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## Climate change, multiple stressors and human vulnerability : a systematic review

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Springer Science and Business Media Deutschland GmbH

2016

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Räsänen, A, Juhola, S, Nygren, A, Käkönen, M, Kallio, M, Monge Monge, A & Kanninen, M  
2016, 'Climate change, multiple stressors and human vulnerability : a systematic review',  
Regional Environmental Change, vol. 16, no. 8, pp. 2291-2302. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-016-0974-7>

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/172918>

[10.1007/s10113-016-0974-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-016-0974-7)

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1 **Climate change, multiple stressors and human vulnerability – a systematic**  
2 **review**

3

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15

16 **Abstract**

17 We systematically reviewed current climate change literature in order to examine how multiple  
18 processes that affect human vulnerability have been studied. Of the 125 reviewed articles, 79 %  
19 were published after 2009. There are numerous concepts that point out to stressors other than  
20 climate change that were used in reviewed studies. These different concepts were used  
21 interchangeably and they illustrate processes that act on different scales. Most widely used concepts  
22 included non-climatic (40% of the articles), multiple stressors (38%) and other factors (37%). About  
23 75% of the studies either acknowledged or carefully analyzed the social and environmental context  
24 in which vulnerability is experienced. One third of the studies recognized climate change related  
25 stressors as the most important, one third argued that stressors other than climate are more  
26 important and the rest of the studies did not analyze the relative importance of the different  
27 processes. Interactions between different stressors were mentioned in 76% and analyzed explicitly  
28 in 28% of the articles. Our review shows that there are studies that analyze the social context of  
29 vulnerability within climate change related literature and this literature is rapidly expanding.  
30 Reviewed studies point out that there are multiple interacting stressors, whose interlinkages need to  
31 be carefully analyzed and targeted by policies, which integrate adaptation to climate change and  
32 other stressors. In conclusion, we suggest that future studies should include analytical frameworks  
33 that reflect dissimilarities between different types of stressors, methodological triangulation to  
34 identify key stressors and analysis of interactions between multiple stressors across different scales.

35

36 Keywords: adaptation; non-climatic; driver; exposure; pressure; risk

37

38

39

## 1 Introduction

Within the literature on climate change and human vulnerability (*i.e.* vulnerability of individuals, communities, societies and human systems), climate change has been conventionally seen as the main driver of vulnerability. This is evident for instance in the definition suggested by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The widely used IPCC definition of the Fourth Assessment Report states that “[*V*]ulnerability is the degree to which a system is susceptible to, and unable to cope with, adverse effects of climate change, including climate variability and extremes. Vulnerability is a function of the character, magnitude, and rate of climate change and variation to which a system is exposed, its sensitivity, and its adaptive capacity.” (IPCC 2007).

This definition has become the most widely used in the climate change vulnerability literature (Bassett and Fogelman 2013; Füssel and Klein 2006) thus having a major influence on research. Furthermore, it has been argued that this particular interpretation of vulnerability affects the practical policies considering adaptation to climate change and the reduction of vulnerability (O'Brien et al. 2007).

In addition to the IPCC, there are wide array of different definitions of vulnerability and different frameworks through which the concept has been operationalized in research (Adger 2006; Berry et al. 2006; Birkmann 2006; Eakin and Luers 2006; Füssel 2007; Füssel and Klein 2006; Giupponi and Biscaro 2015; Hinkel 2011; McLaughlin and Dietz 2008; Ribot 2014; Turner et al. 2003). Furthermore, although IPCC definitions did not change considerably between the First and the Fourth assessment report (Bassett and Fogelman 2013), a major change can be seen from the Fourth to the most recent Fifth report. In the 5<sup>th</sup> assessment report (AR5) of the IPCC working group 2 (WG2), the central focus is on climate-related risks instead of vulnerability.

66 In the IPCC (2014) climate risk framework, risk is the result of interaction of hazard, exposure and  
67 vulnerability. Hazard refers to a physical event, trend or their impacts that have an effect on human  
68 or natural systems; exposure means the presence of people or other unit of interest in settings,  
69 where there can be adverse effects; while vulnerability is defined as follows: "*The propensity or*  
70 *predisposition to be adversely affected. Vulnerability encompasses a variety of concepts and*  
71 *elements including sensitivity or susceptibility to harm and lack of capacity to cope and adapt.*"  
72 (IPCC 2014).

73

74 This latest IPCC definition is hence more general as recommended before by various authors  
75 (Hinkel 2011; Wolf et al. 2013). Climate change or other biophysical concepts are no longer  
76 mentioned in the definition, although they are still embedded in the new hazard concept as part of  
77 climate risk. In this climate risk framework, exposure and vulnerability can also increase risks  
78 alongside the physical hazards (Mechler et al. 2014). This new conceptual vagueness does not,  
79 however, necessarily mean that social factors, which are important issues in shaping the  
80 vulnerability context (O'Brien et al. 2007; Ribot 2014), have a more central role in the IPCC climate  
81 risk framework and on research and policies that utilize the framework.

82

83 These definitions and frameworks have been elaborated within different orientations, which have  
84 divergent views on what causes vulnerability (Adger 2006; Birkmann 2006; Eakin and Luers 2006;  
85 Füssel and Klein 2006; Giupponi and Biscaro 2015; McLaughlin and Dietz 2008; Ribot 2014).

86 Some political-ecological –oriented researchers have, for example, criticized that the earlier hazard  
87 literature did not carefully consider the social aspects of vulnerability (Bassett and Fogelman 2013;  
88 Ribot 2014); and the same critique has been directed to the IPCC vulnerability and adaptation  
89 framework (Bassett and Fogelman 2013).

