



LEVERAGING LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION FOR PEACEBUILDING IN CLIMATE- AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

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INTRODUCTION

Livelihoods are central to the relationship between climate change and conflict. Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns negatively affect household income sources and food supply, particularly those of households reliant on subsistence farming (rain-fed agriculture or livestock raising).¹ The lack of alternative livelihood options, coupled with political, social and economic strife, may lead people to resort to violence to safeguard their means of survival.²

Despite the recognition that climate change related livelihood deterioration is associated with conflict, the use of livelihood diversification as a peacebuilding tool remains limited in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts, and most diversification is done autonomously as people try to manage the effects of climate change and conflict by, for example, changing crop planting times or engaging in petty trade.³ Moreover, although women play a significant role in agricultural production, initiatives that support women's livelihoods are overlooked as a peacebuilding tool, overshadowed by peacebuilding efforts that focus on addressing the consequences of sexual violence after conflict.⁴ The lack of livelihood diversification interventions is

¹ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, eds H.-O. Pörtner et al. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2022).

² Mobjörk, M., Krampe, F. and Tarif, K., 'Pathways of climate insecurity: Guidance for policymakers', SIPRI Policy Brief, Nov. 2020.

³ Young, H. and Goldman, L., 'Managing natural resources for livelihoods: Supporting post-conflict communities', eds H. Young and L. Goldman, *Livelihoods, Natural Resources, and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding* (Routledge: London, 2015); and Tseer, T., 'Surviving violent conflicts and climate variability: An intersectional analysis of differentiated access to diversification resources among smallholder farmers in Kuka', *Heliyon*, vol. 9, no. 6 (June 2023).

⁴ Reinke, A. J., 'Gendering peacebuilding in post-conflict northern Uganda', *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2016); Galabuzi, C. et al., 'Women and youths participation in agroforestry: What counts and what doesn't around Mount Elgon, Uganda?', *Journal of Mountain Science*, vol. 18, no. 12 (Dec. 2021); Dumas, S. E. et al., "'Men are in front at eating time, but not when it comes to rearing the chicken": Unpacking the gendered benefits and costs of livestock ownership in Kenya', *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, vol. 39, no. 1 (Mar. 2018); Diiro, G. M. et al., 'Women's empowerment in agriculture and agricultural productivity: Evidence from rural maize farmer households in western Kenya', *PLOS ONE*, vol. 13, no. 5 (2018); and Carranza, M. and Niles, M. T.,

SUMMARY

● Livelihoods are central to the relationship between climate change and conflict. Despite the recognition that climate change related livelihood deterioration is associated with conflict, livelihood interventions are not prominent as a peacebuilding tool and most livelihood diversification is done autonomously. Supporting women's livelihoods is also overlooked as a peacebuilding tool, with the focus primarily being on addressing the consequences of sexual violence after conflict. This SIPRI Policy Brief offers insights into how building and diversifying livelihoods can contribute to peacebuilding in climate- and conflict-affected contexts. The policy brief recommends: (a) supporting viable and sustainable livelihood diversification interventions to effectively address livelihood insecurity and associated conflict risks, and (b) increasing support for women's livelihoods to promote women's empowerment as a peacebuilding tool.



concerning given their potential to contribute to peacebuilding, especially if they encompass women's livelihoods and acknowledge women's capacity for peacebuilding.⁵

This SIPRI Policy Brief begins by exploring how livelihood diversification can contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in climate- and conflict-affected contexts. It then examines how livelihood diversification can offer viable options in settings where climate change and resulting livelihood insecurity increase the risk of conflict. The brief highlights the importance to peacebuilding of supporting women's economic activities and emphasizes that explicitly addressing women's livelihoods empowers women and thus enables their contribution to peacebuilding efforts. To this end, the policy brief recommends: (a) supporting viable and sustainable livelihood diversification interventions to effectively address livelihood insecurity and associated conflict risks, and (b) increasing support for women's livelihoods to promote women's empowerment as a peacebuilding tool.

THE POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION OF LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION TO PEACEBUILDING

The deterioration of conditions that support people's livelihoods can increase the likelihood of human insecurity and violent conflict arising.⁶ Livelihoods such as farming and herding are adversely affected by climate change, and experiencing the impacts thereof may exacerbate grievances and tensions among marginalized groups, particularly in the absence of viable alternative livelihoods.⁷

Building and diversifying livelihoods, however, can have positive effects on peacebuilding in conflict-affected and post-conflict contexts, as people learn not only to manage the changes they experience but also to actively adjust to changing circumstances.⁸ Livelihood diversification is the process by which households move away from relying on a single source of income to engaging in a range of activities to ensure their survival and improve their living standards.⁹ For most rural agrarian households, diversification can be classified as either on-farm or off-farm. As its name implies, on-farm diversification includes income-generating activities that take place on the farm, such as growing crops, rearing livestock, hunting and fishing, while off-farm diversification encompasses activities that take place away from the farm, such as agroprocessing, trade and wage labour.¹⁰

⁵ 'Smallholder farmers spend credit primarily on food: Gender differences and food security implications in a changing climate', *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, vol. 3 (2019).

