

# Conference Report

Potsdam Spring Dialogues 2022 – online

sef:

## Climate change and conflicts – preventive strategies of African regional organisations

Ingo Nordmann

**How are risks caused by climate change and conflict in Africa interlinked, and how do they exacerbate each other? How can we ensure an exchange between the policy makers who design strategies to tackle climate-related challenges and the local populations that suffer from its effects? How can the disconnect between the mitigation-focused Global North and the adaptation-focused Global South be overcome? And why do climate change and conflict affect men and women in different ways? Answers to these questions and more were provided at the Potsdam Spring Dialogues 2022, which took place online in four sessions on 29-31 March and 5-7 April 2022.**

70% of the most climate-vulnerable countries are also some of the most fragile in terms of security, as Lukas Rüttinger, Senior Advisor at Adelphi, explained. He added that while climate change does not directly cause more conflict and insecurity, it converges with other economic, political, social and environmental pressures, such as food insecurity, rising inequality and uncontrolled urbanisation. These in turn exacerbate drivers of violent conflict, especially in already fragile contexts.

Philip Attuquayefio from the Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department of the African Union Commission explained that in the region where he works, the Lake Chad basin, politicians have moved beyond the question whether climate change has a role to play in security issues or not, as they clearly see its influence in their day-to-day work. As an example, he pointed to intercommunal conflicts over access to natural resources in the Sahel region, which are dramatically intensified by climate change. He highlighted efforts by the African Union to address these challenges, reflected in regular meetings of its Peace and Security Council on the issue.

### Making vulnerable communities resilient to disaster risks

In many African regions, a preponderance of conflict coincides with a high risk of disasters such as droughts, floods or cyclones. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 offers a global



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Water scarcity can be reinforced by climate change

plan to mitigate such disaster risks. It is intended to move from short-term disaster response towards long-term disaster management and preparation. It is often a challenge to achieve this “behavioural change”, as Amjad Abbashar from the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) in Nairobi explained, since emergency response often takes up all capacity, leaving none for building up long-term resilience.



Potsdam Spring Dialogues 2022 – Online (clockwise): Angelika Spelten (Chair) with Perrine Piton and Amjad Abbashar

He added that disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures do not enjoy a “CNN effect”, as they do not usually receive as much public attention as major disasters. Their importance can be highlighted by showcasing specific examples of how DRR measures have saved lives. Hopefully, this might lead humanitarian organisations, climate adaptation specialists and DRR experts to overcome their silos and cooperate more intensively.

### Connecting global policy frameworks to local needs

Involving the local context and perspective is crucial on the path to disaster preparedness, as Perrine Piton from Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS) pointed out. That is why BRCiS, a consortium of nine international and national organisations, works with 400 communities on the ground towards community-led resilience. She criticised what she described as a “huge inequality of information”, as international policy makers rarely possess the necessary local knowledge, while local communities do not have the power to design policies.

This must be remedied by empowering local people to influence policy design, while at the same time providing policy makers with more information on local conditions. “It is not about telling people what to do, but about co-designing strategies with local people,” Piton said. Amjad Abbashar added that for

### Evidence of climate change in indigenous cultural practices

In some indigenous communities in the Horn of Africa, as Linda Ogallo explained, children are given a specific name if they are born during a drought. Over the past 10 years, these names have become more popular, suggesting that the frequency of droughts has increased over that time. This complements scientific evidence of climate change in the region, and creates opportunities to communicate about these matters in a vivid, relatable way, integrating and acknowledging local cultural practices.

this reason the Sendai Framework calls for national and local disaster risk reduction strategies, which have already been developed in many African countries.

### From local to global and back: circular processes in policy making

A similar approach is needed in the field of migration, according to Linda Adhiambo Oucho, Executive Director of the African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) in Nairobi. The question, she said, is not how to adapt international frameworks to the local level, but how the local level can inform frameworks from their inception onwards. Policy making should be a bottom-up, rather than a top-down project.