90

91 Within climate change literature, this duality of approaches has been called end-point and starting-

92 point (Kelly and Adger 2000), top-down and bottom-up (Dessai and Hulme 2004) or outcome and  
93 contextual (O'Brien et al. 2007). The end-point approach evident in the IPCC Fourth Assessment  
94 Report (IPCC 2007) considers vulnerability as an outcome of climate change, whereas the second  
95 approach regards vulnerability as part of multidimensional, context-specific climate-society  
96 interactions. It has been argued that the wider socio-cultural, political-economic and environmental  
97 contexts of vulnerability are important both analytically (O'Brien et al. 2007) and also in practical  
98 adaptation policy (Eriksen et al. 2011).

99

100 Approaching vulnerability as contextual directs attention to the cascading effects of different  
101 political-economic, and socio-ecological processes that make people differentially vulnerable to  
102 changes in their environment. It consequently has been argued that climate change is but one of  
103 'multiple stressors' (Adger 2006; O'Brien et al. 2004; Turner et al. 2003) that cause vulnerability. In  
104 addition to 'multiple stressors', other concepts have emerged, including 'non-climatic factors'  
105 (Füssel and Klein 2006), 'double exposure' (O'Brien and Leichenko 2000), 'multiple exposures'  
106 (Belliveau et al. 2006; Bennett et al. 2015a) and 'other stressors' (Tschakert 2007).

107

108 Some researchers have argued that especially within hazards research 'multiple stressors' have been  
109 studied for decades (Kelman et al. 2015); whereas others argue that 'multiple stressors' is a  
110 relatively new issue (Bennett et al. 2015a). Although 'multiple stressors' were mentioned already in  
111 the first IPCC reports, in fact, the focus has often concentrated on single stressors using *ceteris*  
112 *paribus* assumption (Hashimoto et al. 1990).

113

114 This discussion illustrates that the idea of 'multiple stressors' and 'non-climatic factors' has been  
115 incorporated as part of the climate change and vulnerability discussion. Some authors have even  
116 tried to identify all different driving factors of vulnerability. Zou and Wei (2010) classified in their  
117 review 361 different driving factors of social vulnerability in coastal Southeast Asia. In another

118 review, Bennett et al. (2015a) gave examples of different stressors/exposures that are evident in  
119 coastal areas constructing a conceptual framework on how ‘multiple exposures’ can be analyzed.

120

121 There are many analyses of different orientations and definitions of vulnerability research (Adger  
122 2006; Birkmann 2006; Eakin and Luers 2006; Füssel and Klein 2006; McLaughlin and Dietz 2008;  
123 Ribot 2014), approaches with typologies of ‘multiple stressors’ (Bennett et al. 2015a; Zou and Wei  
124 2010) and some recent systematic reviews or bibliometric analyses of vulnerability (Delaney et al.  
125 2014; Giupponi and Biscaro 2015; McDowell et al. 2016; Tucker et al. 2014; Wang et al. 2014).

126 However, none have looked systematically at how ‘multiple stressors’ have been conceptualized in  
127 the climate change and human vulnerability literature.

128

129 We synthesize the current knowledge on ‘multiple stressors’ and show that the current literature  
130 about ‘multiple stressors’ is relatively new field. Furthermore, we contribute to the conceptual and  
131 analytical clarity of this of study and hence help in bridging various approaches researching  
132 vulnerability. Our review has important policy implications because the ‘multiple stressors’  
133 literature highlights the various processes which, in addition to climate change, increase  
134 vulnerability and which should be accounted for in climate change adaptation policies.

135

## 136 **2 Methods**

137

138 Systematic reviews are especially useful in synthesizing current knowledge and they are transparent  
139 in their methods (Berrang-Ford et al. 2015; Lorenz et al. 2014). We systematically reviewed  
140 selected climate change literature following the methodology suggested by Berrang-Ford et al.  
141 (2015). They propose three components for the systematic review of climate change adaptation  
142 research: (1) explicit objectives of the review and clear description of the conceptual approach used,  
143 (2) justification of the literature source, detailed description of the search process, description of the

144 inclusion/exclusion criteria and documentation of the literature as well as (3) description of the  
145 methods and critical appraisal of information quality.

146

147 Our overall objective was to systematically analyze different concepts that denote stressors other  
148 than climate and that are used in the literature about climate change and human vulnerability. More  
149 specifically, we examined (1) how widely investigated and how novel the literature about ‘multiple  
150 stressors’, ‘non-climatic factors’ and other similar concepts is within the literature about human  
151 dimensions of climate change, (2) how these concepts have been used and what differences there  
152 are between concepts and (3) what is the relative importance of different stressors.

153

154 Articles that were selected for review were first screened using SCOPUS and Web of Knowledge  
155 searches. These search engines were selected because they have the two most encompassing  
156 databases of social and environmental sciences articles (Landauer et al. 2015). We selected only  
157 peer-reviewed journal articles. First, the peer-review process of the articles is a measure of quality.  
158 Second, we wanted to focus on the state-of-the-art scientific literature on this topic. Third, many of  
159 the other sources, such as book chapters, were difficult to obtain. It is also worth pointing out that  
160 our selection of the search engines already excluded some gray literature. We acknowledge that this  
161 decision might have excluded some relevant documentation but we consider the sample analyzed  
162 here to be large enough to gain a systematic overview of the existing literature.

