

# Framing the Climate, Peace, and Security Agenda in the Horn of Africa

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## Introduction

### Climate Risks in the Horn of Africa

The Horn has some of the most fragile and conflict-affected countries on the African continent. At the same time, the region is faced with recurrent droughts, flooding, and rising and shrinking lakes, making it one of the most climate-vulnerable regions on the continent. Rainfall in the Horn is concentrated in two rainy seasons: one from March to May (the long rains) and the other from October to December (the short rains). The main drivers of rainfall variability in the Horn are the El Niño–Southern Oscillation and the Indian Ocean Dipole. These interact with local and short life-span systems that influence the northward movement of the Inter Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ), which are moderated by the type of land cover.<sup>1</sup> From the mid-1980s until 2010, precipitation during the long rains has decreased (with some recovery more recently), while the short rains have become wetter. Despite substantial year-to-year variations, these trends are affecting the severity and frequency of extreme flooding, droughts, and ecosystem stability.<sup>2</sup>

Rain-fed agriculture and pastoralism are the main sources of livelihood in the

Horn. Climate variability and change in both temporal and spatial domains greatly impact local livelihoods. In 2021 and 2022, the region faced a drought classified by scientists as exceptional.<sup>3</sup> Recurrent failed growing seasons have plagued the region for many years, compounding the challenges faced by the drought. Somalia has faced ongoing drought periods for more than a decade. Similarly, the arid and semi-arid areas of Ethiopia have been facing back-to-back droughts for more than seven years. In Kenya, the 2021–2022 drought was the worst on record since 1981.<sup>4</sup> This drought resulted in more than 21 million people facing high levels of acute food insecurity and more than 8.9 million livestock died across the region.<sup>5</sup>

The increasing regularity of droughts due to increased temperatures are exacerbating human security challenges as they are in many cases followed by heavy rains.<sup>6</sup> As climate scientists explain, the hardening of soil during the drought period results in the inability of soil to absorb water when it eventually does rain.<sup>7</sup> Rainwater runoff then contributes to extreme flooding. In parts of South Sudan alone, floods have affected more than 900,000 people, displaced more than 200,000, and left roads impassable for another 460,000 people who are already displaced by a mix of both environmental and conflict factors.<sup>8</sup>

1 IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre, “Report on State of Climate, Peace and Security in the Horn of Africa” (Kenya: IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre, November 2022), accessed 28 March 2023, [https://www.icpac.net/documents/648/State\\_of\\_Climate\\_Peace\\_and\\_Security\\_in\\_the\\_Horn\\_of\\_Africa\\_2022\\_gttu3PO.pdf](https://www.icpac.net/documents/648/State_of_Climate_Peace_and_Security_in_the_Horn_of_Africa_2022_gttu3PO.pdf).

2 Paul I Palmer, Caroline M Wainwright, Bo Dong, Ross Maidment, Kevin Wheeler, Nicola Gedney, Jonathan E Hickman et al., “Drivers and Impacts of Eastern African Rainfall Variability”, *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment* 4, no. 4 (21 March 2023): 254–70, accessed 29 September 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43017-023-00397-x>.

3 “Human-Induced Climate Change Increased Drought Severity in Horn of Africa”, World Weather Attribution, 27 April 2023, accessed 6 August 2023, <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/human-induced-climate-change-increased-drought-severity-in-southern-horn-of-africa/>.

4 “The Horn of Africa Crisis, Explained”, Concern Worldwide, 19 July 2023, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://www.concern.net/news/horn-of-africa-crisis-explained>.

5 “Horn of Africa Drought: Regional Humanitarian Overview & Call to Action (Revised 21 September 2022)—Ethiopia”, ReliefWeb, 21 September 2022, accessed 6 August 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/horn-africa-drought-regional-humanitarian-overview-call-action-revised-21-september-2022>.

6 World Weather Attribution, “Human-Induced Climate Change Increased Drought Severity in Horn of Africa” (World Weather Attribution, April 2023), accessed 28 July 2023, <https://www.worldweatherattribution.org/human-induced-climate-change-increased-drought-severity-in-southern-horn-of-africa/#:~:text=This%20change%20in%20drought%20severity,about%20100%20times%20more%20likely.>

7 Palmer et al., “Drivers and Impacts of Eastern African Rainfall Variability,” March 21, 2023.

8 Boris Cheshirkov, “Devastation in South Sudan Following Fourth Year of Historic Floods” (Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 12 December 2022), accessed 31 August 2023, <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/devastation-south-sudan-following-fourth-year-historic-floods>.