On the other hand, Kokebe Hailegabriel, Team Leader at the German development agency GIZ in Djibouti, highlighted the importance of the national and international levels. She suggested a circular approach to policy development, so that local knowledge can influence the ministerial level, which can in turn develop policies that work on the ground. Atle Solberg, Head of the Platform on Disaster Displacement in Geneva, agreed and added that while local knowledge and agency are indispensable, some issues can only be solved at the global level – most notably an effective reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

### Making climate knowledge accessible

Local communities must urgently be given the ability to adapt to an already changed climate and its consequences, argued Linda Ogallo. She works at the Climate Prediction and Application Centre of IGAD, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, a Regional Economic Committee (REC) in the Horn of Africa. IGAD supports communities through projects such as farmer field schools, where locals learn how to deal practically with the disastrous effects of climate change.

By learning how to interpret weather forecasts, they are empowered to change their agricultural practices in the hope of achieving higher yields, for example by switching to drought-tolerant crops. IGAD puts an emphasis on translating relevant information into local languages and a non-scientific style. It has also initiated partnerships with local radio stations, since radio broadcasts, rather than phones or the internet, are often the best way to reach people.

## Effects of climate change on peacebuilding missions

80% of the personnel of UN, AU or EU peace operations are deployed in climate hotspots, explained Florian Krampe, Programme Director at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). A 2019 SIPRI study highlights the double burden of climate and conflict for peacebuilding missions. As well as having severe humanitarian consequences, this has a measurable influence on the mission mandate and success prospects of security sector reforms and state-building processes.

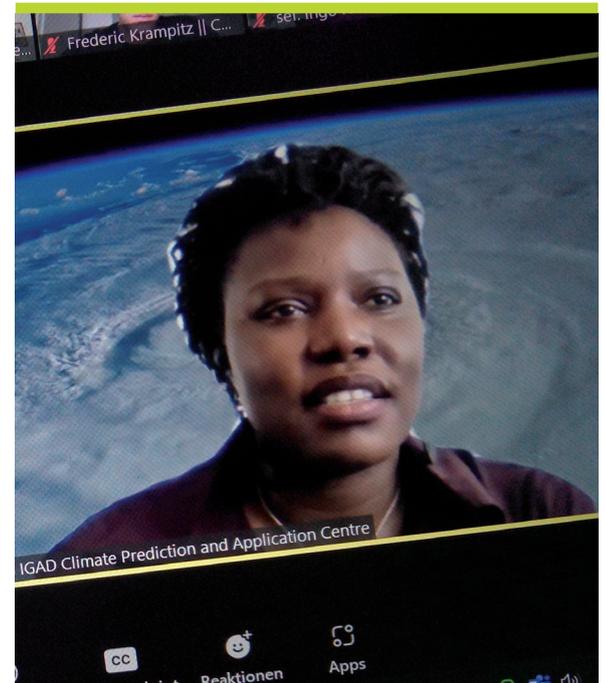
### Gender, climate change and conflict: a cross-cutting issue

Over the four sessions of the conference, it became clear that climate change and conflict affect men and women in different ways. Christophe Hodder summed it up: “Women bear the brunt of climate change.” They are particularly affected by displacement following disasters or conflict and are often left to care for children and the elderly while having to find water, food and firewood. They are also more likely to experience violence and rape. Nevertheless, they are not sufficiently involved in political and social decision-making processes.

Men, in turn, are more likely to be recruited by violent groups and to be actively involved in wars. They migrate more frequently for economic reasons, while women migrate more often after disasters, as Aimée-Noël Mbiyozo, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in Pretoria, pointed out. She added that, at least in South Africa, the gender dimension is not considered at all in reports and migration policies; this puts women and the children travelling with them at particular risk.

Possible solutions that were offered during the conference included amplifying female voices in peacebuilding processes, encouraging female-led businesses and initiatives, and introducing quotas for women in political systems (for example, UNSOM aims for 30%). However, there is still a long way to go until gender equality is achieved.

In some cases, violent groups such as Al-Shabaab in Somalia can indirectly benefit from the effects of climate change. After floods or droughts, they are often the only authority able to respond and to manage flows of emergency aid. This poses a dilemma for international humanitarian actors, who are forced to pay taxes to Al-Shabaab if they want to deliver aid to



Linda Ogallo, Climate Change Adaptation Expert, IGAD

the people. While this is unavoidable from a humanitarian standpoint, it undermines the peace process and state-building efforts, as in practice, it means recognising Al-Shabaab as legitimate government actors.

