CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

CLIMATE CHANGE AND SECURITY IN WEST AFRICA

Regional Perspectives on Addressing Climate-related Security Risks

Edited by: Kheira Tarif
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West Africa faces complex climate change and security risks that need to be addressed through integrated responses

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Address climate-related security risks through iterative responses, acting and learning in tandem

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CLIMATE CHANGE AND SECURITY IN WEST AFRICA

Regional Perspectives on Addressing
Climate-related Security Risks

SUMMARY

Climate change is altering security landscapes around the world. West Africa is experiencing climate change at rates faster than the global average. Climate change is also inter-acting with regional political tensions, violent conflicts and complex humanitarian emergencies. As changing climate conditions impact natural resource availability, biodiversity and agricultural productivity, low levels of resilience are magnifying the human security implications of climate change in West Africa. In the next 10-20 years, unprecedented changes in temperatures and precipitation are projected in the region. Simultaneously, violent conflicts are escalating and spreading, as more and more countries witness spill-over effects.

In view of the need for locally anchored analyses and responses to climate-related security risks in West Africa, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's Peace and Security Centre of Competence Sub-Saharan Africa, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) organised a series of meetings for West African experts, researchers and civil society organisations, from November 2021 to November 2022. This brief summarises the working group's analysis of climate-related security risks in West Africa, responses to those risks and recommendations for actions to address them.

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KEY MESSAGE 1.
West Africa faces complex climate change and security risks that need to be addressed through integrated responses

Regional temperatures are climbing at rates faster than the global average and rainfall is less and less predictable. West African states have limited capacities to respond to climate-related security risks, while regional stabilisation strategies continue to be driven by external actors. This is complicating responses to political tensions, violent conflicts and complex humanitarian emergencies. These strategies need to move beyond reacting to conflict incidents and address underlying conflict issues and structures, with greater regional coordination and cooperation.

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KEY MESSAGE 2.
Governance is an entry point for addressing climate-related security risks and building cooperation

Governance is an entry point for addressing climate-related security risks and building cooperation between livelihood groups, communities, authorities, businesses and more. To address climate-related security risks, conflict resolution needs to be integrated into the logic of climate adaptation. To achieve this, there is a need for dialogue spaces on the shared management of natural resources, more inclusive governance of natural resources, and better integration of local resource management practices with relevant national legislation.

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KEY MESSAGE 3.
Resilience to climate-related security risks must be built with an inclusive, bottom-up approach

Climate-related security risks have implications for individuals, communities, and states in West Africa – as well as the organisations charged with responding. But top-down decision-making alone cannot address the region's overlapping crises. Climate-related security risks need to be connected to local priorities and translated into the language used in local policies. Conflict responses should address foundational human security issues and climate vulnerabilities, and shore up the ways people organise, govern and adapt.

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KEY MESSAGE 4.
Address climate-related security risks through iterative responses, acting and learning in tandem

Climate change and security in West Africa are urgent challenges that require iterative responses: acting and learning in the same process. Important gaps remain in knowledge of climate vulnerabilities in the region. Limited coordination and collaboration between responses to climate change and security undermine the potential for positive outcomes. To address these gaps, there is a need to identify, connect and scale up resilience-building and peacebuilding successes, build capacity in local research and adapt funding to meet evolving challenges.

KEY MESSAGE 1

West Africa faces complex climate change and security risks that require a shift in current regional responses

West Africa faces complex climate change and security risks that need to be addressed through coordinated responses. Regional temperatures are climbing at rates faster than the global average and rainfall is less and less predictable, complicating responses to political tensions, violent conflicts and complex humanitarian emergencies. West African states have limited capacities to respond to climate-related security risks, while regional stabilisation strategies continue to be driven by external actors. These strategies need to move beyond reacting to conflict incidents and address underlying conflict issues and structures, with greater regional coordination and cooperation.

