How can we respond to climate security crises in Africa?

Authors: Frans Schapendonk, Giulia Caroli, Grazia Pacillo, Peter Laderach

Panellists and short summary

This panel discussion took place at a time in which the effects of climate change are increasingly felt all over the world. Its impact, however, are not equally distributed. Many countries in the global south are disproportionately exposed and vulnerable to climate change, while also lacking the capacity to mitigate both climate hazards and related security risks. This is especially true for Africa, where many countries remain among those most vulnerable to climate risks and hazards, while also facing high levels of socio-economic, political, and institutional fragility.

Despite this, there exists a lack of robust, localised, and policy-relevant evidence specifically around how exactly climate security risks may emerge and play out across diverse national and regional African contexts. The Africa Climate Security Observatory (ACSO) aims to fill this evidence-gap by generating local, almost real-time evidence to inform timely and responsive decision-making. We focus, therefore, on three key questions:

- How can we effectively integrate data generated by observatory into decision-making processes in Africa at all levels in order to mitigate climate security risks?
- How can we tailor observatory data to humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding interventions?
- What new or existing mechanisms should we link the observatory to in order to maximise its scalability and “break the cycle” of climate and conflict in the continent?

For this webinar, we were joined by our distinguished panel, consisting of:

- **Arif Husain** (Chief Economist, World Food Programme)
- **Ana Maria Loboguerreo Rodriguez** (Head of Global Policy Research, CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture, and Food Security)
- **Hon. Mohammed Guleid** (CEO, Frontier Counties Development Council, Kenya)
- **Hanna Minaye** (Focal Person on Climate, Peace and Security and Environmental Sustainability, African Union Commission)
- **Sophie Desmidt** (Policy Officer, Security and Resilience Programme at the European Centre for Development Policy Management)
Why this webinar?

The climate crisis, and the security challenges it compounds, is no longer a hypothetical concept. For millions of individuals, households, and communities across the globe, climate change has already translated into very real threats to livelihoods, health, and physical security. Africa in particular emerges as disproportionately vulnerable to compounded climate and security risks. While we should avoid making continent-wide generalisations, it’s notable that over a quarter of the world’s 40 most climate-vulnerable countries are located in Africa, 4 of which were located in the top 10 as of 2019 (Eckstein, Kunzel and Schafer, 2021). Similarly, over 23 of the world’s 40 most fragile countries are located in Africa, 6 of which are located in the top 10 (Fragile States Index, 2021).

In such contexts, drivers of climate vulnerability often overlap with drivers of insecurity and conflict. For example, fragile states that lack the capacity to effectively govern and manage inter-group or state-society relations are less likely to provide social, economic, and nutritional safety nets in the event of climate-related shocks, but also lack the capacity to address and resolve any potential instability or tension that may follow. Furthermore, undemocratic states often institutionalise unjust and discriminatory political and economic structures that marginalise certain groups in particular, fuelling both political grievances and a disproportionate vulnerability to climate shocks. The impacts of a changing climate can, especially in already fragile contexts, therefore initiate, catalyse or sustain self-reinforcing cycles of vulnerability and violence. Communities in these contexts subsequently suffer under the joint burden of climate change and conflict. As the exact nature and severity of climate impacts are intrinsically tied into socio-economic and political grievances, breaking this cycle demands integrated, cross-sectoral policy and development responses. In other words, the multiple interrelated dimensions of insecurity need to be tackled at the same time. In addition to this, responses must also be localized and policies right sized, to match the often highly localized nature of the risks they intend to tackle.

Given the current absence of relevant evidence on the intersection between climate and existing insecurities, tackling these issues remains very difficult. Evidence generated for policy makers and programmers needs to go beyond simply identifying the role of climate, and answer the why, where, and what questions, in order to intervene appropriately. While there is ample data, there remains a fundamental lack of knowledge. This means that while there is information available – for instance, on food security, nutritional values, and the frequency and nature of conflicts – these streams of information remain siloed, making it hard to create a coherent picture that can inform an integrated set of responses. Additionally, analytical information needs to be presented to decision makers in accessible ways, and must align with the processes through which policies and programmes are designed and implemented. There remains something of a structural disconnect between researchers, practitioners, and politicians, visible in the different ways these groups communicate but also in the timescales they use. This is particularly important in the context of climate security as responses to climate-related security threats are incredibly time sensitive. Vulnerable communities need to be reached before a potential escalation into violence and conflict. There is therefore a need for integrated, robust and rapid or real-time evidence generation that takes into account how climate interacts with specific local, sub-national, or national-level characteristics and ongoing socio-economic and political processes.
Background

Africa is a hugely diverse continent, and even within its separate counties there exist hugely divergent environmental, socio-economic, political, and institutional settings. This means that the degree to which African countries are exposed to climate-fragility risks varies massively. However, the substantial overlap between the (structural) drivers of conflict and drivers of climate vulnerability (Buhaug & von Uexkull, 2021) means these risks tend to be self-reinforcing, and as the climate crises worsens, many African countries are likely to face increasingly compounded climate and fragility-related issues in the short- to medium-term.