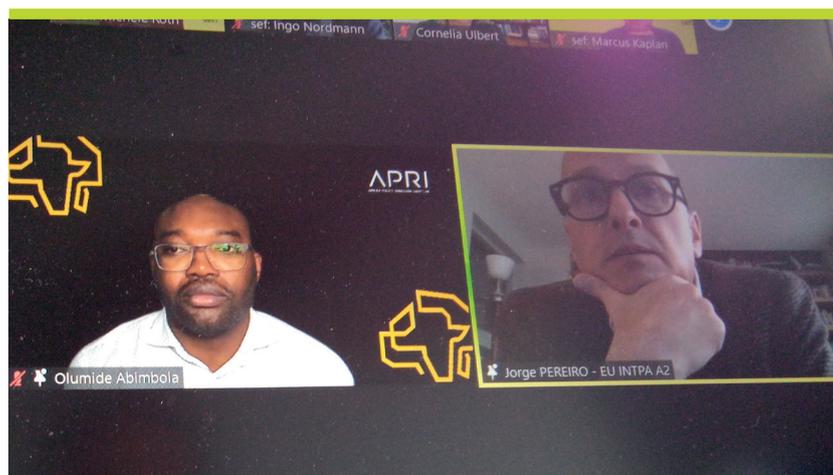
Climate change can also make it easier for extremist groups to recruit new members, as they may be offering the only economic opportunities in resource-poor regions. As livelihoods deteriorate due to climate change, it becomes more difficult to disarm former combatants and reintegrate them into the civil economy. Peacebuilding missions must be aware of these impacts and can mitigate them, as Florian Krampe explained, by considering environmental factors from the outset.

## Environmental peacebuilding in Somalia

Christophe Hodder, UN Climate Security and Environmental Advisor to Somalia, explained how this could look in practice. He is the first dedicated environmental advisor deployed to a peacebuilding mission and works with UN, EU and AU troops, as well as with police and military authorities, to advance environmental peacebuilding. This concept aims to open up pathways to cooperation between adversary groups who find themselves confronted with the same climate-related risks.

For example, the banks of the Shebelle River were rehabilitated to reduce the impacts of often devastating annual floods. This was done through collaboration between peacebuilders and local community leaders, and brought together different clans that would normally be in competition with each other. In this way, protecting the environment in the region has also advanced peacebuilding efforts.

The concept can also work the other way round, as Lukas Rüttinger explained. The humanitarian organisation Mercy Corps had implemented a peacebuilding project involving villages in Eastern



Potsdam Spring Dialogues 2022 – Online: Olumide Abimbola, Executive Director, APRI (left) and Jorge Pereiro Piñón, Directorate-General for International Partnerships, European Commission

Africa (Uganda and the Mendera triangle), which were subsequently hit by a severe drought. In those villages where peacebuilding committees had been established, communities were better able to deal with the disaster and to manage access to scarce natural resources effectively. The peacebuilding efforts actively increased the communities' resilience to climate risks.

### Migration, climate change and conflict

As the effects of climate change can lead to the deterioration of livelihoods and economic prospects, they can be a major migration trigger. A Groundswell Report by the World Bank predicts 86 million internal migrants in sub-Saharan Africa by 2050. Much of this will be rural to urban migration, which may increase risks of tension in already volatile cities.

As Aimée-Noël Mbiyozo highlighted, migration is usually a layered decision; the reasons behind it are often complex, with climate change possibly being one of the most powerful. However, climate change may also prevent people from migrating, as they become too poor to do so. This “involuntary immobility” (Mbiyozo) seems much more likely than a climate-induced rush from the Global South to the Global North.

### Forecasting climate mobility – and harnessing its opportunities

The Africa Climate Mobility Initiative (ACMI), launched by the African Union Commission, the UN and the World Bank, has developed innovative tools to forecast climate-induced population movements. As Sarah Rosengaertner from ACMI explained, they use a data-based model to simulate different future development scenarios, which lead to different distributions of the population. Climate variables can then be factored into these scenarios, revealing potential future hotspots. One finding is that from 2030 to 2050, more population movements are anticipated within states than across international borders.

