Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet South Sudan*

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South Sudan is one of the least peaceful countries in the world and one of the most vulnerable to climate change. Rising temperatures and changing precipitation patterns have led to both drought and flooding, impacting river flows and the groundwater availability and water quality for a population highly reliant on agriculture and pastoralism. Decades of violent conflict have also eroded the population's coping capacities. Weak governance and the lack of infrastructure further undermine the capacity of state and social institutions to adapt to climate change. Beyond the existing tensions between armed groups in South Sudan, the spillover effects of the war in Sudan are exacerbating a complex and persistent humanitarian crisis.

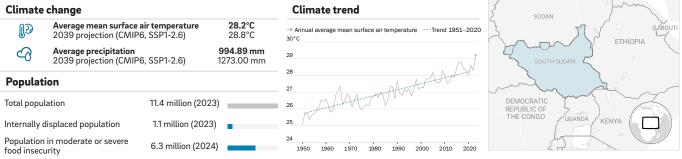
- Climate change is severely affecting livelihoods in South Sudan, with intercommunal conflict and violent cattle raids exacerbating the challenges it poses. People increasingly rely on foraging and humanitarian aid to survive.
- Extreme weather events such as floods are increasingly severe in many parts of South Sudan, which contributes to internal displacement, exacerbates conflict-related displacement (including from Sudan) and increases population pressures in host areas.
- Floods and landmines impact the safety of displaced people and land-grabbing prevents their return.
- The economy remains heavily reliant on oil exports, leaving it vulnerable to global markets. The limited revenue and lack of technical skills of the transitional authorities affect the prospects for national climate action.

Efforts to achieve a solution to South Sudan's political conflict continue. Progress on implementing the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), which established the current transitional government, continues to be slow. The planned political milestones, including 2024 national elections, have been hampered by a lack of consensus among leading political figures. Nevertheless, several developments suggest that the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Climate Security Advisor and team are having a positive impact on local conflict prevention and the protection of civilians, including through the development of integrated early warning systems, flood response systems and food assistance mobilization.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

- The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and other UN and partner agencies should coordinate to strengthen the linkages between local peace agreements and the implementation of climate change adaptation initiatives in communities. Additionally, UNMISS should help ensure that the development of adaptation efforts is peace-positive and locally driven.
- ► UNMISS should collaborate with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and other UN entities in the region, including the Climate, Peace and Security Hub in the Office of the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, the Special Envoy to the Great Lakes regions and the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), to explore opportunities for strengthening conflict-sensitive disaster risk reduction by scaling up in collaboration with regional, national and subnational authorities. This can build on existing regional early warning systems, such as the Nile Cascade Committee Flood Forecasting system.
- ► UN agencies, funds and programmes, and their partner organizations, should explore opportunities for supporting South Sudan's peace process by addressing the environmental impacts of conflict and harnessing environmental entry points for building trust. This could involve technical dialogues on climate-informed economic diversification and securing climate finance for developing economic sectors, including climateresilient livelihood options for former combatants.
- ► The UN Security Council should task UNMISS with further enhancing its reporting on climate, peace and security, which has led to important progress in mainstreaming the topic within the UN system and the South Sudanese government. The Informal Expert Group on Climate, Peace and Security should continue monitoring the situation to better inform the Council's actions. Council members and donor countries should ensure that consistent and proportionate funding enables UNMISS to develop the necessary capacities to respond to climate-related peace and security risks in South Sudan.





Note: Climate change projections are based on the Sixth Phase of the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP6) and a set of Shared Socio-economic Pathways (SSPs). Sources: World Bank, Climate Change Knowledge Portal, 'South Sudan: Current climate—Climatology', accessed 24 Feb. 2025; World Bank Group, 'Population, total—South Sudan', accessed 24 Feb. 2025; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 'South Sudan: Displacement data—Internally displaced people (IDPs) (as of end of 2023)', accessed 24 Feb. 2025; and Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), 'South Sudan: IPC acute food insecurity and malnutrition analysis, Sep. 2024–July 2025; 'A Nov. 2024.

