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The Implications of Climate Change and Environmental Degradation for Dialogue and Mediation Processes in Peace Operations and Crisis Management

Notes of a side event at the Berlin
Climate and Security Conference
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Introduction

There is growing recognition that climate change and environmental degradation are central to conflict prevention and recovery efforts. Local peacebuilding actors demonstrate a strong understanding of this link, which manifests in their communities as degraded land, disrupted rainfall, and diminished access to renewable natural resources. In cases from the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, these factors exacerbate governance challenges, displacement, and insecurity.

There is also evidence that intentionally addressing the link between climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict has

great potential for conflict resolution. Small, tangible local initiatives can generate important peace dividends by building trust between communities living in conflict. Long-term prospects for peace can also be enhanced by improving natural resource management, building resilience to climate impacts through adaptation, and embedding good environmental governance into peacebuilding frameworks. Achieving this requires linking local innovations to institutional reforms, and strengthening the message that, in some regions, environmental peacebuilding is a development and security imperative.

These issues were the subject of an expert workshop for practitioners and policymakers from the UN system, regional organisations,

peacebuilding NGOs, and researchers, convened on the sidelines of the 2025 Berlin Climate Security Conference by the Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF), the Crisis Management Centre Finland (CMC), the European Centre of Excellence for Civilian Crisis Management (CoE), the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Discussions focused on how to design peace processes that address these risks at local, national, and regional levels, and what partnerships and institutional changes are needed to make mediation “climate-informed”. Participants highlighted five main priorities: increasing funding for climate–peace initiatives; empowering climate, peace and security (CPS) advisors; carefully framing climate issues for different audiences; breaking down institutional silos; and strengthening cooperation with local actors.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Enhancing financial incentives and resource allocation for climate–peace initiatives

Throughout the sessions, the experts underlined the financial aspect of climate-informed mediation and peace processes as especially important when discussing progression and advancement within the field. It was noted that the current funding deficit not only weakens capacity building at different

levels — locally in particular — but also threatens to obscure the risks of climate change and, in turn, to hinder resilience and mitigation efforts. To combat this issue, a discussion on how to incentivise funders to support CPS initiatives occurred. Some recommendations include:

- Encouraging the uptake of targeted funding for climate, peace and security initiatives by creating incentives for funders. This can be achieved through clear demonstration of the impact of CPS initiatives, providing robust and documented evidence and showcasing the intrinsic value of integrated CPS outcomes in comparison to traditional stand-alone climate or peace interventions.
- To further incentivise funders, experts discussed the importance of exploring avenues for investments that reap mutual benefits for the partners involved. This would include both cross-border and regional cooperation and investments that would have a role in mitigating climate-security shocks and promoting peacebuilding. To mitigate the potential sensitivity in working beyond state borders, experts emphasised the use of “softer issues” as entry points for collaboration. Examples of softer issues include mitigation of effects of environmental destruction, and local governance of water and land usage.
- With increased funding, a key aspect which experts further emphasised is the

importance of adequate resource allocation for maximised capacity building, especially on the local level, with investments reaching local contexts helping to build legitimacy and benefit from contextual expertise. Resource allocation can also support CPS “connectors” in their pursuit of bridging gaps between different levels.



Recommendation 2: Strengthen the role of climate, peace and security (CPS) advisors to bridge expertise and connect mediation tracks

Experts emphasised the role of CPS advisors in connecting technical climate and environmental expertise with the political realities of peace processes. As their current roles are often under-resourced, strengthening these advisory functions would enable more coherent and connected approaches to improving responses to climate change and environmental degradation through dialogue and mediation in the context of peace operations and crisis management. Some key actions identified include:

- Resourcing the CPS advisor roles within peace operations, political missions, and regional organisations to support the integration of climate and environmental considerations early in a peace process.
- Exploring joint deployment models to ensure that CPS advisors and mediation teams or political officers can support each other to bridge local, national, and international tracks.
- Building cross-sectoral competencies, for example, through training in environmental degradation trends, impacts on human mobility, and livelihood options for mediation teams, which can effectively expand mediators’ climate-sensitive toolkits.
- Creating shared platforms to facilitate regular information exchange among climate, environment and peacebuilding actors across institutions like the African Union, European Union, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and United Nations, and build more coherent analyses, policies, and responses.

A well-connected network of CPS advisors can effectively support translation and bridge-building between grassroots initiatives, national decision-makers, and regional policy frameworks. This would help to ensure that climate-related risks and opportunities are both factored into peace strategies at every level.

Recommendation 3: Strategic framing of issues across levels and actors

The issue of framing became an engaging topic of discussion for the experts, with emphasis on the critical role framing plays in how climate, peace and security-related issues are understood, prioritised, and acted upon. Here, language and conceptualisation of different topics act as a strategic tool for engagement and creating incentives or barriers for different stakeholders. The experts' discussion highlighted the importance of refining the framing of issues to cater to the different needs and identities of actors at different levels. This approach would serve as means of incentivising participation while acknowledging the broad lived experiences, cultures, and identities of stakeholders.

