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Enhancing the Conflict Sensitivity of National Adaptation Plans

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Introduction

Climate change adaptation measures in conflict-affected areas need to be planned in a conflict-sensitive manner if they are to be effective and avoid unintentionally intensifying existing conflicts or creating new ones. Considering that vulnerabilities to climate change can, when exacerbated by social, economic and political factors, increase conflict risk, adaptation planning ideally moves beyond doing no harm to actively reducing conflict risk and promoting sustainable peace.¹ However, as yet, adaptation agendas are often poorly aligned with agendas focusing on peacebuilding.²

Addressing conflict considerations in national adaptation plans (NAPs) may help to facilitate the design of conflict-sensitive adaptation measures. NAPs are one of the means by which national governments of developing countries communicate their adaptation needs to the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The purpose of a NAP is not only to reduce a country's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, but also to facilitate the integration of adaptation strategies into other development policies, programmes and activities.³ Their dual purpose makes NAPs an ideal entry point for governments seeking to reduce or avoid the possible security implications of climate change. However, despite some examples of countries that have made a good effort in this regard (see box 1), many conflict-affected countries do not in their NAPs systematically consider how conflict dynamics may affect adaptation and vice versa, or clearly demonstrate the integration of adaptation action with existing national development or peacebuilding policies.

On the basis of an analysis of the NAPs of the 10 least peaceful countries that had submitted a NAP to the UNFCCC secretariat by November 2022, this policy brief identifies three key actors that are well placed to take concrete steps to enhance the conflict sensitivity of NAPs: (a) national governments, which prepare NAPs; (b) the

¹ CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA), *Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) Basics: A Resource Manual* (CDA: Cambridge, MA, 2016).

² Matthew, R., 'Integrating climate change into peacebuilding', *Climatic Change*, vol. 123, no. 1 (Mar. 2014).

³ UNFCCC secretariat, decision 5/CP.17 ('National adaptation plans'), adopted at the seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties, as contained in document FCCC/CP/2011/9/Add.1 (UNFCCC Secretariat: Bonn, 15 Mar. 2012).

Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG) under the UNFCCC, which guides the process to formulate and implement NAPs; and (c) international climate finance providers, which financially support adaptation action.⁴

Interactions between conflict, climate change and adaptation action

Based on the literature, there are six ways in which conflict, climate change, and action taken to adapt to climate change can interact. First, climate change, because it affects people's vulnerability, can indirectly increase conflict risks through, for example, competition over land and other resources, grievances against responsible authorities, or the recruitment of impoverished people by armed groups.⁵ Second, and opposite to the first mode of interaction, climate change may indirectly *decrease* conflict risks. For example, extreme weather events, which may increase in frequency and severity as a result of climate change, can weaken the position of armed groups, offering an opportunity for peace negotiations.⁶ Third, conflict reduces people's coping capacity, making them more vulnerable to climate shocks.⁷ Fourth, climate

⁴ The countries are listed in box 1. For details of the analysis, see Remling, E. and Meijer, K., in preparation.

⁵ Mobjörk, M., Krampe, F. and Tarif, K., 'Pathways of climate insecurity: Guidance for policymakers', SIPRI Policy Brief, Nov. 2020.

⁶ Kreutz, J., 'From tremors to talks: Do natural disasters produce ripe moments for resolving separatist conflicts?', *International Interactions*, vol. 38, no. 4 (Aug. 2012); and Nemeth, S. and Lai, B., 'When do natural disasters lead to negotiations in a civil war?', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 59, no. 1 (Jan. 2022).

⁷ International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *When Rain Turns to Dust* (ICRC: Geneva, 2020).

BOX 1. CONFLICT CONSIDERATIONS IN THE NATIONAL ADAPTATION PLANS OF 10 CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES

Of the 40 national adaptation plans (NAPs) that had been submitted to the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change by November 2022, the NAPs of the 10 least peaceful countries were analysed.^a These countries, based on their Global Peace Index rankings in the year of their NAP submission, were the Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Niger, South Sudan, the State of Palestine and Sudan.^b

All 10 NAPs include conflict considerations, but these considerations concern different aspects of climate–conflict interactions. Some NAPs mention conflict, and the insecurity arising from it, in terms of its relationship with increased vulnerability, while some focus on its potential to intensify climate-related conflict or on its risk of hampering climate change adaptation.

Although the NAPs studied address various aspects of conflict, they pay little attention to the underlying dynamics

of existing conflicts, the two-way interaction between adaptation projects and conflicts (adaptation projects have the potential to increase conflict, and increased conflict, in turn, hampers the implementation or the performance of the adaptation project), or the potential of local resource conflicts to intensify tensions and grievances and fuel larger scale conflicts.

Only five of the NAPs (Central African Republic, Kenya, Niger, South Sudan and Sudan) include adaptation actions specifically targeted at reducing security risks related to climate change, for example improving the management of pastures to reduce conflicts between herders and farmers, developing conflict resolution mechanisms, and building a knowledge base on climate and conflict links.

^a UNFCCC NAP Central, Submitted NAPs, 24 Mar. 2023.

^b Vision of Humanity, Global Peace Index, [n.d.].