BACKGROUND

Climate data shows that West Africa is experiencing global warming at rates faster than the global average. Temperatures have increased by between 1°C and 3°C since the mid-1970s, particularly in the Sahel, and rainfall is less and less predictable across the region.[1] Unprecedented changes in temperature and precipitation are projected by the late 2030s and early 2040s in the Sahel and tropical West Africa.[2] As changing climate conditions impact vegetation cover, natural resource availability, agricultural productivity and biodiversity, low levels of resilience are magnifying the human security implications of climate change. Climate change will complicate responses to political tensions, violent conflicts and complex humanitarian emergencies.

Violent conflicts in the region continue to escalate. (see Figure 1) Numerous armed groups are active in the central Sahel and Lake Chad Basin. Violent attacks on civilians, and between armed groups and military forces, continue in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, including in the tri-border Liptako Gourma region. Spill-over attacks in northern regions of coastal countries, like Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo, are becoming more frequent and deadly.

CHALLENGES

There is an urgent need to address climate change and security now, but the capacity of West African states to respond is limited by weak governance, political instability and regional tensions. Climate change is also a transnational issue that often exceeds the capacities of individual states to respond, requiring concerted regional actions.

As the Sahel reaches its tenth year of international conflict intervention, suspicion of the international community is growing in many West African countries. At the same time, governments worldwide are investing more in national security than in human security. This is an important challenge for climate action and peacebuilding and speaks to the need for urgently resetting North-North and North-South relations to address the twin crises.

1 R.B. Kerr et al., 'Food, Fibre, and other Ecosystem Products,' and C.H. Trisos et al., 'Africa', eds H.-O. Pörtner et al., Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Working Group II contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

2 I. Niang et al., 'Africa', eds P. Dube and N. Leary, Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part B: Regional Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

FIGURE 1.

West Africa: Climate vulnerability and conflict incidents

ND-GAIN Country Index Score, 2020   30 35 39 45

Fatalities 50 ● ● 100
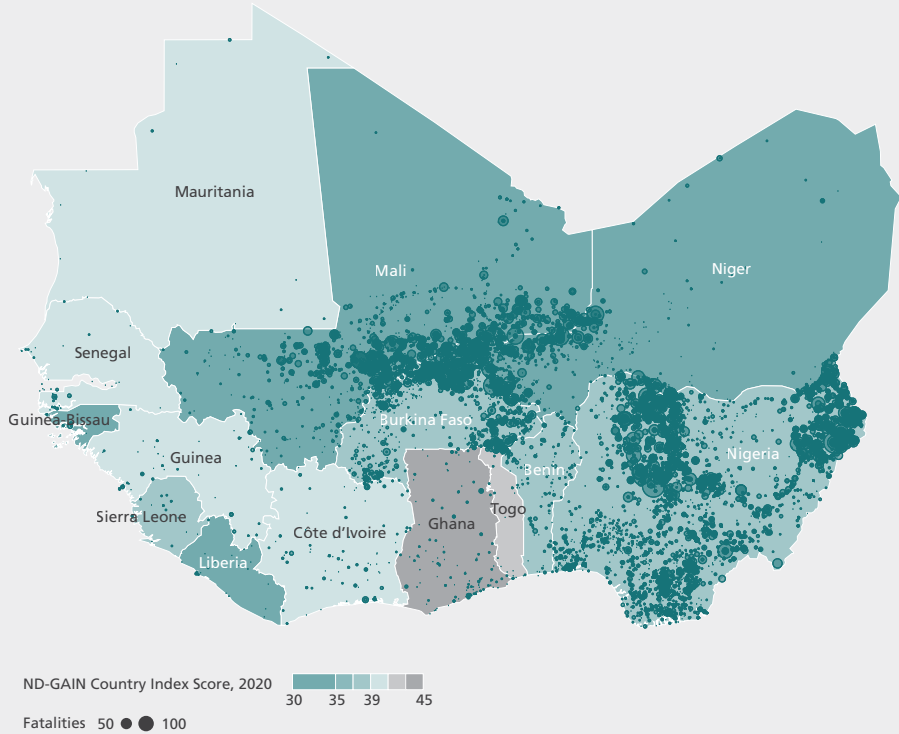
Note: The ND-GAIN Country Index uses climate vulnerability and adaptation readiness indicators to develop a score from 1 (most vulnerable) to 100 (least vulnerable)
Sources: World Bank (boundaries), Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project