Key recommendations suggested:

- Framing issues according to audience and context by using tailored language that fits in with the institutional or cultural context of the recipient;
- Employing inclusive and empowering narratives that acknowledge local strengths and agency, rather than only highlighting risks and vulnerabilities;
- Creating feasible entry points through framing issues that match the mandate and capacity of stakeholders at different levels.



Recommendation 4: Silos and collaboration/fragmentation

The issues with fragmentation and silos in mediation processes were discussed as obstacles for climate expertise to influence these processes. If we do not cooperate, the approaches will be fragmented and not comprehensive. The experts shared suggestions on how to create cooperation and understanding. Simplicity, networking, and emphasising the urgency of the climate issue are good key practices, with the need for professionals who operate at the intersection of peace processes and climate also being important for success.

- There is a need for more exchange and dedicated knowledge transfer among stakeholders to overcome fragmentation. Some actors struggle to grasp the long-term impacts and the threats to human security of climate change, even if they are aware of them. Actors might mean the same thing but use different terminology and pursue different goals.

- A need to establish pathways and practices to connect national, regional, and local levels was brought forth. It is not necessary to always do more, but rather to find ways for the right actors to work together.
- More collaborations on climate, peace and security assessments and analysis — across mandates — are recommended, as well as the use of methods and arenas that are already there. Mutual benefits and incentives, such as shared investment or resource-sharing agreements, can strengthen cooperation and make mediation outcomes more sustainable. We should also push these kinds of events to find and create cooperation and information sharing.

well as societal considerations. Flood management and resource access are examples of locally driven responses to climate-induced challenges. Initiatives around water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) often include networks of women who can play key roles. Climate change and natural resource management offers valid entry points across different worldviews and can be a unifying issue in divided contexts.

- How can we align our work with existing local structures like indigenous and youth groups? We need to pave the way for local actors to lead their own solutions, and shift focus from needs-based to strengths-based. Local initiatives often demonstrate stronger engagement and trust.
- National policies may frame issues as “climate and security”, but at the local level, conflicts are often over specific resources like a pond or river. Climate analysis is not sufficiently localised and needs to reflect lived realities. These insights are harder to translate to the international stage. We need to cooperate more with the media to amplify local examples.
- Local actors are key actors in mediation processes but often lack training in climate and environmental issues. Empowering locals through knowledge is essential. Empowering local communities to manage risks and recover from shocks contributes to national stability and helps prevent



Recommendation 5: Strengthening cooperation with local actors

Dialogue and mediation at the local level can be highly effective due to the involvement of influential community leaders and poses a good opportunity to discuss gender aspects of the conflict and climate mitigation measures, as

manipulation of local grievances.

- There is a challenge in connecting grassroots initiatives (local-level natural resource management) with political-level peace processes and linking these threads to continental and international mechanisms like African Union dialogues. The Common African Position on Climate Change, Peace and Security is a promising step toward, facilitating broader involvement.

Conclusion

This workshop underscored the importance of effectively integrating climate change and environmental considerations into dialogue and mediation processes, to ensure that peace outcomes are sustainable in a changing climate. Advancing climate-informed mediation will require coordination of actions across governance levels, more investment in local capacities, and stronger efforts to bring communities' voices to national, regional, and international peace talks. These measures offer ways for peace operations and crisis management actors to better anticipate climate-related security risks, unlock entry-points for cooperation, and support resilient and inclusive pathways to peace.

First, participants stressed that current funding for climate-informed mediation is insufficient, which weakens local capacity and hides climate risks that undermine resilience. They recommended creating clear incentives for funders by demonstrating measurable impacts

of integrated climate-peace initiatives and by promoting investments with mutual cross-border benefits, such as joint projects that reduce climate-related security shocks.

Second, they called for stronger CPS advisor roles to connect technical climate expertise with political negotiations, including better resourcing of these positions, joint deployment with mediation teams, cross-sectoral training, and shared information platforms among organisations like the African Union, European Union, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and the United Nations.

Third, the workshop emphasised that issue framing significantly influences the extent to which different actors engage with climate-security questions. Tailoring language to institutional and cultural contexts, using narratives that highlight local strengths rather than only vulnerabilities, and presenting issues in ways that fit stakeholders' mandates can create practical entry points for cooperation.

Fourth, participants warned that fragmented, siloed approaches prevent climate expertise from influencing peace processes. They argued for greater knowledge exchange, simpler collaboration pathways, and professionals working at the intersection of climate and peace to connect local, national and regional levels.

Finally, the workshop highlighted that local actors are crucial for effective climate-related mediation because they command trust and understand concrete disputes over specific resources, such as water or farmland. Participants recommended shifting from needs-based to strengths-based support,

suggesting that processes be embedded within existing community, indigenous, and youth structures, and working with media to amplify local experiences. Local actors also need better training on climate and environmental issues so they can manage risks and recover from shocks.

This approach supports national stability and links grassroots initiatives to continental and international frameworks like emerging African positions on climate, peace, and security.



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