163

164 As the first step, we searched for articles that mention ‘non-climatic factors’. We then performed  
165 new searches in which we added new terms because we found early on in the search process that  
166 many different notions have been used in literature. Finally, we used the following search sequence:

167

168 ("other pressure\*" OR "other risk\*" OR "other driver\*" OR "other stress\*" OR "other  
169 factor\*" OR "multiple pressure\*" OR "multiple risk\*" OR "multiple driver\*" OR "multiple  
170 stress\*" OR "multiple factor\*" OR "multiple exposure\*" OR "double exposure\*" OR non-

171 climat\*) AND (vulnerab\* OR adapt\*) AND (climat\* OR "environmental change\*" OR "global  
172 change\*")

173

174 These terms were searched from the title, abstract and keywords of the articles. Full text searches  
175 were left out since we wanted to find the articles in which climate change and non-climatic factors  
176 were pointed as the central focus of the research in the title, abstract and/or keywords. The result  
177 included 888 hits from SCOPUS and 836 hits from Web of Knowledge on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2015. When  
178 duplicates were removed, there were 1081 studies left. From this total, the titles, abstracts and, if  
179 needed, full texts of all articles were skimmed based on the following criteria.

180

181 We analyzed the quality and relevance of different articles and we selected articles that had a focus  
182 on (1) ‘non-climatic factors’ or ‘multiple stressors’ and (2) issues of human vulnerability or  
183 adaptation. We did not select studies with a focus on ecology (majority of the excluded articles) or  
184 environmental vulnerability without clear links to human vulnerability. We further deselected  
185 articles in which the focus was infrastructure, medicine-related, law, economics, highly specific  
186 commodity studies, energy policy, archaeology, education, migration or conflict and national  
187 security. In addition, we excluded studies in which the main focus was on climate change mitigation  
188 efforts or which did not include a clear case study or a review of specific case studies. This  
189 selection process left us a total of 125 peer-reviewed, English-written journal articles  
190 (Supplementary Material).

191

192 After the article selection process, we analyzed the content of articles using eight guiding questions  
193 that were modified from the relevant vulnerability literature. *First*, we evaluated when and where  
194 the studies have been conducted. *Second*, we asked what or who is vulnerable (Malone and Engle  
195 2011). *Third*, we asked about the source of vulnerability (“vulnerability to what” (Malone and Engle  
196 2011)), by examining what kinds of stressors are mentioned in the studies. More specifically, we  
197 used the divisions to local/global (internal/external) and cross-scale vulnerability factors and to

198 social, biophysical and integrated vulnerability factors (Füssel 2007). Moreover, with the help of the  
199 IPCC climate-related risk framework (IPCC 2014), we analyzed if the stressors have an effect on  
200 hazard, exposure or vulnerability. *Fourth*, we further evaluated, how different concepts such as  
201 stressor and factor are used and if there are differences between and within different concepts. *Fifth*,  
202 based on the distinctions used by O'Brien et al. (2007), we divided the orientation of the studies into  
203 outcome-orientation and contextual-orientation. *Sixth*, by analyzing the vulnerability context, we  
204 evaluated if the importance of different stressors is assessed as suggested by Bennett et al. (2015a),  
205 and how the importance has been assessed. *Seventh*, we examined if the interactions between  
206 different stressors and across different scales are examined as suggested by Turner et al. (2003).  
207 *Eighth*, in order to further analyze the novelty of 'multiple stressors' approaches, we examined what  
208 traditions and articles are cited in the reviewed literature.

209

## 210 **3 Results and discussion**

211

### 212 **3.1 When and where the studies were conducted**

213

214 The review shows that there is a significant increase in studies that encompass 'multiple stressors'  
215 or non-climatic factors during the last ten years. The number of publications increased after 2006  
216 with a peak of publications being 23 (18 %) in 2014. Of the analyzed articles, 79% were published  
217 after 2009 (Fig. 1). It has been found also in other reviews that there has been a recent increase in  
218 articles looking at vulnerability (McDowell et al. 2016; Wang et al. 2014). In our sample, the  
219 number of articles per year has been increasing with one notable exception; in 2011, the amount of  
220 articles published was less than half of the amount of articles published in 2010.

221

222 This overall trend reflects the foci of the IPCC assessment reports. For the WG2 AR5 report, studies  
223 that were published after October 2006 and accepted for publication (minimum requirement) before

224 August 2013 were considered. Our sample indicates that there were few studies published before  
225 October 2006; therefore, there was relatively limited literature considering ‘multiple stressors’ to be  
226 considered for the IPCC reports prior to AR5. This result resonates with the latest IPCC report  
227 where it was pointed out that the AR5 has overcome limitations evident in AR4 in relation to the  
228 research analyzing the human dimensions of climate change (Burkett 2014). Our sample also  
229 demonstrates that most of the studies that focus on the various processes that cause vulnerability  
230 have been published after some founding papers, where ‘multiple stressors’ and other similar  
231 concepts were analyzed explicitly for the first time (O'Brien and Leichenko 2000; O'Brien et al.  
232 2004; Tschakert 2007). This result demonstrates that the analysis of other stressors is a relatively  
233 new issue within this field of literature.

234

235 In geographical terms, the main focus of the ‘multiple stressors’ studies is in Africa. In 36% of the  
236 reviewed articles, the study area or part of the study area was situated in Africa while the rest of the  
237 study areas were located in Asia (22%), North America (18%), Latin America (14%), Europe  
238 (14%), and Oceania (14%). These numbers do not sum up to 100% since study areas from multiple  
239 continents were included in some of the studies.

240

### 241 **3.2 The object of vulnerability**

242

243 The scope of the study varied in the articles. Majority of the studies evaluated small-scale farming  
244 communities in developing countries. Livelihood vulnerability (79%) was the central focus in most  
245 of the articles whilst the remainder of the studies analyzed the vulnerability of, for instance,  
246 industrial agricultures or wider societal processes. Some of the studies did not particularly analyze  
247 vulnerability. For instance, Hageback et al. (2005) examined farmers’ land use decisions, and  
248 Coulibaly et al. (2015) the reasons behind crop failure. Whilst not explicitly examining a vulnerable  
249 entity, the drivers behind these issues were often similar as the causes of vulnerability.