Current conflict responses in West Africa are imported by foreign states and primarily rely on international military operations. This trend has inflated the role of bodies like the G5 Sahel (G5S) at the expense of African-led conflict responses and peacebuilding; for example, by the African Union or Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The limitations of military operations like the G5S have become clearer in the context of regional instability, including tensions between Mali's military-led government and its foreign partners.

RESPONSES AND BEST PRACTICES

Prevailing conflict responses in West Africa need to move beyond reacting to conflict incidents and address underlying conflict issues and structures, including climate change. Initiatives by the African Development Bank, European Union, ECOWAS, G5S and Lake Chad Basin Committee seek to advance climate mitigation and adaptation, resilience-building, development and peace in the region. But the potential impact of these actions is hampered by the fact that they remain isolated initiatives. Systematising them requires much closer coordination of national/regional/international initiatives to identify and build on synergies and avoid duplicating efforts.

Moving beyond current strategies in West Africa to addressing the underlying issues and structures that underpin conflict and accentuate climate vulnerabilities requires nationally- and regionally-owned coordination and collaboration. The AU and ECOWAS have a larger role to play in connecting and maximising resilience-building and peacebuilding across the region. The AU Peace and Security Council has recognised that climate change has negative consequences for peace and security on the continent and can build capacity within ECOWAS to analyse cross-regional trends, share relevant information and improve knowledge and tools within its member states. Furthermore, the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and UN Development Programme (UNDP) have launched a UN regional working group on climate change, environment, security and development, which can also support ECOWAS with timely information and analysis. The recent agreement on the establishment of a fund for loss and damage during UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP27 is important recognition of the outsized impact that climate change has on developing countries with lower carbon emissions. The fund also has the potential to support projects addressing climate-related security risks in the West African region.

CONCRETE ACTIONS

Working with national governments…

a. Build platforms for information-sharing and coordination between donors, implementers, national governments and institutions with activities related to climate change, conflict and peace, for building on synergies, scaling up best practices and avoiding duplication. Participation by researchers in platforms can support bridging research, policy and practice.

b. Build the capacity of national conflict observatories to identify climate-related security risks and incorporate relevant indicators in government analyses, policies and programming. Strengthen the links between national conflict observatories and regional and continental early warning systems for better information-sharing on local, national and regional risks.

c. Build platforms for exchanging information on climate change, environmental degradation, mitigation and adaptation and climate-related security risks, facilitating communication and collaboration between researchers, civil society organizations, journalists and community associations.

Working with regional organizations…

a. Facilitate regional ministerial dialogues on climate-related security risks, particularly transboundary risks, to enhance information-sharing, strengthen responses and regional early warning systems, and inform best practices .

b. Make the nexus of climate change, peace and security a part of the ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy and build conflict-sensitive climate action through establishing and supporting a ECOWAS climate stabilisation fund.

c. Support collaboration between ECOWAS and the AU on climate-related security risks, to strengthen regional and continental early warning systems, cross-regional analysis and information-sharing, and improve knowledge and tools within ECOWAS member states.

KEY MESSAGE 2

Governance is an entry point for addressing climate-related security risks and building cooperation

Climate change is not a direct cause of conflict in West Africa, but the effects of climate change can increase the risk of conflict. Governance plays a critical role in the relationship between climate change, environmental degradation, declining resilience, grievances and conflict. It can therefore be an entry point for addressing climate-related security risks and building cooperation between livelihood groups, communities, authorities, businesses and more. (see Figure 2) There is a need for dialogue spaces on the shared management of natural resources, more inclusive governance of natural resources, and better integration of resource management practices with relevant legislative frameworks.

