

Climate change, conflict and displacement

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Cover photo: Dried out riverbeds in Southern Iraq. © Fareed Baram for NRC

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Women carry water to the Protection of Civilians site near Bentiu, South Sudan. © UN Photo/JCMcIlwaine

Editorial

This edition of the *Humanitarian Exchange*, co-edited by Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) Research Fellow and interim HPN Coordinator Kerrie Holloway and Senior Research Fellow Caitlin Sturridge, focuses on the relationship between climate change, conflict and displacement in crisis settings. While the relative weight of these factors may vary, some combination of all three coexists in many, if not most, contemporary crises. Some causal links exist between each of these, but they are not inevitable and are obscured by wider pressures and inequalities. The individual challenges of each are amplified when they occur at the same time and in the same place. Contemporary crises are becoming increasingly complex and entrenched, with seemingly no solutions in sight for people affected by climate change, conflict and displacement.

Against this backdrop, the contributors to this edition critically reflect on some of the major issues and topics emerging from their work on climate change, conflict and displacement. Their contributions could not be more timely. The combined challenges of these three phenomena must be addressed collectively, yet deep-seated disconnects persist between the sectors, disciplines and geographies involved – between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding; between migration and displacement studies; between the social and natural sciences; between policy, practice and academia; and between the so-called Global North and Global South.

In their study on drought in South Sudan, **Hilda Muteshi and Laban Ashioya Etindi** advocate for integrated and long-term programming that spans the humanitarian–development–peacebuilding nexus. Also focusing on South Sudan, **Kuach Pech and Natalia Chan** provide insight into how a conflict-sensitive approach to the impacts of climate change and displacement could look, drawing on often overlooked community perceptions of local conflict dynamics, and **Rebecca Bushby and Cedric Shingirai Regede** call for sustained and flexible funding that bridges the gap between humanitarian and development financing, and which enables the incorporation of crisis response and prevention, as well as longer-term resilience building. In the context of water scarcity in Iraq, **Imrul Islam and Thomas Wilson** highlight the need for humanitarian agencies to work more closely and effectively alongside Iraqi authorities to develop national and governorate-level policies on disaster displacement.

This resonates with the finding that local voices and perspectives are routinely marginalised in conversations about climate change, conflict and displacement. Policy decisions and funding allocations are typically driven by the political preoccupations of international actors rather than the priorities and preferences of affected communities. **Zahra Khan Durrani, Meshach Bwala and Sani Muhammed Ibrahim** argue for the importance of localisation efforts in Nigeria. As the primary witnesses to climate-related changes, communities play a pivotal role in establishing early-warning systems, and enhancing preparedness for extreme weather events. With a focus on Afghanistan, **Sameera Noori** reveals how local communities and innovative grassroots organisations have stepped up as leaders, helping to fill some of

the gaps left by international sanctions since the Taliban takeover. **Zaki Ullah and Aaftab Ullah** highlight the steps that internally displaced persons in Afghanistan are taking to adapt their natural resources and livelihoods to the combined pressures of climate change, conflict and displacement.

Angela Cotroneo and Marta Triggiano explore the intersections between armed conflict, climate risks and mobility in Afghanistan, Mozambique and the Sahel, and argue that humanitarian actors need to recognise that mobility is an important coping strategy for people and a pathway to durable solutions. Also with a focus on mobility, **Madison Jansen and Madina Yunis Mahat** reveal how severe drought in Kenya is impacting pastoralist communities in Garissa County – causing some to adapt their migratory routes, and others to abandon pastoralism altogether and become immobile. **Jane Linekar** explores the narratives on climate mobility. She argues that the focus on prevention and securitisation is peddling fear and contributing to a failure to protect people on the move – thereby increasing their vulnerability.

Drawing on research in Ethiopia, **Fekadu Adugna Tufa** illustrates how the combination of climate change, conflict and displacement exacerbates vulnerabilities and complicates institutional responses. **Aloysius Tumusiime** shares this vulnerability stance in neighbouring Kenya and Uganda – calling for countries, especially those most responsible for carbon emissions, to demonstrate a stronger commitment to burden sharing and a greater respect for human rights. **Helena O’Mahony** considers the role of litigation as a promising and, as yet, underutilised mechanism for mobilising the international human rights system.

When it comes to international financing, **Evan Easton-Calabria, Adeline Siffert, Joanna Moore and Eddie Jjemba** argue that fragile and conflict contexts urgently need funding for anticipatory action if they are to move beyond an emergency mindset to one that focuses on self-reliance, resilience and livelihoods. **Nanki Chawla and Garth Smith** highlight several other challenges to ramping up anticipatory action, including a lack of cross-disciplinary action, data and local expertise. While anticipatory action has been widely applied to climatic events or disease outbreaks, they highlight a gap in it to inform conflict.

Kerrie Holloway and Caitlin Sturridge

Climate change, conflict and displacement

Too much and too little rain: food insecurity among displaced and host communities in South Sudan

Dr Hilda Muteshi and Laban Ashioya Etindi

Food insecurity is a chronic problem in South Sudan, and the situation has worsened in recent years despite the multifaceted approaches and investments by various actors. Agriculture, food security and livelihoods are the most sensitive sectors to climate change, yet they **are the least prepared to absorb the shocks**. The World Food Programme (WFP) estimated that 7 out of 10 people in South Sudan were food insecure in August 2023. The food insecurity is exacerbated by climate change and conflict that have curtailed people's efforts to feed themselves.

Annual flooding has been witnessed in South Sudan since 2019. The Greater Upper Nile region of South Sudan is the most adversely affected by annual flooding, and is the area with the highest levels of food insecurity. **Bentiu, the capital of Unity State, has lately become an island courtesy of floodwaters**. As of September 2023, **more than 95% of the landmass in Unity State was under water, and flooding has displaced 120,000 people**. The predicted El Niño phenomenon across East Africa has increased rainfall across the Lake Victoria basin, and **this is expected to increase flooding in South Sudan**. It is particularly important for aid workers and policymakers to understand the impact of flooding events on food security, especially for regions in South Sudan which grapple with the triple burden of conflict, climate change and food insecurity, so that they can design appropriate interventions that alleviate human suffering.

This article analyses the experiences of 120 households who were part of various food security and livelihood interventions in the Leer and Mayendit counties. The overarching project sought to increase agricultural productivity and food production through distribution of agricultural inputs, training on agronomic practices and provision of extension support services. A questionnaire was administered to some of the project participants to ascertain the extent to which their food security situation has been impacted by conflict, flooding and drought.

Effects of climate change

The majority of the population in South Sudan (87%) depends on agriculture, livestock and forestry. One would expect South Sudan food insecurity to be driven by conflict, but this is not the case. Besides the protracted conflict, which has destabilised livelihoods for more than a decade, climate change has also impacted households negatively. Climate change is a greater cause of food insecurity than conflict, but conflict is still a factor. Coalition for Humanity (CH) has implemented various interventions in Mayendit County since 2020. The projects – ranging from crop and supplies distribution, climate change-related updates, and cash distribution – have achieved only short-term outcomes with minimal lasting solutions to the food insecurity situation. As part of project monitoring and evaluation, CH has made an effort to understand the factors influencing the food security situation in Leer and Mayendit counties.

Climate change remains a factor that cannot be ignored if humanitarian interventions are to have a lasting impact and the Sustainable Development Goals are to be met. Out of the surveyed households in Mayendit County, 71% were host communities, 19% were internally displaced, and 10% were returnees. The majority of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Mayendit (62%) were displaced due to floods, while in Leer 35% were affected by floods. Leer County had a higher number of returnees and IDPs due to conflict (63%), with only 35% displaced due to flooding. Households face multiple displacements; a conflict-affected IDP or returnee can be displaced again due to floods.

Dependence on humanitarian support

The once self-reliant community has been made dependent due to climate change. As with South Sudan in general, Mayendit and Leer counties primarily engaged in agropastoralist livelihoods. A 2020 survey in Mayendit therefore revealed that only around 4% of people relied on remittances from friends and family, and around 10% on non-governmental organisation (NGO) financial support. But the households that were recovering from political conflict, communal conflict, cattle raiding and revenge killings became victims of climate change and were not able to adequately cope with the multiple shocks. Food insecurity led people to resort to water lilies as an alternative (and insufficient) food source, compounded by the lack of roads to connect to the main markets.

Water levels have remained high since 2019. Flooding continually affects South Sudan, and the number of households depending on NGOs/humanitarian support has continued to increase. The last time such a magnitude of flooding was reported in South Sudan was in 2016. By October 2023, 21% of households surveyed in Mayendit and 40% of those in Leer County depended mainly on humanitarian support; most of the livelihoods had deteriorated over time, despite efforts to support households with crop kits, fishing kits and other inputs. Crops were swept away before harvest, with 96% of the respondents in Leer and 58% from Mayendit reporting that they had lost crops due to climate change. Humanitarian organisations supported the provision and maintenance of livestock, but such animals drowned during flooding or died due to drought. In Mayendit, 55% had lost animals due to climate change, while in Leer it was 92% of the households.

The ability to produce food was also affected by people having to move to new locations where there was no arable land, and roads were cut off so trading was impossible. Only humanitarian partners could airlift food in. This has led to food insecurity among households that depended majorly on agropastoralism and crop production as a source of income.

Despite the humanitarian support, many households did not receive climate-related updates on time, or, as a further example, funding cycles resulted in delays to farm essentials being supplied. The delays in seed and input distribution led to delayed cultivation, households missed the main season, and the floods ruined the unharvested crops. All of the surveyed households in Mayendit had lost some crops (groundnuts, vegetables such as okra, and/or millet); likewise, 100% of surveyed households in Leer had lost some crops (cowpeas, vegetables, beans and groundnuts).

Households expressed their need for climate updates; they wanted to be informed in advance about when to expect rainfall and how much to expect, so that they could plan adequately. The households felt that some of the climate and weather information was not useful due to delays, with disasters having already occurred. Households wanted such updates translated into local languages. Unfortunately, the cascading of climate and weather information was also subject to humanitarian project cycles, with updates stopping as projects came to a close. The lack of sustainable structures for climate information sharing remains a barrier to early warning of and early response to climate-related disasters, so households in fragile states are not able to adequately prepare for disaster.

The irony of drought in a flood-affected county

South Sudan experiences two seasons: one with significant rainfall, and a dry season with much less rainfall. Due to climate change, the seasons have become unpredictable. Sometimes the River Nile swells due to rains in neighbouring counties and the tributaries overflow, displacing households. Affected people might move to higher ground, but the drought in these areas destroys the few crops and the few remaining animals die due to lack of pasture.

One would expect households in Leer and Mayendit to primarily attribute the food insecurity to conflict and drought, but this is not the case. Around 40% of households have attributed the food insecurity to drought while 17% cited flooding. A symptom of flooding and drought is an increase in pests and diseases – affecting both livestock and crops – so 26% of people mentioned these in relation to food insecurity. Despite the widely known political and communal conflicts, analysis indicated these are irrelevant to the current food insecurity situation. This could be because the country has experienced relative calm since the last major political conflict erupted and that communal disruptions like cattle raiding and revenge killings happen on a small scale, affecting few families and not lasting for significant time periods.

But why does drought seemingly lead to greater food insecurity than flooding? Aside from the negative impacts, rainfall is also likely to increase the availability of pasture and water for animals and crop

cultivation, hence not worsening the food insecurity situation in the same way as drought. Also, a good number of households depend on fishing along the River Nile tributaries; during flooding, fish swim into the flood waters to household level, increasing access to fish as food.



Flooding near the Protection of Civilians site in Bentiu, South Sudan in 2014. © UN

Conclusion

Since flooding and drought protracts displacement, their effect on food insecurity is much greater than conflict. Thus, the effects of climate change cannot be ignored as we plan humanitarian response. What seemed to be a protracted humanitarian crisis of flood response has now become a development challenge. There is increasing need for humanitarian–development–peace nexus action, with climate change as a cross-cutting theme in addressing food insecurity. Contextualised responses addressing floods, drought, conflict, pests and diseases could see households improve their food security status. Integrated long-term projects that are multifaceted could be beneficial for Leer and Mayendit counties to provide long-term solutions to flooding, or adopt flood-/drought-resilient food production and access measures. Additionally, there is a need to institutionalise climate information sharing, and move away from a reliance on humanitarian programmes for this, with proper channels that can reach households with accurate information in a timely manner. Failure to do so has hampered early warning of and early response to floods in South Sudan. Efforts to address the root causes of flooding as well as to come up with flood risk mitigation can help humanitarian and development projects have a lasting impact. Flood disaster mapping of higher grounds and the sharing of alternative flood-resilient agricultural crops and practices could see an improvement in food security and livelihood.

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Conflict-sensitive aid at the intersection of climate change, conflict and vulnerability in South Sudan

Kuach Pech and Natalia Chan

South Sudan, already grappling with political instability and the consequences of decades of conflict, is one of the countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change in Africa. This interaction of combined shocks and stressors amidst prolonged insecurity and fragility is likely to continue to have devastating consequences, exacerbating chronic humanitarian needs, disrupting livelihoods, and hampering development efforts.

In Greater Upper Nile, one of three regions making up South Sudan, a significant portion of the population has been uprooted and economic assets such as livestock and agricultural land have been lost due to a combination of flooding and conflict. This unprecedented loss of livelihood assets has led to increased competition for resources amidst elevated tensions over land, water and grazing areas. In Greater Equatoria, incidents of deadly conflict have been frequent, particularly between cattle keepers and farmers, while communities in some areas have also experienced increased pressure due to more frequent droughts. Similar dynamics have also played out in Greater Bahr el-Ghazal. Communities experience such climatic shocks and variability in a context of long-term instability following decades of violent conflict. Despite the 2018 peace agreement, the country's vulnerable social fabric, marked by ethnic divisions and longstanding grievances, further amplifies the prevalence of violent conflict.

Conflict and climatic factors intersect in complex ways to influence a fluid map of forced and multiple displacement, disrupted seasonal transhumance, and economic migration. Efforts to support longer-term and sustainable solutions are undermined by long-term fragility and instability. This article will focus on recent research, which examined often overlooked community perceptions and what this means for the aid sector in terms of ensuring a conflict-sensitive approach to these compounding factors.

Insights from community perceptions

Recent research by the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF) focused on community perceptions of climate change patterns and trends, perceptions of how climate and conflict interact, and perceptions of aid within that framing. The research centred on two case study locations – Kapoeta in Eastern Equatoria state and the Mangala-Bor corridor, between Jonglei and Central Equatoria states. It aimed to identify and reflect perspectives of South Sudanese communities affected by both climate change and conflict, and their interaction with the aid system.

In Kapoeta, communities reported experiencing increased dry periods and droughts, resulting in the loss of pastureland and crop failures. These changes in climatic conditions have led pastoralists to alter migration patterns, encroaching on land traditionally belonging to other ethnic communities, or bringing

their migration routes towards those of other pastoralist groups and leading to increased tensions due to greater pressure on resources. One resident of Kapoeta North County referred to how they migrate to other communities with their livestock in search of water and pasture, saying ‘you go to them with peace in your right hand and a gun in your left’, indicating that if the community cannot allow peaceful sharing of water and pastures then it can be acquired forcefully.

Tensions were more likely to flare up in communities that already had pre-existing grievances, while where communities had a history of community coexistence and existing ties or relationships, changes in migration patterns and displacement were much less likely to result in conflict. For example, the Toposa people of Kapoeta North County peacefully share their water and pasture resources with the Jie community migrating from the Greater Pibor Administrative Area; the same community of Toposa are less able to peacefully share resources with the neighbouring Buya community from Budi County, due to a long history of grievances. Even in areas where there was a history of tension, the risk of conflict had in some cases been mitigated by community-led dialogue processes or coordination groups, which resulted in peaceful agreements on shared access to resources or temporary allocation of land for internally displaced persons (IDPs) based on collective decision-making.

In the Mangala-Bor corridor, flooding has undermined existing coping strategies and resulted in displacement and increased pressure on IDP camps. This displacement, coupled with ongoing insecurity, has forced pastoralists to change their migration patterns, leading to conflict with farmers who see the arrival of cattle camps as a threat to their livelihoods. Communities living in the corridor have been subjected to repeated and severe climatic shocks in recent years. Each wave of flooding has resulted in large-scale displacement, as well as altered seasonal migration patterns for pastoralist communities. In several instances, flooding has coincided with intense periods of political violence. As one research respondent said:

The number one thing that displaced us is flooding. It destroyed everything: cow, goat, crop, food, shelter and other non-food items. What keeps us here is conflict. Our place is dry now, but we cannot go back because of conflict.

The research also reinforced the idea that the intersection of climate change, conflict and displacement in South Sudan is profoundly gendered. As primary providers of food and water, and with fewer alternative livelihood options when displaced due to generally lower literacy rates and social and economic standing, women are particularly vulnerable to the increasing scarcity of potable water and food. In some instances, they are forced to engage in risky activities, such as travelling further to access water, and selling alcohol. These activities expose them to sexual and gender-based violence. At the same time, the intersection affects men and boys: masculinity may be linked to cattle herding, and men and boys face a greater risk of being forced or coerced into other forms of organised violence.

Perceptions of aid in the research locations illustrate that aid actors face a range of complex conflict-sensitivity challenges. The perceived role of aid agencies in the permanent resettlement of IDPs in some

areas, especially in areas where there are existing tensions, has led to frustration. Others lamented what they see as an inadequate and poorly targeted response. Aid actors are under increasing pressure with fewer resources, and the effects of climate change have further heightened this complexity. There were very limited capacities or expertise to support integrated climate and conflict-sensitive action.

When it comes to coping and adaptation strategies, communities in South Sudan still practise traditional early-warning approaches based on bird signs, star observation and wind direction. These systems are limited, but they provide the best guess for the community as to whether there will be drought or flood this year. South Sudan currently has five manual weather stations but only two of these are functional, making it the East African country with the least number of weather stations. The capacity of the South Sudan Meteorological Department to provide weather forecasting and climate modelling remains very limited. The government of South Sudan is currently working with the United Nations Development Programme to establish a Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (MHEWS) to be able to provide weather forecasting and climate modelling, and to use earth observation and geospatial data to predict climate vulnerability, migration trends and conflict risks. This system will also map conflict hotspots along migratory routes and provide conflict early warning to enable communities, government and peace partners to prevent conflict.



Flood-affected houses in South Sudan. © rameesha bilal shah/Shutterstock

Working more effectively at the intersection of climate change, conflict and displacement

Investing in learning around good practice and a better understanding of the interactions at the intersection between climate change, conflict and displacement offer several entry points for those in the aid sector and other relevant areas of expertise to work more effectively in the following ways.

1. Centre the design of responses and strategies around communities

Working at this nexus offers new opportunities to adapt to the changing context and to evolve to meet the changing needs of affected populations. Centring local knowledge is key to doing this well, particularly given the fusion of **customary and modern systems in South Sudan**.

How aid is perceived and accessed also has an important bearing, and directly impacts the effectiveness of interventions. For example, one resident in Bor said ‘the community is responding to the needs of the donors’, which implies a worrying disconnect between what the community wants and what aid projects prioritise. Such perceptions have profound implications for the ownership and sustainability of aid outcomes. Aid actors must critically examine and reshape their strategies to ensure that assistance is contextually relevant and co-designed with communities to ensure their ownership. For example, this may include identifying or supporting existing, locally accepted mechanisms to negotiate shared access to natural resources.

