

Conflict-sensitive climate action in practice

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Introduction

Climate action is critical across all contexts globally, yet every context offers different challenges, barriers and opportunities. Conflict sensitivity provides an essential approach to ensure that climate action is designed, adapted and applied in ways that can achieve maximum positive impacts for both climate and peace in each specific context.

The [Common Principles for Effective Climate Finance and Action for Relief, Recovery and Peace](#)¹ (launched at COP29) provide a practical vision for maximising the effectiveness of climate action and ensuring that it is conflict sensitive and peace positive, offering guidance for the implementation of the COP28 Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace. In alignment with the Common Principles, this paper underscores the necessity of conflict-sensitive approaches – which can help to ensure that climate action avoids exacerbating vulnerabilities and contributes positively to resilience and peace, especially in fragile and conflict-affected settings – and demonstrates their application.

a) Applying conflict sensitivity to climate action

Each year the United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP) seeks to advance progress towards a more just, effective and ambitious approach to tackling the impacts of the climate crisis. It provides a forum to discuss climate finance governance and accountability as well as creative solutions to shared problems, and to make decisions that will have a profound impact on the ability of climate-vulnerable communities to adapt to and mitigate the devastation of a rapidly changing climate. Part of that process is increasingly building understanding, experience and evidence about what approaches to climate action can be most effective² Conflict sensitivity has increasingly been recognised as an essential approach to ensure that climate action does not result in unintended negative consequences due to how it interacts with existing contextual dynamics, and to help maximise the positive co-benefits that can also extend beyond climate action objectives to include social, economic and peace gains. This paper will explain how conflict sensitivity and the Common Principles can be applied in practice across some sectors that are highly relevant for a UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP audience. The paper is informed by the experience of practitioners from the Environment, Climate, Conflict and Peace Community of Practice, who bring practical expertise from across diverse global contexts together with available research and evidence. It is not exhaustive but aims to provide a summary of fundamental areas for engagement, to highlight entry points and existing resources and to stimulate further discussion.

There has been widespread and increasing recognition that in order to achieve the objectives of global climate action, it is essential to also work in fragile and conflict-affected settings that may previously have been overlooked due to the challenges of operating in these contexts. Indeed, there is a strong correlation between vulnerability to climate impacts and fragile and conflict-affected settings that substantiates the need to prioritise these settings, including by addressing the gaps in climate action. For example, 19 of the 25 most climate-vulnerable countries are also fragile and/or affected by conflict.³ This important link has been strongly acknowledged in the COP28 Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace.⁴

Countries characterised as fragile and conflict-affected are often extremely vulnerable to the effects of the climate crisis. Many of these nations are geographically exposed to extreme and persistent climate hazards. The same characteristics that affect their fragility – weak institutions, poor governance and conflict – also ensure they struggle to adapt to the risks and respond to the impact of these shocks.

- Climate change can undermine efforts to secure peace and stability, both by directly impacting livelihoods and health and by indirectly exacerbating existing conflict and fragility, which can increase the risk of conflict.
- Conflict and fragility can increase people's vulnerability to climate change and constrain their ability to adapt. Ultimately, it can undermine efforts to achieve climate objectives.

There is increasing understanding and evidence⁵ to demonstrate that poorly planned and executed climate action can unintentionally reinforce the vulnerability of people that interventions are meant to assist or can exacerbate tensions, divisions and the risk of conflict within specific contexts. Such consequences can undermine the ability of climate action to achieve its objectives or even actively cause harm.⁶

Conflict sensitivity offers essential tools and approaches for designing and implementing climate action while navigating the complexity of working in and across very different and fluid contexts.⁷ At its core, conflict sensitivity is about building an understanding of the context, understanding how an action might interact with that context, and seeking to tailor and adapt that action to achieve the best possible positive impact. Applying conflict sensitivity can help climate action to minimise the risk that initiatives may unintentionally contribute to negative consequences or cause harm. For example:

- Climate finance can contribute to inequality by excluding those in fragile and conflict-affected settings, particularly marginalised groups, or by being syphoned off by elites, fuelling corruption while not reaching those most affected.
- Green energy initiatives can cause grievances in local communities if they are planned on land that has a history of contestation or has been illegally acquired by those in positions of power.
- Climate adaptation projects that do not consider existing environmental and conflict dynamics can unintentionally contribute to unsustainable livelihood approaches or maladaptation.

On the other hand, conflict sensitivity can also help to identify how an action can support positive results beyond the original intention of the intervention, for example by contributing to social and economic benefits and strengthening cooperation, social cohesion and opportunities for peace. For example:

- Early warning systems for climate can integrate or connect with information on conflict early warning provide important information on when and where climate hazards may intersect with existing tensions that increase the likelihood of incidents of violent conflict. Integrated early warning and early action systems may offer opportunities to mitigate the risk of conflict.
- Climate resilience and mitigation projects present opportunities to strengthen relationships between diverse communities if done in conflict-sensitive ways that build trust and social cohesion.
- Climate finance (particularly that which enables transparency and accountability) can contribute to improving the social contract between citizens and authorities/ governments while achieving wider development outcomes.

