

THE ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT ACTORS IN RESPONDING TO ENVIRONMENT AND SECURITY LINKS

KAREN MEIJER AND KATONGO SEYUBA

There has been growing interest among development actors to integrate links between the environment, climate, peace and security into their policies and activities.¹ Climate change and environmental degradation undermine the livelihoods of people in developing countries, resulting in increased competition and tensions, which may escalate into violence.² At the same time, conflict and violence limit the possibilities of people to adapt to a changing environment, for example by inhibiting free movement to pastures, to markets or in search of seasonal jobs.³ Addressing one part of this situation, without careful consideration of other implications, can create new risks or

escalate existing risks. For example, environmental and climate action that is not equitable and conflict sensitive may increase the risk of insecurity in fragile communities, and peacebuilding that is not environment and climate sensitive may fall short in areas where climate and environmental degradation increase the risk of insecurity.⁴

In this SIPRI Policy Brief, these links between the environment, climate, peace and security are referred to as environment–security links, and their associated risks as environment-related security risks. Development actors are referred to as including both donors and implementing organizations. In general, the distinction between the two is based on their roles, such as providing funding and broad strategic frameworks (donors) or carrying out the work on the ground (implementing organizations); and the work of implementing organizations is steered by the priorities and conditions of donors. However, it is important to recognize that these roles may overlap for some organizations.

¹ Gyberg, V. B. and Mobjörk, M., 'Integration conundrums: Framing and responding to climate security challenges in development cooperation', *Sustainability*, vol. 13, no. 5 (Jan. 2021).

² Mobjörk, M. et al., 'Pathways of climate insecurity: Guidance for policymakers', SIPRI Policy Brief, Nov. 2020.

³ Pörtner, H.-O. et al. (eds), *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, Working Group II Contribution to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022; and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *When Rain Turns to Dust: Understanding and Responding to the Combined Impact of Armed Conflicts and the Climate and Environment Crisis on People's Lives* (ICRC: 13 July 2020).

⁴ Black, R. et al., *Environment of Peace: Security in a New Era of Risk* (SIPRI: Stockholm, 2022).

SUMMARY

● Despite growing interest among development actors to integrate links between the environment, climate, peace and security into their policies and activities, practical approaches to addressing environment-related security risks are lagging behind awareness at policy level.

This policy brief provides insights into how donors can incentivize implementing organizations to further develop and apply these practical approaches. It recommends support that: (a) facilitates engagement between implementing organizations and local communities, and prioritizes local knowledge and solutions; (b) builds new partnerships between implementing organizations from both the environment or climate side and the security or peacebuilding side; (c) enables the sharing of good practices and lessons learned on how to address environment-related security risks at various levels; (d) promotes the inclusion and prioritization of environment–security links in country-level policies; and (e) is more flexible in implementation, as well as engages in long-term commitments and funding.

