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Three Steps to Including Conflict Considerations in the Design of Climate Change Adaptation Projects

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Introduction

Research in 2020 found that 12 out of the 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change were also affected by conflict.[1] Climate change, combined with existing social, political and economic dynamics, can exacerbate vulnerabilities, undermine peacebuilding efforts and lead to new conflicts.[2] This is especially the case in fragile and conflict-affected countries, where low development levels, insecurity and weak governance limit coping potential.[3] It is known that little international climate finance reaches fragile and conflict-affected countries to support their adaptation activities.[4] However, it remains poorly understood whether the climate change adaptation projects financed through international climate finance that does reach these countries effectively contribute to reducing conflict risk.

In fragile and conflict-affected countries, climate change adaptation projects have the potential to influence conflict dynamics—and either increase or reduce conflict risks—depending on their design and implementation.[5] The impact of conflict on project implementation (and vice versa) has been recognized by major donors of international climate finance as an issue that should receive attention.[6] However, as yet, conflict risks do not seem to be systematically considered in the design and evaluation of adaptation projects, making it difficult to determine how the projects influence conflict dynamics.

[1] International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *When Rain Turns to Dust* (ICRC: Geneva, 2020), p. 10.
[2] Mobjörk, M., Krampe, F. and Tarif, K., 'Pathways of climate insecurity: Guidance for policymakers', SIPRI Policy Brief, Nov. 2020.
[3] Mobjörk, Krampe and Tarif (note 2).
[4] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Climate Finance for Sustaining Peace: Making Climate Finance Work for Conflict-affected and Fragile Contexts* (UNDP: New York, 2021); and Cao, Y. et al., *Exploring the Conflict Blind Spots in Climate Adaptation Finance*, synthesis report (SPARC Knowledge: London, 2021).
[5] van Schaik, L. et al., *Making Peace with Climate Adaptation* (Global Commission on Adaptation, Global Center on Adaptation: Rotterdam, 2019).
[6] See for example Ahmadnia, S. et al., *Defueling Conflict: Environment and Natural Resource Management as a Pathway to Peace* (World Bank: Washington, DC, 2022); and Independent Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), *Evaluation of GEF Support in Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations*, GEF Council document GEF/E/C.59/01 (GEF secretariat: Washington, DC, 11 Nov. 2020).

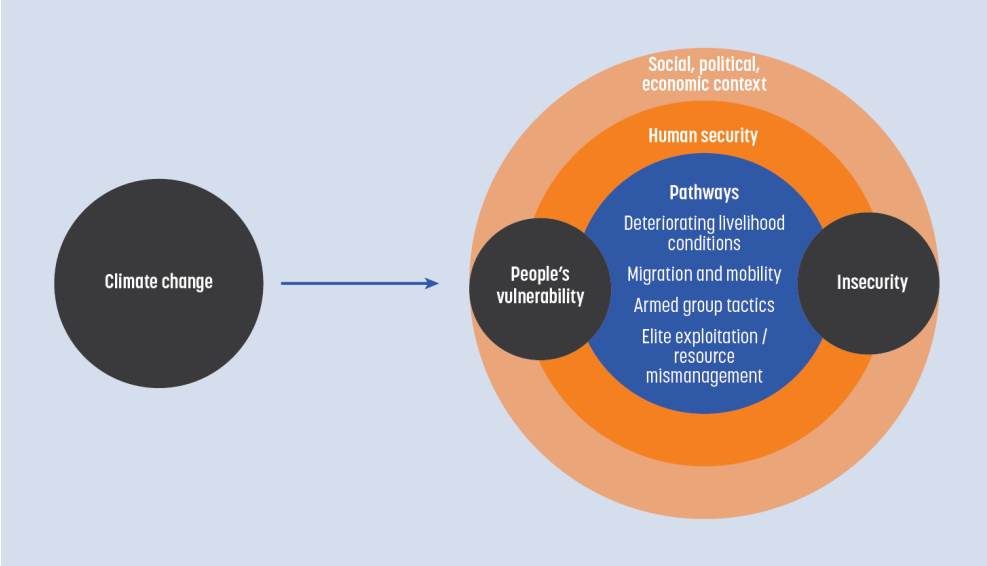

Figure 1. Pathways of climate-related security risks

Source: SIPRI Climate Change and Risk Programme.