While conflict sensitivity is particularly useful for navigating the specific challenges of working in fragile and conflict-affected settings, its application is relevant across all contexts. Every context has existing systems, histories and relationships that can result in either contention or collaboration, and any action or intervention will interact with these dynamics in different ways. The Common Principles⁸ provide basic guidance for a conflict-sensitive approach:

1. **Understanding people and place for enduring, impactful outcomes:** Build an in depth understanding of the specific context through participatory and inclusive processes, and apply this engagement and understanding in the design, implementation and evaluation of climate actions.⁹
2. **Be agile to maintain and boost resilience:** Ensure flexibility and adaptability based on continuous learning and evidence, anticipating and responding to changes over time. This requires adjusting project design, timelines and budget to respond to emerging challenges or shifting priorities to ensure that projects remain relevant and effective.
3. **Prioritise local ownership and leadership by affected groups:** Overall, climate action and finance should be accessible, fit for purpose, and tailored to local needs. All stages of action should prioritise local and traditional knowledge and experience. Finance and programming should support local agency, resilience and capacities.¹⁰
4. **Support collaboration and synergies:** Promote complementarity across governments, international and regional organisations, financial institutions, civil society, local communities, the private sector and other actors to tailor climate action to context and needs.

b) Sectoral application of conflict sensitivity

The next section will explore how conflict sensitivity can be specifically applied in some different sectors of relevance to global climate action, with recommendations and practical examples to illustrate the relevance of conflict sensitivity for each sector. These sectors include:

1. [Climate finance](#)
2. [Climate adaptation](#)
3. [Green energy transition](#)
4. [Early warning and early action](#)
5. [Food security](#)

1) CLIMATE FINANCE:

Countries affected by fragility and conflict are among the most vulnerable to climate change yet receive an extremely low share of global climate financing. In fact, the more fragile a country is, the less it receives from bilateral donors and multilateral climate funds.¹¹ In 2020, countries affected by conflict and fragility received roughly two-thirds of adaptation finance compared to that committed to other low-income countries across all major funders – a gap which has reportedly widened in recent years.¹² Indeed, despite heightened climate vulnerability, the 10 most fragile states received \$269 million in climate adaptation financing in 2022, less than 1% of total flows.¹³ **Yet, the unique challenges presented by fragility and conflict can be overcome to implement highly effective climate action. Climate finance has tended to be risk averse and state-based, prioritising large multi-million dollar projects in safe operating environments.¹⁴ This is seen as a form of global injustice by those in fragile and conflict-affected settings.**

Overall, the imbalance of funding in fragile and conflict-affected settings is itself a conflict sensitivity risk, which can further heighten inequality and vulnerability and also result in greater cost as prevention is more cost-efficient than responding to the consequences of climate hazards. Climate finance that favours specific locations may affect migration flow, natural resource management and societal relations at a macro level. The gap in financing remains very high and significantly scaled-up attention to addressing these trends is needed, through improved analysis and metrics that take conflict and security risks into account alongside climate and peace co-benefits, coordination across financing mechanisms, and tailored approaches.¹⁵

The same climate finance approaches cannot be applied in every context in the same way, as some contexts have weak governance structures or no formal government (e.g. areas under control of non-state armed groups), local or subnational contexts are very different within one state, and the way benefits are distributed can exacerbate existing inequality within societies. **The absence of conflict sensitivity in climate finance can result in operational or reputational risks and undermine the potential climate-related gains for the affected community (and furthermore the potential for wider social, economic or peace co-benefits).**

If conflict sensitivity is integrated into the design of climate financing mechanisms and at institutional levels, including in the strategies and policies of donor governments and institutions from the outset, then this will help to ensure that the projects that receive climate finance also consistently integrate conflict and fragility considerations and prioritise the adoption of 'best practice' approaches.¹⁶ In turn this will alleviate some of the risks and allow for more finance to be allocated.¹⁷ There has been some progress in increasing finance to fragile and conflict-affected settings, and in wider and deeper adoption of conflict sensitivity into institutional frameworks and policies; however, the gap remains significant in terms of amount and quality of climate finance.

Bringing conflict, peace and security expertise into climate finance mechanisms and those involved in their implementation can help to further anticipate and navigate risk, identify potential co-benefits (e.g. peace outcomes) and help to prevent unintended negative side effects of climate finance. There is a growing body of evidence and evaluations that demonstrate how projects supported by climate funds interact in complex and diverse ways in fragile and conflict-affected settings which can offer lessons to further improve the funds themselves.^{18,19} **A further step would be to integrate peace outcomes into the design of climate financing projects, to consider how climate finance can complement other funding mechanisms or projects with such objectives, or to consider a dedicated funding platform within current global finance agreements for fragile and conflict-affected settings.**

Applying conflict sensitivity in practice to climate finance:

BUILD AND APPLY UNDERSTANDING OF CONTEXT:

- Invest in building conflict sensitivity into institutional policies and practice, and ensure that this results in institutionalised commitments to building and applying conflict analysis.
- Strategies and policies which clearly articulate a multi-dimensional approach from the outset (i.e. linking climate, conflict and fragility) will provide a more relevant starting point for analysis processes which inform the design and implementation of funding streams and programming.²⁰
- Rather than simply focusing on security and risk, such analysis should strongly focus on the interaction between funding mechanisms, the projects that are funded and specific contexts. Stronger investment in conflict analysis will also provide a more informed understanding of the high risks of NOT investing in complex areas.²¹

ENSURE FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY:

- Base funding mechanisms on flexible operational protocols which enable a higher risk tolerance and ability to integrate specific actions that address and respond to conflict dynamics. This could include contingency plans to facilitate adaptive approaches to outbreaks of conflict, which could also work in conjunction with local conflict-resolution mechanisms.
- Supporting technical and institutional capacity development at regional and local levels can further facilitate adaptive approaches based on closer familiarity with the context and greater responsiveness.

PRIORITISE LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP:

- Ensure local actors such as civil society and community groups have a central role in the design and implementation of climate funding to guarantee and enhance ownership. All stages should prioritise local knowledge and experience and support local agency, resilience and capacities.
- Climate finance should be accessible and fit for purpose and tailored for specific local contexts and needs, including those in areas where there is weak or no formal government control.
- The technical and institutional capacity of national governments, authorities and local actors, including civil society and the private sector, should be strengthened to maximise ability to absorb, allocate, deliver transformative and impactful results, account for, report and leverage climate finance effectively.
- More decentralised funding mechanisms can enable more funding to reach local actors and contexts. *For example, a decentralised architecture was used to channel funds to local populations in Mali, enabling local authorities to act as a gateway for resilience and climate fund management and planning.²² This is particularly important given that climate change policies can also increase marginalisation if they are politically driven by elites and those in power, and climate financing can provide an additional incentive for this. The Climate Bridge Fund provides local Bangladeshi NGOs with a direct access to climate finance to support a range of adaptation measures.²³*

SUPPORT COLLABORATION AND SYNERGIES:

- Increase collaboration across sectors, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings which are often areas with high humanitarian and development needs, enabling climate finance to be better informed by an understanding of overlapping needs of vulnerable communities and enable funding approaches to also contribute to an enabling environment for supporting complementary resilience, disaster risk reduction, community development, conflict prevention and peacebuilding.
- Better coordination between donors and funding mechanisms on aligning climate finance will also play a critical role in improving the range and quality of conflict-sensitive climate projects in fragile and conflict-affected areas. For example, according to research increased synergies between *climate finance mechanisms initiatives in Cambodia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Namibia has led to better contributions to development outcomes.²⁴*

2) CLIMATE ADAPTATION:

In places affected by fragility and conflict, limited resources, protracted crises, instability and armed conflict can hinder climate adaptation. For example, violence may affect access to information and locations to foster a deeper understanding of specific contexts, the combined effects of climate change and conflict can exacerbate competition over natural resources, and existing grievances and tensions may hinder cooperation necessary for climate adaptation. **Furthermore, adaptation approaches can themselves exacerbate conflict risks: for example, if they redistribute rather than more comprehensively reduce exposure to climate change risks, if they undermine existing coping strategies or peaceful relations, or if they only benefit select groups – all of which can contribute to inequality, grievances and division, which can increase the likelihood of conflict.** Integrating conflict sensitivity can provide a means to mitigate these risks, especially given the high proportion of those who are most vulnerable to climate change in fragile and conflict-affected situations.²⁵

To mitigate this, a conflict-sensitive approach to adaptation and the co-development of adaptation policies with local communities, including marginalised groups such as Indigenous and women's groups, is needed. Conflict-sensitive adaptation takes into account the factors that may provoke new or exacerbate existing conflicts when planning, implementing and managing adaptation activities. Integrating conflict sensitivity requires a contextualised understanding of climate change, natural resource management and conflict challenges, including the drivers of conflict in an area.

Besides specific adaptation projects, this is also an important consideration for National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), whereby **NAP processes that integrate responsiveness to peace and conflict dynamics from the outset can result in NAPs integrating conflict sensitivity.**²⁶ **This can enable NAPs to also align with wider development objectives, support peace, and increase the likelihood of long-term impact and sustainability of adaptation approaches.**^{27,28} This requires high-level commitment to a conflict-sensitive NAP process and integrating conflict sensitivity tools throughout the NAP process e.g. a conflict analysis alongside stocktaking, integrating conflict considerations and adapting to changing peace and conflict dynamics.