* This is an updated version of the fact sheets on South Sudan published in March 2021 and March 2022

Climate exposure: Trends and projections

South Sudan has a tropical savannah climate, with arid regions in the far north and the south-east. The rainy season is generally April-November, with seasonal flooding along the tributaries of the White Nile. It is vulnerable to extreme weather events, leading to severe droughts and floods. Rising precipitation levels and water levels in Uganda's Lake Victoria have exacerbated the flood risks in South Sudan's floodplains.1

South Sudan's observed average mean temperature is 28°C (1991–2020).² Seasonal mean temperatures have risen the most in December-February (1.15°C since 1901) and March-May (1.4°C since 1901).³ The average precipitation is 994.89 mm (1991–2020).⁴ Rainy season precipitation has increased in July-November and decreased in December–May (since 1901).⁵ Rising temperatures and declining dry season rainfall can decrease water availability and vegetation growth. Drying trends, combined with a rise in rainy season precipitation, exacerbate the risk of floods, as dry soil leads to water run-off and soil erosion.

Conservative projections estimate that the average mean temperature will reach 28.8 $^{\circ}\text{C}$ by 2039. $^{\circ}$ The largest temperature anomalies are projected for the dry season in February-May and the end of the rainy season in November.7 Increasing temperatures can exacerbate drying trends. Mean precipitation is expected to rise to 1.273 mm by 2039, with the largest rainfall increases in March-November and the largest increase in extreme precipitation events in July-August.⁸ Changing rainfall patterns can upset seasonal agropastoral and labour cycles, challenging local livelihoods and economies.9

Socioecological vulnerabilities

South Sudan is a hotspot of flood risk. Its population is very exposed to seasonal riverine floods, which have become increasingly severe.¹⁰ Whereas flood waters have historically receded during the November-January dry season, years of consecutive and record-breaking flooding have permanently changed the landscape.¹¹ As of November 2024, about 1.4 million people were affected by flooding.¹² More than 51 per cent of the flood-affected population was located in the states of Jonglei (capital Bor) and Northern Bahr el Ghazal (capital Aweil).¹³

Flooding has had an outsized effect on the people of South Sudan. As much as 87 per cent of the population suffered from moderate or severe food insecurity between 2021 and 2023.14 The situation was exacerbated by rising prices in 2024, including imported goods, basic commodities and food. This was partly driven by the conflict in Sudan, which reduced South Sudan's oil revenues and led the transitional government in Juba to increase customs and border fees.¹⁵ Widespread flooding also drove up prices: by the end of October 2024, an estimated 75 000 hectares of cropland had been impacted by floods.¹⁶

Climate-related peace and security risks

Climate change is rarely the main driver of conflict, but it can undermine development gains, exacerbate the dynamics of ongoing

¹ United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) staff member. Online interview with authors, 27 Jan, 2025; and UN International Children's Fund (UNICEF), 'Facing the floods', 8 Aug. 2024, Dec. 2024. Note that data on climate change and weather for South Sudan is limited by the country's small number of weather stations, water gauges and other measuring devices.

- ² World Bank, Climate Change Knowledge Portal, 'South Sudan: Current climate-Climatology', accessed 7 Feb. 2025.
- ³ World Bank (note 2).
- ⁴ World Bank (note 2).
- ⁵ World Bank (note 2).
- ⁶ These projections are based on the Sixth Phase of the Coupled Model Intercomparison Project (CMIP6) and Shared Socio-economic Pathway (SSP) 1-2.6; see World Bank, Climate Change Knowledge Portal, 'South Sudan: Current projections-Mean projections', accessed 7 Feb. 2025.
- ⁷ These projections are based on CMIP6 and SSP1-2.6; see World Bank (note 6).

⁸ These projections are based on CMIP6 and SSP1-2.6; see World Bank (note 6).