The rising internal displacement and immigration due to the recurrent droughts and flooding has increased tensions between communities due to the low resilience of host communities, natural resource constraints, and other social and political factors. This is especially true where displacement situations are prolonged and migrants are unable to go back home, as was the case for populations displaced by prolonged flooding in Bentiu, South Sudan.

Climate forecasts for the region suggest that the situation will not improve in the near future. The thematic report from ACAPS (formerly known as Assessment Capacities Project) released in July 2023 predicts that as a result of El Niño, the global temperature rise may exceed 1.5°C on multiple occasions in 2023 and 2024.<sup>9</sup> This is expected to result in even more severe and intense heatwaves, wildfires, floods, droughts, and epidemics in the eastern part of Africa (both dry and wet conditions), and in particular in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan, which are already facing humanitarian and conflict crises.

### **Human Security Risks Arising from Climate Insecurity**

Conflict and instability trends in the Horn have followed a negative trajectory in 2023. Given the increasing conflict and human security challenges in the region, national and international support will be tested in order to meet these needs. This is also within a context of declining humanitarian

aid to least developed countries from 2017 onwards.<sup>10</sup> These human security challenges are expected to be compounded by climatic challenges and pre-existing conflict conditions such as grievances over inequality, political marginalisation, and unresponsive and poor governance systems.

Armed groups and extremist groups such as al-Shabaab in Somalia have a history of exploiting local conflict systems during droughts and flooding to gain followers, resources, and territorial control.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, some political actors have been known to use existing competition over natural resources to advance their political agendas. For example, in some areas leaders are known to arm cattle raiders to capture water resources and pastures. In northern Kenya, land and resource competitions have intensified intercommunal violence among rival ethnic groups.<sup>12</sup>

Other effects of the prolonged displacement of populations due to climate change driven disasters could be the loss of cultural practices, social identity, community cohesion, and indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms embedded in the livelihoods of the people. These examples illustrate that the interaction between climatic distress and other socio-political and economic issues is posing serious human security risks in the Horn.

<sup>9</sup> ACAPS, "El Niño Overview: Anticipated Humanitarian Impact in 2023 | ACAPS", 26 July 2023, accessed 27 July 2023, <https://www.acaps.org/en/countries/archives/detail/el-nino-overview-anticipated-humanitarian-impact-in-2023>.

<sup>10</sup> "The Decline of European State Support for Foreign Aid and What It Means for International Development", International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, 6 January 2023, accessed 31 August 2023, <https://iirr.org/the-decline-of-european-state-support-for-foreign-aid-and-what-it-means-for-international-development/>; "Foreign Aid Surges Due to Spending on Refugees and Aid for Ukraine", Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 12 April 2023, accessed 31 August 2023, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/foreign-aid-surges-due-to-spending-on-refugees-and-aid-for-ukraine.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> "Climate and Conflict in the Horn of Africa", International Crisis Group, 28 February 2023, accessed 4 August 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=kkEKKYrI0g&ab\\_channel=InternationalCrisisGroup](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=kkEKKYrI0g&ab_channel=InternationalCrisisGroup).

<sup>12</sup> "How Climate Change Fuels Deadly Conflict", International Crisis Group, 9 December 2021, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://globalclimate.crisisgroup.org/>.

## International Response to the Climate, Peace, and Security Agenda

One of the first formal recognitions of the climate and security nexus is the 2007 publication by then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in the *Washington Post* in which he acknowledges that “amid the diverse social and political causes, the Darfur conflict began as an ecological crisis, arising in part from climate change”.<sup>13</sup> He links this to scientific evidence about the rise in temperature and the resultant reduction in precipitation in southern Sudan by 40% since the early 1980s. In the same year, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) tabled the climate and security agenda for the first time. Since then, council members have held open debates and integrated the climate and security language into many thematic and country or region-specific issues.

When it comes to adopting a stand-alone UNSC resolution on the agenda, however, this has proven challenging to date. The first major attempt was made in December 2021, when the then co-penholders<sup>14</sup> on the climate and security agenda, Niger and Ireland, drafted a resolution, which requests that climate security analysis become a central component in UN conflict prevention strategies. The draft resolution was vetoed by Permanent Five (P5) member, Russia, while China abstained. The remaining permanent and non-permanent members of the council voted for the resolution, with the exception of India. Russia vetoed the resolution for two main reasons: on the basis that the agenda

is an effort to turn a scientific and socio-economic issue into a politicised question, and due to the lack of evidence to justify links. India argued that the UNSC is not the right forum to discuss climate change-related issues, while also stating that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) should focus on making progress on member state commitments to the Paris Agreement.<sup>15</sup>