Conflict-sensitive Nature-based Solutions for climate adaptation

One of the strategies for enhancing climate adaptation and resilience is to support Nature-based Solutions (NbS).²⁹ NbS they can promote biodiversity, support climate adaptation and encourage collaboration between different societal groups if designed in a conflict-sensitive manner. At the same time, as NbS involve changing the ways in which natural resources and ecosystems are used and accessed, they can cause conflict by disadvantaging some groups and benefiting others, for example by turning agricultural land into forest, or prioritising mangrove restoration over fishing interests. The climate and nature crises are deeply connected and fostering greater interconnectivity between global policy processes and frameworks is critical.³⁰

Applying conflict sensitivity in practice to climate adaptation:

BUILD AND APPLY UNDERSTANDING OF CONTEXT:

- Base the design of adaptation projects on analysis which takes into account combined climate and conflict risks, for example by supplementing vulnerability assessments with a conflict analysis to build a stronger understanding of the existing context and conflict dynamics and identifying how the adaptation project may interact with this.³¹
- Well-meaning adaptation processes can end up resulting in maladaptation (for example making more people vulnerable to climate change) if they are based on insufficient understanding of the context, including social inequality, vulnerability and conflict risks. There have been numerous examples^{32, 33} of this, *for instance in Vietnam³⁴ where hydroelectric dam and forest protection policies to regulate floods in lowlands inadvertently redistributed vulnerability upstream by undermining access to land and forest resources for people living in mountain areas, leaving them more vulnerable to climate change.*
- *The Karamoja region of Uganda has experienced conflict for decades, with a long history of cattle raiding between different pastoral groups. Governance is also a challenge in this region, as there are very few laws and regulations around land and water use, with limited enforcement of those that do exist. As a result, adaptation options that seek to maximise the use of increasingly limited resources are hamstrung. Conflict-sensitive initiatives have involved identifying and understanding the existing dynamics of this context to ensure that interventions are tailored*

to those specific challenges; for example, working in partnership with local government to develop and institutionalise resource-sharing agreements including a formal management plan for one of the region's most important water resources – the Kobebe reservoir. This has enabled more secure and equitable access to resources and strengthened social cohesion between local government and impacted communities, which has created a better enabling environment for adaptation without aggravating or reinforcing existing conflicts over resource distribution.³⁵

ENSURE FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY:

- Analysis and an ongoing assessment of how the adaptation project is interacting with the context should continue throughout, ensuring that the project adapts to minimise any negative interactions.
- Adaptive management approaches, based on an ongoing process of analysis, testing, learning and adapting, offer the ability to deepen and improve analysis and operational approaches over time. Rather than a linear approach to adaptation programming, building an iterative approach of learning and adaptation into programme design can enable more impactful, conflict-sensitive programming in complex and volatile contexts.³⁶ *For example, a multi-year, programme to build climate resilience in five South Asian countries captured major lessons based on applying an adaptive management approach which was necessary in the face of changing political realities, social conditions and other factors.³⁷*

- The ability to apply such flexibility and adaptability also often depends on a similar understanding being reflected in requirements and approaches from donors and climate finance mechanisms (see Climate Finance section).

PRIORITISE LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP:

- Locally-led adaptation can be more effective than adaptation interventions run in a top-down manner due to greater understanding of contextual nuances and greater ownership of initiatives which can help to bolster sustainability and greater responsiveness to changes in situations.³⁸
- Climate adaptation should promote the leadership and empowerment of affected groups (including women and girls, children and young people, Indigenous peoples and local communities, people with disabilities, older persons, and refugees, other displaced persons and their hosting communities) to actively participate in policy making, programme design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation supported by education and training.
- This process should include deliberately working with diverse local stakeholders to identify and integrate co-benefits such as the opportunity to strengthen relationships between communities.

SUPPORT COLLABORATION AND SYNERGIES:

- Communication and coordination across diverse sectors (i.e. across different specialisms such as humanitarian and development aid, conflict and peacebuilding, climate and others) are important to ensure complementarity, to avoid duplication and maximise the possibility of achieving co-benefits. This can be facilitated through a mixture of

formal mechanisms, building long-term partnerships, informal meetings and public communications strategies.

- Coordination across local, national and regional levels can also play a critical role in ensuring that bigger picture understanding connects with contextualised approaches.
- *In Haiti collective analysis conducted with the support and involvement of the Haiti Climate Security Group (a coalition of more than 90 Haitian-based civil society, donors, implementing agencies and the government) resulted in a thorough analysis of how the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation contribute to driving insecurity and conflict, building on both quantitative climate data and qualitative insights from local community.³⁹ In the Ferghana Valley in Central Asia, which crosses Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, water scarcity and conflict intersect across local and transboundary conflict dynamics, necessitating connected engagement across local experts and peacebuilders, government officials from three countries and climate scientists to set up a Working Group on Climate Security, which was successful in providing a safe space for dialogue.⁴⁰*

3) GREEN ENERGY TRANSITION:

Decarbonising the energy sector is a critical component of achieving net zero, and commitments to increase the share of renewables across the energy sector through green investment form a key component of strategies towards reducing emissions. A green energy transition is integral to a sustainable and low-carbon economy and carries the potential for wider benefits besides reducing carbon emissions, including increasing the sustainability of public finances and strengthening energy security by reducing dependence on fossil fuels and increasing national production of green energy.⁴¹