⁶ Young and Goldman (note 3).

⁷ van Baalen, S. and Mobjörk, M., *A Coming Anarchy? Pathways from Climate Change to Violent Conflict in East Africa* (Stockholm University, SIPRI and the Swedish Institute of International Affairs: Stockholm, 2016); and Mobjörk, Krampe and Tarif (note 2).

⁸ Mobjörk, Krampe and Tarif (note 2).

⁹ Johnson, M. F., Rodríguez, L. A. and Quijano Hoyos, M., 'Intrastate environmental peacebuilding: A review of the literature', *World Development*, vol. 137 (Jan. 2021); and Young, H. and Goldman, L., 'Managing natural resources for livelihoods: Helping post-conflict communities survive and thrive', eds Young and Goldman (note 3).

¹⁰ Ellis, F., 'Household strategies and rural livelihood diversification', *Journal of Development Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1 (Oct. 1998).

¹¹ Alob Loison, S., 'Rural livelihood diversification in sub-Saharan Africa: A literature review', *Journal of Development Studies*, vol. 51, no. 9 (2015).



Livelihood diversification is an important strategy that individuals and households can employ to manage the effects of climate shocks on their way of life.¹¹ Farmers in Nepal, for example, have moved away from farming to wage labour to cope with the impacts of climate change on agriculture.¹² In Ghana, households have undertaken various new on-farm and off-farm activities, including expanding the types of crop they plant and migrating seasonally, to adapt to increased climate variability.¹³

Livelihood diversification can also help people rebuild their lives in the aftermath of events other than climate shocks. In conflict settings, engaging in diverse income-generating activities can reduce livelihood insecurity and vulnerability, which may, in turn, prevent or mitigate conflict.¹⁴ Viable livelihood activities are equally crucial in post-conflict settings to facilitate recovery and peacebuilding processes. Interventions focused on providing ex-combatants with alternative livelihoods have yielded some success in reintegrating them into society.¹⁵ In the Sahel, for example, investing in the cultivation of drought-tolerant trees producing gum arabic—which can be directly consumed or used in the production of food, beverages and medicines—could provide a sustained source of income for former fighters from armed groups and help integrate them into the community.¹⁶ In Colombia, the provision of alternative livelihoods has contributed to peace by offering communities local employment and sources of income other than the production of illicit drug crops.¹⁷

Links between women's livelihoods and peacebuilding

Gender also influences livelihood diversification and peacebuilding. Gender relates to the social and cultural constraints that affect the roles, behaviours and activities in which men, women, boys and girls can engage.¹⁸ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 recognizes the role of women in conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. It also emphasizes the importance of women's equal participation in all peace and security efforts and encourages the greater participation of

¹¹ Adzawla, W. and Kane, A., 'Gender perspectives of the determinants of climate adaptation: The case of livelihood diversification in northern Ghana', *Review of Agricultural and Applied Economics*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2018); Bhatta, G., Aggarwal, P. K. and Shrivastava, A., 'Livelihood diversification and climate change adaptation in Indo-Gangetic Plains: Implication of rainfall regimes', *Journal of Agriculture and Environment*, vol. 16 (2015); and Matsuura, M., Luh, Y.-H. and Islam, A. H. Md. S., 'Weather shocks, livelihood diversification, and household food security: Empirical evidence from rural Bangladesh', *Agricultural Economics*, vol. 54, no. 4 (July 2023).

¹² Subedi, R. et al., 'Climatic variability and livelihood of rural farmers in Chisapani, Ramechhap, Nepal', *Nepal Journal of Environmental Science*, vol. 6 (Dec. 2018).

¹³ Antwi-Agyei, P., Stringer, L. C. and Dougill, A. J., 'Livelihood adaptations to climate variability: Insights from farming households in Ghana', *Regional Environmental Change*, vol. 14, no. 4 (Aug. 2014).

¹⁴ Young and Goldman (note 3).