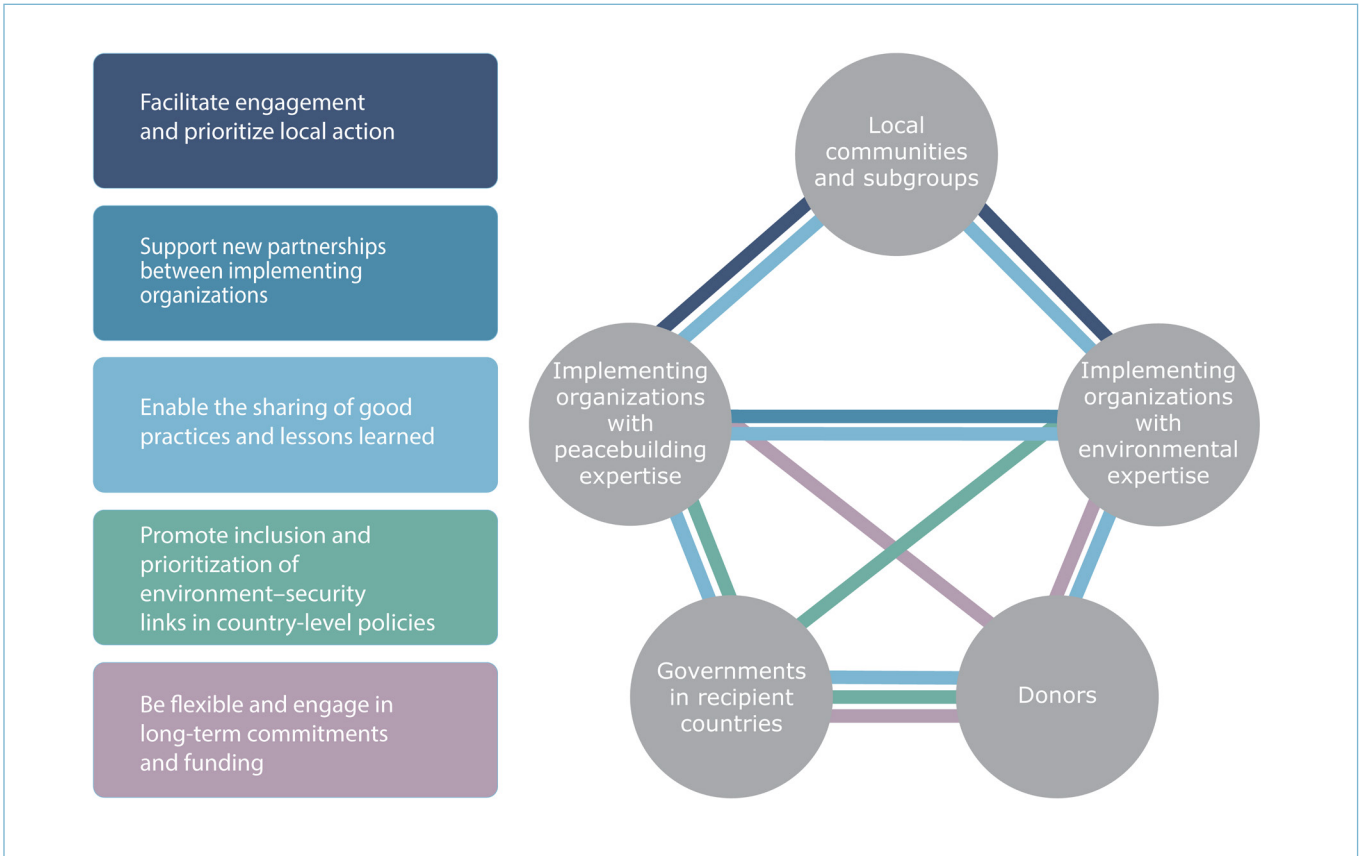


Figure 1. Recommendations for donors to incentivize environment–security considerations at different levels

Development actors can help mitigate and prevent environment-related security risks in two main ways. On the one hand, by better considering how development actions may redistribute environmental resources and climate-related risks, which can create sources of tensions. On the other hand, by more clearly bringing environmental considerations into peacebuilding. Over the years, a general understanding of the links between environment and security has been developed, as have various principles related to them, and research has underlined the importance of addressing environmental and security concerns together.⁵ However, practical approaches to addressing environment-related security risks are lagging behind awareness of

⁵ Black et al. (note 4).

the environment–security links at policy level.⁶ In order to improve these practical approaches, it is important for donors to understand what challenges implementing organizations face when working with environment-related security risks on the ground, so they can support them accordingly.

This policy brief gives an overview of what the challenges are and then provides insights into how donors can incentivize environment–security considerations in peacebuilding, climate action and

⁶ Gyberg and Mobjörk (note 1); Gustafsson, M.-T., *How Do Development Organisations Integrate Climate and Conflict Risks? Experiences and Lessons Learnt from the UK, Germany and the Netherlands*, Research Report (Stockholm University: Stockholm, 1 Sep. 2016); and Abrahams, D., ‘Conflict in abundance and peacebuilding in scarcity: Challenges and opportunities in addressing climate change and conflict’, *World Development*, vol. 132 (Aug. 2020).



broader development projects.⁷ It recommends further support for implementing organizations through: (a) facilitating engagement between implementing organizations and local communities, and prioritizing local knowledge and solutions; (b) supporting new partnerships between implementing organizations from the environment or climate side and those from the security or peacebuilding side; (c) enabling the sharing of good practices and lessons learned on how to address environment-related security risks at various levels; (d) promoting the inclusion and prioritization of environment–security links in country-level policies; and (e) being more flexible in implementation, as well as engaging in long-term commitments and funding. These five recommendations refer to different levels of support that all help address environment-related security risks (see figure 1).