This policy brief recommends a three-step approach to facilitating the consideration of conflict risks in the design of climate change adaptation projects. The steps are: (*a*) analysing climate–conflict dynamics at the project level; (*b*) assessing how the adaptation project influences the climate–conflict dynamics; and (*c*) integrating the insights from the climate–conflict analysis into the adaptation project's design. These steps were derived from an analysis of conflict considerations in four projects from a single country, Sudan, and would benefit from further testing in other contexts.[7] These same steps, with some modifications, can also be applied in the implementation and the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) stages of climate change adaptation projects.

Step 1: Analysing climate–conflict dynamics at the project level

Given the complexity of the links between climate change and conflict, it is important that project developers understand the wider societal system in which they are operating and the potential effects of their projects on target communities. Understanding conflict within the vulnerability context of a project can also help project developers avoid maladaptive outcomes that, for example, reinforce tensions, conflict dynamics and inequitable power relations.[8] By including a conflict-sensitivity analysis in the project's design and making an effort to understand how the project influences the existing climate–conflict dynamics, project developers can help ensure that their projects maximize adaptation gains, avoid exacerbating tensions and, ideally, contribute to peace.[9]

SIPRI earlier identified four interrelated pathways that can help project developers analyse the climate–conflict context in which they are operating: (*a*) deteriorating

[7] Meijer, K. et al., in preparation.
[8] Eriksen, S. et al., 'Adaptation interventions and their effect on vulnerability in developing countries: Help, hindrance or irrelevance?', *World Development*, vol. 141 (May 2021).
[9] Wong, C. and Cao, Y., 'How can climate finance work better for fragile and conflict-affected regions?', UNDRR PreventionWeb Updates, 17 Feb. 2022.

livelihood conditions, (*b*) migration and mobility, (*c*) armed group tactics and (*d*) elite exploitation or resource mismanagement (figure 1).[10] Application of this pathways approach avoids making direct links between climate change and conflict; the approach focuses instead on the institutional structures, actors and processes that influence how climate change can translate into human security risks and under which conditions this may happen.[11] Because of its risk-based nature, this approach can help in understanding climate change as part of a broader system in which variables and processes interact to produce different climate–conflict dynamics and, in turn, in understanding how adaptation projects can influence these dynamics.[12]

The first pathway examines how climate change can interact with other factors and processes to upend livelihoods and increase the risk of people resorting to violence to secure their land and resources. Especially for people with resource-dependent livelihoods, the impacts of climate change can lead to income and job loss that deepens existing tensions relating to inequality. The second pathway considers how human migration and mobility caused by climate change can alter livelihoods and result in increased pressure on already scarce natural resources in destination areas. Migration and mobility as a coping strategy for climate change can introduce the risk of community-based conflicts erupting between arrivals and hosts, and increase the vulnerability of both communities. The third pathway explores how armed groups can wield the impacts of climate change to secure territory and recruit individuals from communities whose livelihoods have been upended. In the absence of government-provided services and relief, armed groups can position themselves as alternative providers and thereby strengthen their authority in communities.[13] The final pathway looks at how individuals with relative wealth and power can exploit climate change impacts and climate-related disasters to increase their control over land and resources at the expense of vulnerable communities. Elites can also allow or even support the escalation of local struggles into a broader conflict that benefits their political agenda.[14]

Climate change adaptation projects have the potential to influence conflict dynamics—and either increase or reduce conflict risks—depending on their design and implementation

Step 2: Assessing how the project influences climate–conflict dynamics

Visualization of the links between climate, livelihoods and conflict, as well as of the various social, economic, political and governance factors that influence these links, can support the assessment of how an adaptation project will intervene in the climate-related security risk pathways. A useful tool for this purpose is a causal loop diagram

[10] van Baalen, S. and Mobjörk, M., 'Climate change and violent conflict in East Africa: Integrating qualitative and quantitative research to probe the mechanisms', *International Studies Review*, vol. 20, no. 4 (Dec. 2018); Tarif, K., 'Climate change and violent conflict in West Africa: Assessing the evidence', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2022/3, Feb. 2022; and Nordqvist, P. and Krampe, F., 'Climate change and violent conflict: Sparse evidence from South Asia and South East Asia', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2018/4, Sep. 2018.
[11] Mobjörk, Krampe and Tarif (note 2).
[12] Mobjörk, Krampe and Tarif (note 2).
[13] Tarif (note 10).
[14] Mobjörk, Krampe and Tarif (note 2).