250

251

### 3.3 Types of stressors

252

253 Overall, there were hundreds of different stressors mentioned. In our sample, the number of  
254 stressors varied between two and 30 within one article. However, it is difficult to explicitly assess  
255 the total number of stressors since they were sometimes lumped together or split into smaller  
256 entities (for different lists and typologies of stressors, see e.g. (Bennett et al. 2015a; Zou and Wei  
257 2010)). Additionally, stressors covered multiple societal scales ranging from lack of local income  
258 opportunities or access to local granaries to globalization and global climate change.

259

260 Approximately 25% of the stressors were biophysical while 75% were social. Biophysical stressors  
261 identified within the articles were mainly related to natural resource degradation, pollution and pests  
262 in addition to climate change and climate-related events such as floods or droughts. Social stressors  
263 were mainly related to issues such as poverty, unemployment, health, agricultural markets,  
264 governance and globalization. The higher number of social stressors can be due to the fact that  
265 social phenomena are more heterogeneous and context-specific.

266

267 The distinction between local and global yet alone to internal and external factors is complicated.  
268 What is ‘internal’ depends on how the boundaries of the object of study are drawn. If the object of  
269 study is a village, internal stressors are different compared to a study in which the object of study is  
270 a country (see Gallopín (2006)). In most of the reviewed studies, the object of study was  
271 comparably small, often a community or a set of communities. Nevertheless, in the majority of the  
272 studies, most of the stressors were not local, such as global climate change phenomena or global  
273 trade tariffs or national subsidies, with little possibilities to alleviate these stressors just within the  
274 local context of vulnerability.

275

276 Cross-scale interactions also hampered the classification of stressors into local and global ones.  
277 There were some social stressors or those related to local power relations that were more clearly  
278 local. However, most of the stressors such as poverty or environmental degradation can be  
279 considered as multi-scale stressors that affect human populations across scales (see also Füssel  
280 (2007)). It has been suggested that multi-scale governance could remove some barriers between  
281 separate scales but challenges of coordinating actions between different scales remain (Næss et al.  
282 2005).

283

284 Most of the stressors were considered to have an effect on either hazard or vulnerability. In other  
285 words, stressors were hardly ever related to exposure, as considered by IPCC (2014). One reason  
286 behind this issue is that exposure, if understood as being merely a spatial concept, is not always  
287 relevant. While exposure to floods tends to be reliant on the location, exposure to other hazards or  
288 shocks, such as drought or economic recession, is more independent of the location.

289

### 290 **3.4 The use of different concepts**

291

292 As can be seen from the search terminology, different concepts have been used in the analyses of  
293 the effects of non-climatic factors on human vulnerability. Quite expectedly, the concept of  
294 vulnerability was used in almost all of the studies (Table 1). Also concepts of risk and factor were  
295 widely used. However, key IPCC concept hazard and concepts such as stress and stressor were not  
296 used in approximately 30% of the articles. When different concepts were combined with the search  
297 words multiple and other, different results were obtained (Table 2). It can be seen that ‘double  
298 exposure’, ‘multiple stressors’, ‘other stressors’ and ‘other factors’ together with non-climat\* were  
299 most widely used; however, these combined concepts were used in less than half of the articles.  
300 This shows that none of the concepts is well established to be used widely; furthermore, many of  
301 the concepts are used interchangeably.

302

303 The term risk is widely used and in many different contexts in different studies. The IPCC climate  
304 risk framework (IPCC 2014) is, however, not used explicitly. One reason behind this is that the  
305 framework is new and not yet widely established. Another important reason is that risks have  
306 dissimilar components in different studies and many different risks are raised ranging from climate  
307 and flood risks to risks related to HIV/AIDS. The term hazard is usually used in the meaning of  
308 natural hazards and pointing to single events. Some authors, nevertheless, acknowledge that hazards  
309 can be slow changes (McNeeley and Shulski 2011) or equate hazards with political-economic  
310 shocks (Shackleton and Shackleton 2012). Similar to risk, the term vulnerability is widely used and  
311 often with different meanings without a clear framework.

312

313 The general components of vulnerability (i.e. exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity) are rarely  
314 analyzed explicitly. An exception is the study by Hjerpe and Glaas (2012) who examine factors that  
315 affect exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity in terms of flooding vulnerability in southwestern  
316 Sweden. The term exposure is not usually used in the same spatial meaning as in the IPCC in the  
317 reviewed studies but in a meaning of a manifestation of a hazard. This is actually in line with the  
318 older IPCC framework in which exposure is defined as “the nature and degree to which a system is  
319 exposed to” shocks and hazards (McCarthy et al. 2001).