CHALLENGES FOR ADDRESSING ENVIRONMENT-RELATED SECURITY RISKS

Effectively responding to environment-related security risks in practice requires connecting the general principles on environment

⁷ This policy brief builds on the results of a round-table discussion on ‘Development challenges and solutions in the environment, climate, peace and security nexus’, which took place on 25 May during the 2022 Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development. It was jointly organized by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), with inputs by experts from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Alert and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. The results are complemented by research to identify the background, challenges and opportunities in relation to environment–security links.

and security to specific locations, and national or local contexts. Some organizations and projects have implemented this with a degree of success, but there have also been challenges.

For example, two pilot projects conducted by the United Nations Environment Programme and the European Union in Sudan and Nepal integrated climate change adaptation and resilience building into conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts, which led to a reduction in natural resource-related conflicts at the community level.⁸ Similarly, a United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded project in the Sahel worked with herders and farmers in Niger to reach agreement on the shared use of natural resources, resulting in a reduction of conflicts.⁹

Further, the peacebuilding organization International Alert has, in some cases, used climate change as a neutral convening power or entry point for dialogue.¹⁰ The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, which specializes in peace mediation and dialogue, has also included climate change and environmental issues in its work, facilitating local agreements to resolve and prevent agro-pastoralist conflicts in Mali and in the Sahel.¹¹

Some of these efforts have been successful in strengthening social

⁸ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and European Union (EU), *Climate Change and Security Partnership Project: Final Report, March 2017–February 2022* (UNEP/EU: Sep. 2022).

⁹ USAID Sahel, ‘Letters from the Sahel: The peace corridors’, accessed 19 Nov. 2022.

¹⁰ International Alert, Round-table discussion extracts, 2022 Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development, 25 May 2022.

¹¹ Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Round-table discussion extracts, 2022 Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development, 25 May 2022.



Responding to environment-related security risks requires connecting general environment–security principles to specific locations and contexts

cohesion and local governance of natural resources, and in preventing and resolving natural resource-related conflicts. However, the integration of environment–security considerations into the activities of implementing organizations on the ground remains challenging.

Implementing organizations do not always have the *appropriate expertise* to understand and assess environment–security links. As these links are multidimensional, spanning over different fields, sectors and expertise, organizations may not know enough about all of the related issues. International Alert, for example, states: ‘It can be a stretch for a peacebuilding organization to work on climate and environmental issues, because it can be quite technical, and we may not be knowledgeable about all the technicalities on land, water, climate, and environment issues.’¹²

Moreover, whether and how environmental change and security are linked is *context specific*. It depends, for example, on the level of socio-economic development, the way natural resources are governed and the effectiveness of local conflict resolution mechanisms. This requires implementing organizations to engage with communities to generate understanding of the context-specific environment-related security risks.

An additional challenge is the *lack of political attention* given to environment-related security risks in developing countries. Without having them explicitly included in policies at country level, it is difficult

for implementing organizations to generate strong engagement among countries’ national, subnational and local governments. The following section provides recommendations for what donors can do to support implementing organizations in overcoming these challenges.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DONORS

Facilitate engagement and prioritize local action

Untangling the complexity of environment–security links and effectively designing entry points for interventions requires a good understanding of local contexts and priorities and, crucially, support for locally led actions. Donors should facilitate active engagement between communities and implementing organizations. They should also prioritize the inclusion of local needs and priorities and the mobilization of local actors, including marginalized groups, in addressing environment-related security risks. One way to do this is by encouraging and supporting the co-creation of interventions, through collaborative approaches that include the exchange of knowledge between affected groups, local stakeholders and implementing organizations on how environment-related security risks impact communities’ daily lives and ways for addressing these risks.¹³

Through this knowledge exchange, donors and implementing organizations can also leverage local knowledge to better understand how the environment and climate

¹² International Alert (note 10).