Although the draft resolution was not adopted, it received strong support from a majority (113 out of a total of 193) of General Assembly members, who had been invited by Niger and Ireland to co-sponsor the draft resolution. Surprisingly low for a region that suffers the most from the climate–security impacts, only 26 African states, mostly from the Sahel and the western Africa region, sponsored the draft.<sup>16</sup> From the Horn, only Sudan, Uganda, and Djibouti sponsored the resolution. Kenya, one of the leading voices on climate change in Africa, and an elected UNSC member at the time, did not sponsor the resolution. This was on the basis of inconsistencies they say they observed between UN member state commitments at the UNFCCC in Glasgow versus at the UNSC, as well as due to council members “consistent resistance to taking action to combat terrorism threat in regions, such as the Sahel”.<sup>17</sup> Later, however, Kenya did vote for the resolution. As Kenya co-hosted the first Africa climate summit in Nairobi (4–6 September 2023), President Ruto’s intervention focused on African potential for growth through transition to green energy.

13 Ban Ki Moon, “A Climate Culprit In Darfur” *The Washington Post*, 16 June 2007, accessed 29 July, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/15/AR2007061501857.html>.

14 The term “penholder” designates a role referring to the member of the UNSC (permanent or elected non-permanent) that leads the negotiation and drafting of resolutions on a particular UNSC agenda item. The penholder role is distinct from the chair of a given subsidiary body on the same agenda item.

15 “Security Council Fails to Adopt Resolution Integrating Climate-Related Security Risk into Conflict-Prevention Strategies”, United Nations, 13 December 2021, accessed 29 September 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2021/sc14732.doc.htm>.

16 “How UN Member States Divided over Climate Security”, International Crisis Group, 22 December 2021, accessed 2 February 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/how-un-member-states-divided-over-climate-security>.

17 Security Council, “Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Climate and Security”, S/PV.8926, 13 December 2021, accessed 28 July 2023, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3951616?ln=en>.

Throughout 2022, many UNSC members made efforts to advance the climate–security agenda through mechanisms formerly used by the UNSC, including: the Informal Group of Experts on Climate and Security; the Group of Friends on Climate; and the Climate Security Mechanism. Strong resistance from a small number of UNSC members to climate change language in outcome documents, however, blocked several UN presidential statements from being adopted in 2022.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, commitment to the agenda in the broader UN system is stronger than what is demonstrated in the UNSC. Through the jointly established UN Climate Security Mechanism in 2018, for example, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) have been doing work to integrate climate, peace, and security considerations to guide conflict prevention, peacebuilding, mediation, and peacekeeping efforts. The UN DPPA is also starting to employ climate security experts for peacekeeping operations, special political missions, and country teams to strengthen climate considerations in their analysis, political strategies, and operational activities. Currently, the UN assistance missions in Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan, along with the UN Special Envoy Office to the Horn of Africa, have climate and security advisors in place, giving the Horn region a global lead in this regard.

The annual climate event held by the UNFCCC, the Conference of the Parties (COP), is not that consistent when it comes to the climate, peace, and security nexus.

In comparison to previous COPs, however, the Egyptian presidential role at COP27 brought the agenda more attention. In total, 23 side events on peace, security, and conflict sensitivity were held during COP27. This includes the launch of the Cairo Climate Responses for Sustaining Peace initiative and the German Climate for Peace initiative.<sup>19</sup> In spite of these efforts, however, the final text of the Sharm el-Sheikh implementation plan did not include a resolution on peace and conflict.

The annual COP28 is set to take place from 30 November–12 December 2023. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has also been positively active on the climate and security agenda at the UNSC, is to host the event in Dubai. Given the seriousness of challenges witnessed in conflict areas, it is encouraging to see that the forthcoming COP28 outlines a ‘Relief, Recovery, and Peace Day’ – to be held on 3 December 2023 in addition to another new theme to COPs – ‘Health’.<sup>20</sup> The discussions on the ‘Relief, Recovery and Peace’ theme are expected to focus on accelerating adaptation, preventing and addressing loss and damage (including in fragile and conflict-affected contexts), and advocating for policies and investments that support community resilience and stability. This will indeed be a very good opportunity for African climate negotiators to put the issues of access to climate financing for fragile and conflict-affected states, and other critical issues, on the climate–security nexus agenda.

