Navigating the peace and security implications of climate change: Recommendations on the climate-conflict nexus at COP29

The devastating impacts of climate change and environmental degradation are intensifying insecurity and conflict risks around the world, particularly in fragile communities. Climate change exacerbates deep-seated, interconnected drivers of conflict, such as low economic development, competition over natural resources, human rights violations, weak governance and institutions, especially at the local level, discrimination and marginalisation, gender inequality, and a broader history of violent conflict. Inequality and the lack of social safety nets further increase the vulnerability and reduce the resilience of those already suffering from the impacts of climate change.

In turn, armed conflicts contribute to the climate crisis both directly - through environmental destruction and military greenhouse gas emissions, and indirectly - through undermining systems of environmental governance and protection and impacting sustainable and equitable resource use. This weakens societies' abilities to adapt to climate change.

These mutually reinforcing and geopolitically transcending dynamics require unprecedented levels of international collaboration and agreement on impactful policy and joint action. The UNFCCC can provide an arena for such intergovernmental collective action, both within the framework of official negotiations as well as initiatives on the peripheries. Whilst much work remains to be done to include climate change and conflict dynamics into formal negotiations, an example of what can be achieved collectively has been the COP28 Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace – now signed by over 90 countries. At a time when the pressures of climate change have never been clearer, and violent conflicts are increasing across the globe, there are real opportunities to tackle these interdependent challenges simultaneously.

This policy brief aims to support these efforts, and to provide further nuance to some of the most pressing topics within the interlinked environmental, climate change, conflict and peace domains. In the below sections, eight core issues are explored alongside actionable recommendations that key decision-makers can enact or demand within the UNFCCC negotiations, at COP29.

For clarity and brevity, we have avoided excessive referencing in this document. However, there are many resources which have contributed to the development of this policy paper which can be found here.

Conflict sensitivity

Each climate change programme operates in a unique social, political and economic context and interacts with these dynamics. Without taking these dynamics into account, especially in fragile conflict-affected contexts or in communities facing severe humanitarian need, programmes risk inadvertently fuelling divisions, tensions and other conflict drivers. Conflict sensitivity is about understanding the context in which you operate, understanding the interaction between the intervention and the context, and acting upon this understanding to minimise risks and negative impacts and maximise positive impacts, such as supporting resilience, conflict resolution and prevention capacities.

Experience tells us that if comprehensive conflict analyses, technical and programmatic capacity-building for climate practitioners, and the integration of local societal needs and knowledge are applied at the centre of climate interventions, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS), they are more effective and "can offer avenues for sustainable development, conflict prevention, and inclusive peacebuilding". Therefore, a conflict-sensitive approach should be integrated into all climate, humanitarian and development actions - whether policy, programming or funding oriented - to design, implement and assess interventions that are tailored to the specific local challenges and opportunities within each context, contributing to sustainable peace.

Recommendations:

- **Conflict sensitivity should be mainstreamed in COP29 decision texts**, especially on Loss & Damage (e.g. guidance to the Fund for responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) board) and adaptation (e.g. Global Goals on Adaptation and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) negotiations).
- Promote conflict-sensitive approaches to climate action at policy, programmatic and funding levels, **from the onset of design; impact, vulnerability and risk assessments; implementation; and monitoring and evaluation of interventions** This should include committing to making all new and existing climate programmes conflict sensitive.
- **Invest in building conflict-sensitive good practices**, including on how tools and approaches can be integrated across actions and mechanisms, and building an evidence base to inform future climate action.
- In 2025, the next Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and **NAPs should address the intersection of conflict and climate change and incorporate inclusive decision-making processes** that include the needs of vulnerable groups.

Climate finance

Not enough climate finance is reaching FCAS. Despite heightened climate vulnerability, the 10 most fragile states received $269 million in climate adaptation financing in 2022, less than 1% of total flows. Both the quantity and quality of finance needs to be enhanced. Just over half of all climate finance to FCAS comes in concessional and non-concessional loans - further burdening countries already struggling with high levels of debt. Donor risk aversion to perceived high-risk environments experiencing violent conflict or underlying instability is often cited as one of the challenges to climate finance provision in FCAS, limiting communities' ability to adapt and build resilience to climate shocks and stressors. Climate and development finance often flows where it is easiest to deliver, through national governments in stable countries, as opposed to where it is needed the most. This is a problem for conflict-affected communities, who often live beyond the reach of the government's control or influence. Even if climate finance is available and national governments are able to receive it, certain marginalised communities within FCAS may be excluded from financial opportunities.

