

A Conversation with Razan Nimir on the Impacts of Climate Change in Sudan

Interview by Hafsa Ahmed

Editorial information

This publication is produced by the Life & Peace Institute (LPI) with support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The articles are the opinion and research of the authors not the donor or LPI. LPI has provided editorial support to the author, however, the content, opinions, and recommendations are those of the authors.

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ISSN 2002-1666

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In October 2022, Hafsa Ahmed, Global Policy Officer at the Life & Peace Institute, spoke with Razan Nimir. Razan is the chairperson of the Mutasim Nimir Centre for Environmental Culture in Sudan. Razan and Hafsa spoke about the challenges of climate change in the Horn of Africa and the implications for people living in Sudan. Temperature and changing rainfall patterns are leading to regular and intensified droughts and floods in the country. Hafsa and Razan discussed how these changes are directly impacting livelihood, peace, and security in Sudan.

Hafsa: *Razan, thank you for speaking with us. Tell us about your institution and the work you are doing.*

Razan: My organisation is Mutasim Nimir Centre for Environmental Culture. It's relatively new. It was established in 2018. We focus on promoting environmental awareness through innovative and practical approaches. Our engagement on climate change has been in building the capacities of the youth by raising awareness and disseminating information. We are producing a regular newsletter that, as of now, is the only environmental newsletter in the country. We have been engaging in a series of forums and public symposiums where we discuss the impacts of climate change on peace, democracy, and governance. We have multiple initiatives to support innovative solutions led by youth. We want to ensure they have the support they need to advance these solutions and translate them into practice. Also, we have a programme called innovative environmental learning where we go to schools and speak to students about climate change, what it means, and how it affects their lives. We were impressed by the knowledge the students already have!

Hafsa: *Give us a sense of the impact of climate change in Sudan?*

Razan: Sudan is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. It is a developing country, which increases its vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. The country has already witnessed some extreme weather events. For example, a high increase in temperature and the unpredictability of the rainy season has been very common in the last few years. Increased incidences of drought and flash flooding have had incredibly significant consequences on people's livelihoods and their living situations. The National Adaptation Plan of Action has already identified three sectors - agriculture, water resources, and the health sector - that will be highly impacted by climate change. These sectors are also all related. For example,

shortages in water limit land productivity and farming production. Similarly, challenges and changes to water resources can increase incidences of diseases such as malaria and cholera.

Hafsa: *How do these sectors you just mentioned directly or indirectly affect conflict in the country?*

Razan: Climate change has already triggered or has been a driver of conflicts. It leads to increasing competition over already scarce natural resources, whether fertile lands or water, and this usually occurs between local farmers and pastoralists who compete over limited productive land. Other conflicts in the country, such as the war in Darfur, have often been labelled as climate-triggered conflicts.

Hafsa: *Who in Sudan is most affected by climate change and why?*

Razan: I would say that everyone is affected somehow. But the most vulnerable are people with low incomes because they have limited, or even no, capacity to adapt and cope with climatic changes. Further, communities that depend on climate-sensitive livelihoods such as, farming and grazing are impacted because of water scarcity resulting in prolonged and more frequent periods of drought that reduce farm production. To emphasise this point, 70% of rural people in Sudan rely primarily on rain-fed agriculture and livestock, so changing rain patterns or drought have huge effects on individuals and communities in Sudan.

Hafsa: *How do these threats affect the livelihood, peace, and security of the community and the people living in Sudan?*

Razan: In general, climate change impacts are threatening the livelihoods, peace, and security of communities in arid areas. In addition to the competition over scarce natural resources, additional implications of climate change that raise tensions are changes to food availability, food shortages, and impacts on overall economic conditions. Times of high climate variability, like when the rains are delayed or significantly late, of course, impact food production.

I would like to highlight that there are some indirect impacts on the environment related to climate change's effects on livelihoods. As fertile land available for agriculture or grazing is shrinking, this has pushed people to leave their jobs and practice new activities, and usually, these new activities involve artisanal mining, which has significant health and environmental consequences.

Another driver of climate change is displacement due

to climate-related disasters that make it hard for people to stay in their homes anymore. As a result, they move to other places in hopes of finding a new livelihood.

But in general, regarding the nexus between climate change, peace, and security, I think it has taken two forms. On one hand, climate change has been a trigger and a driver of conflicts to instability and insecurity. On the other hand, weak political situations, political instability, and insecurity have also significantly undermined the resilience of people and their capacity to cope with climate shocks and climate impacts.

Hafsa: *Are there mechanisms put in place by the government to help communities and people living in Sudan cope with climate change and its impact?*

Razan: Many strategies can be adopted to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Sudan has already developed its National Adaptation Plan of Action and National Adaptation Plan. In a nutshell, the focus always should be on improving the resilience of affected communities. There are some examples of interventions that have been adopted in some communities. However, these examples are implemented in communities by projects managed by the government, so they are not necessarily community led interventions. This includes restoration of degraded ecosystems – whether rangelands, forest, or degraded lands and diversification of crops to ensure that farmers are not depending on a single crop impacted by climate change. For example, one intervention is the introduction of resilient crops that can adapt to drought conditions. There has also been the introduction of renewable energy in farming practices such as solar water pumps. Additionally, there are efforts to improve early warning systems and ensure that the most affected people can reach the information from the systems.

Hafsa: *Are there any community solutions to climate change that you are excited about?*

Razan: I don't have a specific example, but one of the things that needs to be highlighted regarding community-led interventions is the amount of local climate knowledge that communities have accumulated over the years. This knowledge has enabled them to adapt as best they can to weather changes for decades. Local climate knowledge has informed farming practices, grazing, and fishing practices. That said, local climate knowledge alone isn't sufficient to adapt to climate change. But it is an important thing that needs to be more

integrated into modern science and climate science.

Hafsa: *Speaking of the local knowledge of climate, are there any efforts done by civil society organisations in creating awareness of the impact of climate change?*

Razan: Some NGOs are working to help build communities' capacities to undertake the needed adaptive actions that reduce vulnerability, mitigate risk, and build resilience.

Another important thing is they are also trying to make sure that their voices are heard. At the Centre for Environmental Culture, one of our focus areas is to document and disseminate local environmental knowledge with special emphasis on local climate knowledge. We are doing this because we believe that local climate knowledge is a rich source of information. It is a cultural heritage and has supported communities to adapt to environmental changes. For those reasons, local climate knowledge needs to be documented. By documenting it, we hope it will be easier to integrate it into other sciences and plans for the adaptation. This way, we see it to improve the ownership of communities of the policies and research affecting their environment.

Hafsa: *How can communities have a greater voice in the agency in mitigating and adapting to climate change?*

Razan: Through inclusive community engagement in decision-making and interventions' design and implementation and providing resources to support local climate actions. Adaptation and mitigation interventions should also be informed by local knowledge and practices.

Hafsa: *Can you discuss some of the climate impacts on Sudan's urban areas?*

Razan: The main impact has been detrimental flooding in the urban areas. so if we talk about Khartoum, the capital city, then we should focus on flooding and its consequences. In 2013, 2019, and then in 2021, extreme weather events were presented in floods and storms. There has been some increase in the spread of tropical diseases like malaria in some areas.

Hafsa: *Thank you very much for your insightful contribution!*

Razan: Thank you for having me.

N/B This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.