¹⁵ Pritchard, M. F., 'From soldiers to park rangers: Post-conflict natural resource management in Gorongosa National Park', eds Young and Goldman (note 3); and Boyer, G. and Stork, A. M., 'The interface between natural resources and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration: Enhancing human security in post-conflict situations', eds Young and Goldman (note 3).

¹⁶ Kalilou, O., 'Climate change and conflict in the Sahel: The acacia gum tree as a tool for environmental peacebuilding', *International Affairs*, vol. 97, no. 1 (Jan. 2021).

¹⁷ Jaramillo Castro, L. and Stork, A. M., 'Linking to peace: Using BioTrade for biodiversity conservation and peacebuilding in Colombia', eds Young and Goldman (note 3).

¹⁸ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), *Gender Equality Glossary*, [n.d.].



women in those efforts.¹⁹ Research suggests that women's participation in peacebuilding and peace processes can lead to more enduring and successful peace agreements.²⁰

The involvement of women in economic activities and economic reconstruction, through their engagement in both traditional and diversified livelihood activities, holds potential for peacebuilding. Women encounter many obstacles and challenges in maintaining their livelihoods in conflict-affected and post-conflict settings, such as restrictions on land ownership and water tenure and limited access to credit.²¹ Moreover, women's economic roles shift during conflict as they undertake activities traditionally perceived as men's in order to support their households in the absence of male family members who may have migrated in search of other livelihood opportunities.²²

Despite the challenges they face, livelihood diversification can enable women to adapt to changing circumstances and continue providing for their households. For example, pastoralist women in northern Kenya have diversified their income sources to mitigate the negative effects on their livelihoods they were experiencing due to drought, environmental degradation and conflict. With the help of governmental and non-governmental organizations, they formed informal self-help women-only community groups to support each other in diversifying their livelihoods through on-farm and off-farm activities, including growing crops they could easily sell for profit and starting microenterprises such as butcheries and bakeries. The profits from their activities were pooled in communal interest-earning savings accounts. The savings, along with monthly group membership fees, allowed group members to obtain loans for establishing their own small businesses. Funds from the savings accounts were also used to address the community's needs, for example, paying school fees for vulnerable children and improving the community's water and sanitation facilities. While diversifying their livelihoods and improving community infrastructure, the women in these community groups also engaged in peace meetings and political advocacy to address conflict.²³

Empowering women and promoting their active participation in economic activities can contribute to peacebuilding; conversely, excluding women from employment opportunities and economic benefits or focusing solely on protecting them from physical violence can reinforce inequality and oppression, both of which fuel conflict.²⁴

¹⁹ UN Security Council Resolution 1325, 31 Oct. 2000.

²⁰ United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict* (World Bank: Washington, DC, 2018); Coomaraswamy, R., *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (UN Women: New York, 2015); and O'Reilly, M., Súilleabháin, A. Ó. and Paffenholz, T., *Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes* (International Peace Institute: New York, 2015).

²¹ Troell, J. and Keene, S., *Legal Recognition of Customary Water Tenure in Sub-Saharan Africa: Unpacking the Land-Water Nexus* (International Water Management Institute: Colombo, 2022); and Smith, E., 'Gender dimensions of climate insecurity', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2022/4, Mar. 2022.

²² Smith (note 21).

²³ Smith (note 21); and Coppock, D. L. and Desta, S., 'Collective action, innovation, and wealth generation among settled pastoral women in northern Kenya', *Rangeland Ecology and Management*, vol. 66, no. 1 (Jan. 2013).

²⁴ Gizelis, T.-I., 'Gender empowerment and United Nations peacebuilding', *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 46, no. 4 (July 2009); Gizelis, T.-I., 'Systematic study of gender, conflict, and peace', *Peace*



THE RISKS OF OVERLOOKING LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

Although livelihood diversification and women's economic empowerment can contribute to peacebuilding, these strategies have not been used to their full potential as peacebuilding tools. Livelihood diversification often occurs autonomously (i.e. without interventions or support), with limited capital, and in reaction to challenges rather than as part of a long-term strategy.²⁵ Three limitations characterize current approaches used in livelihood programmes in conflict-affected settings, which are discussed below.