CHALLENGES

Growing community violence in West Africa is informed by a range of factors, including the availability of pasture, forests and freshwater resources, natural resource management practices, changing patterns of migrant pastoralism and politicized indigenous-foreigner tensions. These tensions are more commonly associated with the Sahel countries but some coastal countries are increasingly seeing violent community conflicts as well.

Natural resource governance determines who does and does not have access to land, forests, water, pasture and more. As climate change alters the health, availability and distribution of natural resources, some groups are more heavily impacted than others, accentuating inequalities and grievances. Moreover, perceived ineffectiveness or unfairness of the legal system hampers the peaceful resolutions of conflicts around natural resources. The effects of climate change interact with decision-making in West African capitals: poor drought management, low levels of political representation and uneven implementation of environmental, pastoral, agricultural, fisheries and forestry laws can all increase climate vulnerabilities and the risk of conflict. Changing availability of transboundary water resources, such as the Niger, Senegal and Volta rivers and the Lake Chad, increases the risk of tensions between riparian states.

In addition to instances of weak governance, several West African countries also have high degrees of legal pluralism, including around natural resource management. At the community level, natural resource management can be informed by customary rules rather than formal legislation. This complex issue highlights tensions between national and local legitimacies; where state legislation may be seen as less fair at the local level, informal agreements do not necessarily carry legal weight in capitals. This plurality of interpretations of natural resource rights can hamper effective management and increase the risk of conflict when natural resource availability changes.

RESPONSES AND BEST PRACTICES

West Africa needs more coherent conflict responses and peacebuilding strategies, including a reappraisal of natural resource management as a conflict resolution tool.

Some existing initiatives offer lessons in how local peace agreements incorporate natural resource management. In Central Mali – where some communities have not been able to cultivate and/or access markets because of armed group and military operations – local mediators have negotiated agreements with armed groups on the management of transhumance, agricultural activities by migrant herders, forestry management, environmental protection, and more. In a cli-

mate-exposed region experiencing multiple violent conflicts, conflict resolution can contribute to strengthening livelihood security, societal relations between different groups and resilience.

Some organisations are creating dialogue spaces for facilitating and formalizing natural resource management and cooperation between different groups. In Nigeria, community-based and non-governmental organisations have established herder-farmer forums to head off violent conflicts over access to land and water. In Burkina Faso, TreeAid contributes to addressing conflicts between communities and forest conservation agents by facilitating dialogues between local officials, agro-pastoralists and other socio-economic groups. This has led to the development of local charters that bridge local/informal and national/formal forestry management practices.

