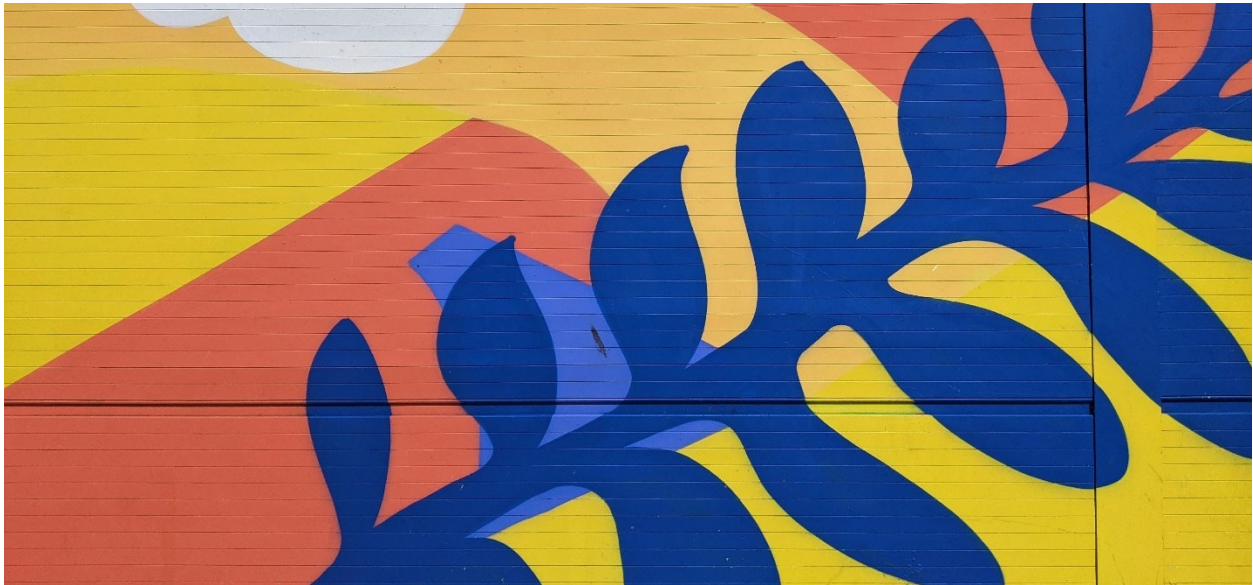


## Synthesis

### KOFF Roundtable: Conflict Sensitivity & Climate Change



In June 2024, the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding KOFF hosted the Roundtable “Conflict Sensitivity & Climate Change” with the aim to explore the interlinkage between conflict sensitivity and climate change and its implications for practitioners working across the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus.

#### Speakers:

- **Jana Junghardt**, Senior Advisor Disaster Risk Management, Helvetas
- **Una Hombrecher**, Advisor Human Rights & Conflict Transformation, HEKS
- **Héloïse Heyer**, Conflict Sensitivity Specialist, PeaceNexus
- **Moe Moe Than Win**, Senior National Program Officer, Embassy of Switzerland in Myanmar

#### Moderation:

- **Flavia Eichmann**, Program Officer, Peacebuilding Analysis & Impact, swisspeace

#### Organization:

- **Cornelia Tobler**, Coordinator of the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding, KOFF
- **Dorothea Schiewer**, Program Assistant, KOFF

## Summary

The roundtable looked at the challenges associated with climate-related programming in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. It highlighted the risks and challenges that implementing organizations need to be aware of, including sensitivity to interrelated climate and conflict risks, do no harm approaches and contributing to more climate resilient and peaceful solutions.

In recent years, climate security has emerged as a term and field of study that explores the linkages between climate change and security dynamics, including violent conflict and social stability. While it is commonly accepted that no direct causal link exists between climate change and increased conflict, the former is undoubtedly a risk factor that can exacerbate existing or contribute to new conflicts.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, many of the countries affected by extreme fragility and violent conflicts are also highly vulnerable to climate change. The main reason is that states that are affected by political and security crises often do not have the means, capacities or political will to adapt to and prepare for climate change impacts. Accordingly, in 2021, 8 out of the 15 countries most exposed to climate risks hosted a UN peacekeeping or special political mission.