Source: Authors, based on Remling, E. and Meijer, K., in preparation.

change adaptation projects that aim to increase people's resilience to climate shocks can support the reduction of the climate-related security risks mentioned in the first point.⁸ However, fifth, if poorly designed or implemented, these adaptation projects can redistribute rather than reduce climate change risks, potentially increasing inequalities, tensions and grievances, in turn deepening existing or fuelling new conflicts.⁹ Finally, the sixth interaction, violent conflicts—the presence of armed groups in particular—can hinder the implementation of adaptation projects owing to security concerns about both personnel and investments.¹⁰ See box 1 for a summary of the main conflict, climate change and adaptation interactions found in the 10 analysed NAPs.

The dual purpose of NAPs makes them an ideal entry point for governments seeking to reduce or avoid the possible security implications of climate change

Key actors and steps

Preparation by national governments

Conflict-sensitive adaptation planning must start with governments conducting a realistic appraisal of the national context, including ongoing violent conflict in which the country is involved, social dynamics, and tensions and grievances within or between communities. This may be a challenge when the national government is itself a party in a conflict. An assessment of 13 multi-year climate resilience projects in conflict-affected contexts found that 'a thorough initial and ongoing understanding of the operating context' was a critical success factor for effective project delivery.¹¹ A conflict analysis that at the least factors conflict reasonably well into vulnerability analysis and into the planning, evaluation and monitoring of adaptation actions would go far in improving the current shortfall in consideration of conflict in NAPs. While integrating conflict considerations might present a novel challenge for those in the climate change community, conflict sensitivity is an established approach for those working in humanitarian aid and conflict prevention. There are thus a number of helpful guidelines and other tools that adaptation practitioners can draw on.¹²

The integration of relevant policy agendas, including those on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, into adaptation planning could be strengthened by bringing relevant stakeholders together in the NAP formulation process. Evaluations of NAPs have shown that those prepared by more than one entity are generally of a higher quality.¹³ Bringing the expertise of different ministries, as well as of entities engaged in

⁸ Hegazi, F. and Seyuba, K., 'Reducing climate-related security risks and building peace through adaptation', Commentary/WritePeace Blog, SIPRI, 3 Nov. 2022.

⁹ Dabelko, G. D. et al., *Navigating a Just and Peaceful Transition*, Environment of Peace (Part 3) (SIPRI: Stockholm, 2022); and Atteridge, A. and Remling, E., 'Is adaptation reducing vulnerability or redistributing it?', *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 2018).

¹⁰ Neaverson, A., Gould, C. and Peters, K., *Delivering Climate Resilience Programmes in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Contexts: Experiences from 15 Projects across 13 Countries: Learning from the Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters (BRACED) Programme* (Overseas Development Institute: London, 2019), p. 15.

¹¹ Neaverson, Gould and Peters (note 10), p. 54.

¹² For an overview, see Africa Peace Forum et al., *Conflict-sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Peacebuilding: A Resource Pack* (Africa Peace Forum: Nairobi, 2004).

¹³ Woodruff, S. C. and Regan, P., 'Quality of national adaptation plans and opportunities for improvement', *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change*, vol. 24, no. 1 (Jan. 2019). Quality was measured using 72 metrics across 7 principles, which related to (a) goal-setting, (b) strategy formulation,

peacebuilding, into the drafting process—or at least into stakeholder consultation—would be a straightforward way in which to improve the conflict sensitivity of a country's NAP.

According to the LEG, the NAP process should follow an integrated approach to development and adaptation planning.¹⁴ Yet, few countries refer to relevant policy agendas in their NAPs. While all 10 countries in the sample for this policy brief had peace agreements (relating to conflicts within State borders) in place when their NAPs were formulated, only two (Central African Republic and South Sudan) referred to them in their NAPs.¹⁵ Bringing together different policymaking communities in the NAP formulation process could further improve the integration of ongoing development and peace processes into adaptation planning.

Guidance of the Least Developed Countries Expert Group

The lack of guidance on conflict-sensitive adaptation planning from the LEG has possibly contributed to ad hoc approaches to this task and the overall low and inconsistent conflict sensitivity of NAPs. The technical guidelines of the LEG, published in 2012, mention conflict reduction once as a potential positive outcome

of adaptation measures, and the LEG document on best practices and lessons learned in addressing adaptation in the least developed countries (LDCs), from 2015, also mention conflict only once, in a case study of Nepal.¹⁶ While recognizing that the LEG guidelines must cater for diverse adaptation situations and local contexts, the large number of LDCs that are or have been affected by conflict cannot be ignored: in 2019, this number was 24 out of the 46 LDCs.¹⁷

Including conflict considerations more systematically in NAPs could facilitate the enhanced implementation of conflict-sensitive adaptation

As the LDCs make up almost two thirds of all developing countries submitting NAPs, it is essential that the reality of conflict occurring in a (not negligible) number of them be taken into account when drafting guidance for NAPs.