FIGURE 2.
Climate-related security risks and governance entry points
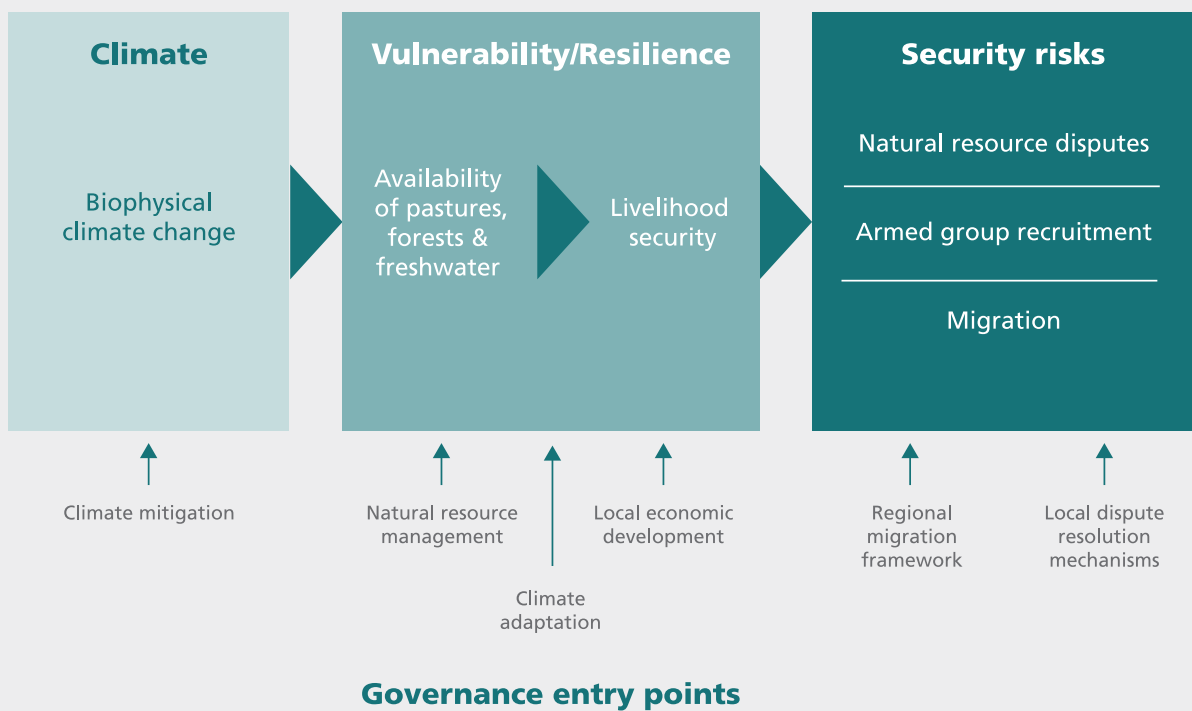
CONCRETE ACTIONS

Working with local communities…
a. Facilitate dialogues between communities and states on climate-sensitive, sustainable natural resource management to bridge national legislation and local practices and build trust.
b. Support effective local justice systems and trusted alternative dispute resolution mechanisms for resolving natural resource disputes and reducing the risk of conflict escalation or relapse. Strengthen local leadership with training in formal land tenure and rights for community leaders.
c. Develop a better understanding of the role of armed groups in natural resource governance in the Sahel.
d. Develop understanding of the impacts of extractive industries and sea level rise for tensions between communities in coastal countries.

Working with national governments…
a. Strengthen legislative frameworks for the participation of local communities in decision-making around climate-sensitive, sustainable natural resource management.

Working with regional organizations…
a. Map national policies and actions that can be harmonized and made more effective in areas at high risk of natural resource conflicts, including in agricultural development, pastoralism and rangeland management.
b. Facilitate regional dialogues on sustainable natural resource management and experiences of where local dialogues resulted in sustainable agreements, for better coordination of efforts, particularly in transboundary areas.
c. Reinforce regional pastoral migration monitoring and protection of regional livestock corridors.

KEY MESSAGE 3

Resilience to climate-related security risks must be built with an inclusive, bottom-up approach

Climate-related security risks can affect individuals, communities, and states in West Africa. They also have implications for the organizations charged with responding. But top-down decision-making alone cannot address the region's overlapping crises. Resilience to climate-related security risks must be built in an inclusive, bottom-up way. Climate-related security risks need to be connected to and translated into local policy priorities. Conflict responses should move beyond reacting to conflict incidents to address foundational human security issues. Better understanding of climate vulnerabilities is needed for developing sustainable responses that shore up the everyday ways in which people organise, govern and adapt themselves.

BACKGROUND

Changing climate conditions have reduced agricultural productivity and reduced fish populations, affecting livelihood security in communities across West Africa.[3] Households face higher food prices; low-income families in urban areas, rural households and children are particularly vulnerable to increasing costs.[4] Factors like poverty, low levels of education, marginalization and restrictions on mobility limit individual resilience.[5] Gender norms influence how climate change impacts men, women, girls and boys, what options they have for responding and the extent to which their needs and roles are taken into account in resilience-building.[6]

CHALLENGES

There is a need to recognise the limitations of responding to climate-related security risks by focusing exclusively on national governance. An alternative is to place greater emphasis on human security and a more holistic approach than the predominant national security lens. Inclusive, bottom-up processes are currently hampered by limited information-sharing and knowledge exchange between communities, governments and multilateral organizations.