While the interactions between climate risks and security dynamics are always context-specific, there are several broader climate-conflict pathways that have been identified through a growing body of research:<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, climate change can exacerbate pressure on already scarce resources and increase the competition for access to natural resources. This can negatively impact livelihoods, increase food insecurity and lead to the adoption of (negative) coping mechanisms. These mechanisms can include violent actions and increased inequalities, including gender inequality. Climate change, natural disasters but also environmental degradation further affect mobility patterns as many communities are either displaced or use migration as an adaptation strategy, which can create new or exacerbate already existing conflicts. On the other hand, war and conflict have dire consequences for the environment, for example through environmental degradation, pollution and the overexploitation or illicit trade of natural resources that is often used as a tactic of armed actors to sustain war efforts.

The multifaceted impacts of climate change on humanitarian crises, sustainable development and peacebuilding have led international cooperation actors to grapple with the effects of the overlapping and interrelated dynamics of climate and conflict risks and prompted reflections

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<sup>1</sup> Hegazi et al. (2022): Beyond a 'Threat Multiplier': Exploring Links Between Climate Change and Security. *New Security Beat*.

<sup>2</sup> See for example: SIPRI (2016): Pathways of Climate Insecurity: Guidance for Policymakers. *Development*, 5(2), 197; Smith and Vivekanda (2007): A Climate of Conflict. The links between climate change, peace and war. *International Alert*; Evans (2010): Resource scarcity, climate change and the risk of violent conflict. *World Development Report Background Papers* Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group; Gleditsch, N. P., & Nordås, R. (2010). Climate change and conflict: a critical overview. *Die Friedens-Warte*, 7-24; Reuveny, R. (2007). Climate change-induced migration and violent conflict. *Political geography*, 26(6), 656-673.

around how to better integrate appropriate considerations in their respective areas of work through climate and conflict sensitive programming.<sup>3</sup>

The KOFF Roundtable on climate change and conflict sensitivity deepened the understanding of the linkages between climate change, conflict and peace. In addition, (a) the implementation of climate-related projects in fragile and conflict-affected contexts were discussed by addressing the associated challenges and the way conflict sensitivity is operationalized in climate programming as well as (b) the adjustment of peacebuilding programming and projects to climate-related realities.

## Key Points

### Intersection between climate change and conflict

- Due to the localized impacts of climate change on peace and conflict dynamics, it is essential to explore the specific pathways through which climate and environmental factors intersect with conflict dynamics and risks. Consequently, “one-size fits all” approaches should be avoided.
- Violence and conflict can lead communities to migrate or change land use practices, which in turn can lead to environmental degradation in another area, potentially creating further tensions. Including a climate or hazard risk lens in conflict analysis processes can help to identify overlapping risks and inform land and resource governance to identify sustainable solutions.
- The example of Myanmar shows that the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events, coupled with environmental degradation, further exacerbates the climate-vulnerability of different population groups. If they intersect with already existing conflicts and ongoing violence, these factors may further exacerbate vulnerabilities and grievances and can also lead to the emergence of new conflicts.

### Challenges

- The selection of partners can be particularly challenging when working on climate-related programming conflict-affected contexts. Due to the often large-scale and long-term nature of climate or conservation projects, having reliable and capable counterparts, especially on the government side, is essential.

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<sup>3</sup> Mercy Corps. (2020). *Climate Change and Conflict: Lessons from Emerging Practise*. Edinburgh, UK: Mercy Corps; Day, A., & Caus, J. (2020). *Conflict Prevention in the Era of Climate Change: Adapting the UN to Climate-Security Risks*. United Nations University; United Nations – Climate Action: Five ways the climate crisis impacts human security: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/human-security>.