2. Prioritise and invest in approaches and changes to systems that enable better and more cross-silo collaboration

The value of more integrated approaches towards common objectives has long been appreciated, recognising that intersecting challenges can only be addressed by intersecting solutions. For example, interest in the ‘humanitarian–development–peace nexus’ builds on previous efforts (**including many specific to South Sudan**) to encourage greater connectedness, and these offer useful lessons on how to include a strong focus on climate resilience and adaptation.

However, efforts to collaborate or coordinate in South Sudan have often been hindered by inter-institutional politics or an assumption that areas, such as peace or climate, are outside of one’s mandate. Specific areas of expertise and clarity of mandates are important; however, this should not be a barrier to collaboration. More collaborative approaches could help those with more relevant expertise apply a peace lens to existing climate resilience approaches and humanitarian responses to displacement, and to ensure that durable solutions to displacement crises are recognised and addressed.

3. Invest in early warning and anticipatory action that integrates climate, environment and conflict and supports longer-term solutions

In order to enhance communities’ resilience and adaptation to the impact of climate change, South Sudan’s ability to forecast and predict climate impact needs to be strengthened to provide timely climate information to farmers. Establishing and strengthening multi-hazard early warning systems (including conflict indicators) can provide an essential tool for anticipating and proactively responding

to intersecting risks. Development partners and government institutions need to pool their resources and expertise to enable the operationalisation, functioning and effective downscaling of early-warning information to communities in accordance with the United Nation Secretary-General's Early Warning for All agenda. Early-warning systems should build on existing local climate prediction practice and tailor how early-warning information is shared accordingly, considering how local practice informs decisions, and harmonising with traditional climate information sharing channels. Early-warning systems are most effective when wider contextual analysis and meaningful community engagement are integrated throughout.

Anticipatory action can play an important role in protecting people's lives, livelihoods and wellbeing, though this need to be designed for specific conflict contexts (for example, an [Anticipatory Action in Conflict Practitioners Group](#) brings together practitioners to better understand how it can be designed and implemented effectively in situations of conflict). Conflict-sensitive anticipatory action must support long-term solutions that address underlying causes of conflict and vulnerability, while also shoring up the capacity of communities to build resilience to the effects of climate change and conflict.

4. Ensure conflict-sensitive climate change adaptation

Climate change adaptation strategies must be conflict-sensitive, for example by ensuring that the construction of dykes and other types of flood-management infrastructure accounts for the potential impact on migration routes, or integrating conflict-management systems into water, sanitation and hygiene projects such as boreholes, haffirs and dams, or ensuring that climate-resilient infrastructure such as flood- or drought-resilient crops and water-supply systems are designed for specific contexts. Applying a peace lens can also enable such interventions to further contribute to peace and a more sustainable approach to adaptation and mitigation, including by promoting sustainable resource management and fostering dialogue among conflicting parties, and informing sustainable responses. Aid actors will need to consider how they collaborate with local governance structures – particularly in relation to strengthening local resource management institutions, fostering collaborative approaches to adaptation and mitigation, and improving accountability mechanisms. By integrating conflict sensitivity into climate change adaptation initiatives, aid actors can contribute to lasting peace and resilience.

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Regenerative resilience in the South Sudan displacement context

Rebecca M. Bushby and Cedric Shingirai Regede

South Sudan faces several challenges, including armed conflict, inter-ethnic tension, sociopolitical instability and a refugee crisis, as it attempts to navigate a revitalised peace agreement and a transition leading to elections later in 2024. Meanwhile, it also grapples with severe impacts of climate change, which in recent years has primarily been in the form of extreme flooding and dry spells. Natural disasters compound the existing challenges faced by the population, including food insecurity and conflict.

Although South Sudan is rich in arable land and has a youthful population (75% of the population is under 35 years of age), communities are exceptionally vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to heavy reliance on rain-fed agriculture. South Sudan's agricultural potential has not been fully realised, because of limited infrastructure, rudimentary farming practices, conflict and displacement, **which are further exacerbated by increasingly erratic weather patterns and environmental degradation**. Rampant deforestation across the region has stripped the watershed of its protective cover, further increasing the risks of future floods.

In 2021–2022, several areas of the country witnessed the most severe flooding in six decades, **affecting an estimated one million people**. Unity State was among the hardest-hit regions, where the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) had been working with communities for several years. The massive flooding ruined nearly 90% of agricultural and forest lands in Rubkona County, rendering many areas permanently waterlogged.

The ongoing war in Sudan led to a sudden influx of nearly 287,000 returnees and 39,000 Sudanese refugees, placing additional strain on the country's already stretched resources and infrastructure, amplifying the humanitarian crisis. The war also contributed to severing trade supply routes that come into South Sudan, driving up the prices of essential commodities by as much as 60%.

Climate- and conflict-related displacement disproportionately affects women who provide most of the agricultural productive labour. Women already face dangerous journeys to fetch firewood, wading through flooded water, and exposing themselves to threats of predators or even various forms of gender-based violence (GBV), including rape. Women are also exposed to risks of GBV when displaced in camp settings.

In response to these multifaceted challenges, the DRC – present in South Sudan since 2005 – embarked on innovative, regenerative resilience-building. This focuses on climate-adaptive agriculture and livelihoods, using a holistic approach that not only aims to enable people to adapt to the changing climate and mitigate its impacts, but also seeks to regenerate and restore ecosystems, communities and social systems to a healthier and more sustainable state. In all its activities, the DRC uses regular conflict analysis and monitoring of the impacts of its work on conflict to adapt accordingly and ensure conflict sensitivity.

These pilot activities aim to address immediate household needs relating to: (i) food security, (ii) access to clean energy and (iii) environmental protection.

Floating gardens, chinampa farming and permaculture for food security during floods

Floating gardens, a traditional practice from Mesoamerica, offers farmers in South Sudan a means to maintain or boost agricultural productivity during flooding. The approach involves weaving together aquatic plants, primarily the invasive water hyacinth, to create floating beds that rise and fall with water levels. Crops cultivated in these beds evade waterlogging and benefit from nutrient-rich decomposing matter. As water levels recede during the dry season, the beds are ploughed into the soil for winter crop cultivation.

The DRC developed a floating garden pilot plot, adapted for the South Sudanese context, through experimentation with various floating materials and transplantation techniques. Local communities were engaged in the process, and the traditional practice showed great potential. In 2024, the DRC is set to scale up the floating garden initiative by working with 100 flood-affected women to establish an additional 50 floating garden plots.

Chinampa farming is another example of a climate-adaptive technology (widely practised in Mexico) that the DRC has piloted in South Sudan. Raised agricultural beds are built by youth, men and women (via cash-for-work schemes) using soil and organic materials such as dried grass, ruminant manure, indigenous water plants and fish waste, packed layer upon layer to create beds full of fertile material and moisture. Women collect local materials to reinforce the beds' structures, particularly against erosion during periods of high water levels. Following a successful pilot, the DRC developed another eight chinampa plots in 2022 and is now adding a further 26 chinampas benefiting 148 farmers (104 women, 44 men).



Chinampa in Bieh IDP Camp, South Sudan. | Cedric Shingirai Regede/Danish Refugee Council

The DRC also introduced five perma-gardens in Rubkona County to showcase the potential of creating food forests rich in agrobiodiversity. These innovative gardens incorporate a variety of shrubs and crops, carefully selected to ensure year-round production. The perma-gardens not only provide a sustainable source of fibre-rich food but are also an essential source of fodder for livestock, fuel, and even medicinal plants. The same concept has also been used to complement other vegetable gardens and engage farmers through field schools, to foster agricultural innovation and sustainability.

Bio-briquettes for clean energy

After the flooding, communities in South Sudan struggled to meet energy needs as floodwaters compromised firewood sources. The DRC introduced a clean energy initiative in Rubkona in partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP). This initiative involved training 20 local women in clean energy and biofuel preparation using water hyacinth. The process encompassed carbonisation of water hyacinth, preparation of water hyacinth–molasses blends, densification/briquetting, and moulding of the resulting briquettes. After some trial and error, communities succeeded in producing briquettes. The DRC also provided training to women in energy-efficient stove production and offered business development and Village Savings and Loan Association training for sustainability. The fuel-efficiency initiatives contribute to reducing deforestation rates, carbon emissions and indoor air pollution in households.

Agroforestry – supporting climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation

Large numbers of refugees from Sudan have been living in camps in the Ruweng Administrative Area of South Sudan for years. The population has only grown with the renewed fighting in Sudan. The population growth has increased firewood harvesting, resulting in indiscriminate tree felling. The DRC has established community-managed tree nurseries for various fruit- and non-fruit-bearing trees. These efforts include agroforestry initiatives, integrating trees and shrubs into crop and animal farming systems to create environmental, economic and social benefits. The four major benefits of agroforestry include climate change mitigation through carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation, soil health improvement, and air and water quality improvement. To reduce tree cutting, the DRC also trains households on fuel efficiency and provides movable fuel-efficient stoves. These stoves not only improve air quality but also reduce the emission of carbon particulates and greenhouse gases, contributing to climate change mitigation. Environmental management awareness sessions further prepare communities on how to mitigate climate change and deal with environmental challenges through efficient management of natural resources.

Lessons learned: building community resilience to climate change impacts

Though the initiatives have had positive resilience outcomes, they have also faced challenges and generated lessons, which we delve into in this section.

The floating gardens and chinampas have expanded the availability of agricultural land for food production, particularly during flooding seasons when access to arable land is limited. Farmers have adapted to the challenges posed by floods by making use of the flood water and employing flood-adaptive agricultural techniques to create new agricultural opportunities, but some of the technologies face issues of seasonality. If the floods in the wet months are not large enough for the chinampas, the waters risk drying up during the dry seasons. With increasing changes in climate and weather patterns, the chinampa technique may require adaptations.

The process of local communities adopting new agricultural techniques is gradual, and it often takes time for communities to recognise and realise the tangible benefits of these methods. One of the foremost challenges relates to reconciling the long-term nature of resilience-building efforts, reliant on gradual behavioural change, with meeting immediate humanitarian needs. Finding a balance between these two imperatives remains an ongoing challenge, as the benefits of resilience-building may not be immediately visible but are crucial for long-term sustainability and self-reliance. Particularly in a protracted humanitarian crisis, as seen in South Sudan, short-term funding cycles hamper opportunities to build longer-term resilience which would help to protect communities from future climate impacts, thereby reducing future humanitarian need.

Another challenge stems from the fact that the pilot initiatives introduced were foreign to South Sudan and borrowed from other contexts. Integrating and adapting these ideas at community level took time; they needed to be tailored to the unique local conditions and cultures, as communities were accustomed to conventional agricultural practices.

The introduction of clean energy initiatives, such as the production of briquettes for cooking fuel from processed water hyacinth, has not only broadened climate-resilient livelihood options for women but has also supplied households with a clean energy source. This, in turn, has led to a reduction in carbon emissions and improved community-led natural resource management. However, similarly to the chinampas, the water hyacinth is a seasonal plant. Communities need to be prepared to collect large amounts during the season to support their needs throughout the year. Additionally, for some communities the hyacinth is located at distances from their homes and a canoe is required to travel on water to access water hyacinth.

The planting of shade trees has had many benefits beyond those originally planned, but similarly to the two other initiatives, has faced challenges. Beyond providing shade and respite from the scorching heat, these trees have played a pivotal role in regulating the impacts of climate change. Around 30% of participants reported a reduction in heat at their homesteads as a direct result of having shade trees. This reduction in heat has had a cascading effect, facilitating agroforestry initiatives that have

improved crop production conditions. Notably, these initiatives have mitigated the adverse effects of dry spells that previously hindered productivity. However, the choice of the neem tree has led to issues of community members removing branches from the woodlot, as the branches have traditionally been used for other household purposes, such as cleaning and whitening teeth.

Additionally, many of the trees have been fruit-bearing, which has proven to be highly effective in addressing household nutritional needs, surpassing the original expectations of the project. By offering an alternative food source, these trees have significantly improved household dietary intake. This initiative benefits over 10,250 households, with 200,000 seedlings produced for distribution and planting within woodlots.

These challenges were addressed in two key ways. Firstly, the DRC has worked to ensure that households adopt these initiatives, rather than seeking to implement them on a larger scale. This approach allows for a more customised implementation process, considering the available solutions and the household's interests. Communities have displayed immense enthusiasm for planting trees to address food insecurity and natural resource conservation. Secondly, community engagement has been key to foster ownership and empower community members in driving forward their development priorities. Ultimately, this collaborative approach not only enhanced the effectiveness of the DRC's efforts but also promoted sustainable, long-term solutions that resonate with the people we aim to assist.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the challenges faced by South Sudan, from climate change impacts to food insecurity and conflict, have contributed to the dire humanitarian situation. To address the multifaceted issues stemming from displacement and climate change impacts, the DRC embarked on innovative resilience-building initiatives on climate-adaptive agriculture, clean energy, and natural resource management, to both address immediate needs and restore ecosystems and communities to a healthier and more sustainable state. Challenges encountered include the balancing of long-term resilience-building with meeting immediate humanitarian needs, adapting foreign ideas to local conditions, and working with short-term funding cycles that are not conducive to long-term resilience strengthening.

In protracted humanitarian crises like South Sudan, there is a need for sustained and flexible funding that bridges the gap between humanitarian and development financing, and which enables the incorporation of crisis response and prevention, as well as longer-term resilience building. This would allow for strengthening long-term resilience to recurring shocks and stresses, reducing future humanitarian need. Second, community participation and ownership of projects is key, and engaging local communities in the design and adaptation of initiatives is critical for long-term success. Lastly, providing support to communities beyond the conclusion of projects has proved useful to ensure that newly acquired skills and approaches are used and disseminated among the community, reinforcing their ability to respond to and mitigate future crises.

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Extreme heat, drought and displacement in Iraq

Imrul Islam and Thomas Wilson

This article draws on the authors' recently published report, [Inadequate and inequitable: water scarcity and displacement in Iraq](#).



A boat on the banks of what was once a river. © Fareed Baram for NRC

Iraq's climate is changing faster than people can adapt. With each passing summer, new records are logged: record high temperatures, record low water levels. The heat is particularly extreme between May and October, with average daily temperatures ranging between 35°C and 51°C across the country.

All this is happening in a country rebuilding from 20 years of conflict, with 45 million people looking to find a way to move forward with their lives. While all in Iraq are affected, some face the summer with much less support than others. An estimated **1.1 million Iraqis are still displaced**, in addition to the almost **300,000 Syrian refugees** hosted in the Kurdistan region. While some internally displaced people live in homes, most live in makeshift shelters, often in airless tents at the mercy of the extreme weather. Across the country, year after year, the heat compounds their suffering, threatens to undo painstaking gains in livelihoods and food security, and precipitates risks of secondary displacement.

Starting in 2021, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has issued a [yearly report](#) based on survey data on the impact of drought in Iraq across four broad themes: water security and governance, income and food insecurity, social tension, and drought and displacement. In 2023, [this analysis](#) indicated deepening economic vulnerability, increasing community tension, and clearer linkages between climate, conflict and displacement in the [Ninewa Plains](#), an area of northern Iraq that witnessed large-scale conflict and displacement during the war against the so-called Islamic State.

Water security, climate change and livelihoods

In early June, as temperatures spiked across Iraq, dead fish floated to the surface of the Euphrates river in the south. Videos from Baghdad showed people walking across ankle-high waters of the Tigris river. By August, [the Ministry of Water Resources reported that water reserves were at the 'lowest levels' in Iraq's history](#). As early as 2014, the ministry was seeking \$184 billion in funding to rehabilitate crumbling water infrastructure and, as of the end of 2023, those plans have largely remained unfunded. The strategy projects a shortfall of 10.94 billion cubic metres between the demand and supply of freshwater, and estimates an almost 25% loss in freshwater availability over the next 15 years across Iraq.

The transboundary nature of Iraq's water resources means the country is largely reliant on cooperation from upstream riparian governments, namely Türkiye and Iran, for regular flows from the Tigris and Euphrates. While the [lack of regional water-sharing agreements](#) continues to be a cause for concern, the governance of water resources within Iraq not only undermines these negotiations, but also poses additional challenges.

Much of Iraq's dam system was built to manage flooding, ['when Iraqi rivers had too much water, not when they have too little'](#). Additionally, limited regulations on distribution, consumption and pollution have contributed to rising inequality between Iraqis with access to water upstream and those with increased scarcity downstream. Lack of investment coupled with outdated agricultural practices mean Iraq's farming communities are increasingly impacted. [Around 20% of Iraq's workforce can be found in the agriculture sector, responsible for 5% of the country's gross domestic product \(GDP\) – second only to the oil sector.](#)

While the 2023 harvest was comparatively better than in recent years, largely due to higher rainfall in the central and southern parts of the country, it did not necessarily translate into greater economic and food security for all farmers across Iraq. Reported income in farming communities increased from 46% in 2022 to 54% in 2023, but women's income security declined: 15% of women reported not earning incomes in 2023 compared to 6% in 2022. Part of the reason might be that women-led farming households have struggled to recover from last year's drought, with NRC aware of households who have been forced to give up farming altogether.

The growth rate has also slowed. On average, household income increased for the third consecutive year, from an average of Iraqi dinar (IQD) 250,000 per month in 2021 to IQD 320,000 in 2023. However, the rate of income increase has dipped from 20% between 2021 and 2022 to only 6.67% between 2022 and

2023. Slower growth can be attributed to multiple stressors, chief among them drought in the second half of 2023 and steep devaluation of the Iraqi dinar against the United States dollar. Combined, reduced purchasing power meant that 4 in 5 respondents in farming communities in northern governorates still reported reducing food expenditure over the past 12 months.

There continue to be systemic barriers to equitable access to water in Iraq. By and large, irrigation accounts for the largest source of water for crop farming in Iraq. In Kirkuk and Salahaddin governorates in central Iraq, for example, approximately two-thirds of all farmers reported relying primarily on irrigation. However, irrigation practices in Iraq use dwindling water resources extremely inefficiently. Almost 70% of farmers surveyed reported using flood irrigation, which is widely considered the most water-intensive of all irrigation methods.

In areas without irrigation networks, such as Sinjar and Ba'aj in Ninewa governorate, farmers rely predominantly on rainfall or dig boreholes to access groundwater. In these locations, 1 in 3 surveyed respondents used boreholes, the drilling costs of which range between \$25,000 and \$40,000 and cut into estimated profits. Additionally, Iraq does not have accurate estimates of groundwater levels, and **experts have repeatedly warned of the long-term impact of exhausting reserves which are not being replenished.**

Punitive measures also often compound problems, with the government of Iraq increasingly controlling water flow to regulate use. In Salahaddin for instance, the Directorate of Water Resources closed certain canals throughout the summer of 2023, making it impossible for farmers downstream to continue crop production. As one farmer surveyed said, even when the canals are open, little to no water reaches his fields in Anbar.

Although the government has taken steps to incentivise efficient irrigation practices, subsidies are often only available to farmers who can afford the initial investment, or who are currently registered and connected to a network. This means poorer farmers without subsidised support are forced to continue to practise flood irrigation methods.

While the importance of water governance is acknowledged by authorities, Iraq's static legislative structure increasingly hinders the country's ability to adapt policies in a timely manner. Laws often cannot be changed in time due to bureaucratic impediments, and there is limited political will, which is required to push changes through parliament. On the ground, the result of this stagnation means many new farmers are not formally incorporated into national irrigation networks and those already registered are unable to renew certification.

Drought and displacement

Since the end of large-scale conflict in 2017, **more than 4.8 million Iraqis have returned home, predominantly to five governorates: Ninewa, Kirkuk, Anbar, Diyala and Salahaddin.** In many cases, people initially returned to war-torn villages and towns lacking basic services and infrastructure, to communities and neighbourhoods scarred by division and loss.