However, how such green energy projects are designed and implemented can have significant implications for communities, local populations and ultimately the success of the project itself. Well-intentioned renewable energy projects may have unintended negative consequences if they do not adequately take into account the context in which they are being implemented; for example, by aggravating existing local grievances (either between local groups or between communities and authorities) which may lead to conflict, contributing to worsening inequality if the benefits favour elites, contributing to environmental degradation or contributing to corruption. All of this in turn may have a negative impact on projects by causing delays or obstructions, increasing the risk of damage to infrastructure and equipment or undermining the long-term sustainability of the project, with resulting cost and efficiency implications. On the other hand, projects and associated processes or pathways (including land acquisition, supply chains, or energy distribution) can also be intentionally designed to minimise the risk of harmful consequences and instead aim to support shared socio-economic benefits and contribute to peace.⁴²

A just transition approach aligns with and can be reinforced by conflict sensitivity, ensuring that strategies for greening the economy centre those who are most affected by the low-carbon transition, address inequality and grievances and ensure that no one is 'left behind'.⁴³ Conflict-sensitive approaches can provide a critical tool for navigating the challenge of investing in such contexts, alongside a growing toolbox of de-risking tools and tailored financing mechanisms.

Applying conflict sensitivity in practice to green energy transition:

BUILD AND APPLY UNDERSTANDING OF CONTEXT:

- Developing a detailed understanding of the local context for green energy projects is critical to ensure a clear understanding of both risks to the project from conflict, insecurity and also how the project itself may be received or perceived by local groups and communities (e.g. if the reception is negative due to perceived harm, then the initiative is more likely to be contested or rejected), alongside opportunities for the project to be designed in ways which also integrate wider socio-economic and peace benefits.
- A combined approach to integrating conflict analysis into due diligence and environmental assessment processes can support this.⁴⁴
- *The expansion of green energy production in Western Sahara has aggravated tensions between the Moroccan government and Indigenous Saharawi. While Morocco is striving to become a renewable energy global leader, seeking to reach 52% power generation by 2030 (comprising 20% solar, 20% wind and 12% hydropower),⁴⁵ the Saharawi view the project as an attempt by the Moroccan government to legitimise its presence in the region. For example, the Aftissat (Boujdour) Wind Farm reportedly commenced operation without consulting and obtaining consent from the Saharawi.⁴⁶ Concerns have been raised by Saharawi organisations that the exploitation of its natural resources triggered armed conflict in November 2020, harming peace efforts and violating international humanitarian laws protecting civilian populations under occupation.*

Energy and jobs have also appeared to benefit Moroccans from outside the region rather than Saharawis. While Morocco has attracted international private investment and donor support for its schemes, concerns over the impact of the exploitation of Western Sahara's natural resources on the conflict were highlighted in an African Union meeting.⁴⁷ Companies have been criticised for reportedly failing to undergo meaningful community engagement to consider the impact of their projects on local communities' lifestyles according to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.⁴⁸ The overall lack of conflict sensitivity has contributed to increased tensions and prolonged conflict, while efforts to integrate conflict sensitivity could play a significant role in mitigating these risks (including the risk to the investments themselves) and identifying opportunities for co-benefits.⁴⁹

ENSURE FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY:

- Adopting flexible contracts and approaches which are tailored to the context can help to enable adaptation based on changes to the context as well as to improve planning and approaches based on learning on how the project is interacting with the context to maximise positive impacts.
- Decentralised renewable energy systems (where energy production is close to the point of consumption) may be better suited for enabling greater flexibility, being more attuned to fluid local contexts and well placed to contribute to peace and stability.⁵⁰

PRIORITISE LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP:

- Consultation with local stakeholders throughout all phases of the project provides important opportunities to further understand the local context and potential risks in relation to conflict and grievances, ensure that wider policies support a just green transition which embeds local ownership and maximise opportunities for associated projects, pathways and policies to contribute to wider positive social, economic and peace benefits.
- Renewable energy processes and green energy transition strategies should embed community engagement and accountability measures, especially in the design stage, including regular communication with local groups in relevant languages and channels to ensure that there is clear understanding of projects and processes and how accountability mechanisms function. For example, community-led small energy projects may also reduce corruption risks associated with large infrastructure projects.

SUPPORT COLLABORATION AND SYNERGIES:

- Renewable energy projects are usually based on collaboration between governments, donors and private companies, which offers valuable opportunities to share good practice and lessons on conflict-sensitive and contextually relevant approaches.
- There are significant opportunities for international finance institutions and donors to develop common standards and align further on collective approaches on conflict sensitivity and integrating a focus on peace-positive outcomes in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

- Furthermore, collaboration with other actors in specific settings (e.g. aid actors, civil society, community groups and structures) would lead to a much greater chance of achieving co-benefits as they are often better placed to identify where opportunities might be to integrate social, economic and peace benefits due to a better understanding of context and combined expertise across sectors and silos.⁵¹
- *Integrating conflict-sensitive approaches can result in projects maximising co-benefits. For example, the Mubuga solar project in Burundi contributed to economic and social development (for example, promoting local skills development and linkages to tertiary education), promoted gender equality through supporting female participation in the economy, and provided affordable power to 90,000 people.⁵² A wind project on the Scottish island of Shapinsay has helped to increase cooperation and communication between the community and its local government.⁵³ There is also expanding evidence on how renewable energy access can contribute to peace and social impact.⁵⁴*