¹³ United Nations Environment Programme and European Union (note 8); Black et al. (note 4); and Hegazi, F. and Seyuba, K., ‘The social side of climate change adaptation: Reducing conflict risk’, SIPRI Policy Brief, Sep. 2022.



affect peace and security in local settings, and vice versa, and the means to manage associated risks. Research has shown that such collaborative processes have the potential to increase trust between different actors and improve the uptake of interventions, as well as improve the effectiveness and sustainability of peacebuilding and environmental action.¹⁴

Although such processes can be time consuming, and thus resource intensive, they can result in higher impacts. Therefore, donors should support implementing organizations by giving them time to develop sufficient understanding of local contexts and build relationships between communities and local actors, in order to create collaborative interventions.

Support new partnerships between implementing organizations

Given the multidimensional nature of the links between the environment and security, cooperation is required between implementing organizations from both sides.¹⁵ Implementing organizations from the environment or climate side and those from the security

or peacebuilding side typically make use of very different data and methods, and use different terminology. Therefore, as stated above, working together to identify and address environment-related security risks takes time, and consequently funds. However, tackling this initial hurdle may still be more efficient than trying to build additional expertise within an organization, as ‘The goal for partnerships and cooperation is to try and find areas to complement each other’s work to produce effective responses’.¹⁶

Donors can incentivize the creation of new partnerships between implementing organizations by making the need for combined expertise explicit in funding requirements and by allowing implementing organizations to spend time on, and budget for, getting acquainted with each other’s approaches, identifying common ground and developing a joint approach that builds on the strengths of each individual organization.

Donors should support partnerships and cooperation between implementing organizations

Enable the sharing of good practices and lessons learned

There is a clear need to gain a better understanding of what approaches have worked well in connecting the different environment and security elements, and in addressing environment-related security risks in practical projects. These environment–security links and approaches to them are still new for many development actors, as well as for national and supranational governmental organizations. All can

¹⁴ United Nations Environment Programme and European Union (note 8); Hegazi and Seyuba (note 13); Cologna, V. and Siegrist, M., ‘The role of trust for climate change mitigation and adaptation behaviour: A meta-analysis’, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, vol. 69 (June 2020); Brigg, M., ‘Relational peacebuilding: Promise beyond crisis’, eds T. Debiel, T. Held and U. Schneckener, *Peacebuilding in Crisis: Rethinking Paradigms and Practices of Transnational Cooperation* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2016); and Fisher, J. et al., ‘Collaborative governance and conflict management: Lessons learned and good practices from a case study in the Amazon Basin’, *Society & Natural Resources*, vol. 33, no. 4 (2020).

¹⁵ Gyberg and Mobjörk (note 1).

¹⁶ International Alert (note 10).



therefore benefit from new insights and approaches being shared and made more easily accessible. In order to encourage this, donors can actively collect good practices and share lessons learned from recent projects in which environmental and peacebuilding organizations have partnered, weighing up what has worked well and what has not.

Promote inclusion and prioritization in country-level policies

In order to obtain support from subnational and local governments for environment–security projects, it is important that environment–security links are recognized and prioritized in country-level policies. This relates to both the national policies of recipient countries and the country strategies of donors. The inclusion of environment–security considerations in such policies may be best supported by adding new elements to ongoing policy processes. For example, to the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) developed in the framework of international climate cooperation.

