

Working in and on conflict: how climate and humanitarian action can support peace

As part of the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks (HNPW) 2025, the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) and adelphi organized an online session titled “Working in and on conflict: how climate and humanitarian action can support peace”, on Thursday 20 March 2025. This session related to the Climate Crisis Area of Common Concern. Below are key takeaways from the session.

- **While the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation do not directly cause conflict and insecurity, they can contribute to their drivers, including by exacerbating competition over increasingly scarce natural resources, loss of livelihoods, and food insecurity.** This, in turn, can push individuals into illegal activities, trigger social discontent, political turmoil and violence, as well as the delegitimization of institutions and governance structures. These linkages are especially evident in fragile and conflict affected contexts, where most humanitarian action takes place. In South Sudan, for example, floods submerge farmlands, while droughts lead to poor harvests, resulting in chronic food insecurity. Pastoralist communities are facing delayed cattle migrations, and this has escalated resource-based conflicts between different livelihood groups, leading to a perpetuating cycle of displacement, tensions and violence in an already fragile context.
- **By stretching human and productive systems to their absolute limits, climate shocks and stressors can directly impact humanitarian needs if communities are left with no livelihood alternatives.** In Yemen, climate change has exacerbated semi-arid conditions, leading to extreme droughts and erratic rainfall, which have worsened competition over vital resources like water and arable land. This, in turn, has intensified the country’s humanitarian crisis linked to the ongoing conflict with up to 75% of the population in need of aid. Climate shocks can also pose logistical challenges to the delivery of aid and peacekeeping efforts, constraining capacity to reach those in need and creating a vacuum that can be exploited by armed groups, furthering insecurity. In South Sudan, flooded terrain and damaged infrastructure have impacted terrestrial aid delivery in the aftermath of severe floods. Floods also hinder peacekeeping patrols, leaving areas vulnerable to armed groups, increasing local conflicts, and creating security vacuums.
- **Integrated climate, humanitarian, and peace and security responses are needed to build resilience and sustain peace.** In terms of policy and planning, there is a need to integrate climate risks into peacebuilding and humanitarian planning, adopt long-term strategies, and ensure conflict-sensitivity by considering dynamics across states and communities. In Somalia, for example, efforts to build climate-resilient infrastructure and support disaster preparedness have been ongoing, working with local governments and communities to strengthen their capacity for managing risks and implementing solutions. At the operational level, there is a need to invest in community-led solutions, strengthen early warning systems, and undertake risk mapping. In South Sudan, early warning systems and risk mapping

(e.g., flood projections) proved vital in helping communities relocate to safer areas and prepare for disasters.

- **The use of data to inform policy, planning and action is crucial.** While data is increasingly available and accessible, ensuring that it is well-understood, and carefully assessing which datasets are the most relevant, and which should be deprioritized, is essential to best support projects and programmes on the ground. In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, flood forecasting systems were developed to address specific climate hazards like tropical cyclones and riverine flooding. The integration of data into actionable plans for vulnerable populations is key to ensure that interventions are tailored to specific types of floodings or hazards.
- **Environmental peacemaking, as an integrated conflict prevention approach, can address short- and long-term needs and produce positive peace and environmental outcomes while tackling the root causes of conflict.** By framing environmental and climate action as an entry point for peace mediation, dialogue and negotiation, it can offer opportunities to bring conflicting parties to the table. In Yemen, for example, this approach has served as a neutral entry point for dialogue among conflicting factions, which were invited to discuss environmental issues affecting present and future generations as a way to build trust, rather than contentious issues of power, resources, or political sharing.
- **Cooperation around climate adaptation and mitigation can help broader efforts for conflict prevention and peacebuilding at community, national and cross-border levels** by allowing conflict parties to focus on shared challenges rather than opposing views. By focusing on opportunities and solutions, cooperation can foment trust-building among parties and increase the social, environmental and political costs of conflict, ideally fostering long-term peace. These opportunities are also sustained by the Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace and the Baku Call on Climate Action for Peace, Relief, and Recovery. Furthermore, the NDCs 3.0 offer opportunities to integrate conflict sensitivity into national climate policy planning and implementation. Bridging the implementation gap between commitments and action, particularly in fragile and conflict affected contexts, requires creating an enabling environment for climate finance, capacity building, strong partnerships and active stakeholder engagement.