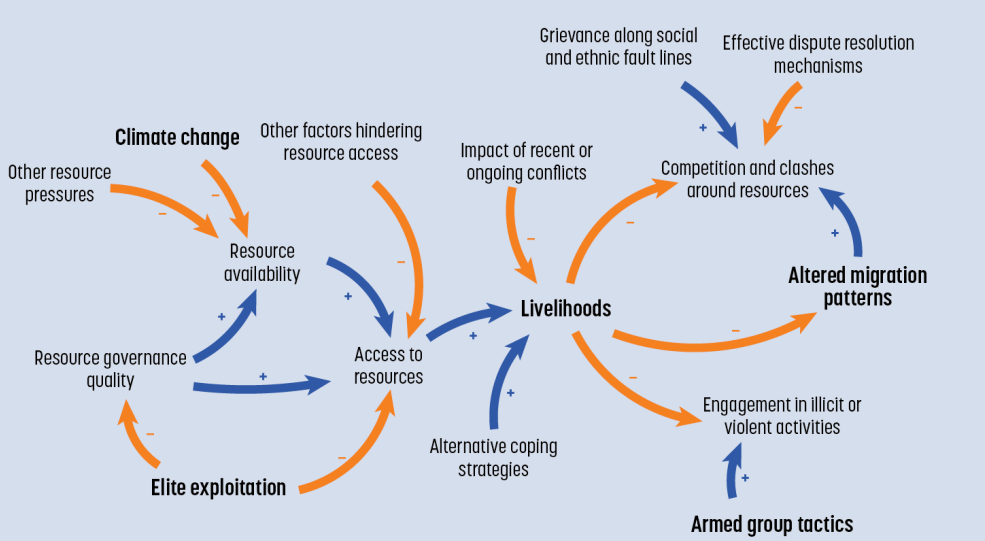

Figure 2. Example of a causal loop diagram showing climate–conflict dynamics

(CLD) (see figure 2 for an example of a CLD showing the four pathways). The CLD will reveal both factors that influence other factors in the same direction (e.g. farmers having restricted access to land will grow fewer crops) and factors exerting influence in the opposite direction (e.g. strengthened conflict resolution sees fewer conflicts escalate into violence). A CLD can be made to visualize existing dynamics and assess how the proposed project intervenes in these dynamics and what consequences that may have on the wider system.

Visualization of the links between climate, livelihoods and conflict can support the assessment of how an adaptation project will intervene in the climate-related security risk pathways

For the CLD to provide insight into how a proposed adaptation project will potentially influence social dynamics and affect conflict risks, context-specific (local) data is needed. Information at a high level of granularity is necessary to determine if and how climate change and climate change adaptation projects will redistribute resources and risks among the different groups in a society. In addition, detailed insights are required into the response options these groups have. To ensure relevant factors and dynamics are fully considered in project design, a process in which a CLD is co-created with local actors is desirable. Local actors possess valuable knowledge about the needs and coping strategies of their own communities.[15] Moreover, this co-creation approach can contribute to local ownership of climate adaptation, which can facilitate its implementation and durability.[16]

[15] Nyong, A., Adesina, F. and Osman Elasha, B. 'The value of indigenous knowledge in climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies in the African Sahel', *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change*, vol. 12 (June 2007).

[16] Marks, S. J. and Davis, J., 'Does user participation lead to sense of ownership for rural water systems? Evidence from Kenya', *World Development*, vol. 40, no. 8 (Aug. 2012); and Jager, N. W. et al., 'Pathways to implementation: Evidence on how participation in environmental governance impacts on environmental outcomes,' *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, vol. 30, no. 3 (July 2020).