- ⁹ See 'Figure 1. Key livelihood and labour cycles in South Sudan's seasonal calendar' in Yaw Tchie, A. E., Grand, A. O. and Tarif, K., 'Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet: South Sudan', NUPI and SIPRI, Mar. 2021.
- ¹⁰ For a map of recurring flooding from 2015–22, see Revilla-Romero, B. and Nobakht, M., 'Climate-resilient flood management in South Sudan through earth observation insights', European Space Agency, 13 Oct. 2023.
- ¹¹ Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), 'South Sudan: Food security outlook, June 2024–January 2025', 9 July 2024.

violence and existing tensions, and disrupt fragile peace processes. Violent conflict and political instability can also weaken community resilience to the effects of climate change. This fact sheet uses four interrelated pathways to navigate the relationship between climate change, peace and security: (a) livelihood impacts, (b) migration and mobility, (c) armed actors and security, and (d) political and economic grievances.17

Livelihood impacts

The effects of climate change have severe consequences for livelihoods in South Sudan, where an estimated 85 per cent of people are engaged in nonwage work and rely on rainfed subsistence agriculture.¹⁸ Deteriorating livelihood conditions due to failed crops and diminished livestock health can lead to economic, social and political grievances, which in turn create insecurity.18

Research has identified that the compounding effects of conflict and recent flooding have led to a decline in community livestock holdings. leading people to look for alternative livelihood strategies. In Unity state's Rubkona county, people have reported a decrease in traditional livestock and crop farming and an increased reliance on humanitarian aid and foraging for firewood and wild water lilies.²⁰ Changing strategies are reflected in broader sociocultural shifts. Traditional coping mechanisms have been eroded, including reciprocal support between households, pointing to the very limited coping capacities within some communities.²¹ Gender roles have also shifted, with women spending more time on income-generating activities outside the household and men adopting traditionally women-led activities like firewood production.²² While these activities seek to make up the shortfall in traditional livestock husbandry, they are unlikely to ensure long-term household security and speak to the urgent need for resilience building.

Research has found that the negative impacts of droughts and floods on food security and livelihoods have increased competition between communities in South Sudan, for example, between pastoralists and farmers who compete for grazing land and water resources.²³ This can increase the risk of local conflicts, cattle raiding and looting, feeding retaliatory intercommunal conflicts. In some areas, pastoralists have also adopted agropastoral livelihoods, with the aim of diversifying income sources. However, this can increase their vulnerability to climate change when farming is challenged by adverse seasonal conditions and can increase competition over marginal farming lands.²⁴

The UNMISS Civil Affairs Division has facilitated peace dialogues to address natural resource and livestock-related conflicts in pastoral communities, including in the states of Eastern Equatoria, Central Equatoria and Western Bahr el-Ghazal, and in the border regions of the Lakes and Unity states.²⁵ The outcomes of these dialogues have included agreements on shared rules for the protection of local livelihoods and mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Working with UN agencies and other partners, UNMISS should seek to connect local dialogues to the implementation of climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction initiatives in communities.

- ¹² UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 'South Sudan: Floods snapshot (as of 8 November 2024)', 8 Nov. 2024.
- ¹³ OCHA (note 12).
- ¹⁴ Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) et al., *The State of Food Security* and Nutrition in the World 2024 (FAO/IFAD/UNICEF/WFP/WHO: Rome, 2024).
- ¹⁵ Food Security Information Network (FSIN), Global Network Against Food Crises (GNAFC) and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Regional Focus on the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Member States: 2024 Global Report on Food Crises (FSIN: Nairobi, 2024).
- ¹⁶ Gordy, A., FEWS NET, 'Scientists get ahead of South Sudan floods: "We need to save people's livelihoods", Earth System Science Interdisciplinary Center, University of . Maryland, 26 Nov. 2024.
- ¹⁷ Mobjörk, M., Krampe, F. and Tarif, K., 'Pathways of climate insecurity: Guidance for policymakers', SIPRI Policy Brief, Nov. 2020.
- ¹⁸ Mayen, J. V., Wood, E. and Frazier, T. G., 'Practical flood risk reduction strategies in South Sudan', Journal of Emergency Management, vol. 20, no. 8 (July 2022).
- ¹⁹ Mobjörk, Krampe and Tarif (note 17). ²⁰ Humphrey, A. et al., 'Faced with floods: Shifting livelihood strategies among South Sudan's pastoralists', SPARC, Dec. 2023.
- ²¹ REACH, 'South Sudan: "We survive through the water"—Shifting livelihood coping strategies in Greater Upper Nile', June 2024.
- ²² Humphrey et al. (note 21).
- ²³ Pendle, N. R., 'The "Nuer of Dinka money" and the demands of the dead: Contesting the moral limits of monetised politics in South Sudan', Conflict, Security and

For example, South Sudan's Second Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to global climate change mitigation identifies an opportunity in rural agricultural hubs for cold storage and more efficient transport of agricultural products to markets.²⁶ The agricultural hubs can advance locally owned climate change adaptation and support local-level peace processes by convening different communities to design and implement initiatives in mutually beneficial ways. These processes should engage with and reinforce the capacities of South Sudan's states to support resilience-building activities.