RESPONSES AND BEST PRACTICES

One way of addressing these gaps is to build better understanding of (and support for) the everyday ways in which people organise, govern and adapt themselves. For example, in Guinea Bissau, communities in national parks manage their own natural resources with support and input from the Ministry of Environment's Institute of Biodiversity and Protected Areas. In Senegal, non-governmental organizations have convened local consultative forums on changing forest ecosystems and resources, sensitizing communities to national forestry legislation, improving their participation in reforestation and environmental protection and enhancing their economic resilience. Similar projects have taken place in Côte d'Ivoire, where reforestation programs have sought to build social co-

3 M.A. Caretta et al. 'Water,' and C.H. Trisos et al., 'Africa', eds H.-O. Pörtner et al., Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Working Group II contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

4 Kerr et al. (note 1).

5 Caretta et al. (note 8); United Nations Development Program, Human Development Report 2019, Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century, United Nations Development Program: New York, 2019.

6 E.S. Smith, Gender Dimensions of Climate Insecurity, SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security No. 2022/4, March 2022; C. McOmber, Women and Climate Change in the Sahel, OECD West African Papers No. 27, 9 March 2020.

hesion and reduce vulnerability to climate change. To build local support for and ownership of measures to address climate-related security risks, connections must be made with the most pressing priorities of West African communities, and reflected in project implementation. The empowerment of different communities is critical to ensuring that climate mitigation and adaption plans do not accentuate existing inequalities or create new ones. The entirety of the population needs to feel ownership of climate action in order to achieve sustainable change.

CONCRETE ACTIONS

Working with local communities…
a. Build inclusive processes for better understanding climate vulnerabilities in the region, for example by working jointly with community stakeholders to identify climate impacts, mitigation and adaptation needs and strategies. Women and young people must participate in dialogues to ensure that their specific needs and roles are addressed.
b. Build bridges between indigenous knowledge of climate change and current climate data to boost the capacities of communities to engage in formal processes for defining responses to the effects of rising temperatures, changing weather patterns and more. Indigenous knowledge of local ecosystems and adaptation strategies should also be incorporated in climate mitigation and adaptation policies and programs.

c. Support initiatives to make agro-climatic information accessible to community-based early warning mechanisms. Develop climate-sensitive agricultural practices with agri-tech schools in rural areas and climate-resilient livelihood strategies for agro-pastoralists with the input of women and young people. This can be achieved with technical input from climate scientists and peacebuilders.
d. Ensure that language on climate-related security risks is adapted to local realities and helps local communities to address pressing challenges.

Working with national governments…
a. Create spaces for dialogue between climate scientists and communities to bridge indigenous knowledge of climate impacts, mitigation and adaptation needs and strategies with national climate action.
b. Build capacity in national and local government to enact national climate mitigation and adaptation plans in conflict-sensitive ways, and to ensure that climate action is context-specific and does not accentuate vulnerabilities or increase the risk of conflict.

Working with regional organizations…
a. Map, analyse and scale up good examples of resilience-building in West Africa. Connect isolated interventions within the same geographic scope under the aegis of existing regional initiatives, such as the Great Green Wall and Action Against Desertification.

KEY MESSAGE 4

Address climate-related security risks through iterative responses, acting and learning in tandem

Climate change and security are urgent challenges for West Africa, requiring iterative responses: acting and learning in the same process. Important gaps remain in knowledge of climate vulnerabilities in the region. Limited coordination and collaboration between responses to climate change and security undermine the potential for positive outcomes. To address these gaps, there is a need to identify, connect and scale up resilience-building and peacebuilding success stories, build capacity in local research and policy communities and adapt funding and operations to meet new, complex and evolving challenges.