Over the intervening years, significant collaboration by Iraqi authorities and international agencies has resulted in the rehabilitation of vital infrastructure, ensuring some access to services. In conflict-affected Mosul, the rehabilitation by the United Nations and others of destroyed infrastructure has breathed new life into the city. In Kirkuk, rehabilitation of irrigation canals and grain silos by the NRC has contributed to increased yield across vast hectares of farmland. However, increasingly, climate change is limiting the rate and impact of this progress, and threatening to deepen inequities by limiting livelihoods opportunities, diminishing the natural resource base, and reducing water availability. These factors in turn contribute to rising community tensions.

From 2021 to 2023, while the locations surveyed by NRC have remained unchanged, the lived realities of the communities in these governorates have shifted. In 2022, just under 50% of respondents were still displaced; in 2023, almost 94% of individuals surveyed reported having recently returned. Motivations for return in Iraq are mixed and follow global trends. Many displaced individuals have returned spontaneously, independent of support from governmental or other actors, often for private reasons. Some have returned because conditions have improved, or, conversely, because conditions in places of displacement have deteriorated – economically, socially, politically or environmentally.

Between 2021 and 2023, NRC data indicates social tensions due to climate have ebbed and flowed in strong correlation to yearly rainfall. In 2022, almost 40% of respondents indicated an increase in community tension; in 2023, that number dropped to just 4% across surveyed governorates. Accordingly, this correlates strongly with rainfall performance recorded across the country between 2022 and 2023, whereby 2022 experienced lower rainfall than average compared to 2023, with significant variation across the country.

Interestingly, the highest levels of community tensions were reported in the Ninewa Plains, with 1 in 5 respondents in Ba’aj linking social cohesion to drought. While southern governorates have witnessed the most extreme impacts of climate change, the Ninewa Plains show signs of an emergent hotspot. With large-scale displacement and return in an underserved region, lacking infrastructure and surface water, Ninewa remains both socially and politically vulnerable to intercommunal conflict.

As of October 2023, [the International Organization for Migration \(IOM\) estimates upwards of 130,000 Iraqis in the south have been displaced due to climate change](#), jumping from approximately 80,000 as of August 2023. Interestingly, three-quarters of all climate-induced displacements recorded by IOM have occurred within urban areas predominantly in the south of the country. NRC data validates these findings and indicates a clear upward trend: between 2021 and 2023, the percentage of respondents reportedly displaced due to drought have increased from 2% to 5% nationwide. Similar to reported levels of social tensions, levels of climate-induced displacement were highest in the Ninewa Plains, with 24% of respondents in Ba’aj thinking of moving because of drought.

Conclusion

Despite the scale and speed of climate change across the country, and the impact it is already having on millions, international attention and support have been slow to mobilise. Humanitarian donors have largely deprioritised Iraq as the [humanitarian response to the conflict with the Islamic State transitions into development-oriented approaches](#). On the other hand, development donors have been slow to step forward, often citing Iraq's oil revenue as proof of the country's capacity to solve its own problems. Combined, this gap in support has meant that communities recovering from conflict and displacement are now at risk of being displaced by impacts of climate change, as systems stretched by years of conflict approach breaking point. Mitigation measures are needed, and fast. Food systems, water sharing and climate security in the region are inextricably interlinked, and the impact of fluctuating temperature is being felt across a diverse and complex geography.

First, the government of Iraq needs to strengthen operational ability and capacity to monitor, regulate and allocate the country's water resources. For data-driven solutions, Iraq must step up monitoring of weather patterns and water resources, enhance anticipatory warning systems, and drive forward policies like those found in the [Green Paper](#) to improve water governance. Ultimately, stabilising water security in Iraq will need a triaging of water-sector needs, an improvement in data and information, and the restoration of key built and natural water infrastructure.

Second, continued investment by donors and international financial institutions is required to upgrade old, inefficient infrastructure, alongside initiatives that support 'climate-smart' adaptations and farming practices. Additionally, support to system-strengthening needs to account for specific vulnerabilities of communities affected and displaced by conflict.

Lastly, there is a need for displacement-focused agencies to work alongside Iraqi authorities to develop national and governorate-level policies on disaster displacement. The NRC is currently working with stakeholders in Ninewa governorate to develop locally owned strategies to cope with climate change, which might serve as a replicable model.

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When climate change and conflict collide: the need for localisation amid Nigeria's protracted crises

Zahra Khan Durrani, Meshach Dauda Bwala and Sani Muhammed Ibrahim

Internal displacement in Nigeria is increasing due to a multitude of complex and often overlapping causes, including insurgency, intercommunal conflict over scarce resources, and devastating climate disasters.

This article is authored by a representative of Islamic Relief Worldwide, in conjunction with its Nigerian partners, who are humanitarian practitioners and first-level responders serving their communities. The Intercommunity Development Social Organisation (IDS) and the Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS) have been engaged in IRW's [Strengthening Response Capacity and Institutional Development for Excellence \(STRIDE\)](#) programme, where IRW has been supporting the capacity enhancement of both organisations' financial systems and human resource management, among other self-identified areas.

This collaborative piece brings forth local actors' perspectives to paint the complex and challenging picture of the realities on the ground, and to make the case for greater localisation as a key part of the solution.

Floods in the south

It has been more than a year since the devastating floods in Nigeria that affected around 2.8 million people across the country, according to the NRCS. [A record 1.4 million people were displaced as floods engulfed large areas of farmland across the country, and '70,566 hectares of farmland' were 'completely destroyed', while 89,348 homes were partially or fully destroyed.](#)

A year on, we travelled to the Niger State with the NRCS and spoke to members from two flood-affected communities, the Jijiwa and Gussoro, who were some of the rights holders of the IRW-sponsored Cash Voucher Assistance programme with NRCS.

We held a focus group discussion with four men (aged 35 to 47) and four women (aged 19 to 42) to listen to their experiences. The affected communities were farmers and fisherfolk, who relied on their farm lands for food and income. They told us how they went from being self-sufficient to completely deprived and dependent as a result of the flooding.

Resettled in a primary school in Paiko, living in tents, the men and women that we spoke to were unanimous in their decision to not return to their homes, even if the homes were completely restored. When asked why they felt so strongly about not going back, one of the women narrated how over the

years she has observed changes in the environment that scare her: ‘We saw that the water kept rising and erasing farm boundaries over time.’ She raised her hands and pushed the index fingers together as she explained, ‘Every year we saw people’s farms joining together.’

She also said that ‘with frequent flooding, the temperatures also kept getting lower every year’ and that the 2022 floods were so much bigger than what they had experienced before, and these changes scared them. Another woman asked, ‘What if the situation repeats itself?’



Flooding in Lagos, September 2022. © Tolu Owoeye/Shutterstock

Conflict in the north

While people in the southern parts of the country are abandoning their homes due to extreme climate-induced events, those in the north of Nigeria face displacement due to human-induced conflicts.

Nigeria has sadly been marked by a complex interplay of conflicts, creating significant challenges for its people. Internal conflicts, exacerbated by factors such as religious tensions, ethnic divisions and economic disparities, have led to widespread displacement of communities, tearing apart the social fabric of the nation.

The conflicts in the northeastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa have triggered a severe humanitarian crisis, displacing millions of people from their homes. Families have been torn apart,

livelihoods shattered and communities uprooted, leaving a trail of human suffering in their wake. These expelled populations often have inadequate access to food, clean water, healthcare and education, amplifying the urgency of addressing this crisis comprehensively.

We interviewed a chief imam in Kaga, a local government area in Borno State, where IDS implements food assistance for vulnerable communities. He talked about his community's reliance on farming and the population's restricted access to farmland due to the prolonged ongoing conflict. He also spoke about the influence of the military, where 'trenches dug up to serve as a deterrent, or barricades meant to mark areas of safety for all community members, at the same time limit the function of available land for farming'. The military has also placed restrictions on the type of crops communities can cultivate, limiting people's access to a wider variety of staple foods. He added that the flash flooding in 2022 damaged farmlands, leading to a more devastating food crisis in the region.

Conflict meets climate

We wanted to hear from community leaders and government officials on how they believed climate change affected communities in conflict.

We spoke with Local Government Council Chairman Hon. Mustapha Bukar Daima, who said that climate change has been a leading cause of loss of livelihoods, food insecurity and health issues in Nigeria. He added that shortages of food, resources and unemployment were a leading cause of increased political insecurity and thuggery. He emphasised how climate change is deeply connected to conflict, saying, 'Climate change is one of the reasons we have the Boko Haram crisis, as it is deeply rooted in ideologies over resources.'

He talked about increased and repeated displacements of people due to climate change, giving an example from the Bama local government area, where people who were already living in displacement camps had to relocate from their temporary shelters in 2023 due to heavy downpours. Daima said, 'These conditions have further created challenges to the population as they are prone to several diseases like cholera, typhoid fever, malaria fever, and increased instances of gender-based violence as well.'

We also interviewed Yagana Ali Abadam, Director Admin. of the State Emergency Management Agency, who spoke about the country's increased displacement and forced migration. He said climate change has been a significant cause of migration within Nigeria, where people have moved in search of better opportunities. He spoke of Lake Chad, saying, 'The lake has been shrinking and causing communities to move away as they depended on it for their livelihoods. Prolonged drought has also driven farmers from their lands, contributing to displacement problems.'

The protracted and complex nature of conflict

Nigeria is not only one of the most vulnerable countries to be impacted by climate change, it also has a very low level of adaptation and readiness. As reiterated by local actors, climate change and conflict

continue to impact the country's development significantly. With Lake Chad having lost 90% of its surface water area, the fishing, farming, and herding sectors experienced adverse effects due to the lake's receding. Decreasing agricultural land productivity has been one of Nigeria's significant causes of changing conflict dynamics, as real incomes decreased and resource competition intensified, prompting households to likely migrate to other regions.

We spoke to Hajiya Zainab Suleman Saidu, Head of Operation in Kwara and Niger, and Hassan Adamu Suleiman, Chief Disaster Management Officer at the National Emergency Management Agency, on the changing dynamics of conflict. They highlighted the growing conflict between farmers and herders in the country:

Farmer–herder clashes have been increasing exponentially as productive land continues to diminish. The current scenarios in Nigeria are leading to farmer–herder conflict which in turn has led to migration of people who have lost their homes as a result.

The scarcity of rainfall in the north compels farmers to migrate southward, where rainfall is comparatively higher. Excessive rain in the south leads to floods, displacing members of numerous communities. These circumstances result in a shortage of land for both farmers and herders, escalating conflicts and causing the migration of people who have lost their homes due to the strife.

The human cost of farmer–herder violence has been immense, surpassing even the toll of the Boko Haram insurgency. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives or have been forced to flee their homes. Additionally, Nigeria has witnessed a rise in ethnic, regional and religious divisions due to these conflicts. Compounding these issues, the northern regions are expected to experience even more frequent droughts and desertification, while the rest of the country will face rising flooding. These changes will severely affect agricultural output, which is already insufficient to meet the country's food demands. This crisis has eroded national stability and unity.

The need for localisation

The need for localisation efforts in the country is crucial; it is vital in aiding Nigerians' response to disasters, and is a powerful strategy to address climate breakdown and develop a resilient local economy. Local actors in Nigeria often require significant support from national and international agencies to garner and enhance their capacity and capabilities to respond effectively to large-scale conflicts and promote sustainable development practices.

We asked government representatives about the importance of local actors and community engagement in the decision-making process for humanitarian and development initiatives, and the responses supported the need for a deeper understanding of community strengths and leveraging community knowledge. One respondent said that:

Local engagement is equally as important as planning and securing the funding for interventions. Communities help us understand the needs of the population for which the assistance is meant.

Successful interventions necessitate more than just planning and funding – they rely on active local engagement. Communities play a pivotal role in clarifying the needs of the population receiving assistance, promoting accountability and transparency. This involvement assists stakeholders and decision-makers in making well-informed decisions, improves the visibility and understanding of issues, and empowers communities to shape decisions affecting them. As we heard in the discussion, ‘this results in social transformation and advocacy, serving as a voice rooted in tradition’.

When donors and civil society fail to include local communities in decision-making and planning processes, they impede the establishment of meaningful connections, hinder community empowerment, and limit the effectiveness and sustainability of development and humanitarian projects. This was a shared view from all community leaders and members we interviewed.

While donors and international organisations increasingly realise the importance of local engagement and work to overcome barriers for more inclusive and participatory approaches, lack of awareness regarding the depth of local knowledge, power imbalances, communication barriers, time and resource constraints, assumptions of external expertise, and bureaucratic processes are some of the challenges that limit community engagement.

Building a sustainable future

A substantial portion of the anticipated global economic growth is expected to occur in Global South countries. Nigeria has the potential to participate in this growth, provided that climate change impacts and human-induced conflicts do not erode potential gains. Adhering to a ‘business as usual’ approach within the current globally distressed economy, which divorces environmental considerations from economic decisions, poses the risk of devolving into a social and economic crisis.

Localisation holds immense significance for Nigeria within the context of climate breakdown. Several factors have hindered local-actor engagement in responding effectively to climate-induced and human-induced conflicts in Nigeria. These challenges include limitations due to a lack of:

- adequate financial resources
- infrastructure to address mass-scale and complex conflicts effectively
- specialised training and expertise to manage the protracted crisis, exacerbated due to climate change.

Other challenges include the security risk to local actors in conflict zones, which prevents them from operating and assisting affected communities. Political instability also hinders the autonomy and effectiveness of local actors in responding to conflicts.

Addressing these multilayered challenges requires coordinated and multifaceted strategies with increased support, training, resources, and collaboration between local actors, government bodies and international organisations. Empowering local actors with the necessary tools and resources is crucial to enhancing their capacity to respond to these complex challenges and conflicts.

Involving communities in decision-making processes not only empowers them but also fosters a sense of ownership over initiatives, contributing to increased project sustainability and effectiveness. Furthermore, localisation allows for identifying and implementing culturally and contextually appropriate climate adaptation strategies, harmonising traditional knowledge with standard approaches.

In Nigeria, as elsewhere, faith actors could be engaged to mobilise communities for action. **This could mirror the example of faith leaders using their influence and religious messaging to help curb the Ebola epidemic in some parts of West Africa in 2014–2015.** Faith actors are often left out by international organisations and national governments in the planning of development and emergency programmes, but recognising their role in communities and their engagement can be a means of sensitising and mobilising communities in Nigeria for climate action and promoting social cohesion.

As the primary witnesses to climate-related changes, communities play a pivotal role in establishing early-warning systems, and enhancing preparedness for extreme weather events. Through its STRIDE programme, IRW has first-hand experience of the impact of localisation. The capacity enhancement of local partners through grants for system strengthening and leadership trainings, and direct funding for disaster response (following localised approaches) enhanced efficiency and ownership. A great example is the timely and effective humanitarian response to the Nigerian floods in 2022, where IRW quickly disbursed funds to local partners to implement a community-identified plan of providing unconditional Cash Voucher Assistance to displaced flood-affected communities.

Through efficient resource allocation and addressing pressing needs, localisation maximises the impact of humanitarian and development efforts. This approach also aids in conflict prevention by tackling underlying issues related to resource scarcity. Moreover, a localised system ensures cultural sensitivity in project design and implementation, respecting local customs and traditions. In essence, localisation is a comprehensive and community-driven strategy for effectively addressing the multifaceted challenges of the protracted crisis in Nigeria.

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Climate change, conflict and displacement: perspectives from Afghanistan

Sameera Noori

Amidst the ongoing conflict and displacement crisis in Afghanistan, the impact of climate change has intensified, creating a complex web of challenges. As Deputy Director of the Citizens Organisation for Advocacy and Resilience (COAR), I aim to illuminate the current situation, examining the intersection of climate change, conflict and displacement. Drawing on recent data, including insights from the Humanitarian Response Plan and a stakeholder survey on climate change in Afghanistan, this article offers a concise and informative overview of the multifaceted challenges faced by affected communities, setting the stage for more in-depth exploration.

Rising temperatures and erratic weather patterns compound resource scarcity, particularly affecting conflict-affected areas. The stakeholder survey, involving interviews with local communities, environmental experts and government officials, provides detailed insights into these intricate dynamics. The Humanitarian Response Plan emphasises the vulnerability of displaced populations to climate-related hazards, underscoring the need for targeted interventions.

By examining these findings, we gain a nuanced understanding of how climate-induced factors intersect with conflict dynamics, influencing displacement patterns.

The impact of climate change: navigating the complex terrain

Climate change, a significant driver of displacement in Afghanistan, is underscored in the recent [Humanitarian Response Plan](#) (HRP) and findings from the stakeholder survey. The effects of climate change, including rising temperatures, irregular precipitation and prolonged droughts, are outlined in both sources. These impacts have devastating effects, severely affecting agriculture, worsening food insecurity and triggering widespread migration.

In 2023, it is estimated that there will be around 1.1 million cross-border returnees, with the majority returning from Iran and the remainder from Pakistan, highlighting the multifaceted nature of these population movements. While climate undoubtedly plays a role in these returns, it is crucial to acknowledge the broader political context. The forced expulsions of Afghan refugees in Pakistan are undeniably playing a significant role in shaping migration patterns. These returnees are predominantly settling in border provinces or returning to their original provinces of residence, if they have home or land there. The involuntary nature of this displacement, driven by political decisions, adds a layer of complexity to the challenges faced by individuals and families returning to Afghanistan.

Displacement is particularly pronounced in regions heavily affected by drought, such as Nimroz, Zabul, Oruzgan, Farah, Badakhshan and Faryab. Individuals and families from these areas are relocating to neighbouring provinces or migrating to neighbouring countries.

Understanding the dynamics of this migration is crucial for determining whether it is temporary or permanent. Tailoring response measures to address the unique needs of affected populations hinges on this understanding. Additionally, this migration trend raises concerns about heightened protection risks, especially for vulnerable groups such as women and girls. The influx of returnees into new areas necessitates a comprehensive approach to ensure the wellbeing and safety of those affected by climate-induced displacement.

Conflict amplification: unravelling the complex nexus

In the complex web of challenges that Afghanistan faces, the interplay between climate change, conflict, and recent sanctions in light of the Taliban takeover has given rise to a perilous feedback loop. Scarce resources, notably water and land, have become increasingly contested, leading to heightened tensions and violent clashes among different groups within communities. Adam Pain's work on '[Land, power and conflict in Afghanistan](#)' can be referred to here: it explains how these community clashes reflect how [power dynamics, exacerbated by the last three decades of instability, have intertwined with geographical and social dimensions](#). The distinctions between mountainous regions and plains, between subsistence-based economies and intensive irrigated lands, have historically laid the groundwork for structural inequalities and disputes over resource distribution.

The observation on the '[breakdown of customary water distribution practices](#)' aligns seamlessly with our exploration of the impact of climate change on water resources. Irregular precipitation patterns and prolonged droughts intensify conflicts over dwindling water resources. The downstream villages' accusations against upstream communities for over-extracting water form a critical link to our exploration of resource conflicts influenced by changing climatic conditions. It is one example of the many complex layers of conflict amplification.

Moreover, [there is an ethnic dimension to these conflicts over resources](#); different communities, historically settled in diverse geographic settings, now all vie for access to water. Ethnic complexities undoubtedly exacerbate conflicts, particularly when communities used to living on irrigated land clash with those relying on subsistence-based economies.