320

321 The term ‘double exposure’ refers to two hazards or shocks that together cause risks and  
322 vulnerability. In the reviewed literature, ‘double exposure’ was used almost exclusively in this  
323 manner, although the concept has been extended to diverse social and environmental changes  
324 (McKune and Silva 2013) or broadened to ‘gendered double exposure’ (Nyantakyi-Frimpong and  
325 Bezner-Kerr 2015). In addition, the original authors of the ‘double exposure’ concept have later  
326 broadened the concept by looking at three pathways of ‘double exposure’, which are outcome  
327 (combined impact of processes), context (one process changes the context of the other process and

328 decreases capacity to respond) and feedback (interactions between process impacts and drivers)  
329 (Leichenko and O'Brien 2008; Leichenko et al. 2010; O'Brien et al. 2009). The concept of 'multiple  
330 exposures' is another extension of the 'double exposure' concept but one that is used slightly  
331 differently. For instance, Belliveau et al. (2006) use the term risk as a potential harm, while  
332 exposure is a manifestation of this harm (i.e., someone is exposed to a risk). Belliveau et al. (2006)  
333 also bring exposure and sensitivity together so that the unit under exposure and its characteristics  
334 are evaluated simultaneously. The same kind of terminology is used by Westerhoff and Smit (2009)  
335 who employ the term 'multiple exposure-sensitivities'. Other authors such as Bunce et al. (2010)  
336 and Bennett et al. (2015b), primarily use the concept of 'multiple stressors' but refer to 'multiple  
337 exposures' when the different stressors are manifested. This usage is in accordance with the older  
338 IPCC exposure-sensitivity-adaptive capacity vulnerability framework.

339

340 The concept 'multiple stressors' was first used to denote the two phenomena of climate change and  
341 globalization that cause 'double exposure' (O'Brien et al. 2004) but the usage of this term has been  
342 considerably widened. Stressor is fairly often used synonymously with IPCC's hazard concept but  
343 its significance is much broader. For instance, Tschakert (2007) uses terms worry, stress, stressor,  
344 hazard and threat interchangeably to denote threats that affect people. Therefore, some of the  
345 stressors such as poor health or lack of money used by Tschakert (2007) and also by other authors  
346 can be considered merely issues that increase individuals', households' or communities' social  
347 vulnerability to hazards rather than hazards per se. Similar issues have been elaborated in social  
348 vulnerability literature (Cutter et al. 2003).

349

350 'Factor', 'driver' and 'pressure' further complicate the mixed usage of different concepts. Factor is  
351 used in a wide array of meanings: denoting to a statistical connotation, to factors of change, risk  
352 factors or more widely to non-climatic factors. Driver is often used to mean the processes that cause  
353 changes (drivers of change) and in some cases as a synonym for pressures or stressors (Connolly-

354 Boutin and Smit 2015). Pressure is used in the same way as stressor or in the very wide everyday  
355 meaning. For instance, Chandra and Gaganis (2015) use the term ‘non-climatic pressures’ when  
356 referring to issues such as tourism, social change and deforestation, while Suckall et al. (2014) use  
357 drivers and pressures in the drivers-pressures-states-impacts-response (DPSIR) framework. In this  
358 widely used framework, climate change, economic growth and other *drivers* exert *pressures* (e.g.  
359 over extraction of resources), which cause changes in *state* (e.g. in livelihoods). These changes are  
360 considered *impacts*, which may be alleviated with adaptive and coping *responses*. DPSIR and other  
361 frameworks (Bennett et al. 2015a; Hopkins 2015) are used for organizing complex information and  
362 simplify the usage of different concepts, which can otherwise be confusing.

363

364 The usage of the term non-climatic illustrates how one concept can be used in various meanings and  
365 in different combinations. The term is originally used as denoting other factors than climate that  
366 contribute to vulnerability (Füssel and Klein 2006). In the reviewed articles, non-climatic has been  
367 used in combination with factor, pressure, risk, determinant of vulnerability, stress, stressor, impact,  
368 stimuli, condition, change, force, issue, exposure-sensitivity, variable and driver. All these  
369 combinations show that non-climatic can attain many meanings often denoting to hazards or other  
370 issues that have an effect on risks or vulnerability. Hence, the term non-climatic is used as a  
371 counterpoint to climatic but in different studies the term is used differently.

372

373 Furthermore, the relative importance of non-climatic versus climatic varies in different studies and  
374 in different cases. For example, Lereboullet et al. (2014) model the impacts of future climate to  
375 viticulture in southern France and use interviews in order to analyze the relative role of non-climatic  
376 factors, while McDowell and Hess (2012) analyze the effect of ‘multiple stressors’ on indigenous  
377 smallholders on Bolivian highlands using the term ‘non-climatic stressors’ to highlight that not all  
378 the stressors are climatic. Whereas the weight is clearly given to climate in the first example,  
379 different stressors are considered equally important in the second study. In general, the reviewed

380 studies show that non-climatic and ‘multiple stressors’ do not have different emphasis; rather they  
381 illustrate that both concepts are used in versatile ways.

382

383 Overall, our analysis shows that different concepts have been used in a wide range of meanings.

384 One key message is that the different factors cannot be organized to the IPCC framework of

385 hazards, exposure and vulnerability since there is no conceptual clarity of the key concepts among

386 the researchers within this multi-disciplinary field of human dimensions of climate change. Ideally,

387 concepts should be general enough in order to allow their usage in the same meaning across

388 different cases and in different studies. Nevertheless, as Hinkel (2011) suggests, a general definition

389 of vulnerability should be agreed upon but the concept should thereafter be further operationalized

390 based on the conceptual framework used and the context of the case analyzed. In our sample, only a

391 few studies were explicit in how the different concepts were operationalized and on which kind of

392 conceptual framework the studies were based. This mixed usage of concepts and lack of explicit

393 description of frameworks has been found also in a vulnerability review by Delaney et al. (2014).

394

395 This lack of conceptual clarity within the field hinders a better understanding of the dynamics of

396 climate change and human vulnerability. Given the overlapping use of concepts, it is hard to

397 consider to what extent the different non-climatic factors interact or influence each other. There is

398 no abundance of conceptual frameworks or models, par a few examples (e.g. DPSIR), which

399 address this issue and attempt to present a simple model of interactions. Whilst developing even a

400 simplistic framework or model always leads to compromise, it can nevertheless help to clarify some

401 connections within complex system. At the same time we acknowledge that differences between the

402 reviewed studies partly relate to divergences in interpretations that are rooted in different discourses

403 and some of the differences may not be integrated into one common framework (O'Brien et al.