18 Security Council Report, “The UN Security Council and Climate Change: Tracking the Agenda after the 2021 Veto: Research Report: Security Council Report” (New York: Security Council Report, 30 December 2022), accessed 29 September 2023, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/research-reports/the-un-security-council-and-climate-change-tracking-the-agenda-after-the-2021-veto.php>.

19 “Peace@COP27: A Brief Review”, Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, accessed 27 July 2023, <https://www.gppplatform.ch/sites/default/files/COP27%20Peace%20Report.pdf>.

20 “Thematic Program”, COP28 UAE, accessed 27 July 2023, <https://www.cop28.com/en/thematic-program>.

## Regional Responses to the Climate Peace and Security Agenda

Many AU policy frameworks recognise risks emerging from climate change and how they undermine human and state security.<sup>21</sup> At the level of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), climate, peace, and security has been a recurrent thematic issue since 2016.<sup>22</sup> As of 31 July 2023, the AU PSC has held 12 sessions on the topic, including 2 summit level meetings in 2021. In addition to this, climate change also features in the various country and regional files of the AU PSC. Various AU PSC decisions highlight the importance of early warning, resource mobilisation, and collective action to support member states that are severely affected by climate and insecurity.

Despite progress at normative levels, the AU has not been able to prevent or respond to the challenges associated with the impacts of extreme climate events. This is a deficit across the AU conflict early warning mechanism, whereby early warning does not lead to early response or preventative actions.

More recently, in line with repeated AU PSC requests,<sup>23</sup> the Department of Political Affairs, Peace, and Security (PAPS) of the African Union Commission (AUC) is undertaking a continental climate-related

security risk assessment study. The study is expected to inform and help mobilise a common African position on climate change and security, ahead of COP28. The AU PSC commitment could be an indication of the unique challenges Africa faces due to the compounded effects of climate change and insecurity. Once complete, the report may also contribute to increasing awareness and consensus among AU member states and inform policy processes to better prevent and respond to the security risks posed by climate change.

The African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy And Action Plan (2022–2032)<sup>24</sup> is another important AU strategic framework that sets out brief, but clear objectives for African stakeholders on the climate–conflict nexus. The text calls for context specific, localised solutions and capacity strengthening for practitioners in both the climate and peacebuilding sectors.

IGAD is one of the strongest African institutions with regard to taking practical steps to pursue the climate, peace, and security agenda.<sup>25</sup> One such effort is the series of studies that IGAD conducted in an attempt to determine with statistical confidence the extent to which environmental variables increase risk scores in anticipating subsequent conflict outcomes in the region.<sup>26</sup> The studies find

21 Vane Moraa Aminga and Dr Florian Krampe. "Climate-Related Security Risks and the African Union" (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, May 2020), accessed 23 August 2023. <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2020/sipri-policy-briefs/climate-related-security-risks-and-african-union>.

22 "The 585th Meeting of the Peace and Security Council of the AU: An Open Session to the Theme: Climate Change: State Fragility, Peace and Security in Africa", African Union, 12 April 2016, accessed 29 September 2023, <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/the-585th-meeting-of-the-peace-and-security-council-of-the-au-an-open-session-to-the-theme-climate-change-state-fragility-peace-and-security-in-africa>.

23 "Peace and Security Council 774th Meeting 21 May 2018 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia," African Union Common Repository, accessed 29 September 2023, <http://archives.au.int/handle/123456789/5305>; "Communique of the 1051th Meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) Held on 26 November 2021 on the Theme: Climate Change and Peace and Security: The Need for an Informed Climate-Security-Development Nexus for Africa", African Union, 13 December 2021, accessed 6 February 2023, <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/communique-of-the-1051th-meeting-of-the-au-peace-and-security-council-psc-held-on-26-november-2021-on-the-theme-climate-change-and-peace-and-security-the-need-for-an-informed-climate-security-development-nexus-for-africa>.

24 African Union, "African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2032) (Addis Ababa: African Union, 2022), accessed 29 September 2023, <https://au.int/en/documents/20220628/african-union-climate-change-and-resilient-development-strategy-and-action-plan>.

25 The IGAD region stretches over an area of 5.2 million km<sup>2</sup>. See: "The IGAD Region", Intergovernmental Authority on Development, accessed 29 September 2023, <https://igad.int/the-igad-region/>.

26 "The Nexus between Climate and Conflict in the IGAD Region", CEWARN, accessed 5 March 2023, <https://cewarn.org/2021/11/02/the-nexus-between-climate-and-conflict-in-the-igad-region/>.

that pastoral conflict incidents reduce when vegetation improves, while the risk scores increase significantly with low vegetation values.