4) EARLY WARNING AND EARLY ACTION:

Strengthening Early Warning Systems (EWS) is seen as a crucial component of adaptation and risk reduction, as has been recognised in successive COPs; for example, the launch of the Early Warnings for All (EW4All) Initiative Executive Action Plan at COP27⁵⁵ and the 'Getting Ahead of Disasters' Charter launched at COP28. Both recognise the importance of expanding access to EWS in fragile and conflict-affected settings, particularly given the disproportionate number of people affected by climate change in these contexts. Coordinated regional early warning systems that get data to people in timely ways that they can both understand and act on is critical, and this requires navigating the specific challenges and nuances of establishing and maintaining EWS in such contexts.⁵⁶

How early warning systems and approaches are designed and implemented comes with risks and opportunities and the interaction of climate hazards and conflict and fragility adds further complexity to early warning. For example, attempts to apply the same technical models across different contexts may fail to capture the nuances of how specific contextual dynamics can have varying implications for forecasting, especially given that access to data may be severely restricted or undermined by weak institutions, the most remote or marginalised areas may not be reflected due to access constraints and risk reduction infrastructure may be destroyed or difficult to maintain during armed conflict - this may all risk skewing information and perpetuating biases. **For an early warning system to have relevance and result in meaningful action for at-risk and affected communities, it must provide information in accessible ways (i.e. socio-culturally appropriate, understandable, through relevant channels) and in a timely and actionable manner. If such systems are not conflict sensitive, there is a danger that they will not be trusted, which diminishes the likelihood of appropriate action.**

How early warning information is used and early action (also known as anticipatory action or forecast-based action) is planned may also have unintended consequences, for example if it is implemented in ways that exclude certain groups or if early warning information is only accessed by those in privileged positions and does not reach the communities most affected. In some incidents, early warning and early action mandates may be abused

by those in positions of power to obscure political objectives behind decision making. Early warning and early action can save lives and livelihoods and reduce the impacts and losses from disasters, however its benefits are limited if it does not link with other disaster-related activities and longer-term approaches to preparedness, risk reduction, adaptation, longer-term resilience – and also conflict prevention and peacebuilding. **Multi-hazard analysis and forecasting that integrates conflict and fragility, either by including relevant indicators and conflict analysis from the outset or combining with conflict early warning systems, can provide a much more comprehensive approach to better inform early action and conflict prevention.⁵⁷ Successful early action carries the same hallmarks as conflict sensitivity – it cannot effectively achieve its mission without taking a locally led, people-centred and inclusive approach.**

In humanitarian spheres, there has been a significant movement from purely response towards acting before a disaster occurs.⁵⁸ Anticipatory action refers to actions that can be taken before a predicted hazard hits to prevent or reduces its potential impacts (e.g. reinforcing homes, early evacuation, distributing health protection kits, distributing cash). The sustainability of anticipatory action relies on integrating local knowledge into its strategies and action plans, as well as fostering greater collaboration and alignment among donors. However, it remains underutilised, particularly in regards to how anticipatory action can be expanded for conflict contexts.

Applying conflict sensitivity in practice to early warning and early action:

BUILD AND APPLY UNDERSTANDING OF CONTEXT:

- Conflict sensitivity is most effective when incorporated in the design phase of early warning and early action. For example, early action plans must be based on a contextualised understanding of the nature and magnitude of the risks, who will be affected, how, and when.
- Analysis should measure the scale of risk through compound risk analysis, assessing climate hazards, conflict risks, and population movements.
- *Attribution of crises solely to a climate event may obscure the role of social and political-economic conditions resulting from inequality, politics, poor decision making or failures at the institutional or policy level. As research from Brasil has shown, adopting climate-centric framings for recurring climate-related disasters that fail to capture the socio-economic and political factors that are central to vulnerability can be a means to play down imprudent political decision making that may have inhibited better early action.⁵⁹ Therefore, a one size fits all approach that does not take into account multiple facets of climate hazards and how climate indicators interact with other conflict or socio-economic dynamics may come with conflict sensitivity risks, obscuring more informed early warning and early action.*

ENSURE FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY:

- Regular monitoring of the risks and the correlation of multiple compounding hazards and their volatility is key for enabling adaptability.
- Early action plans or protocols should be revisited and tested on a regular basis to ensure they remain relevant against changes in the context and to adapt according to feedback and learning. The maintenance and sustainability of early warning systems to enable functionality and consistency is a key consideration (as illustrated in Indonesia, when not enough budget was allocated to maintain the country's early warning system which failed during the 2018 tsunami⁶⁰) – particularly when early action is contingent on specific thresholds.
- Furthermore, these thresholds may themselves change in appropriateness based on the context, particularly given the fluid nature of fragile and conflict-affected settings. Therefore, evaluation of these thresholds will be necessary to enable a more contextually-relevant system and action.