404 2007). More conceptual clarity would nevertheless enable some integration of approaches that are

405 discursively close to each other and also help in bridging the approaches that may fundamentally

406 differ but still complement each other.

407

### 408 **3.5 Analysis of the vulnerability context**

409

410 We divided the orientation of the studies to outcome-oriented, contextual-oriented and mixed focus  
411 using the division by O'Brien et al. (2007). In their distinction, outcome vulnerability is a linear  
412 result of projected impacts on the exposed unit, whereas contextual vulnerability builds on a  
413 processual and multidimensional approach in which several social, economic, political and  
414 institutional structures and conditions also affect vulnerability. They also acknowledge that some  
415 approaches lie between the two interpretations of vulnerability and specifically exemplify that  
416 'multiple stressors' is an intermediate approach: vulnerability can be an outcome of 'multiple  
417 stressors', or 'multiple stressors' can impact the context in which vulnerability is experienced.

418

419 We classified 76 articles (or 61%) as contextual oriented, 32 articles (26%) as outcome focused and  
420 17 articles (14%) as mixed. Our analysis thus shows that among climate change literature there is  
421 considerable number of studies that analyze the vulnerability context. Furthermore, the number of  
422 these studies is rapidly increasing (Fig. 1). Our classification is in line with the analysis of  
423 McDowell et al. (2016) but differs from the analysis of Bassett and Fogelman (2013), who stated  
424 that 70% of the 558 studies they considered were outcome focused (where the main source of  
425 vulnerability was climate impacts), 3% of the studies focused on social roots of the vulnerability  
426 and 27 % considered both.

427

428 This disparity results from many reasons. First and foremost, the sample of the studies between the  
429 reviews differs. Our review was systematic and we selected articles using systematic searches as  
430 recommended by Lorenz et al. (2014), while Bassett and Fogelman (2013) chose four journals and  
431 used only one search word: *adaptation*. The article search process was different and our search

432 words could have favored contextual vulnerability or mixed-focus studies. Second, we selected only  
433 studies with clear focus on human vulnerability, whereas Bassett and Fogelman (2013) did not carry  
434 out the further pruning of the studies. Third, we classified all the studies where there is a clear  
435 analysis of the vulnerability context as contextual. In our view, most of these studies would have  
436 been classified as mixed in the analysis by Bassett and Fogelman (2013). Fourth, many of the  
437 studies in our analysis were published after 2012 the time when the Bassett and Fogelman (2013)  
438 article was submitted for the review.

439

### 440 **3.6 Importance of stressors**

441

442 Quite often, the reviewed articles claimed that climate was not the most important factor or not the  
443 most pressing stressor affecting vulnerability (Table 3). In 44 (35%) of the 125 studies analyzed,  
444 there was no indication of which the most important stressors are. The rest of the studies were  
445 divided into two parts: half ranked climate-related stressors such as drought as the most important,  
446 and the other half stressors other than climate as the most important. Stressors other than climate  
447 included social issues such as lack of income or capital, health, governance, neoliberalism or  
448 globalization and demographics.

449

450 As this list suggests, stressors can be found at different scales. While some of the stressors, such as  
451 lack of income or poor health, have an effect on everyday lives, other stressors, such as climate  
452 change and globalization, are global-scale forces that might exert an effect on more proximate  
453 stressors. This indicates interconnectedness of stressors across different scales. Many of the  
454 stressors are also fairly heterogeneous and their impacts can vary depending on the context. For  
455 instance, while in a remote community in the Norwegian Arctic primary stressor for community  
456 adaptation is population decline (Amundsen 2012), in many other contexts one of the major stresses  
457 concerning the adaptation to climate change is caused by population growth (Fazey et al. 2011;

458 Laube et al. 2012; Pricope et al. 2013).

459

460 In the reviewed literature, the relative importance of different stressors was analyzed by methods of  
461 interviews, participatory approaches and surveys, by judgments made by researchers, by focusing  
462 on some stressor(s) and by modeling or by combining different approaches. All these different  
463 methodological approaches yield varying results (Table 3). When importance was examined based  
464 on data gathered by interviews, surveys or participatory methods, 41% of studies ranked climate as  
465 the most important stressor but more articles ranked climate as the most important when importance  
466 was evaluated by researchers' judgment (57%) or selection of focus (83%).

467

468 In addition, there were differences in how the evaluations were made or how the interviews were  
469 carried out. These interlinked with the conceptual issues of how the object of vulnerability was  
470 defined, what the important stressors were considered to be, at what scales they were analyzed and  
471 how the interviews and their analyses were framed. Different sorts of stressors were often included  
472 in the same analysis. In many of the reviewed studies which were based on interviews most  
473 important stressors were considered to be everyday distress or everyday worries. In future, we  
474 suggest using triangulation and cross-checking in data interpretation to sort out the importance of  
475 stressors at different scales and to examine how stressors might be interlinked. Better explanation of  
476 the conceptual framework used would also be important.

477

478 Our review indicates that there are complex interconnections between climatic and non-climatic  
479 factors concerning the human vulnerability and climate change. First, climatic factors cannot be  
480 analyzed in isolation because other stressors shape the context, in which climate change is  
481 experienced (Eriksen et al. 2011; O'Brien et al. 2007). Furthermore, especially in many parts of the  
482 global South, adaptation and mitigation policies themselves can sometimes cause further  
483 vulnerabilities (Bose 2015). Second, other stressors affect the vulnerability of especially those

484 communities and groups of population that are already experiencing high levels of vulnerability.  
485 These communities might become even more vulnerable in the future when the impacts of climate  
486 change become more evident. In order to decrease vulnerability, the context of ‘multiple stressors’  
487 should be taken into account; and the vulnerability to different stressors should be reduced (Eriksen  
488 et al. 2011; McCubbin et al. 2015).