First, where dedicated livelihood diversification interventions have been implemented, their long-term viability and sustainability has not been well considered.²⁶ Yet, without sustainable livelihood options, peacebuilding may be undermined.²⁷ One way in which peace processes can be undermined is when people, in seeking livelihoods, return to activities or adopt illicit, unsustainable practices that may increase the risk of conflict.²⁸ In Sierra Leone, for example, initiatives aimed at supporting alternative livelihoods for youth, ex-combatants and victims of war, including establishing reparation funds, reclaiming land, providing capacity building and skills training, and promoting agriculture, have been implemented to decrease the risk of conflict recurrence. Despite some success, these initiatives have fallen short of meeting people's long-term needs. Consequently, people, particularly youth, have returned to the conflict-linked mining sector and the informal urban economy because they have proven to be more lucrative than agriculture in rural areas.²⁹

Second, addressing gender during peacebuilding has mostly focused on addressing sexual violence.³⁰ Although UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security notes that economic reconstruction is essential to peacebuilding, women's roles in economic reconstruction are often undefined, despite achieving this goal being a priority for many women.³¹ In northern Uganda, for example, many women have prioritized addressing the unequal distribution of economic resources over physical violence as a post-conflict concern.³² The focus on addressing physical violence against women in peacebuilding has neglected inequitable access to economic resources and

Economics, Peace Science and Public Policy, vol. 24, no. 4 (Dec. 2018); Prügl, E. et al., 'Introduction: Local peacebuilding through a gender lens', eds E. Prügl et al., *Gender in Peacebuilding: Local Practices in Indonesia and Nigeria* (Brill: Leiden, 2022); and Turner, C. and A. Swaine, 'Aligning participation and protection in the women, peace and security agenda', *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, vol. 72, no. 2 (Apr. 2023).

²⁵ Tseer (note 3).

²⁶ Godnick, W. and Klein, D., *The Challenges of Supporting 'Alternative' Economic Opportunities for Peacebuilding: Perspectives from Colombia* (International Alert: London, 2009).

²⁷ Young and Goldman (note 3).

²⁸ Young and Goldman (note 8).

²⁹ Keili, A. and Thiam, B., 'Mitigating conflict in Sierra Leone through mining reform and alternative livelihoods programs for youth', eds Young and Goldman (note 3).

³⁰ Reinke (note 4).

³¹ Rigual, C., 'Three dimensions of gender mainstreaming in economic peacebuilding: Insights from Indonesia and Nigeria', eds Prügl et al. (note 24); and Aguiari, S., 'The cost of peace: Exploring opportunities for women's livelihoods in post-conflict settings', ed. W. Harcourt, *Women Reclaiming Sustainable Livelihoods: Spaces Lost, Spaces Gained* (Palgrave Macmillan: 2012).

³² Reinke (note 4).



women's lack of economic opportunities, which are central to vulnerability, grievances and the likelihood of conflict.³³

Third, livelihood programmes implemented in conflict-affected settings tend to focus on men and the livelihood activities in which they engage, overlooking the needs of women or how their roles have changed after conflict. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, women's work accounts for 60–80 per cent of food production and trade. Despite this, women's roles in agriculture and food production were overlooked in agricultural programmes for post-conflict reconstruction, which emphasized the growing of cash crops, generally grown by men, rather than food crops, generally grown by women.³⁴ This approach limited women from developing their own agriculture-based livelihoods, which had knock-on effects for food security.³⁵

RECOMMENDATIONS

Livelihood diversification and women's economic empowerment both have the potential to contribute to peacebuilding. To this end, this policy brief recommends: (a) supporting viable and sustainable livelihood diversification interventions to effectively address livelihood insecurity and associated conflict risks; and (b) increasing support for women's livelihoods to promote women's empowerment as a peacebuilding tool.

Supporting viable and sustainable livelihood diversification interventions

In settings affected by climate change and conflict, supporting livelihood diversification to improve livelihood security can be crucial for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, especially where livelihood insecurity drives conflict.³⁶ Policymakers and practitioners should support and facilitate the implementation of livelihood diversification strategies that are viable, sustainable and climate-resilient; that meet people's needs; that promote peacebuilding over the long term; and that prevent the recurrence of conflict linked to the deterioration of conditions that support livelihoods.

Combining on-farm and off-farm diversification in a complementary manner can yield better results. This is demonstrated in Karamoja, Uganda, an area susceptible to climate-related conflict. Although growing crops as the single source of livelihood diversification had, to some extent, improved livelihoods, the integration of more activities—both on-farm and off-farm—was ultimately needed to enhance livelihoods to a sufficient degree.³⁷ Having diverse sources of income can also mitigate the incentive for people to adopt illicit or unsustainable livelihoods or return to conflict-linked livelihoods in the long term.

³³ Stork, A., Travis, C. and Halle, S., 'Gender-sensitivity in natural resource management in Côte d'Ivoire and Sudan', *Peace Review*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Apr. 2015); and Aguiari (note 31).

³⁴ Stork, Travis and Halle (note 33).

³⁵ Stork, Travis and Halle (note 33).

