition to geoengineering technology, there are also other ways to cope with the climate issue, such as the renewable energies, and here can be cited as examples the wind energy, tidal energy, geothermal energy, solar energy, biofuels, gas purifiers etc.

At the present, the most tested technologies come from the nuclear and hydroelectric sources. Concerning the use of nuclear sources, it is well known the large preoccupation and risks of catastrophes such as radioactive contamination, accidents and massive destruction of incalculable levels, possibility of terrorist attacks, lack of sufficient technical expertise in the production and maintenance of such technology, expensive cost of installation, among others (LUTZENBERGER, 1980).

For those reasons, the use of alternative energy sources may contribute significantly to the reduction of greenhouse gases emissions. In a very near future, we will have to rely on the diversity of energy sources to break the current dependence on oil, coal and gas (RIFKIN, 2013).

The challenge now is to find new ways of technology that are less aggressive in terms of environmental pollution and that can really achieve positive results. However, the research and development of such technologies and innovations may become more expensive than fossil fuels. Nevertheless, the spread of new technologies, especially those that come from renewable sources, could lead to the increase of employment in some areas such as biofuels, for example (IRENA, 2011).

According to Giddens (2009), the key problem is the difficulty that people have in accepting that the risks related to the climate phenomena are real and urgent. In this way, the obstacle that is sustained is that, without this awareness, the use of fossil fuels occurs in a carefree way, becoming, in some cases, extremely difficult to turn back a society whose way of life is basically built around the mobility and the excessive consumption of energy from fossil sources.

Undoubtedly, industrial civilization differs from all previous civilizations. The use of fossil fuels has brought progress to the international community, but it is necessary to reflect to what extent such progress is advantageous and beneficial. In other words, when progress brings negative interference, as is the case with the greenhouse effect, it can no longer translate into progress. Therefore, our civilization can be self-destructive with gigantic consequences, such as the production and development of nuclear weapons, climate change, deforestation, pollution etc. Climate change by itself is capable of enormous disasters for humanity.

4 Conclusion

According to Jeffrey Sachs (n.d.), the idea is to adopt sustainable development that could provide a more public awareness that would take the challenges outside the diplomacy and International Law, and so to put them in front of the world's public and in front of the world's governance in a much more direct way. However, the referred author also states that this could easily suffer the same fate as Agenda 21 and all the rest and we haven't succeeded yet in a serious way in turning high-minded scientifically correct and vital ideas into global action. It remains a profound and essentially unsolved problem of politics, governance, policy that is absolutely urgent.

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