Climate-fragility risks are defined as a series of overlapping and compounding risk pathways that may potentially emerge when the impacts of climate change interact with pre-existing insecurities (Rüttinger et al., 2015). Conceptualising of the climate security nexus through a risk-resilience framework is perhaps the best way to understand how the nexus operates, and also serves to inform responsive climate security-related interventions. The complex and emergent nature of climate-fragility risks means that we should avoid drawing deterministic conclusions about causality and be wary of conducting retrospective analysis in which climate impacts are perhaps given more weight than they are due. Climate change is more likely to produce insecurity only when combined with other more structural factors. This means we need to accept a certain degree of unknowability in terms of how, if, and when climate-fragility risks may escalate into conflict and violence. As the emergence of climate security risks are made more likely by processes from multiple dimensions – occurring at multiple spatial scales - its emergence and exactly what shape it will take is incredibly unpredictable. Because of this, it is essential to continuously and rapidly gather and monitor evidence to inform programme and policy adaptation.

There are several climate-fragility risks that appear to be particularly relevant for already fragile areas in Africa. For example, competition over access to scarce resources may spill over into conflict and violence in the absence of effective and equitable resource sharing or dispute resolution mechanisms (see case study on Kenya), particularly in areas experiencing rapid demographic growth and economic development. Such dynamics are visible across the Sahel and other areas of sub-Saharan Africa, where pastoralist communities are increasingly forced to travel further afield to access pasture and water, at times coming into violent contact with small-holder farmer communities or large agri-businesses. Climate-induced resource scarcity may also contribute to livelihood insecurity and force people to migrate. This is particularly true for those who work in climate-sensitive sectors and who – due to pre-existing inequality or fragility- have little access to livelihood diversification strategies and are unable to find work elsewhere. Most of such moves are made from rural to urban areas, which can end up reproducing insecurity and fuelling grievances, especially if urban authorities are already overwhelmed and unable to provide proper safety nets and support to growing urban populations. Climate change may also lead to food price volatility and supply chain disruption, potentially fuelling longstanding grievances and sparking demonstrations, protests, or violence.
Case Study: Kenya

Kenya has in recent years suffered under more frequent and more severe drought, so much so that President Kenyatta has at the time of writing declared a state of emergency across the country. Whereas droughts used to occur once every decade, they now occur once every two or three years. Particularly affected by this are the arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) that characterise Kenya’s frontier counties, which have historically seen low rates of government investment, are generally less economically developed, and are therefore particularly vulnerable to climate hazards. In these areas, pastoralist communities reliant grazing pasture and water are increasingly forced to travel further afield to access these, at times bringing them into contact with sedentary agriculturalist communities or agri-businesses. Several have died in the resulting clashes.

Given the increased frequency of these droughts, there is a pressing need to develop appropriate climatic early warning systems, which will allow communities the time to prepare for shocks and stresses. However, such initiatives need to go hand in hand with other efforts that are likely to help reduce the risk of insecurity and attendant conflict and violence. The Frontier Counties Development Council (FCDC), which represents and works to improve coordination and cooperation between the 10 frontier counties in Kenya, has helped draft a bill, which is designed to help manage security and peace within areas particularly affected by climate-related security impacts, as well as working to develop a disaster response mechanism to mitigate the effects of drought when they do occur.

How can the Africa Climate Security Observatory help mitigate climate security risks?

Generating evidence

The Africa Climate Security Crisis Observatory (ACSCO), developed by CGIAR’s climate security team, aims to address gaps in evidence in this area. The observatory is a decision-support tool which, using an interdisciplinary set of methodologies, will produce an integrated and coherent analytical picture of the climate security nexus as it manifests itself locally in diverse contexts throughout Africa. The observatory makes use of several technologies at the regional, national, and sub-national level. These include complexity-informed impact pathways, real-time monitoring and risk forecasting of the interaction of climate, conflict, and other insecurities using big-data and machine learning, and automated spatial and hot-spot analyses to regularly identify highly insecure and fragile areas and their main drivers. These complimentary methodologies will help give decision-makers information and analysis needed (and in appropriate formats and time frames) to answer crucial where, who, and what, questions:

- Which areas are particularly vulnerable to overlapping climate and fragility risks?
- Which communities are disproportionately affected by these risks, and within these communities, which groups are the most vulnerable?
- What is the set of integrated solutions that need to be applied simultaneously to reduce the risks associated with the climate security nexus?
Answering these questions will help improve our understanding of the ways climate can cause insecurity and conflict, by identifying and mapping how variables from different dimensions interact with each other. Such variables include the nutritional values of the food available to communities, the prevalence and type of conflict, as well as data around economic shocks and stresses. Identifying how these variables interact to produce insecurity and heighten the risk of conflict will help decision-makers make more targeted decisions that are responsive to local conditions. Crucially, this evidence will be provided in real and almost real-time, meaning that effective interventions can be designed and implemented before an escalation into violence occurs. In addition, the platform has been designed to complement and inform pre-existing systems and processes of evidence generation that aim to help build and inform resilience to climate impacts and reduce the risk of conflict. By adding local and sub-national components, an additional layer of data will help refine indicators and help localized responses.