In addition to launching the IGAD Regional Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2023–2030), IGAD also released a policy brief and technical report in 2022 entitled “Report on State of Climate, Peace and Security in the Horn of Africa”.<sup>27</sup> The report concludes that climate change is negatively impacting the availability of natural resources in the region, which often contributes to intercommunal conflict by worsening livelihood conditions and pushing people to resort to alternative sources of livelihood. IGAD has also partnered with the UN Office of the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa (UNOSE) to establish a regional climate security mechanism.<sup>28</sup> Once operational, this mechanism will be the first of its kind in UN engagement on climate and security with various regions globally.<sup>29</sup>

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Social or environmental phenomena are not products of linear or simple relationships. Climate change impacts societies by disrupting natural environments, human-made infrastructures, and economic and social systems on which people depend. Depending on geographic contexts

<sup>27</sup> IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre, “Report on State of Climate, Peace and Security in the Horn of Africa” (Kenya: IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre, November 2022), accessed 28 March 2023, [https://www.icpac.net/documents/648/State\\_of\\_Climate\\_Peace\\_and\\_Security\\_in\\_the\\_Horn\\_of\\_Africa\\_2022\\_gttu3PO.pdf](https://www.icpac.net/documents/648/State_of_Climate_Peace_and_Security_in_the_Horn_of_Africa_2022_gttu3PO.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> “Press Release: The 48th IGAD Council of Ministers Successfully Concluded in Khartoum, Sudan”, IGAD, 30 November 2022, accessed 29 September 2023, [https://igad.int/the-48th-igad-council-of-ministers-successfully-concluded-in-khartoum-sudan/#:~:text=November%2030%2C%202022%20\(KHARTOUM%2C,of%20Foreign%20Affairs%20of%20Sudan](https://igad.int/the-48th-igad-council-of-ministers-successfully-concluded-in-khartoum-sudan/#:~:text=November%2030%2C%202022%20(KHARTOUM%2C,of%20Foreign%20Affairs%20of%20Sudan).

<sup>29</sup> During the recent Africa climate summit in Kenya, IGAD organised a high-level dialogue entitled “Climate Security: Resilience, fragility and displacement in the borderlands of the Horn of Africa”, showing its commitment and leadership on matters of climate, peace and security, with a clear focus on what is contextually most relevant for its own region. The ‘call to action’ in the summit’s main outcome document - [THE AFRICAN LEADERS NAIROBI DECLARATION](#), did not however address climate-security risks.

and social, political, and economic vulnerabilities, the security risk of climate change can be higher or lower. The Horn faces one of the highest risks in this regard, given the multidimensional nature of and complexities underlying the relationship between climate and conflict in the region.

African actors such as the AU and IGAD have increasingly shown greater understanding of the climate change, peace, and security nexus in its systemic complexity and are leading at the policy level. Practical interventions on the ground, however, lag behind policy pronouncements. To some extent, this is interlinked with the financial and organisational resource limitations faced by AU member states and the regional actors across the continent. In contrast, although increasingly integrated in the policy discourse of global governance frameworks, in some cases the climate–security nexus appears to have fallen prey to the growing polarisation of permanent UNSC members.

At the regional level, IGAD must strive to turn policies into actions, including by engaging with international partners to attract climate adaptation financing that focuses on improving the livelihoods of communities to build climate resilience. IGAD could also engage its member states and humanitarian agencies to ensure that humanitarian responses to extreme weather events and calamities (such as settlement of displaced populations after flooding) are implemented in a conflict sensitive manner and, moreover, do not create cross border tensions. The recently established IGAD–UN climate and security mechanism should go beyond a research and analysis mechanism to being a platform used to inform and influence global actions that address the climate, peace, and security nexus.

The AU should also translate its policies into practical support to its member states. For example, it could strengthen the newly established Africa Multi-Hazard Early

Warning and Early Action system to provide localised meteorological observations and coordinate with the IGAD conflict early warning mechanism to provide early warning on climate-related security risks. Looking ahead to COP28, the AU should ensure that African calls for a stronger position on the climate–security agenda, whereby climate adaptation and mitigation efforts are coordinated, combined, and integrated with prevention, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping efforts, to ensure that a sustainable environment and a sustainable peace are mutually reinforcing.

At the global level, both the UNSC and UNFCCC should reflect better on the interlinkages between their respective primary mandates. This would support the UNSC to bring climate considerations into conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding efforts in political transition and post-conflict settings. The UN and other international humanitarian actors also need to balance short-term life-saving humanitarian response with the need for building resilience and longer-term preventative work to future climatic shocks and peacebuilding efforts.

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