³⁶ Young and Goldman (note 3).

³⁷ Muhereza, F.E., 'Livestock-centered diversification and livelihood recovery in post-disarmament Karamoja', Paper presented at the Pathways to Resilience in the Karamoja Cluster conference, 21–23 May 2019.



However, livelihood diversification alone may not yield significant results for peacebuilding.³⁸ One crucial element for the success of livelihood diversification as a peacebuilding tool, especially in the context of long-term peacebuilding processes, is moving beyond viewing livelihood diversification from the sole perspective of its ability to generate economic benefits. Adopting a more holistic approach to livelihood diversification, one that integrates political, economic, social, environmental and cultural factors, can yield broader, longer-term benefits. Focusing solely on supporting the economic aspects of diversification, such as improving access to capital, may not necessarily support the social aspects that are essential to peacebuilding.³⁹ Integrating activities that generate income with activities that promote social cohesion holds greater peacebuilding potential.⁴⁰ Improving the participation of marginalized groups, such as women, in economic activities by reducing their barriers to livelihood diversification, such as the restrictions women face in land ownership and water tenure, has further potential to improve peacebuilding.⁴¹

Increasing support for women's livelihoods

Economic recovery after conflict is a concern for many women. Policymakers and practitioners should, therefore, design livelihood diversification programmes for conflict-affected and post-conflict settings that are specifically geared towards women and their economic needs. Such programmes should acknowledge and aim to eliminate the barriers that women encounter in engaging in livelihood activities, such as poor access to credit, lack of land tenure and restrictive gender norms.

Projects in conflict-affected countries that included women in livelihood diversification have demonstrated positive economic and peacebuilding benefits. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations supported the voluntary formation of community groups for discussing improvement of livelihoods and food security and sharing views on associated challenges. In the north-eastern DRC, fishing is a traditionally male-dominated activity and social norms prohibited women from taking a proactive role in fishing. Through discussion in the community groups and awareness-raising efforts, social norms shifted, allowing women to fish, thereby increasing their income and improving their food security. The community groups created an opportunity for women to engage in a new livelihood activity at the same time as empowering them and improving their status as they participated or took leadership roles in resolving tensions within the community, thus also contributing to peacebuilding. The change in social norms also improved

³⁸ Kurtz, J. and Elsamahi, M., 'How can peacebuilding contribute to climate resilience? Evidence from the drylands of East and West Africa', *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, vol. 63 (Aug. 2023).

³⁹ Myrntinen, H. and López Castañeda, D., 'Perils of peacebuilding: Gender-blindness, climate change and ceasefire capitalism in Colombia and Myanmar', eds S. Smith and K. Yoshida, *Feminist Conversations on Peace* (Bristol University Press: Bristol, 2022).

⁴⁰ Kurtz and Elsamahi (note 38); and Young and Goldman (note 3).

⁴¹ Kurtz and Elsamahi (note 38); and Troell and Keene (note 21).

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household relationships between men and women, evidenced by a decrease in gender-based violence.⁴²

In Maluku, Indonesia, a livelihood support project implemented by the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization supported the creation of nutmeg juice cooperatives through material inputs and training.⁴³ Under the project, women were involved in managing the cooperatives; as a result, their incomes increased, and they reported feeling empowered and independent as they did not have to rely on their husbands for money. The project also changed local gender norms and power relationships within communities, as women could make their voices heard and question their community leaders when they did not receive machinery or other equipment they were promised.⁴⁴

Women's economic empowerment in conflict-affected contexts can improve their economic outlook as well as change social norms and enhance gender relations within communities. All these factors are important for peacebuilding. Livelihood diversification programmes in conflict-affected contexts should, therefore, be designed for women and aim to address their needs, as well as consider broad obstacles for women, such as restrictive gender norms and restrictions on land tenure, in order to contribute to sustainable peacebuilding.

CONCLUSIONS

Livelihood diversification can be a helpful tool in reducing the likelihood of climate-related conflict. Purposefully supporting sustainable and viable livelihood alternatives that consider the needs of women represents an additional avenue for peacebuilding.

⁴² Justino, P. et al., 'Pathways to achieving food security, sustainable peace and gender equality: Evidence from three FAO interventions', *Development Policy Review*, vol. 38, no. 1 (Jan. 2020); and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Dimitra Clubs in Action: Special Edition of the Dimitra Newsletter* (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations: Rome, 2019), pp. 20–21.

⁴³ Rigual (note 31), p. 163.

⁴⁴ Rigual (note 31), pp. 163–167; and Prügl et al. (note 24), p. 18.