- Major climate financing instruments tend to be rather state-centric with funding often being channeled through governments. Particularly in conflict-affected environments with limited state capacity, this becomes a challenge as funding does not reach areas exposed and vulnerable to climate change impacts. Moreover, state-centric approaches not only complicate direct access to climate financing for non-state actors but it can potentially force actors to cooperate with authoritarian governments, which can pose a problem in terms of unintentionally legitimizing them.

## Opportunities

- While the struggle for land and livelihood can cause divisions and conflict, land and resource governance can also be a connector. For example, in Myanmar, different faith-based organizations are working together in a project for the conservation of natural resources.
- Working with non-state actors and community-led initiatives on environmental conservation and climate change action can provide an opportunity to stay engaged and to respond to local needs. Further, it can address the impacts of climate change and conflicts in contexts where direct cooperation with authorities may be difficult due to political sensitivities.
- Climate actors are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of integrating conflict sensitivity into climate-related programming as it contributes significantly to the effectiveness and sustainability of results. With their different access points to governments and other relevant actors, they thus open new entry points for peacebuilding actors in terms of funding and approaches. Although there is great potential for complementarity between climate and peacebuilding activities, enabling factors must be identified.

## Relevance of integrating climate and conflict sensitivity in programming

- Given the interdependence of climate and conflict risks, it is essential to integrate a conflict lens as well as climate considerations more prominently in context analysis and all programming, including humanitarian, development, peacebuilding and environmental/climate programming to adjust project design and implementation accordingly.
- Translating concepts between different sectors and actors is key as there is often a lack of common language or terminology. Organizing workshops and trainings to sensitize actor groups in terms of climate or conflict sensitivity respectively can help to raise awareness and promote the cross-sectoral integration of these concepts.

## Recommendations:

### **Due to the reinforcing dynamics of climate and conflict risks, breaking down barriers between different sectors is essential.**

- Integrate climate change adaptation and mitigation considerations more prominently into humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work, and conflict sensitivity into climate-related work. This entails an integrated context analysis, including conflicts, climate risks and hazards, and a mapping of actors, existing mechanisms and capacities. It does not require completely new approaches or tools but rather the integration of key considerations into existing analysis processes. Understanding the localized impacts of interdependent climate- and conflict-related factors is essential to design appropriate responses and address existing blind spots. Not least, an integrated context analysis increases effectiveness, coherence, feasibility, and sustainability of interventions.
- Provide spaces for dialogue, to share information, experiences and approaches, and conduct joint analyses among actors from different sectors with the aim of achieving greater complementarity and cooperation between humanitarian, development, peace and climate actors.

### **Integrate local and traditional knowledge and solutions in climate and humanitarian-development-peace projects.**

- Strengthen partnerships with local organizations to bolster initiatives that enhance the resilience of communities affected by intersecting risks. Locally-led solutions are often more sustainable in addressing climate- and conflict-specific risks as they incorporate existing context-related mechanisms, knowledge and approaches.
- Value and incorporate local and traditional knowledge related to climate change adaptation and environmental protection to strengthen local ownership and the sustainability of interventions. This does not only relate to projects with an explicit focus on climate change but also humanitarian-development-peace interventions that include climate components or are situated in climate vulnerable regions to address intersecting risks.
- Enable more equitable access to climate finance for a wider range of actors including local non-governmental organizations, minority groups and civil society actors to support locally led approaches and solutions in line with communities' most pressing needs and to reach those most in need.

## **Move towards more flexible and adaptive program management**

- Apply adaptive program management to flexibly react to crises (e.g. famine, displacement) exacerbated by climate change (e.g. droughts, floods, landslides) or conflicts and adjust interventions accordingly.
- To effectively address climate- and conflict-related risks, be flexible in adapting intervention modalities and partnerships depending on context changes. Integrating humanitarian contingency funding, e.g. crisis modifiers, into programming can help to respond to both climate- and conflict-related emergencies. This allows more rapid access to humanitarian funding when needed.