PRIORITISE LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP:

- Local knowledge is essential to ensure ethical data collection and that actions suggested will actually be implemented.⁶¹ Communication must be tailored to effectively transfer knowledge about the hazard and the intervention plan to the affected communities as well as to collaborating partners, authorities, and local and traditional leaders and structures.
- At the same time, identifying pathways for local knowledge on conflict and climate systems to inform early warning information and action can offer important opportunities to shore up community ownership and improve response.
- Early action should be pre-identified and validated based on community engagement and ownership of actions.
- *Community early warning and early action systems that integrate community understanding and Indigenous knowledge have been designed in Niger and Zimbabwe. In Niger, these systems operate as a community-level link to the national system for the prevention and management of disasters and food crises, ensuring that communities access information and that their needs are taken into account in high-level decision making and providing an initial emergency response to shocks in remote locations. They can also provide an initial localised response to a shock. In Zimbabwe, research by a university has demonstrated the value of Indigenous knowledge for early warning systems, and how if this had been applied some communities may have been forewarned of Cyclone Idai.*⁶²

SUPPORT COLLABORATION AND SYNERGIES:

- Early warning systems and early action remain fragmented overall, with even less prevalence of approaches which take into account conflict forecasting and prevention, though there has been some emergence of hubs⁶³ to facilitate the exchange of experiences.
- Approaches which integrate conflict into climate early warning systems from the start can also provide critical opportunities for early action for conflict prevention.
- More collaboration across humanitarian, conflict and climate specialists could enable powerful synergies and complementarity. This can help to ensure effective collaboration (avoiding duplication), convergence of interests, and synchronised coordinated points of action for each stakeholder.

5) FOOD SECURITY:

Food systems and land use are responsible for one third of global greenhouse gas emissions (GHG),⁶⁴ yet food systems are also highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. At the same time, conflict and instability are the leading drivers of food insecurity globally, affecting 135 million people.⁶⁵ Conflict and fragility reduce the availability of food by disrupting agriculture, damaging or destroying food-related infrastructure, and upsetting the coping and adaptation mechanisms of households. The combined impact of climate, conflict and fragility therefore has compounding impacts on food security.^{66, 67}

In turn, food security and climate change⁶⁸ have also been linked to the increased risk of conflict.⁶⁹ Chronic food insecurity, often a legacy of war, can drive a downward spiral where acute food insecurity exacerbates existing grievances or generates new ones, particularly related to access to essential resources like land, water, livestock, and food production assets. This is especially true in countries where agriculture is the primary livelihood strategy. In order to transform agriculture and food systems towards more environmentally sustainable practices which shore up resilience while also ensuring equitable access to safe, sufficient, affordable and nutritious food for all, an approach that takes into account how food systems intersect with conflict and fragility will be critical.

The interlinkage between sustainable and resilient food systems and climate has grown to be a significant part of the agenda in COPs,⁷⁰ recognising the importance of addressing these links in ways that align well with conflict sensitivity, for example on the need for ‘context-appropriate approaches’ and to ‘maximise climate and environmental benefits while containing and reducing harmful impacts associated with agriculture and food systems’.⁷¹

Land, food systems and conflict

Land is key to agriculture and food systems, but land degradation and inequitable access can also be a conflict driver. It is essential that efforts to transform agriculture and food systems take into account historic grievances and contestation around land ownership, previous exploitative behaviour by elites and private companies including land grabbing and increasing competition overland due to the effects of climate change to ensure that the risk of further exacerbating conflict is mitigated. A focus on peaceful natural resource management and equitable access to land and food provides important opportunities to address key conflict drivers. **Water stress and land degradation place additional pressures on food insecurity, and understanding their intersection with peace and security is also important to inform conflict-sensitive climate action.⁷²**

Confirming that an understanding of potential harmful impacts also takes into account how changes can have implications for societies on many levels, and acting on this understanding, can help to ensure that such transformation is sustainable and maximises other positive socio-economic and peace benefits.

Food security programmes are well-positioned to use data to enhance their conflict sensitivity –and even their contributions to conflict prevention – in unique ways, as these programmes have long relied on early warning systems to build and proactively respond to crisis scenarios. For example, the Famine Early Systems Network (FEWSNET) examines the role played by conflict dynamics in precipitating food crises. Situating food systems within wider societal and global systems, which take into account the overlapping dynamics of socio-economic challenges as well as the impact of conflict and fragility on livelihoods and access to food, can help to further address the complex overlapping causes of hunger, malnutrition and inequitable access to food and ensure that efforts to transform agriculture and food systems are more sustainable and impactful, and do not perpetuate inequality or increase the risks of tensions and conflict.