Promote inclusion and prioritization of environment–security links in country-level policies

Although climate action is high on the political agenda in many developing countries, only a quarter of the NDCs recognize environment–security links and their associated risks.¹⁷ Several countries have nevertheless recognized these links in their NAPs, although challenges remain

¹⁷ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), ‘A typology and analysis of climate-related security risks in the first round Nationally Determined Contributions’, UNDP Policy Brief, Oct. 2022.

in terms of adaptation planning and implementation to effectively address environment-related security risks.¹⁸

One way to influence the policies and priorities of national, subnational and supranational organizations, such as regional intergovernmental organizations or UN missions, is through seconding environment–security experts. For example, the climate–security expert seconded to the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) contributed to mainstreaming the environment and climate considerations in the mission’s work; improving coordination between UN agencies, government organizations and non-governmental organizations; and supporting the Somali government in furthering climate action plans and policies.¹⁹ Having a focal point expert can be a good way to connect considerations about environment–security links with the day-to-day realities of specific activities and mandates.²⁰ Indeed, this is an opportunity that donors are already engaging with. For example, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) financially supports the UN Development Programme’s climate and security experts in regional hubs and peacekeeping missions.²¹ More generally, donors and donor country governments would do well to promote the

¹⁸ Crawford, A. and Church, C., ‘The NAP process and peacebuilding’, NAP Global Network Briefing Note, Feb. 2020.

¹⁹ Russo, J., ‘The UN Environmental and Climate Adviser in Somalia’, International Peace Institute (IPI) Issue Brief, Oct. 2022; and Broek, E. and Hodder, C. M., *Towards an Integrated Approach to Climate Security and Peacebuilding in Somalia*, SIPRI Report (SIPRI: Stockholm, June 2022).

²⁰ Broek and Hodder (note 19).

²¹ Openaid, ‘UNDP Peacebuilding 2022–2024’, [n.d.], accessed 30 Nov. 2022.



alignment of different development agendas in their cooperation with recipient country governments in the fields of climate, development and security.

Be flexible and engage in long-term commitments and funding

As discussed above, new knowledge, approaches and collaboration need to be developed in relation to the links between the environment and security. As a result, implementing organizations require time to develop these and the outcomes or activities that they lead to are uncertain. Moreover, the insecure situation in conflict settings requires peacebuilders to act carefully and flexibly and, where necessary, shift the focus, timing or place of activities. Thus, approaches to addressing environment-related security risks need to be integrated, adaptive and flexible.²²

In order to support implementing organizations and allow them to build the necessary partnerships and knowledge base, it is important that donors are prepared to take risks and engage in long-term commitments and funding. This demands patience on the side of the funders: asking for proof of impact in too short a timeframe will be counterproductive.²³ Flexibility and long-term commitments can also result in higher funding needs. Aligning agendas and pooling resources from currently siloed funding streams can be a way around this, while at the same time promoting an integrated approach that meets the objectives of the various agendas. As such,

improved donor coordination is key to promoting integrated projects and seeking complementary, so that different funding streams work towards shared goals. This relates to both coordination between different funding streams within a donor organization and coordination between donors. It is important to identify complementarities and divide tasks, for example, through financing specific, tangible measures that may follow from peace deals and agreements, such as water points, agricultural equipment and infrastructure improvements.

Further, allowing flexibility and uncertain short-term outcomes can make it more difficult for donors to justify the efficient use of public funds to their governments.

New metrics are therefore needed to demonstrate that money is well spent, and that progress is made towards conflict reduction and sustained peace. Using the increased understanding of how environmental and climate factors may affect peace through their influence on development and equality, new ways to measure progress along these pathways can be developed to indicate that steps are being made in the right direction. Being able to demonstrate progress can then make it easier to allow flexibility.

In summary, implementing organizations are working on addressing environment-related security risks in their activities on the ground, but they face challenges because of the complex nature of the environment–security links, which requires a particular combination of expertise and knowledge. As such, these organizations need donors to take a leading role and support them adequately at multiple levels.

Donors should be prepared to take risks and engage in long-term commitments and funding

²² de Coning, C., 'Adaptive peacebuilding', *International Affairs*, vol. 94, no. 2 (Mar. 2018).

²³ Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (note 11).

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STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Signalistgatan 9
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr Karen Meijer (Netherlands) is a Senior Researcher in SIPRI's Climate Change and Risk Programme.

Katongo Seyuba (Zambia) is a Research Assistant in SIPRI's Climate Change and Risk Programme.