Migration and mobility

Climate change can interact with migration and mobility in several ways, including leading to displacement caused by extreme weather and altered mobility patterns due to changing seasonal weather. Forced migration can then increase population pressures on natural resources, as well as drive competition between groups with limited coping capacities. In some cases, this competition leads to conflict around the access and control of resources.27

Flooding has become a leading cause of internal displacement. In 2024, flooding displaced over 379 000 people in 22 counties of South Sudan and

the Abyei area.²⁸ The border areas of Lakes–Unity and Jonglei–Upper Nile states have seen cattle-related conflicts due to flooding, while high ground areas like the Mayom, Panyijiar and Koch counties in Unity state have seen tensions exacerbated by the arrival of many displaced people.29

Droughts have also affected livelihood security and pastoral mobility. Since 1982, droughts have occurred more frequently in the southeastern and north-eastern regions than in other parts of the country. In the states of Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile, droughts have affected pastoral mobility and other natural resource users. This has sometimes led to competition between neighbouring communities and cattle raids.³⁰

Since the 2023 outbreak of conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces, South Sudan has seen an influx of close to one million Sudanese refugees and South Sudanese returnees. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), almost 276 000 Sudanese refugees have crossed the border and more than 692 000 South Sudanese have returned since April 2023.³¹ In the states of Unity, Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Western Bahr el Ghazal and the Abyei area, this has placed additional pressure on natural resources and worsened already high levels of food insecurity; it has also pressured local economies and humanitarian assistance in areas with already large numbers of internally displaced people.³² Reports indicate that these pressures have contributed to local tensions.33

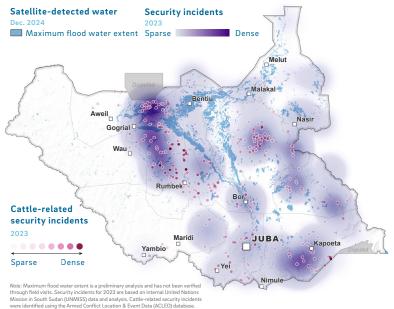
UNMISS is mandated to provide risk assessments on how the adverse effects of climate change affect the delivery of humanitarian assistance. During recent floods, it supported South Sudan's state and county authorities in identifying high ground for communities to selfrelocate, as well as in developing a conflict sensitivity database and activities to mitigate the risks of conflict.³⁴ The UN Security Council

- ²⁴ FEWS NET, 'South Sudan: Food security outlook, June 2024–January 2025', 14 Nov. 2024.
- ²⁵ James, O., 'UNMISS convenes community dialogue to end cattle-related conflict in Kidepo Valley', UNMISS news, 12 Apr. 2024; and Mpimbaza, E., 'Dialogue averts conflict between farmers and cattle keepers in Rokon, Central Equatoria, UNMISS news, 18 Dec. 2024.

²⁶ South Sudanese Ministry of Environment and Forestry, *South Sudan's Second* Nationally Determined Contribution (South Sudanese Ministry of Environment and Forestry: Juba, 30 Sep. 2021).

- ²⁷ Mobjörk, Krampe and Tarif (note 17).
- ²⁸ OCHA (note 12).

Figure 2. Flooding and security incidents in South Sudan



es: UN Satellite Centre (UNOSAT), 'Satellite detected water extents between 14 and 18 Dec. 2024 over South Sudan', 20 Dec. 2024; UNMISS, 'Overview of UNMISS data and is on flooding and conflict in South Sudan', Unpublished document, [n.d.]; and ACLED, 'Data export tool', accessed 18 Feb. 2025.

should commend the UNMISS troop-contributing countries (TCCs) for their protection of civilians from flooding and encourage all TCCs to equip their deployments to be able to fulfil their mandates in extreme weather conditions. UNMISS should work with UN missions in the broader region, including the offices of the special envoys for the Horn and the Great Lakes regions, to explore opportunities for scaling up conflict-sensitive disaster risk reduction in collaboration with national and subnational authorities.