Therefore, understanding the multifaceted layers of conflict amplification, fuelled by climate change impacts on resource availability, is crucial. Pain's article provides a rich context for our discussion, emphasising the need for a holistic approach that addresses immediate clashes over resources and underlying environmental vulnerabilities. Effectively navigating the complex terrain of climate-induced conflict in Afghanistan necessitates a thorough understanding of local perspectives, as underscored by insights gathered from relevant analyses.

Adaptation and resilience: the role of local initiatives

In the face of Afghanistan's many challenges, local communities and grassroots organisations have stepped up as leaders in dealing with climate change. The stakeholder survey report emphasises the essential role of community-led efforts in creating lasting solutions, like effective water management, crops that can handle droughts, and renewable energy projects.

These local efforts are happening while non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Afghanistan are working hard to learn and share scientific knowledge, even though advocacy groups and NGOs face difficulties due to limited resources and the ongoing violence. In particular, the ban on women humanitarian workers intensifies the critical nature of humanitarian response efforts. This ban has heightened the urgency to target women-headed families in surveys, ensuring the identification of their specific needs and vulnerabilities. The humanitarian community recognises the increased significance of tailoring responses to address the unique challenges faced by women in the aftermath of such restrictive measures. Despite these challenges, these NGOs continue to collect data and recommend programmes, with findings that are readily accepted by the communities and individuals who stand to benefit from interventions. Their determination to learn and share knowledge, even in tough situations, shows how committed they are.

There's also a noticeable change in how people talk about climate change in Afghanistan. More and more, people are realising how important local knowledge is. This isn't just about saying local knowledge matters; it's about actually using what local people know alongside what scientists know. This mix of different knowledge helps in dealing with disasters and talking about climate change. It's like putting together pieces of a puzzle, using both what people in Afghanistan know from their own experiences and what scientists know from their studies.

Recent reports, including those from the HRP, stakeholder surveys, and research reports on climate change in Afghanistan, show that international groups are starting to see the value of what local people are doing. They're giving support and resources to help these local efforts grow. *The voices of local NGOs in climate change issues* adds to this story, talking about how local NGOs in Afghanistan are crucial in dealing with the effects of climate change in their communities.

Humanitarian response: navigating challenges and building bridges

The humanitarian response to the challenges posed by climate change and conflict-induced displacement in Afghanistan has been intricate. The HRP for 2023 outlines the need for improved coordination and integration of climate change adaptation strategies into humanitarian interventions. It also emphasises the necessity of addressing the specific needs and vulnerabilities of displaced populations, including access to basic services, shelter and livelihood opportunities.

However, it's crucial to note that the planning process for the HRP faced unexpected obstacles. The 2023 Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan was formulated between August and December 2022, with the

intent of publishing it in January 2023. Unfortunately, on 24 December 2022, the de facto authorities issued a decree barring Afghan women from working for NGOs. This led to a month-long partial operational pause of non-time-critical humanitarian programmes.

Despite these challenges, efforts were made to move from an ‘operational pause’ to an ‘operational trial’ period, supported by a related concept of operations. The HRP for 2023 was still issued based on the initial planning, but references to the ban and changes in the context were also included.

The ban on women’s participation in humanitarian response is expected to have profound and enduring consequences, especially for women and girls, who are already among the most vulnerable members of society. The reduction in the workforce due to the ban significantly hampers the ability to deliver assistance and services directly to women in need. Moreover, it undermines the qualitative components of the response, including safeguarding, meaningful engagement, and quality assurance, as the exclusion of women from humanitarian efforts limits the diversity of perspectives and skills necessary for a comprehensive and effective response.

The humanitarian community, including the Humanitarian Country Team, is actively engaging with other partners and basic-human-needs actors. They have developed a monitoring and reporting framework to assess the impact of the ban on access, sectoral and local authorisations, and the ability of humanitarian partners to operate within the recommended criteria. Ongoing assessments are being conducted to understand the ban’s impact across all sectors, and advocacy efforts are in progress to engage with the authorities and overturn the ban. Based on monitoring outcomes and advocacy efforts, a comprehensive review of the operation and a revision of the HRP will be conducted as necessary.



IDP camp outside Kabul, Afghanistan in 2017. © UN Photo/Fardin Waezi

Conclusion

The current state in Afghanistan underscores the pressing need for concerted action at the convergence of climate change, conflict and displacement. International actors must adopt inclusive and sustainable approaches that prioritise the voices and experiences of local actors. This call is not just for abstract collaboration, innovation and advocacy, but for a nuanced and practical roadmap for effective and comprehensive responses addressing the complex impacts of climate change in conflict-affected regions. What could this look like?

- 1. Collaboration:** Actively engaging with local communities, NGOs and international partners to foster meaningful partnerships. This means establishing channels for ongoing dialogue, joint planning and shared decision-making in climate change initiatives.
- 2. Innovation:** Encouraging and investing in innovative solutions that address the unique challenges posed by the intersection of climate change, conflict and displacement. This could involve technology-driven solutions, community-driven initiatives, and adaptive strategies tailored to the specific needs of affected regions.
- 3. Advocacy:** Advocating for policy changes at both national and international levels to integrate climate considerations into conflict-resolution strategies. This involves leveraging the findings from stakeholder surveys and research reports to influence decision-makers and shape policies that prioritise the wellbeing of affected communities.

In practice, sustaining collaboration implies ongoing partnerships with local NGOs, communities and international entities. Innovation involves supporting and scaling up successful local initiatives, while advocacy requires active engagement with policymakers and stakeholders to influence policy changes that address the intricacies of climate-induced conflicts in Afghanistan.

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Climate change adaptations in displacement: a case study from Herat, Afghanistan

Zaki Ullah and Aaftab Ullah

Afghanistan is amongst those countries that have faced the dual challenges of armed conflict and climate-induced natural disasters for several decades. For the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Herat, a city in west Afghanistan, displacement is usually due to climate change, conflict, or both. For many, returning from displacement is not an option, given the ongoing drought or insecurity, or both. This article is based on the study '[Climate change, conflict and internal displacement in Afghanistan](#)'. The

study included qualitative interviews with IDPs and host communities living in and around Herat city. The field work for the study was conducted during mid-2022, and ODI published the report in November 2022. The article elaborates on the approaches taken by the IDPs and host communities to address the intricate challenges posed by climate change. These adaptations relate to water scarcity, energy sources, climate-driven cooling solutions, food preservation solutions and livelihood diversification.



Compounding factors, including drought and earthquakes, drive food insecurity and displacement in Herat, Afghanistan. © Waheedullah Jahesh/Shutterstock

Water scarcity and adaptation

In light of the shifting climate patterns, there has been a noticeable decrease in both rain and snowfall in the vicinity of Herat. This observation was highlighted by one of the elder respondents in the study who stated, ‘We used to believe that water scarcity was a problem in Badghis, and people from there were migrating to Herat. However, we are now witnessing a decrease in rain and snowfall here as well. If this situation continues, we are uncertain about where we will go.’

In Herat, the host community demonstrated adaptability in response to climate-induced water scarcity. Proactively, they invested in deep wells, ensuring a consistent water supply by contributing financially to their maintenance. Additionally, they utilised water storage tanks, enabling storage for essential needs. A woman from the host community, who has lived in Herat her entire life, explained, ‘To overcome the shortage of water and to overcome the issue of unavailability of urban tube-well pipes [piped water], we are now paying each month a small amount of money to the keeper of the deep well. For this deep well, we have purchased a water storage tank.’ Additionally, low-income host community members also adopted low-cost methods, such as using clay jars covered with linen to store water.

Conversely, IDPs faced financial constraints but exhibited resilience. They adopted similar low-cost techniques. An IDP respondent living in a camp stated, ‘In our camp, we used to spend a lot of time fetching water from the nearby community. Then, an INGO [international non-governmental organisation] built a well in our camp, but we still had to draw water with buckets. So, we collected AFN 1,500 per house and bought a solar panel for the well. Now, we easily get water, and use that saved time to earn our meals.’ Furthermore, in another similar example, to tackle the climate change impact (in terms of scarcity of water) with available financial resources, the IDPs have to pool their resources. In one instance, the IDP community jointly purchased a plastic water tank; designated IDP women from each shelter would refill the water tank every seventh day, ensuring a consistent water supply.

Energy sources and adaptation

In Herat, the primary source of electricity is hydroelectricity from Salma Dam, supplemented by power imports from Iran. The region heavily relies on both these sources for its energy needs. However, the adverse effects of climate change, specifically the reduction in rainfall and snowfall, have led to a decline in the water level of the Salma Dam. Consequently, this decline in water resources has had a substantial and concerning impact on the electric supply in Herat.

Therefore, in light of the decreasing water levels in Herat, which in turn affected electricity generation, the inhabitants took proactive steps. They also made strides in adopting renewable energy sources, installing solar systems for electricity to ensure essential energy supply for households, especially during nights. Some utilised solar batteries and generators for both hot and cold weather, indicating a shift towards use of household-level renewable energy means for basic needs. A shopkeeper in the host community explained, ‘Many of us in this area have installed solar systems [...] and generators because the shortfall of electricity is a significant issue, and our children cannot sleep at night.’

Besides water, the decreased number of trees due to the changing climate conditions has meant a reduction in wood availability, which is another important natural energy source. Therefore, as an adaptation measure, the community transitioned from traditional wood-burning stoves to more efficient clay ovens. These are a special type of traditional tandoor (clay oven). It is fixed in the side walls of kitchens above ground level to use less firewood compared to stoves. These clay ovens are used for baking bread and keeping the surroundings warm for a longer time. The decrease in firewood, the primary source of fuel, led IDPs to burn shrubs and dung for cooking and heating.

Climate-driven air-conditioning solutions

With summers becoming exceedingly hot and winters growing much colder than before, the host communities implemented various measures to adapt. During the winter, they invested in electric heaters to combat extreme cold, while also insulating their homes by covering windows with plastic to retain warmth. Additionally, they painted their houses white or applied mud plaster to keep the interiors cool during scorching summers. Some well-off host households installed electric air conditioners and air coolers to maintain comfortable indoor temperatures during the hot summer months.

To get some relief from scorching heat, some poor IDPs were only able to seek refuge under nearby tree shade. Similarly, while facing limitations in their temporary shelters/houses, some IDPs whitewashed their houses and utilised solar-powered air coolers to stay cool during hot weather. Some of the IDPs made alterations to their shelter by improving ventilation through installing windows. Others have transitioned from tents to constructing mud houses, as these help maintain temperature levels.

However, the IDPs' ability to make substantial adaptations was restricted due to the temporary nature of their dwellings and financial constraints, key limiting factors for them to find long-term permanent cooling solutions. One displaced man outlined the situation: 'The majority of displaced individuals who have the means are relocating to rented houses [either made of mud or bricks], while others are constructing mud houses to sustain their livelihood.' Mud houses have proven advantageous in both summer and winter seasons, as they help maintain a moderate temperature compared to alternatives such as tents or other shelters.

Moreover, a few IDPs have installed the solar-powered air coolers, though one unfortunate individual had theirs stolen and lacked the means to replace it. An elder male IDP in camp explained: 'Those with financial means have painted their houses, and those capable have bought heaters and room coolers. I also installed a solar-powered air cooler, but it got stolen. However, since dung is available for free, we collect and dry it for fuel, keeping us warm in winter and aiding in cooking.'

Food preservation solutions

The above discussed situation (climate change resulting in reduced electricity and increased temperatures) also poses a challenge for preserving perishable food items for extended periods. However, both the host community and IDPs in Herat have shown resourcefulness in sustaining their food supply and minimising wastage, especially as the region experiences hotter weather that prevents traditional room storage. They are storing meat, vegetables and fruits in deep wells, effectively prolonging their freshness, and ensuring a stable food supply. As one woman said, 'We have traditional methods to keep food fresh for a longer duration, such as storing it in deep wells, especially during the summer seasons when food tends to spoil.'

Additionally, during Eid al-Adha, some IDPs collect meat from the host community and preserve it using traditional drying techniques. One IDP said that, 'Landi is the best practice; we preserve the meat we collect during Eid days. The meat remains tasty and can be used for months.' This preserved meat, known as 'landi', can be stored for an extended period and is particularly reserved for consumption during the winter season.

Livelihood diversification

The changing climate in Herat has also impacted the livelihoods of both the host community and IDPs. Previously, they mostly relied on agriculture, but due to water scarcity, they have been forced to find alternative economic pathways. One of the male members of the host community explained this

situation: ‘We were relying on agriculture, specifically saffron production. However, due to the decrease in the water level, we diverted our activities to animal husbandry [raising chickens and cattle]. Some of us also resumed khorjan [embroidery] production because we have to feed our families.’

On the other hand, the IDPs who were working as daily wage labourers or farmers in the fields of the host community also shifted to alternative sources of income. Some of them have turned to collecting and selling trash, with children involved in gathering marketable items like raw plastic. Non-saleable items are repurposed for fuelling fires, conserving scarce wood resources for cooking. Additionally, men have transitioned to construction work, earning their meals instead of relying on agriculture, while some have taken extreme measures such as marrying off their daughters at an early age in order to obtain cash, a practice known as ‘walwar’.

A displaced man elaborated on their situation, stating, ‘Before our displacement, we were engaged in agricultural activities, both in Badghis and then here, in the fields of the host community. However, when the water levels decreased, the landowners sold their land. Consequently, I had to find work as a labourer in the fruit market, while my children have resorted to collecting trash to support our family.’

Conclusion

Overall, the host community, faced with water scarcity, exhibited adaptability by investing in deep wells and water storage tanks. Their proactive measures, such as adopting renewable energy sources and diversifying livelihoods, showcased their resilience in overcoming climate change-induced hardships. In contrast, IDPs, constrained by financial limitations and impermanent dwellings, also displayed resilience despite their challenges. Their resourcefulness was evident, as they pooled resources and found low-cost solutions or reverted to traditional practices to sustain their food and water supply. Collaborative efforts within the IDP community, along with external support from (I)NGOs, were also major aspects in this regard. However, for livelihood, IDPs also resorted to some negative coping strategies such as engaging children in trash collection and the practice of walwar.

In summary, host and IDPs communities have adopted different strategies to mitigate climate change impact. The variation and nature of the adaptation measures are reflective of the higher vulnerability amongst the IDP population. This is mainly linked to the weaker financial standing of the IDPs as compared to hosts in Herat. Ultimately, the international community can play a greater role through continued support to the IDPs and host communities in Herat and other parts of Afghanistan.

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Exploring the intersection of armed conflict, climate risks and mobility: the ICRC's experience

Angela Cotroneo and Marta Triggiano

In the last few years, the issue of displacement in the context of climate change has increasingly been the topic of policy debates. However, the focus has been mostly on climate risks and environmental degradation as drivers of displacement, with climate- and conflict-related displacement being tackled as parallel and distinct situations. Building on the operational experience of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Afghanistan, Mozambique and the Sahel, this article provides a more nuanced perspective on the intersection of armed conflict, climate risks and mobility,¹ describing it as complex, non-linear and constantly evolving. This article also reflects on the challenges related to developing an operational framework to effectively integrate climate risks and mobility considerations in analysis and the humanitarian response to conflict-affected people.

The interplay of armed conflict, climate risks and mobility

Climate variability and extreme weather events may not only directly lead to displacement – they often amplify and compound other factors contributing to people's mobility. Countries at war are **disproportionately affected by the effects of climate change and environmental degradation, as armed conflict weakens the capacity of institutions and people to adapt to and mitigate the negative impacts of climate shocks and extreme weather events**. This means that when disasters hit those countries, their consequences, including displacement, are more severe. It also means that, for communities living on the frontlines of war, violence and destruction, especially those enduring protracted armed conflict, **climate risks may act as vulnerability multipliers and contribute to people resorting to mobility, either in-country or cross-border**.

A case in point is Afghanistan, a country heavily impacted by **climate change effects** as well as decades of armed conflict. Here, the rise in global temperatures has diminished ice and snow reserves, augmented heavy rains, and depleted surface and ground waters. Droughts and floods have become more frequent and intense, affecting the majority of the country's provinces and more than half of the population. With risk reduction, early-warning systems and adaptation measures being weak to non-existent, recent years have witnessed **large-scale internal displacement** caused by sudden extreme weather events. At the same time, as the country is largely dependent on agriculture, water scarcity has been progressively and negatively altering food production and livelihood. Uncontrolled deforestation and usage of

¹ The ICRC uses the term 'mobility' to refer to all types of internal and cross-border movements of individuals as survival, coping mechanisms or resilience strategies. These movements include internal displacement, planned relocations, migration (which, according to the ICRC's operational description of who is a migrant, also includes cross-border displacement), as well as other forms of movements (such as pastoralist transhumance and seasonal movements). This article adopts the same definition.

underground water have amplified the damage caused to crops by floods as well as soil degradation. Thus, all over the country many families have had to leave their villages – sometimes after selling their lands – and move to urban areas (like Kabul) or abroad. Alternatives to mobility for those families were scarce and would have entailed adopting harmful coping mechanisms likely to expose them to further risks related to the conflict, such as taking part in the hostilities, or engaging in illicit activities.

Looking at the **3.25 million internally displaced people (IDPs) within Afghanistan and the fast-growing 5.2 million Afghan refugees and asylum seekers abroad**, it is hard to clearly separate and quantify the reasons for people's displacement. In a country that has seen more than 40 years of war and violence, economic decline, recurrent natural (including climate-related) disasters, and where more than half of the population needs humanitarian assistance, particularly food support, distinguishing between climate risks and environmental degradation on the one side, and armed conflict and insecurity on the other, as drivers of displacement is practically impossible. As confirmed by **United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) border monitoring in the first half of 2023**, there are many interconnected reasons for people to leave Afghanistan, including the lack of access to essential services and livelihood opportunities, alongside droughts, violence and insecurity. Mobility – whether leaving home or the country – may be the best available option for many Afghans to find safety and/or better prospects for a dignified life for themselves and their families.

Climate risks can also create additional challenges for people displaced by armed conflict, affecting their ability to move to safety and/or access essential services in the place of displacement. Mozambique's vulnerability to climate risks has been increasing in recent years, **affecting people's lives and livelihoods, the national economy and critical infrastructure**. The impact of the non-international armed conflict in the north, exposure to climate shocks such as floods, storms and cyclones, and a lack of development have converged to create significant short- and longer-term risks for communities. People who fled from attacks in coastal cities in 2020, when the conflict in the north displaced many within the country, told the ICRC that **the main land routes that could have led them to safety had been damaged by Cyclone Kenneth**. Thus, most people had to take the riskier sea route by boat. In the Montepuez district of Cabo Delgado, more than 80,000 IDPs, who had sought refuge in urban areas and their surroundings, found themselves unable to cope with an environment already ranked below the national average in terms of access to safe water sources and sanitation. This resonates with the situation in large Afghan cities such as Kabul, Herat and Kandahar, where mass displacement from rural areas has posed enormous pressure on already strained water resources.

In several countries, the ICRC has observed how people displaced by armed conflict or violence often end up staying in climate 'hotspots' – in part, because the land that is available for displaced people is uninhabited or waste, as it is more prone to climate risks such as flooding, or has poor access to services, food and water. This is also true in urban areas where, increasingly, **displaced persons live and/or seek to settle**. It is also because camps and informal settlements are often built for short-term habitation, and not designed for continual exposure to climate and environmental risks. All this exposes displaced persons to the risk of secondary or multiple displacement due to climate shocks and disasters, **while undermining their local integration as an interim or durable solution**.