Policy and programming support

The observatory will aim to contribute and align with processes already underway across the continent. The African Union’s (AU) Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) department’s team, for example, is working to better map the links between climate, insecurity and conflict. Based within efforts to support regional level efforts undertaken by member states, the AU department has identified potential routes to support peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts. These include mediating conflicts over natural resources, taking steps to prevent transhumance-related violence, and seek to mitigate other forms of conflict that may emerge as a consequence of climatic pressures. There is also an increased inter-departmental effort to mainstream the relationship between climate and conflict and work towards more climate security-sensitive approaches. These include work by the Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment (ARBE)—which hosts the AU’s climate change mandate—to bring together different actors at the technical level through its inter-departmental coordination platform: the Climate and Security Cluster. Data and evidence produced by the observatory could be integrated to create coherent and responsive policy interventions across different sectors while helping to shed light on what works, in what contexts, and how by improving monitoring and evaluation of interventions. This policy and programming support could therefore help prevent or adjust unintended negative impacts of climate adaptation or climate mitigation efforts.

The observatory will also enable programming to adapt better, by capturing and generating evidence on rapidly shifting socio-ecological contexts and conditions. Social and ecological systems are linked in complex ways, and give rise to dynamics that operate across multiple spatial levels and timescales. The exact nature of these dynamics is emergent and non-linear as a consequence of this, meaning that the future behaviour of said systems is inherently uncertain. It also means that the exact outcomes of any intervention cannot be predicted during the planning stage. Generating knowledge inductively can help tackle this issue, by utilising experimentation and feedback to generate knowledge, and to continuously adapt interventions accordingly. Experimenting with multiple parallel interventions and selecting, replicating, and scaling up effective interventions are crucial in ensuring programming and intervention strategies remain responsive (de Coning, 2018). The observatory is able to provide the real-time data and analysis needed to improve the monitoring and evaluation of peacebuilding interventions in complex and shifting climate-sensitive and conflict-prone contexts.
Throughout all of these processes of evidence generation and provision, it is essential to make sure the observatory is as participatory as possible. Evidence generated must be translated into formats that are accessible both to local policymakers, but also to community members, in order to encourage participation and to verify analytical results at a local level. In this way, the observatory can build upon and provide useful evidence for local peace and resilience-building activities and processes. This is a crucial exercise in ensuring solutions are used and have the buy-in from a wide range of relevant actors and communities. These priorities are broadly reflected in the values and priorities the CGIAR’S Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) deploys when conducting its research. Particularly notable is the program’s aims to involve partners at every stage in order to co-develop research and priorities, which accompanies capacity building so that partners are able to effectively use and implement CGIAR research. The observatory aims to replicate these values and practices by involving stakeholders from the community, sub-national, and national level. Actors can work to cooperatively identify key areas of interest, by engaging in a qualitative verification process in which empirical results are tested against local experiences, and by providing the evidence base for the development of localised, evidence-based collective action initiatives to reduce the risk of climate-related insecurity and conflict.

**Targeted climate finance**

Climate finance is a potentially vast resource to tackle the root causes of vulnerability and prevent conflict. The allocation of funding for fragile and conflict-affected states, and for climate change adaptation, has increased significantly over the past years. Despite this, there remain relatively few climate funds that have been directed into countries that are at major risks of climate-driven instability (Detges et al., 2020). By delivering better and timely information and analysis on current and future key climate security hotspots, the observatory can play an important role in supporting international bodies such as the Adaptation Fund, Climate Investment Fund, Global Environmental Facility and Green Climate Fund to identify and reach countries, regions, and populations most vulnerable to compounded climate and conflict risks.

Moreover, while opportunities for climate finance to yield benefits for both climate change adaptation and peacebuilding exist, these funding opportunities generally support more siloed responses and solutions and often fail to address the increasingly complex and changing environment in which they take place (Peters et al., 2020). There remain a number of barriers and challenges, however, in making sure green investments do no harm by worsening or causing entirely new conflicts. Barriers include, for instance, technical constraints such as a lack of reliable and consistent data sets, accurate information, and locally relevant indicators (Goud and Tabet, 2020). An institutional lack of know-how within financial institutions with regards to reading and appropriately interpreting climate-risk information is also likely to play a role. The data produced by the observatory can help international and private investors gain a systemic understanding of specific contexts and integrate it into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation framework of an interventions. The observatory can, therefore, act as a useful support tool to make sure funds are managed sensitively, and negative impacts are minimised. This is particularly important for fragile and conflict-affected countries, where conflict-blind adaptation investments can actually reinforce or worsen existing conflict drivers.
Resources