Armed actors and security

South Sudan was among the three least peaceful countries worldwide in 2024.³⁵ Intercommunal conflict stemming from community-based militias and civil defence groups continued to be the main cause of subnational violence during the year, driven by border disputes, crossborder conflicts, cyclical retaliatory attacks and ethnic polarization.

Between April and June 2024, UNMISS documented 1062 victims of intercommunal and political violence; this represented a 32 per cent increase in violent incidents and a 16 per cent increase in the number of victims compared to the first quarter of 2024.³⁶ The gravity of the violence was most extensive in Warrap state. Additional peacekeepers were deployed to Jonglei and Western Equatoria in 2024 as escalating intercommunal violence led to an increase in civilian deaths, abductions and displacements.³⁷ Deadly violence between community militias persists, with women and children also being abducted in attacks and infrastructure and crops being destroyed. The relationship between intercommunal violence and pastoralist livelihoods has been highlighted by efforts to disseminate information on international humanitarian norms among cattle herders to reduce violence against civilians.38

Decades of conflict have also had direct impacts on the environment. South Sudan is highly contaminated by landmines, particularly in the southern parts of the Greater Equatoria region.³⁹ In some areas,

³⁴ UNMISS staff member (note 1); and United Nations, Security Council, 'Situation in South Sudan: Report of the Secretary-General', S/2024/776, 25 Oct. 2024.

³⁵ Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), *Global Peace Index 2024: Measuring Peace* in a Complex World (IEP: Sydney, June 2024).

Development, vol. 20, no. 5 (2020).

²⁹ UNMISS, 'Overview of UNMISS data and analysis on flooding and conflict in South Sudan', Unpublished report, 6 Feb. 2025; and UNICEF, 'South Sudan Humanitarian Situation Report no. 10, reporting period 1–31 October 2024', 2 Dec. 2024.

³⁰ World Bank Group, 'Rising from the depths: Water security and fragility in South Sudan', 2 May 2023.

³¹ UNHCR, Operational Data Portal, 'Sudan situation', accessed 14 Jan. 2025. ³² UNICEF (note 29).

³³ FSIN, GNAFC and IGAD (note 15).

³⁶ UNMISS, Human Rights Division, 'Brief on violence affecting civilians, April–June 2024', 16 Oct. 2024.

³⁷ UNMISS, 'UNMISS responds rapidly to protect civilians and restore calm amidst fresh outbreaks of intercommunal violence', Press release, 30 Apr. 2024.

³⁸ Geneva Call, 'Civilian protection upheld in South Sudan cattle raids after armed groups apply IHL training,' 21 Dec. 2023.

increasingly severe floods, driven by climate change, are compounding landmine risks. In Pigi County, for example, people were unable to follow UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) advice to evacuate in January 2022 because they were surrounded by floodwater.40

Land is a valuable commodity and there is a higher risk of land-grabbing today as floodwaters recede less, leaving more of the country inundated for longer. A UN panel of experts has reported on incidents of violent land-grabbing by the National Salvation Front (NAS) in Central Equatoria state, and subsequently South Sudan People's Defence Forces operations against the NAS that killed and displaced civilians.⁴¹ However, flooding has also led to cases of unexpected temporary cooperation between rival armed groups in stemming the effects of floods, as well as to the creation of physical barriers between some armed groups and civilians.42

The technical support provided by the UN climate security team in South Sudan has facilitated the development of climate-informed approaches to community violence reduction. UN agencies, funds and programmes, including the Peacebuilding Fund, should work with partner organizations to explore opportunities to support South Sudan's peace process by addressing the environmental impacts of

conflict and harnessing environmental entry points for building trust. This could involve technical dialogues on climate-informed economic diversification and securing climate finance, including climate-resilient livelihood options for former combatants. Women and young people should be represented in such dialogues to capture opportunities for gender- and age-disaggregated economic activities.

