DANIDA FELLOWSHIP CENTRE

CLIMATE CHANGE AND CONFLICT: LESSONS FROM DANIDA-FUNDED RESEARCH

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Denmark's strategy for development cooperation pledges to engage substantially in supporting climate change adaptation and increasing resilience in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. In 'The World We Share' (2021-2025), there is a strong emphasis on preventing poverty and inequality along with conflict, displacement, and irregular migration while strengthening resilience towards climate change. Integrating climate change programming in countries which face protracted conflict is a pressing issue and has never been more relevant. Countries that experience violent conflict, are simultaneously some of the most vulnerable to climate change but remain the least funded. However, findings from development research collaboration projects (FFU projects), highlight how support for climate-related activities in fragile contexts requires a deeper understanding of local and historical dynamics and the ways in which climate change programming can also interact with and amplify conflict dynamics.

This policy brief is based on findings from a meta-study, which overviews research from eight Danida-funded projects, with a particular focus on lessons for programming on climate change in countries affected by conflict. Based on research in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Myanmar, Somaliland and Tanzania, the projects collectively emphasise the multidimensional character of the climate-conflict nexus, contingent on the specific socio-political context, historical conflict dynamics, the interplay of climate stressors, and the vulnerability and coping capacity of local communities. It concludes with a list of key recommendations to support tailored, adaptive and accessible climate financing, which overcomes low donor risk appetite and restrictive monitoring in conflict-affected contexts.

The meta-study report can be found at the Danida Fellowship Centre website, see: https://dfcentre.com/research/

Local Conflicts over Diminishing Natural Resources and their links to Climate Change

A growing body of international research demonstrates that the link between climate change and security is indirect, non-linear and multi-dimensional. Research from Danida-funded projects shows that climate change is putting pressure on both rural and peri-urban livelihoods and, in some cases, amplifying or exacerbating pre-existing inter-communal tensions and conflict dynamics. For people whose lives depend on land and agricultural livelihoods which are climate sensitive, research shows that the pressure placed on already vulnerable groups is leading to conflicts, especially in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. However, research shows that focusing too strongly on climate-related factors as a cause of conflict has the potential to overshadow more fundamental issues underpinning violence and instability. These include the legacies and violent histories of colonialism, ongoing forms of state-based persecution, weak governance and legal frameworks and policies, which undermine people's access to land and natural resources.

Conflicts Associated with Land Appropriation, Conservation and Commercial Interventions

Research shows that appropriation and regulation of land are major drivers of violence at both local and national levels across many conflict contexts. The livelihoods of many rural and Indigenous populations are threatened not only by climate change, but primarily by unequal distribution of resources, land acquisitions and the political manipulation of property rights. Research from Danida-funded projects demonstrates that climate change actions can inadvertently contribute to local conflicts by exacerbating historical trends of land dispossession, including the legacies of colonial land laws. In Kenya, Tanzania and Myanmar, for example, some community-forestry, national parks, and wildlife conservation reserves have contributed to land alienation processes, constraining and criminalising the livelihoods of nomadic and forest-dependent communities. The introduction of wildlife conservancies, agrobusinesses as well as large-scale wind and oil projects has also led to the dispossession of communal lands and, in some cases, led to violent conflict between affected communities.

Effects of Violent Conflict on Financing for Climate Change

While there is increasing global policy attention on the need to prioritise climate funding for communities experiencing violent conflict, research shows the need for more flexible funding arrangements in conflict-affected contexts. People living in violent conflict settings are three times more affected by climate extremes than those in other countries, yet receive the least climate funding. The ongoing violent conflicts in Myanmar and Somalia raise important questions about whether United Nations organisations and donors should rethink state-centred financing for climate change initiatives, especially in the cases of illegitimate and violent military regimes. Research points to the need for climate funding to shift away from top-down, state-centric and purely technical solutions to people-centred approaches with flexible funding and reporting requirements suitable for local CSOs and Indigenous-led groups. Instead of being constrained by state-based solutions, climate financing in conflict contexts should target assistance at local actors and non-state organisations who have an existing track record of working with communities on the ground.

Gender Inequality

Research across all projects shows that women suffer disproportionately from the impacts of the climate-conflict nexus, for various social, economic and cultural reasons. Despite changes to national-level laws to promote gender equality in some countries, the increasing privatisation of communal lands in conflict-affected contexts has a disproportionately negative impact on women and their livelihoods. Part of this is informed by the fact that in many countries, land ownership and transferal is guided by cultural and social norms which position women as subordinate to men, and in some cases, excludes women entirely from inheritance rights.