The UNFCCC discussions this year will focus on agreeing on a new global climate finance goal with the adoption of a New Collective Quantified Goal on climate finance (NCQG), that has the ambition to replace the commitment for developed countries to a collective goal of mobilising USD 100 billion per year between 2020 and 2025 for climate action in developing countries. This provides an opportunity to improve the quantity of climate finance flowing to FCAS, and address both the quality and the perceived risks of climate finance provisions in fragile areas that currently constitute a barrier to finance reaching climate-vulnerable communities more consistently.

Recommendations:

- Ensure **a greater and more equitable proportion of high-quality climate finance is channelled to FCAS**, in particular for adaptation finance, that is conflict-sensitive, locally led, gender-responsive, transparent and grant-based. This could be helped by setting a target for grant-based finance earmarked for FCAS, with targets set for climate bilateral finance to be gender-sensitive.
- Set financial **sub-goals in the NCQG for adaptation, mitigation, and loss and damage finance**; the allocation of which should be based on needs, topping up where there is higher climate vulnerability and less government capacity for domestic financing, such as in FCAS.
- **Remove access barriers for vulnerable communities** including regarding accreditation processes and the amount of money distributed.
- Establish **direct access windows to climate finance** earmarked for FCAS governments, local governments and civil society.
- **Ensure that all climate finance interventions undertake and regularly update conflict and context analyses**, leading to periodical updates of any finance targets for FCAS, including potential future iterations of international climate goals, to take into account the most recent findings of such analyses.

Loss and Damage and Climate Justice

While the root causes of climate change are disproportionately caused by the biggest emitters, it is under-resourced nations that are least equipped to adapt to the impacts of climate change, and cope with climate-induced losses and damages to their economies and societies, resulting in their facing the harshest effects. Indeed, the most fragile contexts are often also those that are the most at risk from climate-change-related losses and damages.

In this regard, Loss and Damage funding arrangements were established for assisting developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to climate change. These funds focus on assisting countries in responding to economic and non-economic losses and damages associated with the adverse effects of climate change, including extreme weather events and slow onset events.

Recommendations:

- **Develop a systemic approach to equitably distribute finance for losses and damages** for affected communities, which integrate considerations of generating peace-positive outcomes and Indigenous knowledge and traditional practices. The FRLD should support a just and inclusive governance of natural resources, especially of land, water, fisheries and forests to transform resource induced conflicts.
- **Engage with experts from the field of Transitional Justice** and include their lessons learnt into the set-up and operationalisation of the FRLD.
- **Ensure that the FRLD adequately includes people in FCAS** under the category of vulnerable populations, and that the Fund is appropriately informed by climate and conflict risk mapping and adopt a people-first approach that includes the possibility of direct funding for, and partnerships with civil society and local actors.

Green Transition

The crucial shift to green energy brings significant economic and social implications, both positive and negative, which need to be well managed to ensure social justice and respect for human rights, as well as the protection of the environment. This is evident in the growing demand for specific minerals essential for producing green energy technologies, whereby current projections suggest that global production for minerals such as cobalt will increase by 500% by 2050. It is crucial that the green transition is managed in just and sustainable ways, with a strong governance architecture. This requires specific attention in contexts with institutional instability, inadequate rule of law, foreign interference, corruption, and/or a history of armed violence or conflict risks - a reality in many resource-rich countries. The extensive industrial activity and acquisition of land for green energy initiatives undertaken in the green transition can then exacerbate the tensions, increase the risk of human rights violations or the risk to inadvertently finance armed groups.

The green transition must be underpinned by conflict-sensitive approaches, including environmental and social impact and risk assessments of interventions and investments. Not only that, but the green transition should create social and economic benefits for the surrounding communities. Therefore, meaningful dialogue and participation of local communities, including on the costs and benefits of resource extraction and on accessible and reactive grievance mechanisms, are crucial from the outset. In parallel, engagement with governments, local and international companies, and civil society is necessary so they can properly understand, follow and monitor the implementation of international and national legislation.

Recommendations:

- **Commit to conflict-sensitive frameworks** that seek the protection of people and planet, including doing regular conflict analysis as well as environmental and social impact and risk assessments, and adjusting actions and decisions as a result of these.
- **Incentivise advisory partnerships with civil society actors for investors**, in order to enhance the social impact of green transition projects, and to enable investors to make more inclusive and sustainable decisions around green transition investments in FCAS.
- **Regulate business in FCAS: adopt legislation on mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence**, with heightened conflict-sensitive due diligence for FCAS settings.
- **Apply the lessons learnt** from decades of work on conflict-sensitive mineral and resource extraction, including those referenced in the link on page 1.
- **Ensure that a common set of conflict, security and human rights principles** (such as the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights) **is incorporated** across regulatory, investor and supply-chain mechanisms seeking to promote responsible investment in the green transition.

