

# Climate-Security and Peacebuilding Thematic Review

## Executive Summary

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April 2023

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CLIMATE SECURITY MECHANISM

from the British people

# Climate-Security and Peacebuilding

## Thematic Review

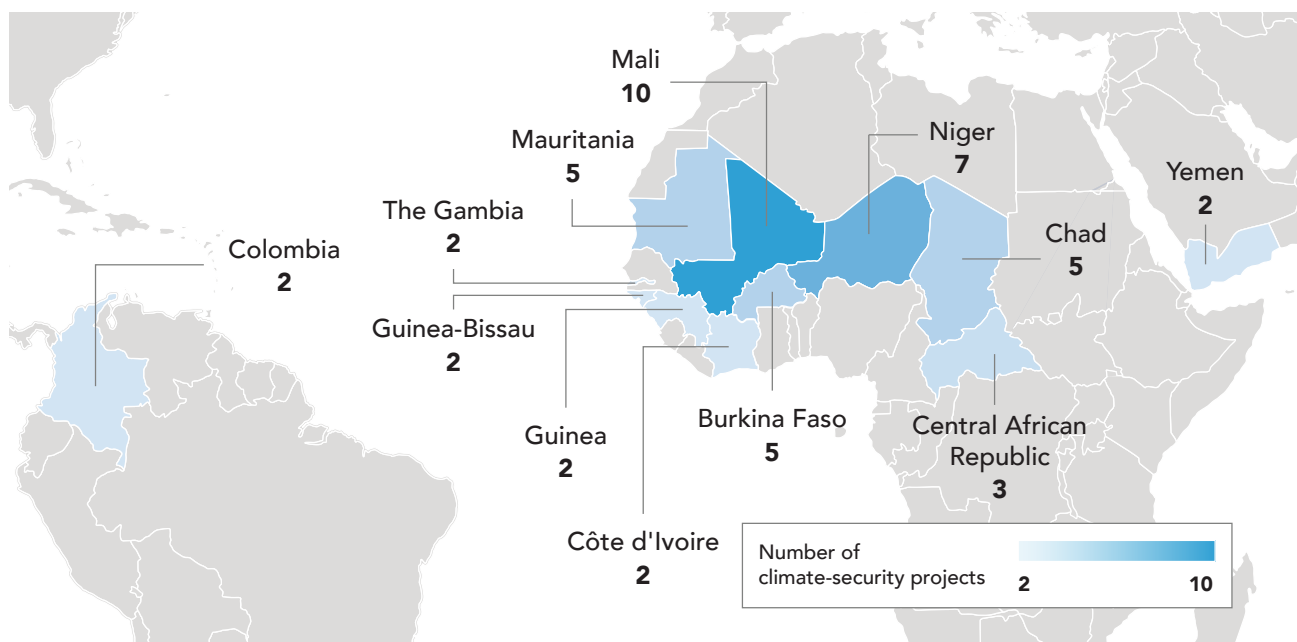
How to respond to anticipated climate change is a defining challenge across nearly every field and scope of human activity. Peacebuilding is no exception. While many have identified ways that climate change or environmental degradation might affect peace and security concerns, how to best respond to these so-called 'climate-security' challenges is still an emerging area of practice within the peacebuilding field.

As part of its continuous monitoring and learning process, the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) annually commissions thematic reviews to examine past practices and promising innovations in specific areas of peacebuilding. This review, focused on climate-security projects approved by the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) between 2016 and 2021, is a particularly relevant exercise given the state of the climate-security field. It offers an opportunity to survey climate-security or related environmental peacebuilding efforts across 33 countries, as developed and implemented by some 29 partners, including both UN entities and civil society organizations.

The 43 projects identified as climate-security projects in this review span a number of issues – from projects that respond to situations in which climate change has already contributed to active conflict to those that raise awareness about the existential threats of climate change, aim to prevent future conflict by nurturing community cohesion, or encourage regional climate change adaptation as an integral part of peacebuilding strategies. The sample also features projects that test integrated responses to issues of gender, climate, and security, promote youth inclusion in natural resource management, and emphasize cross-border or transnational programming approaches.

In addition to providing an overall analysis of the themes and results in these 43 projects (spanning 22 countries), the review drew more contextualized lessons from three case studies: 1) nine projects in the Liptako Gourma subregion spanning Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger; 2) two projects in Yemen; and 3) a cross-border project spanning the three Pacific Islands of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, and Tuvalu.