Growing climate risks and environmental degradation in areas of origin, often combined with persisting insecurity, may prevent displaced people who wish to go back home from achieving a durable solution through safe, dignified and sustainable return. These factors impact people's safety and their livelihood options. In such circumstances, policies and practices that put pressure on displaced people to return to their places of origin may contribute to (re)exposing returnees to the risk of natural shocks and hazards, thus leading to unsustainable leaving conditions and, at times, re-displacement. In the case of Afghanistan, people displaced internally or abroad who were forced or pressured to return to their areas of origin **have faced obstacles** to re-establish their lives in safety and dignity due to **insecurity, limited access to water, land degradation and inability to farm, thus exposing them to further displacement or other risks.**



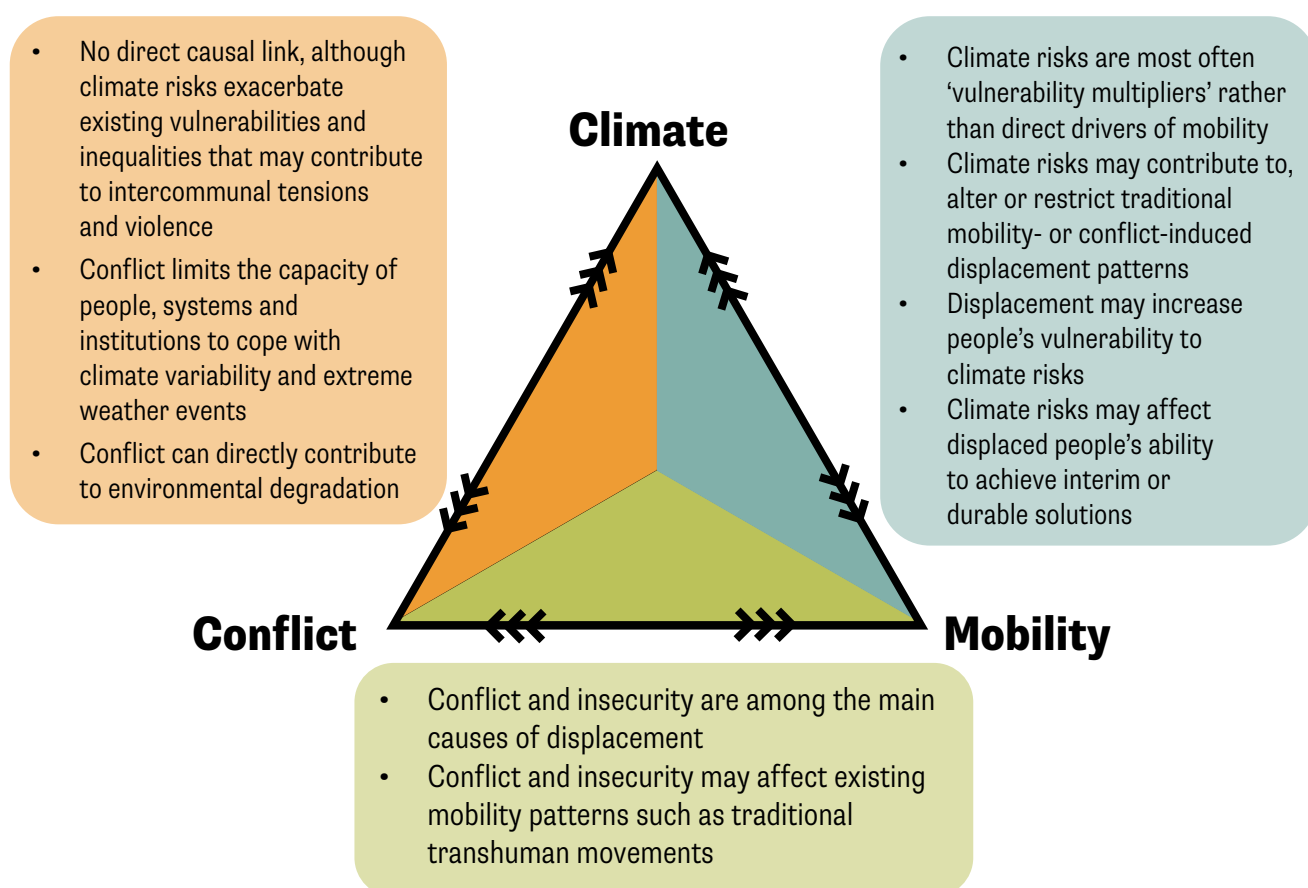
In Kidal, Mali, lives are affected by both climate and armed conflict. Credit: Aboubacrine Ag Assikabar, 2021

Characterised by seasonal migration, communities sharing border areas, and large areas governed by non-state actors, the Sahel region provides another good example of the complex interplay between armed conflict, climate risks and mobility, and their compounding effects. An **ICRC study on the Central Sahel** in 2021 showed how traditional mobility-based resilience² strategies, such as transhumance and seasonal migration, allowing people to cope with a harsh natural environment and diversify their livelihood, have been disrupted by the combined effects of armed conflict and climate-related factors and the indirect harmful impact of restrictive migration-related policies (see Figure 1). For instance, in northern Mali, herders no longer travel long distances with their animals to find grazing land and water,

2 Resilience is defined by the ICRC as ‘the ability of individuals, communities, institutions, and systems to anticipate, absorb, adapt, respond and/or recover from shocks and stressors derived from conflict/violence and hazards without compromising their long-term prospects’. (ICRC, *When rain turns to dust.*)

or to sell livestock in distant markets, due to fearing attacks by armed groups or bandits. Similarly, young men do not go to neighbouring countries to find seasonal work because of insecurity on the road, as well as reluctance to leave families alone in unsafe circumstances. In the Liptako-Gourma triangle between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, transhumant mobility has been redesigned, as pastoralists communities are pushed to take more dangerous or longer routes, or to move towards new areas where they have no social bonds with local communities, thus leading to tensions. In a region with traditionally porous borders, the shift in the last decade towards stricter border-management policies to curb irregular migration and securitise borders has inadvertently contributed to undermining transhumant mobility, be it internal or cross-border, exposing people who depend on it as a coping strategy to protection risks. From a long-term livelihood strategy, mobility has become a short-term survival mechanism. In the most extreme cases, forced displacement has become the main form of mobility.

Figure 1 The intersection of armed conflict, climate risks and mobility



Integrating climate risks into humanitarian responses in conflict settings

In May 2021, the ICRC and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) launched the *Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations* to support and promote greater climate action within the humanitarian sector. The ICRC endorsed the Charter along with three institutional targets:

- to factor climate and environmental risks into programmes
- to reduce the ICRC's greenhouse gas emissions and environmental footprint
- to conduct policy and legal development and influencing to promote the implementation of international humanitarian law in protecting the environment, and to call for greater climate action in places affected by conflict.

In line with these commitments, the ICRC is working to better understand how it can contribute to a collective response to climate risks. These commitments helped shift the institution's approach to climate change, as the recognition of climate risks to people enduring conflict became clearer. It served to push all staff to overcome conceptual silos, consider how the impacts of combined conflict and climate risks may shape the experiences of affected people in exacerbating their vulnerabilities, and try to develop more holistic responses.

In northern Mozambique, for example, the ICRC in collaboration with the local water authorities has improved access to clean water in Montepuez. It helped reinforce and expand the deficient and ageing urban water system and developed a masterplan for further expansion of the network in the future. This helps to ensure that people have access to water during drier periods of the year, as well as to prevent water-related health problems that tend to be correlated with heavy rains and floods. In northern Mali, the ICRC has worked with the National Meteorological Agency to improve access to meteorological information for people living in the conflict-affected areas, and with the National Red Cross, local partners and leaders to help farmers and pastoralists use forecasts to take better decisions. In Syria, as part of its economic security operations and in response to the climate-induced spread of crop diseases such as wheat leaf rust, the ICRC trained staff from the governmental General Organization for Seed Multiplication on disease management strategies and supported its work to produce more adaptive cereal varieties.

These are concrete examples of measures the ICRC can implement to support conflict-affected communities to strengthen their resilience and adaptive capacity in the context of climate change and environmental degradation. They have yielded lessons – that effective programmes take place at the very local level, in collaboration with local authorities, communities and service providers – but they are far from sufficient alone, and an adequate response must go far beyond humanitarian action. Specific research in the Sahel and in the **Middle East** has also helped the ICRC fine-tune its understanding of how risks may interact and trigger displacement, or impact those already displaced, keeping in mind people's individual characteristics, such as their gender, age, or capacity.

An institutional operational framework was adopted in 2023 with a view to supporting more systematic progress towards integrating climate risks into the ICRC's analysis and response to people affected by armed conflict and violence. The framework outlines possible pathways and objectives for climate-risk integration within the ICRC's operations, and provides tools, approaches and technical guidelines to facilitate climate-smart programming. Furthermore, recognising that planning, decision-making and monitoring of climate-risk integration at the ground level are crucial enablers of climate action, ahead of the annual planning exercise for 2024, ICRC delegations were instructed to incorporate climate-risk indicators to assess their progress over time. The idea is for delegations to keep track of whether and to what extent climate-risk information has been integrated into specific programmes.

All this is encouraging but still work in progress. Humanitarian actors such as the ICRC need to devote further thinking on how to enhance protection and assistance for people facing the combined effects of armed conflict and climate risks. More can be learnt from approaches to prevent displacement induced by conflict or disasters, which could help prevent displacement stemming from intersecting risks. At the same time, an exclusive focus on helping people adapt so they can stay at home overlooks the limitations that climate adaptation may have. This is especially the case for people living in conflict areas, where livelihood diversification is often a challenge, and concerns related to access to essential services, shelter, safety and security may contribute to making staying unsustainable. Therefore, humanitarian policies need to recognise that mobility, both internal and cross-border, can be an important coping or even survival strategy for people enduring the combined effects of conflict and climate risks, and as such, it should also be supported. Mobility-related considerations, informed by people's priorities and concerns, need to be better incorporated into the design of adaptation support strategies and approaches, including in countries enduring conflict, and in efforts to achieve interim and durable solutions for IDPs and refugees.

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Climate (im)mobility, gender and conflict: a look inside pastoralist communities in Garissa County, Kenya

Madison Jansen and Madina Yunis Mahat

Garissa County is located in northeast Kenya. It typically has a semi-arid to arid climate, and also grapples with the challenges of climate change: increased temperatures, erratic rainfall patterns and prolonged droughts, **resulting in widespread devastation and the displacement of communities.**

In the heart of Garissa County, **pastoralism is the predominant way of life for 95% of the population.** The livelihoods of these communities depend on the trade of livestock as well as their products like meat, milk and hides. Nomadic or semi-nomadic herding practices are common here, a testament to the resilience of both animals and pastoralist people in the face of the harsh environmental conditions. However, prolonged droughts can lead to livestock losses, presenting an economic challenge to the communities and region at large.

In this article, we explore how climate change (notably severe droughts) impacts pastoralist communities in Garissa County. We aim to unravel the intersecting dynamics of pastoralism, gender, (im)mobility and conflict as they relate to the impacts of climate change, highlighting both the local and global support needed to enable pastoralists to keep flourishing.

Climate change, pastoralism and conflict

Prior to significant climate change, the traditional pastoralist movement consisted of cyclical migrations along established routes. Natural water sources like the Tana River, seasonal rivers, and water pans were pivotal in determining the movement of people and their animals, with seasonal migrations shaping traditional mobility. Recently, traditional patterns have undergone significant changes due to the onset of climate change, alongside urbanisation and the privatisation of land. Pastoralist communities now face the dilemma of either adapting their routes and engaging in fierce competition for water due to heightened droughts and water scarcity, or abandoning pastoralism altogether by selling their livestock – an impractical and upsetting choice for those whose livelihoods have always been rooted in this way of life.

Pastoralist mobility in Garissa County exerts a significant influence on the dynamics and risk of conflict within and between pastoralist communities. One notable 2020 study posits that **just a 1°C temperature increase in areas shared by both farmers and herders escalates the probability of conflict by a substantial 54%.** However, the relationship between climate change, conflict and pastoralism is complex. The Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centres (CGIAR) identifies three distinct pathways through which climate change intertwines with conflict concerning pastoralist communities.

Firstly, as resources like land, water, and pastures dwindle in availability, competition for these assets surges. In their efforts to preserve their livestock, pastoralists resort to heightened and extended

migration in search of these resources. However, these resources may already be claimed by other stakeholders, such as other pastoralists or farmers, setting the stage for conflicts. As precipitation continues to dwindle and become increasingly erratic, the competition for scarce resources may intensify.

Secondly, the theft of livestock, locally called cattle rustling, also serves as a violent trigger for conflict. Such practices have always existed to some extent – traditionally, cattle rustling was a cultural practice, regulated by community elders to replenish livestock, to demonstrate bravery, or to provide a dowry for a bride. But it has evolved into a coping mechanism employed by pastoralist communities in Garissa County, and beyond, to recover their herds after prolonged periods of drought. In the past decade, livestock raiding has occurred more frequently and violently, fuelled by the proliferation of small arms, with the Kenya Livestock Marketing Council calling for a cessation of revenge attacks and the exploration of innovative solutions to curtail this practice.

Thirdly, and as mentioned above, hardships inflicted on livelihoods and food security are additional pathways to conflict, manifesting at the intra-household level. Around 35% of Garissa County's inhabitants face precarious household food security. In pastoralist households and communities, concern and frustration stemming from a loss of livelihood can be a catalyst for elevated rates of gender-based violence within the household.

The ramifications of conflict on pastoralist communities are disastrous. Conflicts can displace farmers from their land, disrupt pastoralists' access to vital resources, and ravage livelihoods by depleting or destroying essential assets. These impacts, however, are not uniformly distributed among the conflict participants, with women and girls disproportionately bearing the brunt of the violence. Nevertheless, amid the various pathways that are exacerbated by climate change, pastoralist communities and other stakeholders utilise a variety of strategies to maintain peace. Pastoralist communities may establish informal agreements with neighbouring farmers to facilitate shared resource access on mutually agreed terms. Secondly, Garissa County has established community-level peace committees, dedicated to mediating disputes and fostering dialogue among different groups to pre-empt conflict escalation.

The changing landscape of pastoralist (im)mobility

Pastoralist mobility in Garissa County is gendered. Men predominantly engage in livestock management and mobility-related decision-making, while women are entrusted with domestic responsibilities encompassing shelter maintenance, food preparation and caring for children and older people. As these communities traverse landscapes, women's social networks are frayed; connections with extended family, friends and neighbours are strained, diminishing the critical support systems that underpin their resilience.

The toll of increased mobility due to climate change impacts women's health. Frequent mobility distances women from healthcare facilities, complicating access to essential sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including maternal healthcare. Healthcare facilities in pastoralist communities are often concentrated in settled areas, necessitating arduous journeys, especially during seasonal

migrations. In addition, the lifestyle of mobility can sometimes lead to nutritional challenges for pregnant women, with limited access to a diverse and balanced diet beyond meat and milk. Poor nutrition during pregnancy especially escalates the risk of maternal complications and adverse birth outcomes.

Frequent mobility also disrupts children's education, with girls often more affected than boys. In pastoralist societies, gender roles stipulate that girls are responsible for domestic chores, such as fetching water, cooking and childcare, while boys are more involved in herding livestock. When families move, girls are tasked with additional domestic responsibilities in new environments, making it challenging for them to attend school regularly. Schools in rural or remote areas, where many pastoralist communities reside, are also far from their temporary settlements. Girls may face longer and more dangerous journeys to reach schools, which can deter parents from sending them to school, especially if there are concerns about safety.

The repercussions of frequent mobility extend to the realm of early marriages for some girls. Faced with limited educational opportunities and traditional gender norms prioritising boys' education, parents may resort to early marriages to secure alliances or resources. In such cases, if families can only afford to educate a select few, boys are favoured, deepening the gender disparity.

It is also critical to address *immobility*. When men leave to accompany the herds, women and families are often left behind for weeks, months, or even longer. The duration of separation is often linked to the changing seasons, the specific pastoralist community, the availability of resources, and the nature of their migratory patterns. In a similar way to regular movement, this immobility means an increased workload for women and girls, also limiting access to education or healthcare. As the climate changes, the longer periods of male absence can leave women, children, and the elderly more vulnerable to conflicts and disputes with neighbouring communities over resources, such as water and grazing land.

The role of CSOs and international agencies

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are instrumental in addressing the interwoven issues of climate change, conflict, gender dynamics and mobility amongst pastoralist communities in Garissa County. However, **research shows that in protracted drought conditions, pastoralists primarily rely on their own community and the expertise of their traditional leaders for support, rather than turning to non-governmental organisations, whether local or foreign.** Thus, the success of any humanitarian or development intervention hinges on working within existing local structures, traditions and practice, which CSOs may already be plugged into.

To work effectively with pastoralists, it's also imperative to acknowledge that programmes for pastoralist communities will differ significantly from those applied to settled populations. While settled communities allow for the establishment of permanent infrastructure such as schools and healthcare centres, pastoralist communities require flexible, adaptable interventions that can pivot with the ever-changing movement patterns of these communities. CSOs can also train individuals within these communities to deliver crucial services like healthcare and education, bridging the gap to these services especially in remote, mobile pastoralist communities.

Moreover, because of the strict gender roles, women are often marginalised when designing programmes, and it is important to ensure their voices are heard before any implementation. When given the chance, women are open about the challenges they face; capturing their experiences is key for more effective and responsive interventions.

CSOs can also play a pivotal role in supporting pastoralist communities in diversifying their income sources. Reducing dependency on livestock is a crucial step towards resilience in the face of environmental uncertainties. For instance, supporting the establishment of small businesses, crafts, or trading enterprises that can be easily adapted and relocated as pastoralists move from one grazing area to another is a practical approach. By encouraging economic diversification, CSOs can help pastoralist communities become less vulnerable to fluctuations in livestock-based income, fostering economic stability and resilience. Of course, **this should be done alongside bolstering climate resilience within the existing traditional systems**, thus safeguarding their longstanding practices without the need for constant reinvention.

One notable example of a CSO making a positive impact within Garissa County is **Pastoralist Girls Initiative (PGI)**. In partnership with **World Jewish Relief**, PGI has undertaken a multifaceted initiative in the Saka Ward pastoralist community. This initiative encompasses the provision of water storage containers, the training of community health volunteers in hygiene promotion, and the construction of water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities in anticipation of the El Nino climatic phenomenon. Through the strategic placement of these facilities within educational institutions and by providing comprehensive training to female community health volunteers on menstrual health management, this intervention effectively tackles several gender-related challenges. Notably, it addresses issues like low school enrolment rates and the unmet need for sexual and reproductive health services that disproportionately impact pastoralist communities in the region.



Focus group discussion with a pastoralist community in Garissa County. © Pastoralist Girls Initiative (PGI).

It is only by working with hyper-local, deeply embedded partners, with established relationships and a bedrock of trust within these communities, that international actors can contribute to lasting success. Such organisations share vital cultural and social connections with the pastoralist communities they aim to support. International actors also have a critical role to play in global coordination efforts, spotlighting the challenges faced by pastoralist communities, raising awareness, support and funding from the global community. This two-pronged approach, focusing on local expertise and global outreach, is pivotal in bolstering support for pastoralists in places like Garissa County.

Conclusion

In sum, this article has explored the nexus between climate (im)mobility, gender dynamics and conflict within the heart of Kenya's Garissa County. It has shown how environmental challenges have reshaped mobility patterns, with women bearing the disproportionate burden from increased workloads to limited access to healthcare and education. The article also has highlighted the relationship between climate change and conflict, discussing the competition for dwindling resources and cattle rustling as triggers. Despite these formidable challenges, pastoralist communities have shown resilience and adaptability, forging innovative solutions to maintain peace. Finally, the critical role of CSOs in supporting pastoralist communities cannot be overstated, as their work to provide support, facilitate dialogue and strengthen these communities is rooted in a deep understanding of local norms, traditions and practices. Flexible, community-driven programmes, with local CSOs playing a pivotal role supported by global partners are key to success. Overall, the challenges faced by pastoralist communities in Garissa County serve as a testament to their resilience while pointing to the pressing need for collective action to ensure a sustainable future for these communities.