489

### 490 **3.7 Analysis of interactions**

491

492 O'Brien et al. (2009) highlight that ‘multiple stressors’ literature should analyze interactions  
493 between different stressors. Interactions were mentioned or acknowledged in 95 (76% of the  
494 studies) of the reviewed studies. However, only 35 (28%) of the studies included explicit analysis of  
495 the interactions as also found by Tucker et al. (2014).

496

497 If there is no clear analysis how the different stressors interact and intertwine, the relative  
498 importance of different stressors is difficult to assess. For instance, climate change is often a part of  
499 the cause for the most proximate and more evident stressors (see e.g. McCubbin et al. (2015)). This  
500 was stressed not only in the studies where importance was assessed using researchers’ judgments  
501 but also by interviewees (Mubaya et al. 2012; Petheram et al. 2010).

502

503 The interconnections between different stressors and different scales also complicate the division  
504 between social and biophysical factors, as well as between local and global processes. For instance,  
505 Reenberg et al. (2012) report that in the Sahel area, drought (non-local biophysical stressor) forced  
506 young men to migrate periodically to find pastures elsewhere. This resulted in lack of labor (local  
507 social stressor) and bottlenecks in agricultural production in the next growing season.

508

509 Therefore, it is more important to analyze the interactions and cause-response relationships between

510 different stressors than to divide them to different groups. Interacting stressors and associated  
511 processes are also dynamic: they change over time and context and across scales. Some authors  
512 (Belliveau et al. 2006; Westerhoff and Smit 2009) have thus used the concept of ‘dynamic  
513 vulnerability’ to emphasize the changing environment and interacting stressors. In future studies, we  
514 recommend together with other scholars (Bennett et al. 2015a; Bennett et al. 2015b; Tucker et al.  
515 2014) a clear analysis or at least brief exploration of interactions. The analysis of interactions also  
516 helps in distinguishing stressors that act at different scales.

517

### 518 **3.8 Different scientific traditions**

519

520 Multiple stressors have been studied in many scientific traditions such as climate research and  
521 hazard research. It has been argued that multiple stressors have been examined for decades in the  
522 latter tradition (see Introduction Section). In our sample, only one (Smit et al. 1996) of the papers  
523 was published before the 2000s. This suggests that studies of ‘multiple stressors’ is a relatively new  
524 research interest. However, previous studies might have used other terms than the ones we used in  
525 our literature searches. Thus, it is possible that we might have missed some studies that did not  
526 focus on climate change specifically but belonged to other scientific traditions such as hazards  
527 research.

528

529 In most of the reviewed articles, early studies of ‘multiple stressors’ analysis were not cited  
530 exhaustively, though many of the studies such as Lopez-Marrero and Yarnal (2010), Prno et al.  
531 (2011) and O'Brien et al. (2009) refer to the earlier traditions such as literature on hazards (Wisner  
532 et al. 2004) or social vulnerability (Cutter et al. (2003). In general, it was argued that the earlier  
533 papers were merely theoretical, whereas the newer literature either represents empirical case studies  
534 or analyzes interactions between different stressors. There are also authors such as Smit et al.  
535 (1996) and Smit and Skinner (2002), who acknowledge that there have been studies within other

536 fields such as agricultural systems analysis where multiple factors have been considered but in  
537 many of these studies *ceteris paribus* assumptions have been made. The lack of citation to earlier  
538 traditions illustrates perhaps a discontinuity within research traditions and presents a risk of  
539 reinventing the wheel, conceptually and methodologically. Nevertheless, a recent bibliometric  
540 analysis found some evidence of convergence between different traditions (Giupponi and Biscaro  
541 2015).

542

#### 543 **4 Conclusions**

544

545 We systematically reviewed climate change literature in which ‘multiple stressors’ or ‘non-climatic  
546 factors’ have been accounted for. We chose articles for the review with the help of SCOPUS and  
547 Web of Knowledge searches with different keywords. Our searches left out some articles which  
548 consider ‘multiple stressors’ (Adelekan and Fregene 2015; Amoako Johnson and Hutton 2014;  
549 McDowell et al. 2016) but our systematic sample consisted of 125 articles. We have contributed to  
550 the conceptual clarity of an emerging new field of research on vulnerability that endorses various  
551 processes interacting with climate change. Based on our results, following three major conclusions  
552 can be drawn.

553

554 First, the analysis of ‘multiple stressors’ is a relatively new field with literature expanding  
555 especially since 2010. Although the analysis of ‘multiple stressors’ builds on earlier literature about  
556 hazards, it has made the understanding more profound by using empirical case studies and in some  
557 cases by analyzing interactions between different stressors. We recommend that in further studies  
558 interactions should be better analyzed to clearly demonstrate which stressors should be targeted  
559 simultaneously.

560

561 Second, the literature about ‘multiple stressors’ is heterogeneous. Whilst some of the found  
562 differences in part relate to differences in interpretations that are rooted in different discourses,

563 many of the studies are not explicit about the interpretations and conceptualizations they use (see  
564 Section The use of different concepts). More conceptual clarity would enable some integration of  
565 approaches and also help in bridging the approaches that may fundamentally differ but still  
566 complement each other. We recommend usage of analytical frameworks or models which specify  
567 differences, interactions and relationships between different drivers, processes and stressors.