CHALLENGES

There are important gaps in our understanding of climate vulnerabilities and climate-related security risks in West Africa, and the risks of maladaptation are high where existing information is incomplete. For example, though West African governments adhere to international policy frameworks on climate change, mitigation and adaptation, there are weaknesses in national-level commitments and reporting processes that have consequences for the impact of those policies on the ground. In some countries, national climate action plans have not sufficiently analysed climate vulnerabilities because of pressure to submit reports on deadline. At worst, this dearth of information can contribute to exacerbating local vulnerabilities and increasing the risk of insecurity.

A range of policies framing climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as security responses and peacebuilding in West Africa, appear to have limited impact on the ground – particularly in insecure areas. This is related to the limited coordination and collaboration between actors and organisations working to address climate change and security in West Africa, where many donors and implementers appear to work in parallel, financing programmes and projects without an overarching vision or strategy.

RESPONSES AND BEST PRACTICES

Improving knowledge and capacity to address climate-related security risks in West Africa requires supporting local research, disseminating local research findings and building locally-led policies. There is a need to improve knowledge of sector vulnerabilities in West African states (including in agriculture, energy, pasture and water), as well as the primary sources and emitters of greenhouse gases, and appropriate technologies for climate mitigation and adaptation. Assessments of climate-related security risks should be carried out by local researchers and could be integrated into national legislation and national climate action, to guide mitigation and adaptation policies and programmes that boost resilience and peace. Local research should also guide the concrete steps that need to be taken now. This includes in-depth, context-specific mappings of climate change impacts and existing adaptation efforts on the ground in each West African country. These mappings can inform the activities of implementing organisations.

Connecting and maximising the impact of resilience-building and peacebuilding across the region also requires more coordinated actions and closer cooperation between implementers. The mechanisms through which these actions are supported also affect their impact. In areas where concrete actions can also be put on hold by insecurity, there is a need for flexible programming and funding to allow for lengthy processes of rebuilding social cohesion and reconciliation.

CONCRETE ACTIONS

Working with national governments…

a. Include an assessment of climate-related security risks in national reporting on climate change mitigation and adaptation to reduce the risk of maladaptation. Create national-level working groups for fieldwork and granular risk analysis to feed into national climate policies.

Working with regional organizations…

a. Support ECOWAS analysis and responses to climate-related security risks, particularly the transboundary effects of climate change and insecurity, with capacity-building, funding and platforms for exchange between ECOWAS and its member states.

b. Develop climate vulnerability policy briefs for each ECOWAS country, with in-country fieldwork and granular analysis, supporting dissemination of local research findings.

c. Boost West African analysis of climate-related security risks and responses by investing in research and supporting the diffusion of locally-led research projects in international academic and policy discussions.

d. Promote flexible and durable funding mechanisms for climate change adaptation and peacebuilding programming in conflict-affected contexts; give time and space to long-term social, political and economic processes.

CONTRIBUTORS

Boubacar BA, Mouhamadou-Moustapha BA, Georges BAZONGO, Aminetou BILAL, Stephanie BLENCKNER, Alexandre CABRAL, Fatoumata DJIRE, Anne FUNNEMARK, James GADIN, Leonard HASU, Sait Matty JAW, Michel Saraka KOUAME, Emmanuel Odilon KOUKOUBOU, Georgette Afiwavi KPONVI, Chris KWAJA, Mohamed Lamine MANGA, Karen MEIJER, Adji K. NDIAYE, Babacar NDIAYE, Ndéye Amy NDIAYE, Deborah N'GUESSAN, Ndubuisi NWOKOLO, Abdoulaye RAPHIOU, Elisabeth Lio ROSVOLD, Mahamoudou SAVADOGO, Silwe Kaphalo SEGORBAH, Kouyaté Goundo SISSOKO, Kheira TARIF, Aly TOUNKARA, Nana Alassane TOURE, Alioune TINE, Maman MATO WAZIRI, Niandou Daboré YACOUBA, Aboubacar YOULA

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