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How narratives on climate mobility are contributing to a failure to protect

Jane Linekar

Climate change and migration are each deeply politicised and emotive topics. Combined, they are even more emotive. The image of a tide of climate migrants causing global chaos and insecurity dominates. But this is a misleading narrative, and one which risks causing harm, including the failure to protect both people impacted by climate change and people on the move, and a failure to galvanise effective action to combat climate change impacts.

For years, wildly varying – but consistently enormous – projections have been circulating around the population movements that will be triggered by climate change, suggesting anything from hundreds of millions to billions of ‘climate migrants’ or ‘climate refugees’. The prospect is one of ‘[food shortages, water crises, and catastrophic flooding driven by climate change](#)’ leading to displacement.³ Scarcity of resources may also lead to conflict, which itself triggers displacement. Or displacement can lead to conflict, as tensions between new arrivals and host populations flare. And the headlines persist in 2023: ‘[Oxfam: 216 million climate migrants by 2050](#)’ (the figure was taken from a [Groundswell report](#)); ‘[There could be 1.2 billion climate refugees by 2050](#)’ (the number was sourced from the Institute for Economics and Peace); ‘[We need to prepare for mass climate migration](#)’.

While the scenarios described by experts and scholars are all possibilities, and there are real and very valid concerns about how climate change impacts are going to affect human settlements and migration, the dominant narratives do not consider the likelihood or scope of these scenarios, but rather emphasise the worst case, are selective in the information they highlight, and foster images of global catastrophe. This apocalyptic approach is being taken by a range of stakeholders – some of whom have the best of intentions to achieve climate action and to protect vulnerable populations – with the aim that it will provoke action. The image of hundreds of millions of people on the move is used to trigger fears of instability and insecurity, often purely to attract readers, but also [to prompt action on climate change, and on migration governance](#).

Indeed, it seems from the frequency of the headlines that the numbers are effectively attracting attention and stoking fear, but are they prompting action? And if they are, is it action that will address climate change impacts, reduce the likelihood of conflict, and foster safe migration? In short, is it action to protect?

Stoking fear of climate migration

It might be helpful to reflect on the response so far to fears of mass migration. Fear of large-scale population movements, used for political gain even in countries reliant on migrant labour, has prompted two main policy approaches globally: prevention and deterrence. Fear has led to migration now being widely perceived as a threat, and closely linked to security. Destination countries, often more industrialised countries, have followed a trend of securitising migration and criminalising irregular migration, by increasing surveillance, border controls and detention, alongside addressing the so-called root causes of migration through development interventions to deter people from migrating, while failing to scale up regular migration pathways.

The current securitised approach to migration governance, prompted by fear of mass movements, is to a large extent failing to protect people in need. As of 23 October 2023, the International Organisation

3 See also, for example, the Danish Refugee Council’s [Global Displacement Forecast 2023](#), ‘Changing Climate, Changing Displacement’.

for Migration’s [Missing Migrants project](#) has counted 4,817 deaths, including 958 in the Americas, 2,445 in the Mediterranean, and 1,188 in Africa in 2023. Compare this to 5,321 deaths in 2014, when monitoring began, and it appears that the policies chosen by states have failed to prevent migrant deaths.

The securitised approach is also arguably stoking tensions between communities. The headlines on climate migration seem to be feeding into and amplifying existing narratives that migration is a something to be feared, and that the response is therefore to counter the threat by countering migration, primarily through deterrence. Such narratives of fear of climate migration and climate migrants are likely to lead to more of the same – securitisation, criminalisation – and unlikely to direct us towards improved protection of people on the move, the facilitation of regular migration, or the devotion of more attention to and investment in sustainable climate adaptation.

Transcontinental migration will not be the main climate-related mobility outcome

Let us return to the figures in those headlines and consider how climate change is being instrumentalised in the migration debate, to the detriment of serious attempts to understand the challenges of climate change for migration dynamics and find appropriate ways to address them. The ‘216 million climate migrants by 2050’ is, first, an estimate of the number of internal migrants. Second, it is at the high end of a pessimistic scenario. Presuming that we are heading towards such a scenario, the predicted range of internal migrants is between 125 million and 216 million, with an average of 170 million. The ‘1.2 billion climate refugees by 2050’ refers to the entire populations of 31 countries with low resilience to climate change impacts. It considers that these populations will be ‘contributing to mass population displacement’. Again, this figure is very far from a precise prediction of displacement figures, even less a helpful representation of the kind of displacement.

If the narrative on mass migration is not an accurate reflection of climate migration and displacement, what is? People affected by climate change may move across continents, however, this is likely to occur on a very small scale compared to other kinds of mobility outcomes.⁴

Here we again observe a similar pattern to the current crisis narrative around migration at Europe and North America’s borders. The numbers of people taking irregular pathways to reach Europe and the United States in fact make up a tiny proportion of people on the move, despite popular perceptions to the contrary.

In fact, [rather than cross-border movement, most people moving for climate-related reasons are migrating – and will migrate – internally](#). Perhaps even more important, [most people will not be moving at all](#). This may be because they do not wish to, or because they cannot, or both. Whatever the case, people who are trapped are likely to be among the largest – and most vulnerable – populations impacted by climate change and most in need of assistance.

4 See, for example, [modelling for Africa, which suggests climate impacts will contribute 10% to cross-border migration figures, most of which will be within the region](#).

In short, while it is true that countries and communities are not well prepared for the impacts of climate change on mobility, the current headlines are forcing our attention to the wrong ‘problem’, and to the wrong ‘solutions’.

People impacted by climate change will move in different ways, or not at all

Climate change impacts are likely to contribute to a range of mobility outcomes, including immobility.⁵ The research of the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) in locations in Africa affected by climate-related events found that, predominantly, people have no intention of moving.⁶ Many, particularly those who were working on the land, hold a strong attachment to place. Most participants in MMC’s research considered adaptation strategies as ways of being able to stay. Despite being repeatedly affected by severe weather events, or observing the progressive deterioration of environmental conditions, people were not considering migration – the majority were not thinking about moving away, even from crisis-affected areas. In many places, we found ‘**acquiescent immobility**’, people who did not have the resources or the capacity to move, but who also did not wish to move. But almost a quarter of those we spoke to were people who wanted to move but could not.



People take refuge on roofs following flooding caused by Cyclone Idai in Mozambique. Credit: World Vision

5 For more on the diverse decision-making, outcomes and potential responses to climate-related mobility, see Jane Linekar and Bram Frouws, [Climate change, environmental stressors and mixed migration: Insights and key messages drawn from a decade of MMC research and 4Mi data collection](#).

6 MMC conducted seven case studies as a contribution to the work of the Africa Climate Mobility Initiative. For details on each study as well as the synthesis report, see [Climate and mobility case studies: perceptions, attitudes, and decision-making](#).

For those who had been forced to move for their immediate survival, many expected to return, or had developed a cycle of displacement and return (to take two examples, the fishing community in the city of Beira, Mozambique, which is frequently displaced by storms, or farmers near the town of Chikwawa, Malawi, displaced by storms and flooding). Movement of any kind was most often to local urban areas, or to the country's capital.

Our study followed up with participants who had moved, or whose relatives had moved, to explore outcomes of migration from areas affected by climate change. Results were mixed, with some finding and enjoying new opportunities and integration; others returned, after difficulties making a living or integrating, or sought to move onward.

Climate migration is being used to stoke fear and promote securitisation and so will not result in an effective response

There is no doubt that climate change is impacting – and is likely to further impact – mobility dynamics around the world. However, it is vital to step back from narratives peddling fear in order to understand the full range of those dynamics, how people make decisions around mobility, and the contexts in which those decisions are being made. While numbers can be helpful to try to estimate the scale and scope of an issue, the big numbers we see in the headlines – and the way they are being used – are distracting and likely harmful.

The prevailing response to transcontinental, predominantly South–North migration, is one of prevention and securitisation measures, which are being applied similarly across countries. Intensifying this response will not address the issues raised by climate-related mobility; rather, it risks increasing the vulnerability of people on the move, or who need to move. To respond effectively to climate impacts on lives and livelihoods, responses need to focus on sustainable adaptation strategies. Where people can stay, and want to stay, the response will be about adaptation in place. Where people have to or want to move, it is about formulating a response supporting safe and positive migration outcomes for all. This means working on climate-smart livelihood opportunities and integration, involving migrant communities alongside host populations, and not neglecting the family members who may remain in places of origin. It is likely to mean a lot of work in cities, as climate mobility amplifies urbanisation trends, and climate change impacts on urban populations. And, to an extent, it will also be about encouraging safe and regular cross-border migration.

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Conflict, climate change and displacement in the Somali Region of Ethiopia

Fekadu Adugna Tufa

Until recently, most of the existing studies on displacement or forced migration have tended to neatly distinguish between conflict- and climate-induced displacements. The same was true with media reports, and governmental and non-governmental organisations' interventions. In this flawed approach, climate-induced displacements – especially those that are slow-onset (e.g. drought-related displacements) – have attracted little attention on the part of researchers, donors and government actors. This might be because most attention and resources go to the displacements induced by violent conflicts. More importantly, there has been less emphasis on how the impacts of the two reinforce each other in affecting the victims.

In this article, I will highlight the approaches to displacement in the face of conflict and climate change, and the impact of climate change on communities affected by displacement. This contribution is based on my work conducted in the Somali National Regional State of Ethiopia between 2021 and 2023 for the [Protracted Displacement Economies](#) project.

Conflict, climate change and displacements in the Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa has been experiencing extensive displacement due to the severe impact of both slow- and rapid-onset climate change and protracted conflict. In 2023, it hosted [over 16.8 million people](#) displaced due to conflict, drought and flooding. Out of this, 12.2 million are internally displaced persons (IDPs), while 4.6 million are refugees and asylum seekers. Between 2021 and early 2023 alone, a historic drought that hit the region displaced 2.3 million people from southern and southeastern [Ethiopia, Somalia and Northern Kenya](#).

Ethiopia, with a population of over 120 million, is among the most affected countries in the Horn of Africa. In the last several years, it has been facing unprecedented levels of displacement due to conflict and drought. [As of June 2023](#), the country has registered 4.4 million IDPs, who are hosted in numerous camps and camp-like environments. Additionally, the country also hosts [970,299 refugees](#) and asylum seekers from neighbouring South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan.

The Somali National Regional State of Ethiopia hosts 102,000 IDPs in protracted displacement, primarily displaced due to internal conflict. [According to a recent assessment](#) (limited to only accessible areas), the regional state hosts 542,807 climate-affected IDPs (the regional state claims the number is more than double) caused by the recent drought. In addition, the regional state hosts close to 300,000 refugees displaced due to conflicts in neighbouring Somalia. Of course, some of these refugees might be displaced due to the recurrent drought in Somalia. However, they refrain from registering themselves as 'climate change refugees' since this would not be an acceptable reason for resettlement in a third country.

Flooding has become an emerging but potentially devastating extreme climate shock in a region recurrently hit by drought. When rain came after three consecutive years of drought in May 2023, then again in October and November of the same year, southeastern Ethiopia, Somalia and northern Kenya – areas that had suffered from drought – were again hit by ‘unprecedented floods’. In November 2023, Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya reported that millions were displaced due to flooding.

Refugee and IDP governance in Ethiopia

Refugees and IDPs are dealt with differently by the displacement governance. Refugee management is considered a mandate of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the Refugee and Returnees Service (RRS), a national institute. These two agencies manage refugee camps, but refugees receive monthly rations or cash, though quite insufficient, from the World Food Programme. Partner organisations such as international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other UN agencies might participate in other aspects of refugee life (e.g. education, health and gender) with permission from the RRS and UNHCR.

By contrast, there is confusion about who is mandated to care for IDPs. Officially, the Disaster Risk Management Commission, a government department, should be in charge. However, due to a lack of resources and sufficient expertise, the office’s role is played by partner humanitarian organisations (UN agencies and NGOs) that support IDPs in various sectors (e.g. health and education), thereby leading to confusion and overlapping roles with parallel ministries.

Within the IDP population, those displaced due to conflict and those displaced due to climate change are considered to be two separate categories, and they receive quite dissimilar attention and treatment. Those displaced due to conflict are hosted in big camps with the support of several UN agencies and international and local NGOs. On the other hand, those displaced primarily due to climate shocks are considered temporary, often forced to stay within their district, and are expected to return soon to their villages of origin. As a result, most of them have not been reached by humanitarian organisations. Such approaches are problematic for two reasons.

First, climate-related displacement has become so recurrent that new displacements take place before the old ones are solved. For instance, in April 2023 hundreds of thousands of people were displaced due to drought in the Somali Region, Somalia and northern Kenya. In the following months, from May to November, tens of thousands more were displaced due to floods. In other words, another round of displacement came before the previous one was given a ‘durable solution’. Return is often taken as a durable solution as it is less complicated and cheaper than relocation and local integration. Thus, climate-induced displacement is no longer a temporary and periodic problem that can be treated separately (or less seriously) than other displacements. Policymakers and practitioners need to take this into consideration when they plan for climate displacement.

Second, in a situation where inhabitants’ livelihoods depend on livestock, such as in southern and southeastern Ethiopia, Somalia and northern Kenya, climate shock victims have lost all or most of their

assets due to drought or flood. In the Somali Region, even those who are not registered as IDPs have also lost almost everything, which, in other words, means they are displaced from their livelihood, and not just from their home. There have been ‘three consecutive below-average rainy seasons’ in the Somali Region, exacerbating already dire conditions for **over 50% of the population**. This has caused the death of over 1.4 million heads of livestock in the Somali Region and **over 2.3 million in neighbouring Oromia**. In other words, returning to the place of origin (and to livelihoods) in the short term, after years of drought and flood, might not be feasible. Thus, the conventional approach to climate-induced displacement – namely the physical displacement alone – needs to be reconsidered to include factors such as vulnerability, lack of access to nutrition, healthcare, education and protection.

The impact of climate shocks on coping with displacement

In the Horn of Africa region, climate change and conflict reinforce each other in exacerbating the vulnerability of the populations. Besides being a major factor for displacement, climate change affects the capacity of people to cope with the situation of protracted displacement. It is with this consideration that I discuss below the impact of the extreme climate shocks on the displaced communities’ capacity and agency to cope with the situation of displacement, and the local communities’ capacity to support them.

Let me provide three empirical examples. First, I spent April 2022 in Kebribeyah, a district that has been hosting refugees from Somalia since 1990, and is also home to returnees and IDPs. At the moment, many people have lost most of their livestock to drought. Local economic activities such as farming and construction have been stopped due to a shortage of water. Refugees get more consistent international support. Nevertheless, a closer look at their livelihoods reveals that their survival very much depends on engagement in wage labour in the areas of construction and farming, and small businesses. Despite the fact that refugees do not have the legal right to work in Ethiopia, among the Somali no one cares as long as they manage to get the job. At the climax of drought season, petty businesses were also extremely weakened as the displacement-affected communities’ purchasing power had deteriorated. The situation in the refugee camp was explained by what one of my informants called *taba’an* – a time of crisis. Their relatives, who used to support them, and with whom they used to engage in sharecropping, migrated from the rural areas and overcrowded their small hut, sharing their already scarce resources (e.g. food and water). This shows the extent to which climate change can complicate the life of refugees who have been displaced due to decades-old conflict.

Second, in July 2023 I spent a few weeks in the Dollo Ado refugee camps. During the drought, Dollo Ado coped better than other parts of the region due to its location between two major rivers (Genale and Dawa), and thanks to an irrigation system built by the IKEA Foundation and the refugees’ own experience with irrigation agriculture before their displacement. However, in the summer of 2023, a flood destroyed vegetable farms and ruined the already fragile economy of the displacement-affected people. Many of them were unlikely to be able to return to farming as they could not purchase seeds and other agricultural inputs for another round of planting after they had lost everything to the flood.

Finally, towards the end of July 2023, I visited an IDP resettlement site. This was one of the sites where the Somali Regional government resettled conflict-affected IDPs who had spent several years in a camp.

The resettlement took place smoothly, following consultation with the local communities who belong to the same clan as the IDPs. However, four years after resettling there, the former IDPs could not engage in any production activities – no agriculture or livestock – due to drought. Thus, climate change reinforces the vulnerability of the displaced communities and complicates institutional responses to displacement. Yet, policymakers and practitioners do not include the possible impacts of climate change in their planning. A combination of conflict, drought and floods prolongs the vulnerability of the displacement-affected communities.



Somali family in dangerous river crossing during flash flooding in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia. © Stanley Dullea/Shutterstock

Conclusion

In this short piece, I emphasised the mistaken understanding about the role of climate change in displacing as well as in exacerbating the vulnerability of people displaced mainly by conflict. Among the major misunderstandings are: disregard for the fluidity of the boundary between conflict-induced and climate-induced displacement for the vulnerable population, and considering climate-induced displacement as a temporary and less serious problem than conflict-induced displacement. This suggests two things: on the one hand, climate-induced displacements are becoming more dynamic and more complex through time; on the other hand, there seems to exist static perceptions (and a simplification) of climate-change-related displacement on the part of policymakers and other actors. Donors, policymakers and practitioners need to understand the complex effects of climate change on the people already suffering from multiple problems. Interventions need to have a holistic approach where targeting should be based on the degree of vulnerability rather than on conventional, simplistic categorisations.

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The climate, displacement and conflict nexus: a snippet on its impacts on livelihoods in East Africa

Aloysious Tumusiime

The complex interactions between climate change, displacement and conflict are further exacerbated by the violation of and infringement upon access to basic human rights and needs. Whereas other socioeconomic and geopolitical contributors to such infringements exist, climate change aggravates other underlying causes through increased natural disaster occurrence, food and water scarcity, and livelihood disruption. The Monitor reported that **8 out of 10 households were food insecure, and about 900 people** have died from hunger associated with drought in northeastern Uganda's Karamoja region. This has exacerbated vulnerabilities amongst marginalised communities, who must **constantly adapt to ever-changing** life experiences caused by either overlapping or discrete climate change, displacement and conflict-related issues. Such an uncertain and challenging way of life calls for a collective and global discourse on climate change and how respecting human rights can contribute to a more comprehensive and compassionate approach to protecting environmental crisis victims' rights. This article examines the nuanced relationship between climate change, displacement and conflict, focusing on Uganda and Kenya. The responsibilities of various stakeholders will be identified in preventing and mitigating environmental disasters, minimising damages, and assisting victims.

The East African context

Most of the impacts of climate change have been faced by the Global South, comprising people experiencing high poverty levels due to natural disasters such as droughts, floods and cyclones. These are all linked to anthropogenic climate change through inconsiderate and unsustainable practices like excessive consumption and production. With the East and Horn of Africa undergoing a **sixth consecutive drought**, forced migration and displacement have increased leaving millions displaced, especially among pastoralist tribes. Over one million people have been displaced by drought conditions, thought to be the worst in at least 40 years. Due to climate change effects, **86 million people** are projected to be displaced within their own countries in Africa by 2050. Amid all this, the least-affected by climate change are the 'developed' countries, which double as significant contributors to pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, with about **79% of historical carbon emissions**.

