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Building bridges across the climate and peace divide

Recommendations for successful adaptation

Climate and peace: bridging the divide

Everywhere in the world, populations are vulnerable to climate change and its effects. However, depending on existing coping mechanisms and availability of support, these effects will be felt differently and have different consequences. In more vulnerable or fragile settings, where people rely on natural resources for survival, tensions can arise or be exacerbated. There might be displacement and migration, competition for scarce life-sustaining resources, such as land and water, and tensions around access to livelihoods. If not managed properly with a conflict prevention lens, these tensions can often drive violent conflict.

Conversely, if a context is already affected by conflict, society's capacity to deal with climate change and build resilience is hampered. Local governance structures, needed to manage the interventions, might not be able to do so. The much needed climate change adaptation efforts then might not have the conditions to succeed, especially if they are not designed in a context and conflict sensitive manner.

Addressing both climate adaptation and peacebuilding needs jointly is thus essential. And worthwhile: on one side environmental degradation can present opportunities to bring people together across dividing lines to address shared chal-

lenges, and, on the other, peace will be an enabling factor for successful climate adaptation actions. **Current approaches to climate action and peacebuilding are, however, still operating in silos, and that needs to change.**

Laying the groundwork: examples of climate and peacebuilding work at the local level

The connection between climate change and peace, and its repercussions in the social context are manifold. And even looking specifically at climate adaptation measures, peace actions can be integrated across multiple areas, depending on the context. Looking at the most vulnerable countries, there could be, for example, two workstreams.

First, a **peaceful management of conservation areas**. The restrictive use of resources in these reserves can cause unintended tensions if the approaches are not carefully adapted. However, if peacebuilding activities are integrated, the preservation of the reserves can be an opportunity for collaboration across divides and to build social cohesion. Such was the case of Search's work in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, promoting constructive dialogue and collaboration between different stakeholders and building the resilience of local communities.

Second, **building local resilience to climate change**. Climate change effects can be devastating for the livelihoods of many communities, which can in turn lead to tensions and violent conflict. To avoid this, local coping mechanisms need to be strengthened. This can be done in such a way that promotes social cohesion, contributing to more sustainable results. Through our work in Mali, Burkina Faso, Bénin and Tchad, we have been working in consortia with development actors to ensure the conflict sensitivity of multiple adaptation and resilience building measures, such as climate-resilient infrastructure and joint economic empowerment activities.

Working in conflict-affected areas can be challenging. But it is clear that people in these vulnerable places cannot wait for the 'right' conditions to adapt to climate change. **Climate action in these settings is possible and can offer avenues for inclusive peace-building and development.**

How to move forward?

Three recommendations to promote peace-sensitive climate adaptation

1. Adopt a conflict-sensitive approach to climate adaptation at policy, programmatic and funding levels.

- Apply conflict sensitivity throughout the implementation cycle of all climate investments and interventions: *Design* - with a comprehensive conflict analysis as a first step; *Impact, vulnerability and risk assessments* – including peace and social well-being indicators; *Implementation* – with regular conflict monitoring and adjusting of actions and decisions if needed; *Monitoring and evaluation* – gathering good practices and lessons learned to better adapt future climate interventions.
- Commit to making all new and existing climate adaptation programmes conflict sensitive, including this as a requirement in National Adaptation Plans and COP29 decision texts.
- Hold dialogues with local populations throughout the implementation cycle of investments and interventions, and seek advice from peacebuilding organisations and experts when needed, to ensure the desired impact.

Conflict sensitivity in three steps

- 1) Understand the context we are operating in;
- 2) Understand the interactions between our actions and the context, how they can aggravate tensions or support collaboration;
- 3) Adapt the interventions to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts, promoting peace.

2. Increase and improve the allocation of funding for climate adaptation and peacebuilding in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

- Increase funding for integrated climate adaptation and peacebuilding programmes in fragile and conflict-affected areas, taking into account the knowledge and experience of conflict affected communities in all stages of action.
- Ensure at least 20% of climate adaptation finance reaches affected communities, supporting local agency, resilience and capacities, especially in conflict affected societies. Use COP29 and its aftermath to adapt global and national financial mechanisms to make this happen, removing practical barriers for vulnerable communities in fragile states to access climate funds.

3. Strengthen action at the local level, building capacity and adopting participatory approaches in climate action.

- Democratise climate knowledge and planning, by including climate-vulnerable communities in decision-making processes, taking their grievances into account, using less technical vocabulary, as well as using local languages to increase impact.
- Focus on working with, funding and building the capacity of local-level stakeholders to ensure continuity and sustainability of the climate adaptation actions, engaging technical staff from institutions such as local-level Administration and relevant governmental departments (Forests, Civil Protection, Education, Infrastructure, etc.), as well as local social groups.
- Promote participatory approaches in the design, implementation and evaluation of climate policies, investments and interventions in fragile and conflict-affected settings, integrating local knowledge and needs to ensure climate actions are adapted, impactful and sustainable.