### PBF-supported Climate-Security Projects, by Country



This Thematic Review analysed 74 of the PBF-supported projects implemented in 33 countries over the past six years. These 74 projects were then categorized "climate-security" projects, versus other forms of environmental peacebuilding or other peacebuilding work.

The **Liptako Gourma case study** illustrates how environmental pressures on regional transhumance patterns, in combination with active transnational armed groups and trafficking and weak or absent governance, have fueled violence and contributed to dire conditions. While these dynamics also created stark challenges for project implementation, the PBF investments in climate-security offered some promise in terms of being able to address root causes, and to shift the narrative from overly-militarized approaches. They also introduced a more regionalized lens to peacebuilding, and a much-needed focus on peacebuilding approaches that address the needs of vulnerable populations.

The two projects in the **Yemen case study** sought to mitigate local water blockages and associated conflict in a country that is both one of the most water-scarce in the world and one where conflict dynamics have halted many local peacebuilding and development activities for nearly a decade. Both projects adopted an innovative approach to women's inclusion in local water management and dispute resolution, and succeeded despite substantial gender barriers. The results suggest that 'bottom-up' peacebuilding around local natural resource issues may be among the most promising areas for peacebuilding in these difficult conflict environments, offering opportunities to alleviate local conflicts and sources of vulnerability, while also offering entry points to work on other trenchant social issues, such as women's or youth exclusion.

The **Pacific Islands case study**, although unique among other PBF-funded projects in many respects, offers insights into prevention-oriented programming and the particular climate-security concerns of island nations. While it was an important example of expanding conceptions of climate-security, some of the project components appeared far from PBF's comparative advantage in terms of local peacebuilding, and may not have been well tailored or sufficiently scaled to address the core climate-security issue in question – the existential risk faced by island nations.

Overall, this thematic review suggests that the PBF and the PBSO have helped to focus attention on climate-security and other environmental degradation in the context of peacebuilding. As one practitioner in the field observed: "At the current moment climate-security is a big policy priority but it wasn't [before]. PBSO played a big role in socializing its importance in programming. They've played a catalyzing role."<sup>1</sup>

The PBSO's efforts to focus attention on climate-security and encourage the development of practice has pushed boundaries and galvanized greater attention to the nexus between climate, security, and peacebuilding, which ultimately builds resilience and supports sustainable development outcomes in some of the world's most complex situations. The many partners implementing these PBF-funded projects have been at the forefront of piloting innovative approaches and acting as the 'bottom-up' realization of global commitments to encourage community adaptation. In addition, the nature of the PBF's focus within its climate-security and peacebuilding portfolio has helped to shift the narrative around the causes of conflict, and its possible solutions.

The following key issue areas and recommendations for further growth and improvement stood out:

**Further leverage the tremendous promise that climate-security and environmental peacebuilding demonstrate:**

Investments in environmental peacebuilding approaches, including improvements to agriculture and natural resource infrastructure, get to the heart of what many communities view as both their most pressing human security concerns, and the factors that contribute to persistent conflict and competition. Conducting these activities with an eye towards not just immediate scarcities, but also future pressures due to climate change, is critical. Combining them with other peacebuilding, social cohesion, disaster risk reduction, resilience building, and governance-strengthening approaches will increase the chances that PBF-supported projects have sustaining effects and better address the root causes of conflict. The project evidence also suggested that engaging in the environmental and climate-security space can bring important co-benefits for other peacebuilding priorities. Working through environmental peacebuilding offers entry points for beginning to address trenchant social issues, such as women's inclusion or elite capture in local communities.

**Continue to strengthen gender- and youth-focused projects:**

More than half of the projects examined focus on women and youth, for example, on increasing their participation and inclusion in local natural resource management and other climate-security-related activities. The number of projects focused on women and youth was well beyond those that were supported through the Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative (GYPI), a specific funding modality. Some of the most exciting and innovative climate-security projects supported by

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1 Interview with UN staff, remote interview, 20 July 2022 (Interview #10).