The climate–conflict nexus is reflected in increased migrations in search of better land for settlement, water, food and animal pasture, especially among pastoralist tribes in Uganda and Kenya. As a result, climate victims are exposed to threats to their lives and property due to violent attacks and exchanges between the displaced and host communities. **According to a 2022 report**, migration and displacement in the Amudat district in Uganda are perceived as a climate change adaptation strategy, primarily in

response to overcoming drought hardships. Karamoja is said to have high poverty levels, and **over 62% of the land** is marked for exploration and mining by both the government and the private sector. The remaining land is insufficient for pastoral activity, triggering land grabbing and, thus, potential conflict.

Therefore, climate change isn't the sole contributor to conflict due to many other factors embedded within distinctive local contexts. For example, Karamoja is known for cattle raiding, an aggressive tactic to **obtain more cattle for livelihoods**, but also because cattle represent social value. However, the current climate change-related impacts have widened resource scarcity through famine and the death of livestock. Such disasters have increased the pressure on livelihoods and food security, creating the potential for conflict. As a result, some Karamojongs have extended attacks to farming communities in western and eastern Uganda, in the quest for not only water and pasture but also cultivators' herds, leading to the death of people and engendering mistrust.

The rainy season in northern Kenya is currently erratic and unpredictable, increasing food insecurity due to crops experiencing drought stress, a relatively new challenge that communities are forced to adapt to. For pastoralists like the **Turkanas, who heavily depend on livestock** that need rain-fed pastures and water, they have resorted to migration as a way of widening their territories to both unused lands and neighbouring communities, creating resource competition with host communities. Within Samburu, Marsabit and Turkana counties, conflicts have intensified as they attack each other and other farming communities to gain control over land for settlement, agriculture, water and pasture during drought conditions. There have been increased mortality rates, injuries, and loss of property and livestock. Kenyan herders are estimated to have lost **at least 2.5 million cattle between 2020 and 2022**, lowering their incomes and increasing the motivation to move in search of better pastures and land for grazing. These occurrences also worsen the psychological welfare of communities through grief, trauma and prolonged insecurity. Although such vulnerable communities endure these adversities, exposure to such direct and indirect risks reduces their adaptability to climate change. It also increases poverty and suffering levels, deepening the complexities within the climate, displacement and conflict nexus.

As observed, climate change worsens livelihood situations by exacerbating the resource scarcity of marginalised communities, which encourages them to migrate in search of other survival means. Within the process, mobility and settlement patterns are altered, causing displacement due to pressure on resources, which increases the risks of conflict through theft and land grabbing, among other things. The violence or conflict fundamentally causes further displacement directly through the insecurity it creates in people's lives and indirectly through the uncertainties created around social networks and economic opportunities. However, circumstances differ across contexts; thus, it is equally vital to understand the specific circumstances under which climate relates to displacement and conflict to create successful mitigation measures.

Exploring deeper, at the household level, there are links between climate change and violence. With about **81% of the Ugandan population dependent on rainfed agriculture, it is no surprise that the sector contributes 40% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP)**. Seasonal changes, with prolonged droughts and floods in many places in Uganda, therefore, bring alterations in agricultural patterns. For

example, there was a long dry season between May and July in 2022, which is usually the wet season, bringing about crop failures. This led to a reduced food supply, resulting in high food prices, with most prices doubling. Families that depended on subsistence farming could hardly afford to purchase food, exposing them to malnutrition and diseases. For heads of families, typically fathers, there was added insecurity – traditionally, the role of men is to provide for the family, and the inability to meet those needs sometimes creates conflicts. In Kenya, dwindling water sources means **women must travel long distances** to collect water for domestic work. Such journeys increase their exposure to sexual assault while travelling, and intimate partner violence at home, if they refuse to engage in sexual intercourse following the exhausting journey.

Call to action

There have been efforts to mainstream human mobility within national and regional climate change frameworks, especially within the **Kampala Declaration on Migration, Environment and Climate Change**. This is designed to be a resilient, just and sustainable initiative to mitigate conflicts that arise from climate-induced displacement. Such interventions, however, come with ill-conceived land use and institutional changes; they can effect a reduction in self-reliance amongst citizens as they lose their land and environmental resources and have to resort to fragmentation and other environmentally unsustainable practices. Despite these adaptation measures, their implementation also remains challenging as smallholder groups and families cannot adopt them due to skills and knowledge gaps; constantly changing prices of crops and adaptation mechanisms like insurance and irrigation systems; and finally, general poverty and a lack of access to financial support.

Ultimately, more holistic approaches need to be adopted to protect the dignity and improve the welfare standard of those affected by climate change through the following:

1. As governments respond to climate adaptation through land-use systems, a **bottom-up approach** should be used to enable community involvement so that their needs are prioritised from the onset. When instead they are excluded, it threatens internal mobility and their access to previously owned and utilised resources like land, water and pasture, especially for pastoral groups. The realisation of climate-induced displacements should, therefore, call for reflections and agency especially for people in positions of influence. They should look into the possible effects of violence and its ability to alter the livelihood and safety of the people at risk as a motivation for crafting sustainable solutions.
2. Governments and humanitarian organisations should offer technical and risk-mitigation support services like drought-resistant crops, financial access through loans and emergency relief. These actions can be backed up by evidence-based research to disseminate relevant information on traditional and modern adaptation measures to guide current and future climate resilience programmes. This will reduce the pressure that exacerbates conflicts within families and migrating communities.
3. Advocacy programmes that encourage more compassion towards those affected by climate change should be adopted within climate change sensitisation programmes. This will reduce the likelihood of hatred and bias attached to climate-induced displaced people amongst host communities, which spawn conflicts.

4. Countries should prioritise climate financing to vulnerable communities, especially those countries with a greater contribution towards climate change. This will ensure timely response and design of sustainable solutions for affected communities through digital, green and circular-economy initiatives that are environmentally friendly. A reliable investment will also enable people to engage in sustainable and climate-friendly ventures to meet their daily needs. The absence of reliable funding mechanisms will leave cash-strapped countries unable to transition to best practices that bring renewal to those affected by climate change.
5. There is a need for continuous audits of major carbon-emission contributors' efforts in securing funds for global climate financing. This will ensure that major carbon emitters shoulder their responsibility in securing and contributing funding and prevent them from hiding behind other stakeholders' contributions. It will also diversify sources of funds from governments, the private sector and philanthropists supporting climate adaptation, protection and resilience programmes.
6. Specific contributions made by various stakeholders should openly be shared in reports as mandated by the **Paris Agreement**. This would shed light on those major carbon emitters who take advantage of the support of other stakeholders' contributions. Global carbon emission standards, procedures and principles should be set with better implementation policies to ensure adherence. This will create momentum for corporate social responsibility, especially climate-friendly approaches, in turn leading to harmonious but productive competition to attain the set standards.



Installing solar panels on a Karamoja house, Uganda. © Joerg Boethling/Alamy

As observed, there is a disparity in vulnerability amongst countries regarding readiness and adaptation to climate change. Climate change remains a direct trigger for displacement and conflict within vulnerable areas, as seen in some parts of Kenya and Uganda, which not only calls for an even burden sharing of consequences but also for those that pollute the most to take responsibility and care for the marginalised. For the above suggestions to be successful, the ethical and moral standards and call

for humanity, respect and dignity for every human being should remain a priority. The existence of fixed guidelines does not overrule or discourage the presence of voluntary protection and support opportunities for those affected by climate change. From an individual level, we all have a moral obligation to rise against climate change-induced injustices towards vulnerable communities.

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Litigating the climate crisis: is the international human rights system the answer to the climate emergency?

Helena O'Mahony

Climate change is a human rights emergency. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events and record temperatures are changing the way in which we inhabit the earth, placing the lives and livelihoods of millions at risk. Often the impacts of climate change on our human rights will not be spectacular or newsworthy. They will be slow, cumulative and complex.

Conflict and displacement represent two such issues: complex, gradual and interlinked, climate-related conflict and displacement will impact communities across the world and affect the enjoyment of a number of basic human rights. Despite this, the climate crisis is not often understood as a human rights issue and, more importantly, the international human rights system remains largely unengaged on climate issues.

This article explores litigation as an effective mechanism to mobilise the international human rights system in the fight against climate change. Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948, the international community has worked towards creating a robust system of accountability, creating state obligations to respect, protect and fulfil our civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The greatest challenge for environmental activists is accountability: how do we obligate states to adhere to their environmental commitments? As the day-to-day implications of climate change are felt more acutely by communities across the world, the need for state accountability becomes more pressing. Does the international human rights system provide a solution to this? And if so, how do we mobilise it?

This article is not a critical analysis of the efficacy of the international human rights system – rather, it is a call to use it. The international human rights system has the potential to create a robust accountability mechanism for state-led climate action, and litigating is the most powerful way to use it.

Conflict and displacement

A 2018 study by the World Bank estimated that, by 2050, nearly 3% of the population (around 143 million people) in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America could be displaced due to climate change. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimates that ‘some 400 million indigenous people face threats’ to their individual and collective rights due to climate displacement. Increasingly, we are seeing how climate change can drive or exacerbate conflict. Water shortages and resource scarcity can drive conflict between communities. Harsh weather conditions and even rising temperatures have been demonstrated to increase the likelihood of violent conflict. A recent UNHCR report noted that ‘95% of all conflict displacements in 2020 occurred in countries vulnerable or highly vulnerable to climate change’. It is worth noting that conflict and displacement are inextricably linked in the context of climate – one can cause the other. For example, a 2021 study demonstrated how climate shocks can trigger inter-group conflict between farmers and herders in Africa whose migration patterns have been disturbed by changing weather patterns.

These statistics demonstrate the complexity and gravity of climate-related conflict and displacement. The implications for communities are daunting, but these issues do in some ways provide an opportunity: to green up the human rights system.

International human rights law

The international human rights system is primarily founded on three key documents: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which are supplemented by subject-specific conventions on particular issues, such as women’s rights, rights of indigenous people and refugee law.

State obligations under international human rights law fall into three broad categories:

1. The duty to **respect** human rights, which creates a negative obligation on states not to interfere with the enjoyment of human rights.
2. The duty to **protect** human rights, a positive obligation to protect citizens against rights violations by third parties.
3. The duty to **fulfil** human rights, a positive obligation to ensure full and free realisation of rights for all citizens.

There are two types of human rights-monitoring systems within the UN: treaty-based bodies and charter-based bodies. The 10 treaty-based bodies monitor implementation of their respective treaties and hear submissions from citizens who believe their rights have been violated (for example, the Human Rights Committee monitors implementation and hears cases related to violations of the ICCPR).

Climate change as a human rights issue

The relationship between climate and human rights hasn't been straightforward and, in fact, is a relatively new concept.

In 2005, a representative group of the Inuit people asked the Inter-American Human Rights Commission to hear a claim against the United States that global warming was having a direct impact on their human rights and culture. The Commission declined to hear the case, but the claim sparked a conversation around the links between climate change and human rights. This conversation continued, and in 2007, the Malé Declaration became the first intergovernmental statement to recognise the impacts of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights. In 2010, state parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change agreed in Cancun that 'parties should, in all climate change related actions, fully respect human rights'. In 2022, the UN General Assembly recognised the international right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

But the relationship between climate change and human rights is much more complex than simply a right to a healthy environment. It goes to the very heart of human rights enjoyment. Indeed, recently, climate justice has highlighted the inequality and intersectionality of climate impacts across different populations. It is now widely recognised that climate change will disproportionately affect countries in the Global South, as demonstrated by the Loss and Damage Fund announced at COP27. We also see examples across the world of climate change disproportionately affecting minority groups: for example, studies have shown that LGBTQ+ people are often denied access to relief and humanitarian assistance during climate disasters.

International human rights litigation: mobilising the system

Climate litigation is beginning to look towards human rights law as a way of demanding climate justice. Litigation is, in my opinion, the most effective mechanism to operationalise the human rights system in the fight against climate change. Progress in the international courts is slow, but recent case law seems to demonstrate a shift in opinion: it is becoming clear that the international human rights system has a pivotal role to play in climate action.

In recent years, climate litigation has attempted to establish state obligations under human rights law related to climate action. In 2019, the Dutch Supreme Court upheld a decision in *Urgenda Foundation v Netherlands*, finding the Dutch government had violated articles 2 (right to life) and 8 (right to respect for private, family and home life) of the European Convention on Human Rights by failing to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This inspired further cases in various jurisdictions, for example in South Korea, Pakistan and Brazil, all claiming that government climate policies were violating obligations under human rights law.

This approach had limited application in international law, until the Human Rights Committee decision of *Teitiota v New Zealand* in 2020, which became the first human rights treaty body decision directly addressing the human rights impacts of climate change. The case involved an asylum claim by a native

of Kiribati, who was forced to leave his home due to rising sea levels and violent conflict erupting over scarce resources. The claim was unsuccessful, but it opened the doors: the UN Human Rights Committee for the first time recognised that climate policies are subject to the existing obligations of international human rights law.

The Teitiota case set the scene for the case of *Daniel Billy et al. v Australia*, which represents a turning point in international human rights litigation. This was a submission to the UN Human Rights Committee by a group of Torres Strait islanders, claiming their human rights had been violated by Australia's failure to adopt appropriate adaptation and mitigation efforts against the impacts of climate change.

The Torres Strait Islands are an archipelago of small, low-lying islands sitting to the north of Queensland, Australia; they fall under Australian federal authority and are home to a majority of Torres Strait Islander indigenous populations. The islands are particularly vulnerable to climate change. In recent years, the islands have been subject to increased flooding and extreme weather events, loss of agricultural land and rising sea levels, which have had direct harmful consequences on the islanders' livelihoods, food systems and traditional way of life. In one instance of particularly extensive flooding, an ancestral graveyard was disturbed, leaving remains scattered across the island.

The claimants argued that Australia had 'violated its duty to avert devastating and future irreversible impacts on rights protected by the [ICCPR], including impacts caused by existing greenhouse gas emissions'. The Human Rights Committee considered Australia's human rights obligations in line with the [Paris Agreement](#), and found that the claimants' rights under ICCPR articles 17 (right to privacy, family and home life free from unlawful interference) and 27 (right of minority groups to enjoy their culture) had been violated.



Torres Strait Islanders gather outside Parliament House on the opening of COP27. Credit: Leo Bild/Flickr

The Daniel Billy case is a landmark decision, for three key reasons:

1. It is the first time that an international tribunal has found a country has violated human rights law through inadequate climate policy.
2. It is the first time a state has been found responsible for its greenhouse gas emissions under international human rights law.
3. It is the first time that an indigenous community's right to culture has been found to be violated by inadequate climate policy.

The case marks a turning point in international human rights law, as the system begins to adapt and respond to the human rights impact of climate change. It demonstrates a shift in judicial receptiveness to climate litigation, and a key development in overcoming common obstacles in climate cases, such as causation and attribution. Climate change is no longer an 'act of God' under international law: it is a culpable violation of state obligations.

But we need more cases. Both successful and unsuccessful cases can create a precedent, opening the doors for litigants to have their cases heard. Successful litigation can have a number of useful outcomes, including effective remedies such as compensation or adaptation measures for victims to protect their livelihoods from the impacts of climate change. Litigation can also leverage international pressure to force governments into action. In the case of Daniel Billy, before the decision was even published by the Human Rights Committee, the Australian government committed AU\$25 million to the Torres Strait Islands for urgent adaptation measures, amid increasing pressure to respond.

Beyond this, treaty body decisions are an effective change mechanism to reinterpret human rights obligations in the context of climate. The Daniel Billy case is a starting point, but further clarity is needed. The specificity of this case (namely the fact that the claimants are indigenous, and the state party is a country with notably high emissions) means it is difficult to know how it would be interpreted and applied in different scenarios.

As climate-related conflict and displacement worsens, international human rights law and its institutions will need to adapt and respond. The case of Daniel Billy represents an opportunity: the international human rights system has the capacity to create one of the most powerful enforcement mechanisms to drive government response to the climate crisis. And while the impact of climate change on human rights globally is daunting, it does present an opportunity. International human rights law has played a pivotal role in global peace, justice and security since 1948. Going green will be its greatest challenge.

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Anticipatory action to build displaced populations' resilience at the intersection of climate change, conflict and displacement

Evan Easton-Calabria, Adeline Siffert, Joanna Moore and Eddie Jjemba

Most of the world's forcibly displaced people live in fragile and conflict-affected countries, which are among the least able to adapt to climate change. Anticipatory action can better prepare displaced and other vulnerable populations for climate shocks in fragile and conflict contexts and reduce the humanitarian impacts. However, this approach is currently underfunded. Climate finance has a key role to play in addressing the needs of displaced and conflict-affected populations in advance of climate shocks including through anticipatory action and enhancing resilience. This agenda is all the more important given the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General's call for early-warning systems to protect every person globally within five years through the [Early Warnings for All initiative](#), which aims to ultimately link early warning to early action.

Scaling up a pre-emptive approach to crises

Anticipatory action (AA) is an important resilience-building and adaptation tool, which remains underdeveloped. It has the potential to be used by humanitarian and development actors more widely to minimise crisis cycles and build resilience and adaptive capacities, particularly in fragile and conflict contexts.

Anticipatory action has been presented as an important form of humanitarian action to pre-emptively and proactively mitigate the risk of climate hazards leading to disasters. AA interventions generally include:

- a pre-agreed trigger for action using forecast data, often in tandem with triggers based on population needs (e.g. acute malnutrition), including those identified from the past impacts of hazards;
- pre-arranged finance to be released upon activation of the trigger;
- a set of actions to mitigate impacts of the projected shock.

International actors – including the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the UN, and the Start Network – have currently implemented AA pilots in 70 countries worldwide. These include countries affected by conflict and fragility, such as Somalia and South Sudan. Of the 13 AA pilots facilitated by the [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(UN OCHA\)](#), for example, [seven are in countries on the World Bank's list of conflict-affected situations and one on its list of fragile situations](#).

AA for climate shocks in conflict contexts

While there is a growing body of evidence on AA in conflict settings, such as a significant body of work on Somalia,⁷ much of this has emerged as conflict erupted during interventions rather than AA programming being specifically designed to take conflict conditions into account. In Ethiopia, for example, a 2021 OCHA AA pilot to mitigate the impacts of drought included the Afar region, which experienced conflict that temporarily halted the disbursement of assistance. Research that does exist exploring the impact of conflict on anticipatory action or on populations receiving AA has found that (unsurprisingly) it can significantly affect AA outcomes. In a study on the role of AA in complex crises, conflict was mentioned by many participants as having both direct and indirect impacts on their lives and livelihoods, such as inflation due to war in other parts of the country or even the world. This in turn reduced the benefit that cash transfers in advance of a drought were able to have, as funds intended to cover food or livestock feed did not stretch as far as they would have without inflation.⁸

Ongoing research from the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre seeks to identify the interactions between climate hazards and conflict. For example, an [interactive story map](#) by the Climate Centre mapped out the evolution and impacts of cyclones Idai and Kenneth in Mozambique and conflict on internally displaced people (IDPs), concluding that:

Cyclone Kenneth impacted the dynamics of conflict in Cabo Delgado in 2019–2022, including through the displacement of people, patterns of resettlement in high-risk flood zones, and economic dislocation. Subsequently, the number of IDP locations in the southern areas increased rapidly, and with it the number of vulnerable people exposed to flooding and future cyclone impacts in the south-east of the province.