Mitigating the climate and environmental impacts of military and security-sector actors

The world is experiencing the greatest number of conflicts since World War II, with military spending at a record high. This military activity is exacerbating the climate crisis. Militaries are huge fossil fuel consumers: everyday military activity is estimated to be responsible for around 5.5% of global emissions. However, because reporting military emissions to the UNFCCC is voluntary, data is often missing or incomplete. Additionally, researchers have only recently begun to examine the climate footprint of armed conflicts. The war in Ukraine prompted the first comprehensive estimate of the climate impact of an ongoing armed conflict, with researchers estimating that the first two years of the invasion caused emissions greater than the annual output of an industrialised country like the Netherlands. The carbon cost of rebuilding Gaza is estimated to be greater than the annual greenhouse gas emissions generated individually by 135 countries. Yet many of these emissions are not transparently recorded by national carbon accounting, obstructing both scrutiny and accountability, and undermining low carbon recovery pathways.

Furthermore, the environmental degradation caused or exacerbated by armed conflicts and military activities can leave communities more vulnerable to climate change, for example through conflicts' detrimental effects on environmental governance. Landmines and other explosive remnants of war can remain for decades, and their management can be made more difficult by extreme weather events and disasters such as floods. Armed conflicts also leave a legacy on ecosystems through destruction, biodiversity loss and contamination of air, land, water and other natural resources.

Recommendations:

- **Commit to military greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reporting under the UNFCCC framework** which is robust, comparable, and transparent, and includes the climate impact of conflicts.
- **Set clear military GHG emissions reduction targets** that are consistent with limiting warming to 1.5°C and reflect military climate mitigation strategies in the updated NDCs.
- **Prioritize investment in conflict prevention and peacebuilding over increasing military spending,** to promote peace and reduce the environmental impact of military activities.
- **Implement the U.N. International Law Commission Principles on the** protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts and follow the International Mine Action Standard 07.13 when removing landmines and other explosive remnants of war to minimise environmental impacts and support the climate resilience of communities.

Youth, Peace, and Security

Youth account for a large percentage of the population in most climate-vulnerable countries. This demographic is disproportionately affected by climate change, with increased risks of displacement, food insecurity, and economic instability. Girls and women with fewer resources to deal with the consequences are active in livelihoods that are heavily impacted yet are kept out of information and decision systems related to climate change. Youth delegations, groups and committees play a key role in negotiations and representation, demonstrating a positive way forward that needs to be accelerated. However, youth is still underrepresented in climate policy decision making. It is vital to involve youth in the development of climate solutions that address their needs while also contributing to peace outcomes, in alignment with the principles of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security.

Young people's livelihoods and future opportunities are at stake, and it is only through their inclusion that climate recovery efforts will result in sustainable, peaceful and resilient communities. Youth involvement will inject the process with renewed energy, urgency, creativity, and innovative potential to build adaptive capacities and foster a secure and prosperous future.

Recommendations:

- Additional gender- and youth-responsive mechanisms should be established to **ensure that diverse youth are meaningfully included** in international, national and local community climate and peace policy discussions. This can be facilitated through youth councils, advisory boards, and consultations with young leaders and organisations.
- Implement **youth-centric policies** that prioritise the needs and rights of young people in their diversity, that promote gender equality and ensure meaningful inclusion in climate action and peacebuilding initiatives.
- Establish and pursue ambitious funding targets that resource youth-led climate and peace initiatives, and rigorously track these investments through disaggregated data to ensure they reach diverse and marginalised youth, including those with disabilities, from rural areas, and indigenous communities.
- Support sustainable practices and **invest in alternative livelihoods** such as sustainable agricultural practices.
- Provide **training in new technologies while also maintaining and respecting traditional livelihoods**.
- Strengthen partnerships with civil society who represent marginalised groups, such as disability, youth and women’s rights groups and conflict impacted communities beyond the government’s access.

Linking and Learning Among Sectors and Stakeholders

The climate crisis, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, and conflict are interconnected challenges with no single solution, requiring a coordinated effort between numerous sectors and stakeholders to address. The environment, climate change, and conflict crises are also a key issue within the Humanitarian, Development, and Peace (HDP) Nexus, which recognizes the need for coordinated efforts to advance the aims of all three of these inextricably linked sectors.