ACMI's Managing Director Kamal Amakrane then highlighted the potential positive aspects of climate mobility. Africa should be considered a “continent on the move”, determined to harness the opportunities of free movement and free trade, as exemplified by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). He argued that economic and political integration has led to great progress in other regions of the world, notably Europe, and cited the success of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as potential inspiration for the rest of the continent.

### AU-EU cooperation: more plans than action?

In their 2018 MoU on Peace, Security and Governance, the AU and EU agreed to cooperate on “climate-related security threats”, a commitment which was reiterated at the 2022 AU-EU summit in Brussels. The discussion showed, however, that four years down the road, much still needs to be done to turn these plans into tangible action. Olumide Abimbola, Executive Director at the Africa Policy Research Institute in Berlin, pointed out that the climate crisis simply has much greater urgency for Africa, where people are currently suffering from its catastrophic effects. He requested a clearer commitment from the EU to support adaptation measures in Africa financially and politically.

Jorge Pereiro Piñón, Head of Sector for Peace and Security, Governance, Migration and Mobility in the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships, countered that the EU does in fact understand the urgency of the issue, while admitting that implementation of the 2018 MoU is still under way. Key steps in that process are increasing the climate-related knowledge and capacity of EU and AU practitioners working on peace and security, and establishing trilateral cooperation between the EU, AU and the UN.

## Mitigation or adaptation? A North-South divide

The debate showed a key difference in the way Africa and Europe seem to look at the climate crisis. While Europe, and perhaps the Global North, is more concerned with climate change mitigation, focusing on how present and future CO<sub>2</sub> emissions can be reduced, Africa and the Global South are much more concerned with adaptation and resilience-building and are trying to deal with daunting challenges Africa's vulnerable population is living through right now. As one comment from the audience put it bluntly: "You [Europeans] are talking about the future; we don't even have a present."



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### Local communities need solutions for climate and conflict challenges

Kamal Amakrane explained why the European focus on mitigation causes such frustration in Africa. Its 1.2 billion people have barely contributed 4% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This means decarbonisation cannot be a priority for them, especially in sectors that are still developing, such as transport. While the world talks about the 1.5°C target, 23 African countries have already crossed that threshold. The Sahel region has even passed 1.8°C, with disastrous consequences. That is why Africans have decisively and rightfully demanded a clear commitment from countries in the Global North to finance Africa's transformation towards a climate-resilient economy.

This ties in with the global debate on how developing countries can be compensated adequately for climate-related "loss and damage". This concept has also been acknowledged by the IPCC in its Sixth Assessment Report in 2022. Several speakers demanded that this should be a key focus of the next UN Climate Conference, due to take place in Egypt in November 2022. If the international community fails to address these injustices, as Amakrane put it, all the hard-earned improvements in stability, economic growth and political integration achieved over the last 50 years are at risk of being lost.

## Bringing different perspectives together

A number of cross-cutting issues came up in most or all four conference sessions, as Ottilia Maunganidze from the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria pointed out. Environmentalists and peacebuilders need to engage in dialogue and acquire knowledge about each other's fields of expertise. The local and international levels of policy making need to be integrated, so that community knowledge and political frameworks can inform each other. Communities' access to natural resources is crucial: this access is often impacted by climate-related disasters, which threatens livelihoods and may lead to conflict. Where it is managed well, however, the risks of tensions are reduced.

The specific context is more important – and usually more complicated – than assumed. Climate- and conflict-related challenges must be analysed as part of a complex web of interaction with inclusive governance, inequality and marginalisation, racism, displacement and voluntary relocation. The gender dimension must not be overlooked.

A big disconnect remains between the Global North and the Global South, which need to overcome the divide between mitigation and adaptation and tackle both simultaneously. Industrialised countries need to take responsibility and step up their adaptation and resilience financing in Africa. While many bridges still need to be built, as Ottilia Maunganidze put it in her final words, the Potsdam Spring Dialogues 2022 have succeeded in bringing different perspectives together and demonstrated viable approaches to problem-solving.

## Imprint

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Phone +49 (0)228 959 25-0 : Fax -99  
sef@sef-bonn.org : @sefbonn  
www.sef-bonn.org

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Hillary Crowe

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