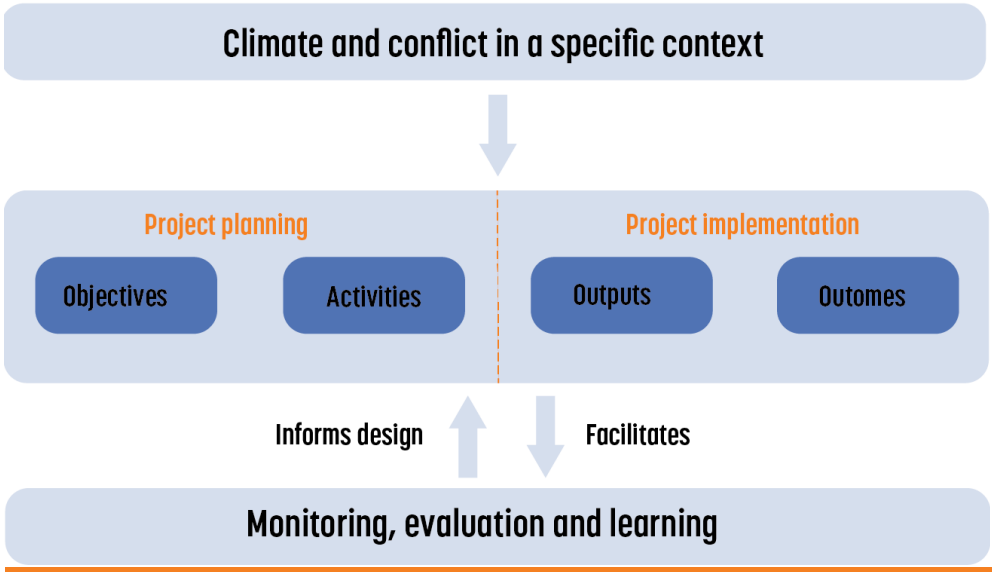

Figure 3. Integration of climate–conflict analysis into adaptation project design

Step 3: Integrating climate–conflict analysis into project design

The climate–conflict dynamics that will be in play when a climate change adaptation project is under implementation need to be understood and integrated into the project's planning or design phase (including its theory of change), and as part of the MEL processes. Ideally, the analysis of these dynamics, carried out in steps 1 and 2, is not merely included as part of the background of a project proposal; rather, the analysis should be fully integrated as part of the project's objectives, activities, and expected outputs and outcomes (see figure 3). In this regard, it is important to distinguish that outputs are the result of the implementation of individual project activities whereas outcomes arise from the project as a whole and are generally linked to its objectives.[17] The inclusion of specific conflict-related output and outcome indicators as part of a project's MEL processes is instrumental in demonstrating the effect of the project on the climate and conflict dynamics identified and allows for adaptive management, when needed. If the analysis of the project's influence on the climate–conflict dynamics and its integration into project design can't be done during the proposal phase (e.g. owing to resource constraints), this step should be included early in the implementation phase.

Measuring and evaluating a project for its effect on climate–conflict dynamics is a sensitive issue and thus presents many challenges. The use of mixed methods (i.e. a mix of qualitative and quantitative research approaches) has proved advantageous in this regard.[18] This third step ensures constant feedback into the project cycle to inform the project's continuation

[17] Belcher, B. and Palenberg, M., 'Outcomes and impacts of development interventions: Toward conceptual clarity', *American Journal of Evaluation*, vol. 39, no. 4 (Dec. 2018).
[18] Hassnain, H., Kelly, L. and Somma, S., eds, *Evaluation in Contexts of Fragility, Conflict and Violence: Guidance from Global Evaluation Practitioners* (International Development Evaluation Association: Exeter, 2021); and Condomines, B. and Hennequin, E., 'Studying sensitive issues: The contributions of a mixed approach', *Revue Interdisciplinaire Management, Homme & Enterprise*, vol. 3, no. 14 (2014).

Conclusions

The three steps proposed in this policy brief comprise a concrete method for the climate change adaptation community to ensure that their projects consider and effectively contribute to reducing climate-related conflict risks. While a detailed analysis of climate–conflict dynamics can be resource-intensive, omitting the analysis from project design and implementation could lead to unintended consequences that undermine the very goals of the project. If planned for in advance and built into the MEL procedures of a project, the three-step approach could save time during the project's implementation phase. Applying this approach can also contribute to a greater awareness of the climate–conflict context in which adaptation projects are implemented, reduce the likelihood of maladaptive adaptation strategies that end up worsening (rather than reducing) climate-related vulnerabilities, avoid exacerbating tensions and, ideally, promote peace.

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The Stockholm Hub on Environment, Climate and Security provides evidence-based insights on building security and prosperity and strengthening resilience in the face of a changing climate. The Stockholm Hub combines the strengths of four leading research institutes: Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and Stockholm Resilience Centre at Stockholm University (SRC). The Hub is funded by the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

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