Nearly half of the climate-security projects related to transhumance patterns, and the way that climate change and resource scarcity has affected traditional migratory routes for herders like the Fulani boy pictured above in Niger. *Photo by Luis Tato, provided courtesy of FAO Niger.*

the PBF have been those exploring women's role in climate change adaptation, and ways to address the specific vulnerabilities faced by women due to climate change and its interaction with other factors. A new crop of projects explored ways that women's inclusion would contribute to achieving the environmental or climate change goals in question, with an explicit testing and adaptive learning approach that is a model for best practice development in the field as a whole.

Despite this, a significant number of the projects that focused on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) had only superficial climate or environmental

components. Gender experts suggested that this reflected a larger trend of not fully realizing synergies in the gender-climate-security sector. Greater support to learning in this field and pushing projects to interrogate the synergies between climate and environmental-related components on one hand, and gender equality and women's empowerment goals on the other, may be necessary. In addition, projects focused on GEWE still tended to measure results based on levels of participation in key activities. More needs to be done to ensure meaningful participation, and also to try assess incremental gains in ways that go beyond satisfying quotas.

There was insufficient evidence to fully evaluate the eight climate-security projects with a strong focus on youth. However, the reviews and evaluations that had been conducted suggested that there may be a need to go beyond expanding opportunities for inclusion and participation. Deeper understanding of youth motivations, as well as the limitations on their participation and the issues behind their grievances and vulnerability, may be necessary to improve their contributions to climate-security dynamics.

**Continue to prioritize, but strengthen, cross-border programming:** The PBSO has prioritized development of cross-border projects (a PBF-supported project carried out in more than one country simultaneously). This was viewed as one of the most significant contributions of the PBF to climate-security work and should continue to be a priority. However, given the additional costs of implementing a project in more than one country simultaneously, there must be clear added-value to the Theory of Change and project goals. Where the main cross-border element involves the same activities on both sides of a border, additional questions should be asked as to how this would advance the Theory of Change. There may also be additional merit in modeling future PBF-funded projects on past environment peacebuilding work that addresses transnational natural resources (i.e. cross-border water issues).

**Build on PBF programming in countries or situations at risk or affected by violent conflict:** The PBF has been an important leader in promoting climate-security and peacebuilding work in countries or situations at risk or affected by violent conflict. These areas represent the most vulnerable to climate-security risks, but also pose the greatest challenges in achieving the scale of programming necessary. The case studies and other project results suggest local level engagement on climate-security and peacebuilding may be one of the most tractable areas to engage in extremely fragile environments, opening opportunities to address local sources of violence and strengthen local governance despite continuing volatility at a national level. The degree of success appeared to vary in part due to whether the resource or environmental issues in question were predominantly transnational or local in nature. Greater exploration of this dynamic may improve programming approaches, and also nuance project results expectations. In addition, extending the timeline for projects in these environments, and continuing the flexible approach that the PBF is known for, will be key to promoting greater success.

**Build on the recent growth in climate-security projects through strategic engagement:** There has been a notable growth in climate-security-related projects in recent years – from none in 2016 to 19 in 2022. Interviews with experts and practitioners suggested that the PBSO focus on this issue has encouraged greater attention to, and investments in, climate-security and peacebuilding among other donors. To enhance this catalytic effect even further, the PBSO might consider engaging in more strategic conversations with larger climate funds and donors leading on climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and resilience – identifying potential synergies with their portfolios, and additional strategies or criteria that might enable more climate-security and peacebuilding projects to be taken up, particularly in more fragile environments.

**Strengthen and reinforce project design, learning, and innovation:** One of the key best practices emerging in the climate-security field was that of taking an integrated approach – addressing the drivers of conflict or vulnerability holistically. In PBF-funded projects this meant addressing environmental or climate-related factors alongside other interrelated drivers, such as poor governance, lack of enforcement or dispute resolution, or intra-communal tensions.

While this was validated as an important overall approach, many projects were still on a learning curve of how to do this. The PBSO might therefore continue to support communities of practice, organize special workshops for those engaged in developing climate-security programming, and encourage reflection on climate-security dynamics throughout the project design (not just in the project context).

To support further programming development in this area, the PBF may also want to consider developing criteria for more accurately categorizing and tracking climate-security projects. Doing so might improve accountability at a project level, allow the PBF to more clearly identify results from this part of its portfolio, and nurture best practices in the field.

More dedicated testing of Theories of Change and project approaches, through iterative projects and investment in longitudinal studies (for at least some of the projects or project approaches), would also add significant value to the emerging learning and development of climate-security and peacebuilding.

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