However, these various fields and issues are often siloed and disconnected, particularly when it comes to inclusion of peace and security. These silos exist in policymaking processes, funding mechanisms and decisions, and program design and implementation. This approach results in efforts that are disjointed and short-term, failing to build resilience and effective long-term solutions, and even exacerbating or creating new conflict dynamics. In addition, the subject matter expertise around climate change and the environment—as well as conflict prevention and peacebuilding—is often communicated using technical jargon that can be difficult to understand, rendering the breaking down of these silos difficult. The environment, climate change, and humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding communities need to work together through a common framing and interconnected approach. This cohesion can clearly demonstrate the impact of the conflict, climate change, environment crises and their relevance to all audiences and stakeholders.

Recommendations:

- Promote a **shared and simplified language** that allows collective, multi-sectoral action around the environment, climate change, and conflict crises.
- **Implement systems analysis** to understand how ecological, social, economic, and political factors relate and interact within the interconnected issues of the climate crisis, environmental degradation, and conflict.
- **Integrate key cross-cutting principles and concepts across all programs and policies** within the environment, climate change, and conflict nexus, including conflict sensitivity, resilience, gender responsiveness, locally led adaptation and peacebuilding, and evidence-based practices, meaningful partnership with civil society and marginalised groups.
- Create learning platforms to **exchange lessons learned based on rigorous monitoring and evaluation of progress and impacts, identify failures,** and improve policies and practice, as well as incentives such as **flexible funding** to encourage practitioners to work across silos.

Community Engagement and Local Ownership

Community engagement and people's participation are critical components of facilitating local ownership of climate projects and programmes. This participation provides a platform that facilitates dialogues between diverse stakeholders, manages expectations, opens feedback avenues, and creates demand for effective delivery through policies and programmes. Conflicts over natural resources exist across nearly all contexts and are often negatively influenced by poor or non-existent governance structures around resource-sharing. Engagement with local actors, especially with vulnerable and marginalised groups, in the planning and decision making can help to improve natural resource management through an awareness of local dynamics. Therefore, inclusive and participatory processes can help achieve more sustainable peace-positive climate interventions.

Unfortunately, community engagement has often been overlooked. This has frequently led to failure to consider communities in benefit sharing discussions, controversies between communities, their governments and the sanctioned projects, actors, and investors whose interests are regarded as extractivist - extracting from communities without their consent and without respecting their legitimate rights. Engaging communities and ensuring their participation in mitigation, adaptation and green transition processes, helps establish guarantees that the economic interests, social wellbeing, cultural protection, environmental health and their indigenous science and knowledge are safeguarded.

Recommendations:

- **Mainstream meaningful participation** and include climate-vulnerable communities in decision-making processes on climate adaptation and critical raw materials with accessible **grievance mechanisms and effective compensation mechanisms**. This should include adhering to Free Prior Informed Consent/FPIC (ILO 169).
- Include civil society in monitoring and evaluation of policies on large scale land-intensive investments to support the green transition (including in critical raw materials), using an Impact Framework to assess societal and environmental effects.
- Formalise partnerships with non-governmental groups like civil society and local community actors, especially those who represent marginalised groups, such as disability, youth, migrants, Indigenous Peoples and women's rights groups; **provide core funding to these organisations** so they can work on the climate-conflict nexus with gender and age sensitive, locally-led, bottom-up and context specific solutions, which are likely to be multi-sectoral and working across silos.
- **Ensure protection of climate, human rights and peace activists** and an enabling environment for civil society actors who are engaged for the rights and interests of the local communities.
- **Institutionalise Local Ownership through Systematic Co-Design and Co-Creation**: Develop and implement policies that mandate systematic and institutionalised co-design or co-creation with local peacebuilders and community members at every stage of peacebuilding and climate security programs. This includes the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation phases, ensuring that local actors are not just consulted but are equal partners with decision-making authority.

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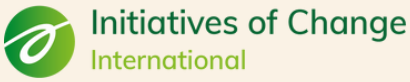
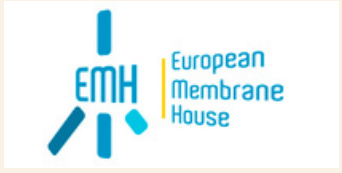
This paper was developed collaboratively by a range of institutions, organizations, and individuals. The drafters are part of a working group on Peace@COP within the Community of Practice on Environment, Climate, Conflict, and Peace (ECCP).

This paper is endorsed by:





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