Political and economic grievances

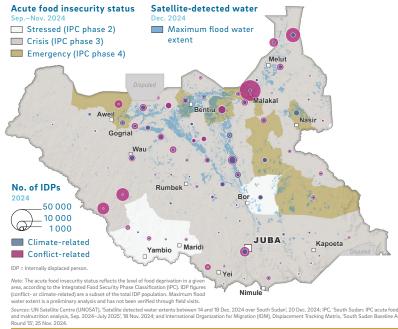
The implementation of South Sudan's peace agreement, R-ARCSS, has been slow.43 Violence has persisted between government and opposing forces, and their respective allied militias.⁴⁴ National political dynamics feed into communal and ethnic conflicts, making them more violent and harder to resolve. The effects of climate change can also be exploited by powerful elites at the expense of vulnerable groups.⁴⁵

South Sudan's national economy is heavily dependent on natural resource extraction. The oil sector accounts for more than one third of gross domestic product, 90 per cent of central government revenue and over 95 per cent of the exports.⁴⁶ In some cases, government forces contribute to environmental degradation through the production of charcoal. While charcoal production is often used as a recourse in times of financial hardship, the unregulated charcoal sector is heavily militarized; soldiers are engaged in production, transportation and trade. Deforestation drives environmental degradation and ecosystem losses for surrounding communities and increases exposure and vulnerability to climate change.47

³⁹ UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS), 'South Sudan', accessed 7 Feb. 2025. ⁴⁰ Surwumwe, I., 'Floods hampering UNMAS demining work in Jonglei State's Pigi

- County', UNMISS, 17 Jan, 2022. ⁴¹ United Nations, Security Council, 'Letter dated 26 April 2024 from the Panel of Experts on South Sudan established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2206 (2015) addressed to the President of the Security Council', S/2024/343, 29 Apr.
- 2024; and United Nations, Security Council, S/2024/776 (note 34). ⁴² Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), *To Stem the Tide: Climate Change, UNMISS*, and the Protection of Civilians (CIVIC: Washington, DC, Aug. 2024).
- ⁴³ IGAD, Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) (IGAD: Addis Ababa, 12 Sep. 2018).
- ⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2023, 'South Sudan: Events of 2022', accessed 13 Dec. 2024.

Figure 3. Flooding, food security and displacement in South Sudan



Trust in government authorities remains low. South Sudan's first land policy was drafted in 2023, with support from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).⁴⁸ Although the policy was subsequently communicated in a series of consultations, civil society actors have criticized the process because it did not first seek to build a consensus on the meaning of land ownership and the policy could be perceived by some communities as an infringement of their land rights.49

While progress in South Sudan's political peace process remains slow, there may be opportunities for technical discussions on climateinformed economic diversification and entry points for investing in sustainable economic sectors and activities, including how climate finance can be leveraged to build and incentivize investment in priority economic areas.

The UN Security Council should continue to mandate UNMISS to assess and report on climate, peace and security, as this has led to important progress in mainstreaming the topic within the UN system and among relevant line ministries and government authorities in South Sudan. The Informal Expert Group on Climate, Peace and Security should continue monitoring the situation closely to better inform the Council's actions and consider undertaking a field visit to South Sudan. As the UN Security Council continues to grapple with a growing number of crises, Council members and donor countries should ensure that consistent and proportionate funding enables UNMISS to continue developing its capacities to respond to climaterelated peace and security risks in South Sudan.

- ⁴⁵ 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)
- ⁴⁶ World Bank Group, 'Country engagement note for South Sudan for the period FY21-FY23', Report no. 158008-SS, 15 Apr. 2021.
- $^{\rm 47}$ Tiitmamer, N. and Anai, J. G., 'The tragedy of the unregulated: Why the government should reform the charcoal sector', Sudd Institute Policy Brief, 26 Apr. 2022.
- ⁴⁸ IGAD, 'Building consensus towards an inclusive National Land Policy in South Sudan,' 11 July 2024.
- ⁴⁹ Tiitmamer, N., 'The South Sudan's new land policy: Contestations and critical issues for considerations in the constitution making process', Sudd Institute Policy Brief, 27 Nov. 2023

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The Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheets aim to generate reliable, relevant, timely and actionable information and analysis on climate-related peace and security risks in selected countries and regions on the United Nations Security Council agenda.

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