568

569 Third, it was often stressed that climate change is not the most evident stressor. This was  
570 emphasized 59% of the studies where results were obtained using interviews or surveys. This is  
571 logical since climate change is only one of the stressors affecting people's everyday lives and it is  
572 not always prioritized in policy implementation. The importance of different stressors is difficult to  
573 measure or rank due to interactions between different stressors and changes in time, context and  
574 across scales; therefore, we recommend use of mixed methods and triangulation of different data  
575 sources in the data analysis to sort out the most important stressors.

576

577 The reviewed literature emphasizes that there are multiple interacting stressors that should be  
578 analyzed together and these stressors should be targeted by policies, which integrate adaptation to  
579 climate change and other stressors. Risks related to climate change are not caused by climate  
580 change alone but by various intertwining biophysical and social drivers and stressors, which have  
581 effects on hazards, exposure and vulnerability. Finally, the way vulnerability is conceptualized and  
582 approached in research has also relevant policy implications. The different definitions of problems  
583 and their consequences outline and justify different kind of policy responses and lead to different  
584 kind of operationalization of vulnerability assessments in the adaptation policies. The framings of  
585 vulnerability thus have very material effects on the well-being of vulnerable and disadvantaged  
586 social groups.

587

588

590 **Acknowledgements**

591 The research was funded by Helsinki University Centre for Environment (HENVI). A draft of this  
 592 manuscript was presented in the Environmental Science and Policy Graduate Seminar at the  
 593 Department of Environmental Science, University of Helsinki. We thank Sanna-Riikka Saarela,  
 594 Alexandra Jurgilevich, Anna Salomaa, Pekka Kauppi and others for giving constructive comments.

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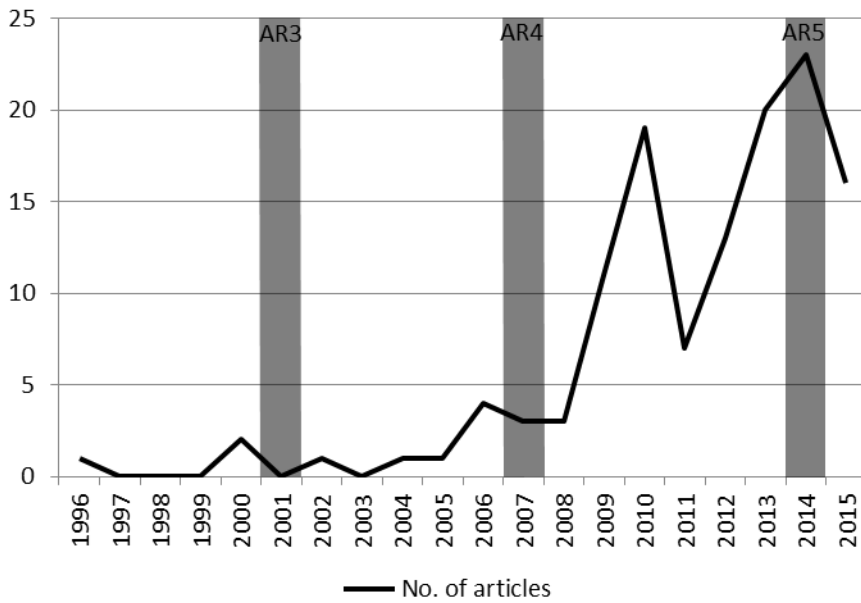
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*Figure 1. The amount of articles that were selected for the review, published each year. The publishing years of IPCC Working Group 2 Assessment Reports (AR) are marked with transparent gray. Because the literature search was performed on June 4<sup>th</sup> 2015, the amount of articles published in 2015 is not comparable to other years.*

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*Table 1. Different concepts, the percentage of articles in which these concepts were used, and how many times these concepts were overall used in the reviewed articles. Concepts were sought from full-texts including references. All concepts were sought both in singular and in plural form. The overall number of words might not be exact due to problems in character recognition, but their order of magnitude is correct.*

Concept	% of articles	Overall
Vulnerability	98 %	4487
Risk	97 %	2561
Factor	97 %	1278
Exposure	83 %	1126
Stress	73 %	1011
Stressor	70 %	1185
Pressure	69 %	342
Hazard	65 %	756
Driver	63 %	502
Sensitivity	58 %	520

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831 *Table 2. Different concepts and the percentage of articles in which these concepts were used.*

832 *Concepts were sought from full-text articles excluding references. All concepts were sought both in*

833 *singular and in plural form.*

Concept	% of articles
non-climat*	40 %
multiple stressor	38 %
other factor	37 %
double exposure	27 %
other stressor	27 %
multiple exposure	12 %
multiple stress	12 %
other stress	11 %
multiple factor	10 %
other risk	10 %
other driver	6 %
multiple risk	6 %
multiple driver	5 %
multiple pressure	3 %
other pressure	0 %

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*Table 3. Ranking of the most important stressor based on different analysis method. For each analysis method, and overall, the amount and proportion of articles are given.*

Analysis method	Number of articles	Most important stressor	
		Climate	Not climate
Interviews, participatory approaches, surveys	37 (46%)	15 (41%)	22 (59%)
Researchers' judgment	23 (28%)	13 (57%)	10 (43%)
Focusing on some stressors	6 (7%)	5 (83%)	1 (17%)
Modelling	1 (1%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)
Combination of two or three approaches	14 (17%)	4 (29%)	10 (71%)
Overall	81 (100%)	38 (47%)	43 (53%)

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839 **Climate change, multiple stressors and human vulnerability – a systematic**  
840 **review**

841 Regional Environmental Change

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847 **Supplementary material: Reviewed articles**

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