Applying conflict sensitivity in practice to food security responses:

BUILD AND APPLY UNDERSTANDING OF CONTEXT:

- Building strong contextual knowledge is critical to the following: understanding local food systems and agricultural practices and why practices which contribute to ecosystem loss and degradation may occur; understanding why the most vulnerable and marginalised groups have inequitable access to food, and; how efforts to change food production may impact social, economic and conflict dynamics in potentially negative ways.
- By building a better understanding of local contexts and factoring this into the design of food security interventions, such interventions will be better placed to achieve wider social, economic and peace benefits.
 - *In South Sudan, changes in climatic conditions have resulted in increased dry periods and droughts, leading to loss of pastureland and crop failure in some parts of the country (for example in Kapoeta, Eastern Equatoria state), while there has been catastrophic flooding across much of the Upper Nile region of the country (for example, the Mangala-Bor corridor) which has undermined existing coping strategies and resulted in displacement and increased pressure on camps for internally displaced people (IDPs). These factors have intersected with historic grievances and more recent violence linked to the national conflict, which has also driven displacement. Humanitarian aid actors face difficult challenges in navigating this complex intersection to respond to food insecurity, with many conflict sensitivity risks – for example, the risk of exacerbating tensions between IDPs and host communities if they are seen to benefit*

one community more than another, navigating politicised dynamics in relation to displacement which is driven by both climatic and conflict factors, the risk of failing to take into account important gender dynamics whereby women are particularly vulnerable to the increasing scarcity of potable water and food, and the risk of undermining existing social relations which may also support longer-term resilience. Considerations such as centering local knowledge to better understand these complex dynamics and more deliberate efforts to apply a peace lens to climate resilience approaches can help to ensure more durable solutions to displacement crises.⁷³

ENSURE FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTABILITY:

- Monitoring, evaluation and learning are essential to enable continuous learning in complex contexts and enable food security programming to adapt. Meaningful MEL relies on institutional commitments to appropriate methodologies alongside dedicated resources including budget lines and MEL experts.
- Building a research base for climate-informed conflict sensitivity in food security programming would further enable more systemic approaches to flexibility.
 - *Food assistance has been provided to refugees in the Gambella region of Ethiopia for decades, integrated into local nutrition programming. However, a conflict sensitivity analysis identified that land is a key driver of conflict between communities in the region. This led to a redesign of the programme, which resulted in a new initiative bringing solar-powered irrigation to arid regions*

to increase arable land. This helped to improve social cohesion between the refugee and host communities. Refugees were able to plant their own crops on new land rather than work on the farms of host communities, and the host communities benefited in terms of their own food security through trade with the refugee-run farms. Overall, the region became more food secure, tensions over land were addressed, and increased economic linkages have also helped to increase social cohesion.⁷⁴

PRIORITISE LOCAL OWNERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP:

- o Ensuring local communities play a leading role in efforts to improve resilient food systems and to respond to food insecurity is critical to ensuring sustainability and addressing the root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition.
- o Engaging and empowering marginalised and Indigenous groups will help to ensure contextually relevant approaches, enable a focus on specific needs of the most vulnerable and also unlock potential for innovation based on local and Indigenous knowledge.
- o A more comprehensive approach recognises that decentralised food systems which are based on local ownership and self-sufficiency have a critical role to play in enhancing food security, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings.⁷⁵

SUPPORT COLLABORATION AND SYNERGIES:

- o The drivers of vulnerability to food insecurity are multifaceted⁷⁶ and require more systems-based approaches which favour collaboration between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors (including UN and NGOs), climate and environmental specialists, the private sector, government and local leaders and groups (particularly those from marginalised groups) to inform a broader strategy for addressing food and nutritional security that maximises connectivity between different approaches to shore up resilience (e.g. livelihoods, economic development, livelihoods opportunities, social cohesion).

c) Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated practical guidance and examples for how conflict sensitivity is highly relevant for climate action and is essential to support the sustainability and effectiveness of climate action across multiple sectors. **It is particularly helpful for navigating the specific risks and challenges of working in fragile and conflict-affected settings; however, its application is relevant across all contexts as climate interventions can interact with existing dynamics and relationships in any setting.** Integrating conflict sensitivity can help to both navigate and minimise the potential for unintentional negative consequences, but can also result in maximising opportunities for climate action to have compound socio-economic, just transition and peace benefits.

While there are technical tools and complex frameworks on conflict sensitivity which may be tailored for specific approaches and settings, conflict sensitivity can also be applied through some basic steps, principles and changes in mindsets which can be integrated across all stages of climate interventions. **It is not purely the remit of conflict specialists – rather it is accessible to all and can be tailored to fit specific climate interventions and approaches.** Awareness of its specific application within climate action has been progressing over the past few years and will continue to develop and deepen over successive COPs.

This paper was written by members of the Environment, Climate, Conflict and Peace Community of Practice’s conflict sensitivity subgroup.⁷⁷ Please contact Natalia Chan for more information – nchan@saferworld-global.org – or to access further guidance on the practical application of conflict sensitivity via ECCP members. An annex with further useful resources is available at the website: ecosystemforpeace.org/conflictsensitivity.

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- 4 [COP28 Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace \(2023\)](#): "Recognising that many of the people, communities and countries threatened or affected by fragility or conflict, or facing severe humanitarian needs, are on the frontlines of the climate crisis, and are among the least resourced to cope with and adapt to associated shocks and stressors."
- 5 See examples throughout the text, and the [Annex](#) with further resources.
- 6 At the same time, it is also critical that conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts also strongly take into account their intersection with climate change and climate sensitivity, and that other approaches such as humanitarian aid take into account both conflict and climate sensitivity.
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