These and other examples illustrate the need to consider, if not directly address, multiple shocks in AA. This has led to the creation, for example, of an [Anticipatory Action in Conflict Practitioners' Group hosted by the Anticipation Hub](#), which brings together practitioners and researchers working on designing effective AA to reach vulnerable populations in conflict settings. Relatedly, [other work has sought to spell out an agenda for implementing AA in conflict settings, premised on the question:](#)

If [AA] can help save lives and livelihoods when anticipated natural hazards strike in settings that are not affected by violent conflict, how many more people could be saved if [AA] was also used to inform humanitarian responses to natural hazards in contexts affected by conflict – or in response to the impacts of conflict itself?

7 See for example: Levine, S., Humphrey, A., Weingärtner, L., and Sheikh, M. A. (2021) [Understanding the role of anticipatory action in Somalia](#); Feeny, E. (2017) [From early warning to early action in Somalia: what can we learn to support early action to mitigate humanitarian crises?](#); and Gettliffe, E. (2021) [UN OCHA anticipatory action: lessons from the 2020 Somalia pilot](#).

8 Easton-Calabria, E., Ahmed, A., Mohamed, D., and Singh, A. (2023) [Anticipatory action in complex crises: lessons from Ethiopia](#). Boston: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University (<https://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/anticipatory-action-ethiopia/>).

This question is a valuable one in and of itself. It also raises the prospect of further supporting conflict-affected populations, including displaced people, through AA.

AA for displaced people

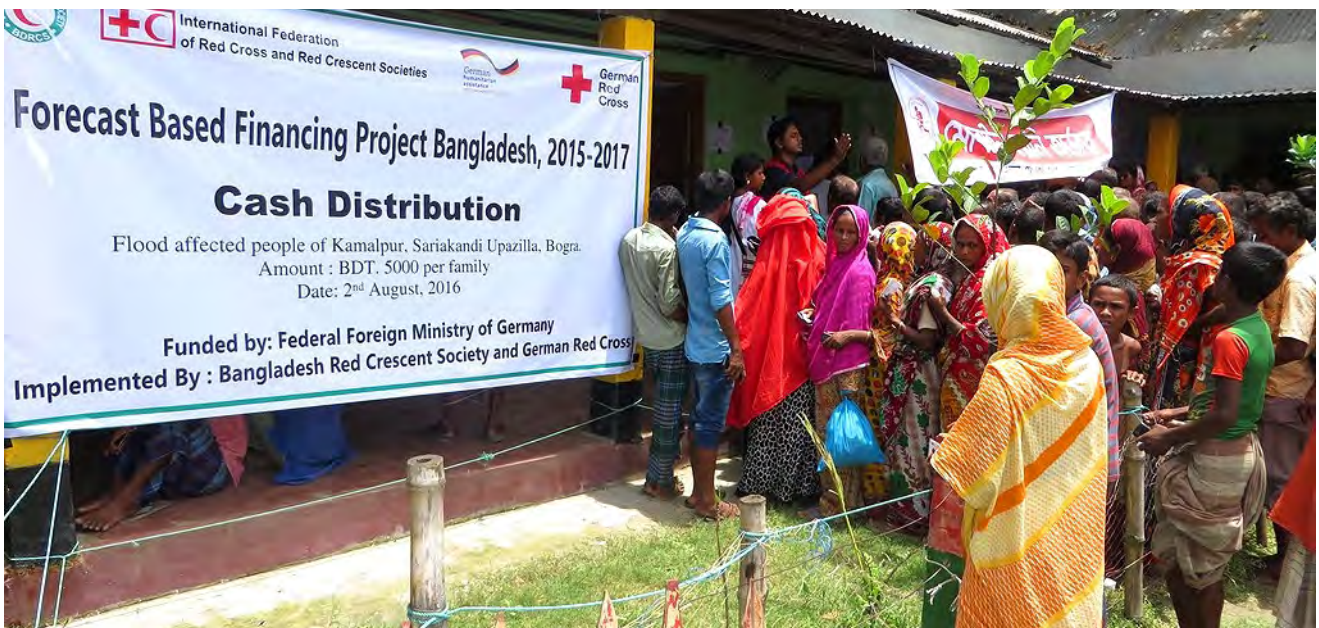
To date, few AA initiatives have focused explicitly on people who have already been displaced. This misses crucially needed opportunities for identifying and reaching people highly vulnerable to extreme weather events and the broader impacts of climate change. One of many important areas of value regarding AA for displaced people is the potential it holds to minimise the risk of additional displacement. Many camps and informal settlements are in hazard-prone areas, which increases the risk of people being displaced again. Indeed, *some research estimates that people may be just as likely to migrate to environmentally vulnerable areas due to poverty or marginalisation as they are to move away from them.* Supporting displaced people to preserve assets and prepare in advance of climate-related disasters may mean the difference between adapting in situ or being forced yet again to move onwards.

However, much of current refugee response is essentially crisis response, focused on attending to the immediate needs of people post-displacement. Ongoing calls to address the so-called ‘humanitarian–development–peace nexus’ illustrate both a need and an appetite for refugee assistance to move beyond an emergency mindset, to support refugees to build self-reliance and resilience, to create or recreate livelihoods in displacement and to exercise greater autonomy from the outset of displacement. Given that many AA interventions seek to assist populations in building resilience and preserving livelihoods, there is much for refugee assistance to explore in this domain, alongside learning from other AA programming focusing on relevant issues such as public health and food security.

While scarce, an emerging body of evidence and practice on AA for displaced people shares good examples and key considerations for wider application. *Evidence on early warning and early action for refugees in Syria and Bangladesh* illustrates how refugee and IDP camps can be effective sites of early and anticipatory action, due in part to existing humanitarian responses and coordination systems, which in some cases include engagement with national and local disaster management actors. In Bangladesh, for example, the country’s Cyclone Preparedness Programme was expanded to refugees, which has enabled greater early warning and early action in camps in Cox’s Bazar. Early actions included the evacuation and transportation of people with their assets and livestock to shelters in safer areas of camps. The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society champions early action and has established *early action protocols that provide plans for anticipatory action to act in advance of hazards like cyclones*, with support from the German Red Cross, the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre and others.

At the same time, much remains to be considered and there is a need for greater piloting of AA for displaced populations. For example, the diversity of these populations – ranging from IDPs to legally recognised refugees to those who have crossed international borders but have either not sought or do not meet formal legal thresholds for refugee status – should impact the design of AA. It may be easier to implement AA for refugees or IDPs living in formal camps and settlements; however, it should also be undertaken for undocumented forcibly displaced people living in urban areas alongside national host

communities. Employing area-based approaches, wherein assistance is provided in areas known to hold high concentrations of forcibly displaced people as well as host populations, is one way that anticipatory action could be implemented to ensure that displaced people are not excluded from assistance at a time when they may need it most.



Forecast-based financing mechanisms run by the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, 2016.
© Olaf Neussner/German Red Cross

The timescale of displacement is a further consideration for AA programming, as recently displaced people may have different needs and live in different environments than those in protracted displacement. Recently displaced people may be confined to camps or reside in informal settlements close to country borders; due to short-term or inadequate shelter, they may be at greater risk of exposure to climate hazards than people who have been displaced for longer. Yet even in protracted displacement, encamped populations often live in highly hazard-prone areas of their host country and may in fact lack durable shelter due to host country regulations. These and other characteristics of displacement illustrate the additional complexities that displacement brings to the implementation of AA – and the value that AA may bring to displaced people.

Increasing finance and efforts for AA for displaced people, particularly in fragile and conflict contexts

AA for displaced people, and in fragile and conflict contexts more broadly, is currently impeded by large financing gaps in fragile contexts, including in major refugee-hosting countries. Fragile and conflict-affected contexts are only receiving a fraction of the support that is needed, leaving displaced people and other vulnerable populations ever further behind.

On the first day of COP28, displacement was included within the scope of the [Loss and Damage Fund](#), building on the recognition at COP27 of forced displacement as a form of loss and damage. Both COP28 and the Global Refugee Forum in 2023 were important opportunities to advance climate action for climate-vulnerable communities, including displaced people. For example, the [Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace Declaration](#) expressed concern about the effects of climate change, conflict, fragility and/or humanitarian crises on refugees and displaced people and committed to promote the leadership and empowerment of refugees and displaced people. At the Global Refugee Forum, [pledges included commitments to scale up climate action and finance](#) for refugees and other displaced people. Overall, increasing refugees' and other displaced people's access to early-warning systems and AA is paramount, and climate finance along with humanitarian and developing funding offers a large-scale means to do so. Recommendations for making this a reality include:

- Scale up finance for adaptation and strengthening resilience in fragile and conflict contexts, including partnerships and earmarked funding to design and implement AA for displaced people.
- Integrate climate finance into humanitarian, disaster risk reduction and development finance, to better enable the provision of funding to address climate shocks in fragile and conflict contexts and for displaced people.
- Extend national early-warning systems and early-warning, early-action programming in host countries into refugee and IDP camps and settlements, wherever possible.
- Design and implement AA for displaced people with a particular consideration of unique aspects of displacement, which may include restrictions for refugees (e.g. a lack of freedom to movement that precludes the ability to evacuate in advance of a hazard) or high vulnerability which may lower a trigger threshold to account for higher risks arising from even moderate climate events.
- Increase the research evidence base on AA in fragile and conflict contexts, including AA for displaced populations.
- Include displaced people in early action and disaster risk management leadership and decision-making processes.
- Promote the imperative for refugee and IDP camps and settlements to be located in safe and secure areas with adaptations for climate shocks in place.

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The global humanitarian system needs to adapt to the worsening climate crisis

Nanki Chawla and Garth Smith

Humanitarian needs have been growing at an alarming rate over the past half-century, with crises increasing not only in regularity, but in scale, severity and complexity. As the climate crisis worsens alongside conflicts, the global humanitarian system requires a forward-thinking strategy to address a concerning new reality.

There were record levels of humanitarian need in 2023, with **339 million people** needing assistance. Household Multi-Sector Needs Assessments indicated a pervasive deterioration in humanitarian conditions, particularly in relation to food security, livelihoods and health.

In the past year, there has been major conflict in Sudan, the occupied Palestinian territory, and Nagorno-Karabakh, with devastating impacts on people and already fragile infrastructure. Displacement is projected **to increase by at least 6.2 million people** by the end of 2024, doubling since 2015. In some of the worst situations, people are unable to move to escape danger, remaining without access to services. **Eighteen ‘hunger hotspots in 22 countries’** will likely face catastrophic food insecurity. Conflict, displacement and lack of basic services are driving health emergencies globally, including resurgences of cholera and dengue.

Against the backdrop of the worsening climate crisis, **El Niño has hit its peak**, with climate emergencies projected to increase at pace. Simultaneously, the international system responded to natural hazards including major earthquakes in Syria, Türkiye, Morocco and Afghanistan, and to major flooding across parts of Asia, North Africa and East Africa, amidst other disasters. As seen with the Türkiye–Syria Earthquake, Libya’s Storm Daniel, and Myanmar’s Cyclone Mocha, natural disasters are increasingly occurring in environments where political crises threaten humanitarian access.

This worsening complexity is challenging current approaches to emergency preparedness and response as a result. This has led to increasing calls for anticipatory action, and cuts to the heart of who, where and how global humanitarian systems prioritise, and why.

A system past its limits?

Against this backdrop, the nature of crises is evolving. Where global humanitarianism has been geared predominantly towards *conflicts* since the 1980s, climate-driven emergencies are likely to increasingly take centre stage. These emergencies, however, may look different from ‘traditional’ disasters that the humanitarian system is used to. Trends suggest that we will see more climate emergencies: occurring concurrently; more occurring **recurrently**; with longer-lasting impacts in permanently changed

environments; and increasingly occurring within existing conflict environments – fuelling new or prolonging conflict dynamics as communities feel resource constraints. Ultimately, it is likely the climate crisis will influence every aspect of humanitarian action, and not be a discrete issue as sometimes perceived. Humanitarian actors must fundamentally shift their mindset away from being geared towards protracted conflict crises and one-off disaster events, and towards approaches that consider cascading risks and a state of global ‘polycrisis’.



In Sudan millions are affected by droughts and flooding. Copyright: EU/ECHO/Anouk Delafortrie

At the same time, the scope of global humanitarianism has expanded significantly in past decades. Humanitarians are covering more situations where no alternative – or no will to seek an alternative – exists. Protracted crises are the norm; humanitarians are providing safety nets where governments can't or won't; and humanitarians have arguably provided short-term fixes for a lack of diplomatic ability, or will, to address root causes of need and conflict. Coupled with relative cuts in financing compared to needs, this strain raises the risk of an international system – one already at its limits – being forced to respond to even more issues with even fewer resources.

Analysis, prioritisation and anticipatory action

There is increasing acknowledgement that these competing demands may lead to a risk of system failure from a perspective of the ability to mobilise and deliver assistance. Less well acknowledged, however, is that the demands will also create significant and worsening challenges in effective analysis, with humanitarian analysis and information agencies struggling to evaluate and prioritise quickly evolving crises to identify people and places facing the most acute needs at speed. This will become particularly critical for response to new emergencies outside of normal annual planning cycles.

Therefore, investment – and hope – in anticipatory action approaches is growing, but while many **initiatives show promise locally**, they have yet to be proven at scale. Anticipatory action systems typically draw on lessons from development contexts where they have borne fruit, notably where data is more readily available than in most humanitarian contexts, particularly hard-to-reach areas where there may be a breakdown in governance and significant barriers to operate.

Where these systems do exist, many are fragmented, single-sector, and lack tangible links to other analysis, decision-makers and responders, meaning there is no guarantee of an actual response taking place. Without robust data, models are also prone to misfire or oversight, particularly if they do not incorporate local expertise and community early-warning systems. Whilst recent anticipatory action pilots have demonstrated utility on prediction for climatic events and disease outbreaks, there remains a significant gap where conflict – a primary driver of need – is concerned, as **conflict prediction models alone cannot be relied upon for anticipatory action**.

Global and country-level systems are also not set up to allow joint analysis to effectively inform Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) structures across the world, and few countries have a clear or transparent process for decisions on prioritisation or resource allocation, particularly outside of the Humanitarian Programme Cycle. In 2023, there has been heightened demand for analysis coordination, with an increasing number of Assessment and Analysis Working Groups, whose functions include assessment coordination, conducting joint analysis, and supporting inter-cluster groups with prioritisation and emergency response. Without collective real-time analysis through such groups, coordination mechanisms are often struggling to quickly reprioritise resources or launch responses. Proper global, country- and area-level preparedness plans linked to such analysis are also required if both emergency and anticipatory responses are to stand a chance of responding to the increasing prevalence of crises in the future.

The future of response

A tightening focus

It is likely that the humanitarian system will therefore have to evolve significantly – and rapidly – to address the changing nature of crises. Whilst not new, global conversations on prioritisation accelerated in 2023, driven both by a desire to improve and by impending funding cuts. Whether forced or intentional, a recentring of *international* humanitarian assistance on acute emergency response and anticipatory action may be necessary given the future scale of crises, and it is critical that humanitarian leaders have the courage to collectively, and more clearly, define what ‘humanitarian’ need and response encompass in this new reality.

This may also present opportunities for strengthening aid effectiveness and be a catalyst for reform, if it can be harnessed. It would require a smaller role for *international* assistance deployed for years on end, and a more intentional focus on targeted support to emergencies. Protracted crises will not disappear,

so this will necessarily require investment in enabling local institutions to prepare for, respond to, and recover from crises, with affected populations and local institutions taking a more central role more rapidly, post-emergencies.

This focusing should not mean that recovery, development and peacebuilding are cast aside; rather, it could enable better complementary action. As humanitarian resources become more stretched, it is critical that international emergency assistance is not used to cover ongoing governance gaps and that efforts to support fit-for-purpose development (and adaptation) assistance mechanisms – ones outside of the humanitarian architecture, but working in coordination – are accelerated.

A tighter global humanitarian focus may also present opportunities, and a need, to regain lost ground on humanitarian principles. A smaller operational role for the international system in-country would have to be complemented by a modified, more facilitative *global* role and reclamation of humanitarian space, rights and laws. This will be critical in a world where emergencies are more frequent, and questions around climate rights, justice and untested elements of international humanitarian law emerge.

A systems approach: real-time monitoring and emergency response

For a prioritised global system like this to work, it has never been more critical for evidence and analysis to drive needs-based prioritisation of resources. An integrated approach is required, bringing together real-time monitoring and analysis that identifies areas of current or impending concern and which explicitly informs decision-makers: donors, who can trigger (re)allocations of funding; non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that can mobilise emergency teams; and affected communities, who can trigger community-led early-warning and response systems.

Figure 2 provides an example of how such a system could be established, capitalising on data that already exists within many humanitarian crises, but that is often not properly analysed against a clear framework. If acute humanitarian assistance can be tightened to focus on averting the worst outcomes (excess morbidity and mortality), then humanitarian research can be designed with a clear purpose in mind: identifying people and places that face the highest risk of loss of life now or in the future, with clear triggers and thresholds established in partnership with emergency responders and anticipatory actors to determine appropriate response modalities to reduce or avert the loss of life.

While a conceptual framework can be standardised globally, these systems must be appropriately contextualised to the crisis at hand, to understand underlying drivers of risk, identify appropriate response, and to ensure affected people are at the centre of critical decisions. As the climate crisis drives new and unexpected challenges, these systems therefore must be flexible and contextualised (to be sensitive enough to pick up changes); light-touch (to be cost-effective while delivered at scale); and designed to collect (remote) data from hard-to-reach populations. While these systems are not easy to design or deliver, the scale and complexity of crises today mean that we have to invest in joined-up, real-time monitoring, analysis and response systems, to help maintain a principled, no-regrets approach to humanitarian action.

Local actors at the centre of response

To support better humanitarian assistance under such a future scenario, NGOs – and particularly local actors – must become more central to anticipatory action and response, given that they are often best placed to mobilise standby capacity and to access populations. Such a shift may force progress in areas where the localisation agenda has been slow to yield transformative results to date.

To work, this would require more responders and coordinators to be local actors, financing coming from and going to a wider range of actors, and a proactive shift towards more diverse humanitarian leadership. At the global level, this would require sustaining United Nations (UN) humanitarian leadership, but with more meaningful inclusion of international and national NGOs throughout the IASC structures, and a rebalancing of global systems to have less of a focus on UN operations and a more holistic view of response, including in situations where international actors play a limited in-country role.

This will be even more true with crises increasingly occurring in politicised environments where international institutions face worsening access challenges. If current trends continue, alternative response models may need to become more frequent – national NGOs and local institutions taking the lead on emergency response, and the international system playing a supportive role. Whilst entrenched power structures in the humanitarian architecture may create resistance to this, potential is already being seen with discussions on NGO-led and locally-led coordination and response mechanisms to complement traditional IASC modality structures in contexts such as Myanmar, Sudan and Syria.

A fit-for-purpose global system

Given the emergence of a new climate crisis reality, the global humanitarian architecture is at a critical juncture: it must evolve or risk abandoning the principles that guided its formation. Despite some progress, the global system remains centred on an internationalised (and often UN-centric) approach. However, as the international system becomes more stretched to the point of potential collapse, there could be an opportunity for reforming in a way that meaningfully puts *people* once again at the centre of response, forcing accelerating progress on reform efforts.

The positive news is that humanitarians, and those they serve, are inherently adaptable. Concerns of the demise of humanitarian principles, erosion of access, and debates on a narrower vs a more expanded humanitarianism have reared their head for the past 40 years and humanitarian aid has continually weathered predictions of its demise. The unprecedented scale of the climate crisis and the political, conflict and rights implications, however, mean that a bold, collective and strategic vision for the global system under this new reality is critical – and global institutions will need to coalesce around that vision, including in ways that limit their current power.

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Figure 2 REACH integrated country and global alert system