As a starting point in solving the problem of lack of guidance, the LEG could revise or supplement its technical guidelines such that they reflect and address the specific challenges that conflict-affected countries face. Many new insights into how the impacts of conflict and climate change influence one another and increase people's vulnerability, and the role of adaptation in that interaction, have emerged since 2012

(c) implementation of the NAP, (d) the extent to which the NAP is fact-based, (e) recognition of uncertainty in the NAP, (f) public participation in the NAP process and (g) cross-organization coordination in the NAP process.

¹⁴ Least Developed Countries Expert Group (LEG), *National Adaptation Plans: Technical Guidelines for the National Adaptation Plan Process* (UNFCCC secretariat: Bonn, 2012), p. 11; and LEG, *Best Practices and Lessons Learned in Addressing Adaptation in the Least Developed Countries* (UNFCCC secretariat: Bonn, 2015), p. 15.

¹⁵ Bell, C. et al., *PA-X Codebook*, Version 6 (Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh: Edinburgh, 2022), <www.peaceagreements.org>; and Bell, C. and Badanjak, S., 'Introducing PA-X: A new peace agreement database and dataset', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 56, no. 3 (May, 2019).

¹⁶ LEG, technical guidelines (note 14), p. 75; and LEG, best practices and lessons learned (note 14), p. 81.

¹⁷ United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), *Doha Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries 2022–2031* (UN-OHRLLS: New York, 2022), p. 27.

and 2015, when the technical guidelines and best practices and lessons learned were published, respectively.¹⁸

Following the structure of the existing guidelines, the LEG could, for example, encourage countries to (a) consider underlying conflict dynamics and drivers when *assessing vulnerability*, (b) assess whether potential actions might have positive or negative impacts on the conflict context when *reviewing and appraising adaptation options* and (c) integrate plans to build or sustain peace when identifying opportunities for *integrating adaptation into development planning*.¹⁹ While they can be strengthened further, the NAPs of the Central African Republic and South Sudan are good examples of bringing conflict sensitivity into a NAP, as they include explicit references to conflict in each of these three areas.

Funding from international climate finance providers

NAPs are expected both to guide countries' investment priorities in adaptation through domestic channels and to attract international climate finance, through the Green Climate Fund and other bilateral and multilateral donors, for implementing adaptation actions prioritized as part of the NAP process.²⁰ NAPs are thus an important means for governments to justify the adaptation projects they would like to see implemented and for which they seek international technical and financial support. For the majority of the NAPs analysed, the submitting countries received some form of external support from international institutions for the formulation process, which suggests international and bilateral partners are key contributors to the shaping of NAPs.

Multilateral donors and implementing agencies could consider requiring applicants from conflict-affected countries to systematically incorporate conflict analysis into their applications for funding NAP implementation. The Global Environment Facility is already considering the relevance of the conflict context for its development portfolio, including by considering conflict, peace and security in its environmental and social safeguards.²¹ This demonstrates the awareness that funding entities have of the need for conflict sensitivity in adaptation planning and the potential for strengthening internal guidance and practice around conflict sensitivity further. The introduction of more elaborate requirements by international financing institutions regarding the addressing of conflict sensitivity in funding applications would likely incentivize governments to include conflict considerations in the NAPs they prepare.

¹⁸ Dabelko et al. (note 9); von Uexkull, N. and Buhaug, H., 'Security implications of climate change: A decade of scientific progress', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 58, no. 1 (Jan. 2021); Busby, J. W., 'Beyond internal conflict: The emergent practice of climate security', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 58, no. 1 (Jan. 2021); and Nadiruzzaman, M. et al., 'Conflict-sensitive climate change adaptation: A Review', *Sustainability*, vol. 14, no. 13 (July 2022).

¹⁹ LEG, technical guidelines (note 14).

²⁰ NAP Global Network, *Financing National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Processes: Contributing to the Achievement of Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) Adaptation Goals*, guidance note (International Institute for Sustainable Development: Winnipeg, 2017).

²¹ Independent Evaluation Office of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), *Evaluation of GEF Support in Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations*, GEF Council document GEF/E/C.59/01 (GEF secretariat: Washington, DC, 11 Nov. 2020).

Ways forward

Having conflict considerations more systematically included in NAPs could facilitate the enhanced implementation of conflict-sensitive adaptation. The actions of different actors can be mutually reinforcing; that is, funding requirements related to conflict sensitivity, put in place by donors, and guidance for conducting an analysis of conflict sensitivity, prepared by the LEG, can both incentivize and support governments in addressing conflict considerations when they are preparing NAPs. Many countries are still in the NAP formulation phase.²² They thus have the opportunity to include conflict considerations more systematically in the development of their NAPs. Moreover, NAPs are designed to be reviewed periodically, which presents an opportunity for further elaborating conflict considerations in future iterations.²³ Integrating conflict considerations into NAPs will support the exploration of possibilities for adaptation to actively contribute to peace by increasing resilience to climate shocks in conflict-affected areas.

²² As at Oct. 2022, 139 of 154 developing countries had taken some action towards preparing a NAP. UNFCCC secretariat, 'Progress in the process to formulate and implement national adaptation plans', document FCCC/SBI/2022/19 (UNFCCC secretariat: Bonn, 5 Nov. 2022).

²³ LEG, technical guidelines (note 14), p. 15.

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