Urbanisation Trends

Research in Kenya, Somaliland, Ghana and Burkina Faso highlights the importance of responding to urbanisation trends in climate programming in conflict contexts. This builds off a growing body of work which recognises the growing climate vulnerabilities of people living in urban and peri-urban spaces in conflict-affected contexts and the challenges posed by population growth as a result of internal displacement, due to conflict, climate change and land acquisitions. Despite the fact that many urban centres are growing in population fast-growing small towns, mid-sized cities and peripheries of larger cities have largely been ignored in climate financing.

Recommendations for Climate Programming in Conflict Contexts

This body of research underscores the need for an integrated and context-specific approach to climate-change programming in conflict affected contexts. By understanding the multifaceted interactions between environmental stressors, land tenure, socio-economic inequalities and political dynamics, policymakers can develop targeted interventions to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change and promote sustainable peace in these vulnerable regions. Ten key recommendations for climate-programming in conflict contexts should be prioritised:

1. **Country-specific Programming:** Climate change is not a causal instigator of conflict, but feeds into existing dynamics and historical tensions. It is vital that climate change programming in conflict affected countries is tailored to meet specific local conditions. Beyond the importance of working with local communities as part of a localisation agenda, it is important that programming does not amplify and feed into existing conflict dynamics.

2. **Recognition of Land Policies as a Catalyst for Conflict:** Climate change policies and programming should ensure they do not exacerbate land-related grievances and disputes and enhance vulnerabilities of marginalised groups. In conflict contexts where the appropriation and regulation of land are major drivers of conflict, promoting equitable land distribution and tenure security should be a key part of climate change programming.

3. **Protection of Indigenous and Nomadic Pastoralist Rights:** Globally, nomadic pastoral and Indigenous communities encounter various risks, which in addition to climatic change, include the privatisation of land, relocation and sedentarisation programmes. The implementation of climate change programming can further constrain the mobility crucial for pastoral and Indigenous livelihoods, leading to unequal outcomes, benefits and rights. Policymakers must prioritise the protection of Indigenous and nomadic pastoralist rights, as their unique lifestyles and livelihoods can also support sustainable adaptation models.

4. **Community-driven Adaptation Strategies, rather than Universal Policies:** Flexible and inclusive adaptation strategies that consider the dynamic nature of conflicts and the specific vulnerabilities of marginalised groups should be adopted. Interventions need to be tailored to the unique needs, knowledge, and practices of local communities, empowering them to actively contribute to the design and implementation of sustainable solutions.

5. **Integration of Conflict Sensitivity in Climate Change Policies and Programming:** Policymakers must integrate conflict sensitivity into climate change policies and programming to avoid exacerbating existing tensions and further marginalising already vulnerable groups (especially women and girls).

6. **Gender-Inclusive Climate Policies:** Recognising the distinct roles and vulnerabilities of both men and women within conflict contexts is critical for effective climate change programming. Policymakers should prioritise gender-inclusive programmes and policies tailored to support women and girls and the specific challenges they face.

7. **Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:** Strengthening local conflict resolution mechanisms is imperative for preventing disputes over land and resources from escalating into violence, especially in periods of climatic shock. Policymakers should invest in community-based conflict resolution training and establish platforms for dialogue in conflict-affected areas.

8. **Regional Mechanisms and Cross Border Collaboration:** Transboundary issues, such as migration routes and resource management, often contribute to conflicts between rural communities, which suffer from climatic shocks. Policymakers should facilitate cross-border collaboration, programming and information sharing between governments and local communities in neighbouring regions about how to respond to climate change.

9. **Climate Change Governance for Urban Transformation:** Climate change policies and programming need to better account for population growth and urbanisation trends due to conflict as well as a dwindling resource base in rural areas. More support needs to be directed to public safety nets, water and land management and alternate livelihood strategies in small to medium sized towns.

10. **Investment in Research:** The ability of international policymakers to build robust strategies for climate change in conflict-affected contexts, relies on an in-depth understanding of the complex dynamics on the ground. It is vital to continue funding research collaboration projects (eg. FFU projects), to support effective climate programmes and policies which are evidence based and responsive to the specific needs and priorities of fragile and conflict-affected contexts.