



Emerging Lessons from Implementing Climate-Related Peace and Security Mandates

April 20, 2021 Cedric de Coning, Florian Krampe, and Jake Sherman

Six of the ten largest United Nations-led peace operations in 2020 were located in countries that are the most exposed to climate change. Both UN peacekeeping operations and special political missions are increasingly mandated by the UN Security Council to consider and respond to climate-related security risks.

A Security Council meeting on the maintenance of international peace and security, with a focus on understanding and addressing climate-related security risks. (UN Photo/Loey Felipe)

In response, UN peace operations have tried to more effectively respond to climate-related peace and security challenges by adapting existing approaches and exploring innovative new ways in which to operationalize these tasks. Efforts to translate these climate and environmental-related mandates into policies and practices are a work in progress, and can benefit from ongoing learning, monitoring, and adaptation. In this regard, lessons and good practices for integrating climate-related security risks into policies, analysis, activities, and reporting are beginning to emerge.

Why Climate-Related Security Risks Matter

Both slow-onset consequences of climate change—reduced rainfall, drought, desertification—and rapid onset events like flooding and sandstorms pose significant risks for communities that can exacerbate conflict and protection risks, undermine already weak governance, and **complicate the ability of UN missions to respond** and address other priorities. In **Somalia**, droughts and flooding contribute more to displacement than conflict. Frequent sandstorms and flooding are an obstacle to operational objectives and logistics of peacekeeping and government troops in **Mali**. In **South Sudan**, unpredictable rainfall and extreme weather events affect pastoralist mobility patterns and routes and agricultural production that can exacerbate tensions between farmers and herders. At the same time, effective responses to local climate impacts can also create opportunities for peacebuilding, such as creating openings for negotiation or cooperation between conflict parties.

How UN Peace Operations are Responding

UN missions have adopted a range of different tools and approaches, from integrating climate-related security risks into early warning systems and risks assessments, to working more closely with development and humanitarian counterparts and regional partners, to **reducing their own environmental impact**.

The UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) seconded the first ever climate security adviser to the UN Mission in Somalia (UNSOM). The dedicated position, based in the office deputy special representative of the secretary-general/resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator, focuses on promoting coordination and integration across the mission and the UN country team, including through monthly environmental task force meetings. The position is helping the mission and UN system to mainstream climate security into programming, to improve the interlinkages between humanitarian, development, and peace actions, and to provide training and support to both mission and other UN personnel, implementing partners and national counterparts. An emerging lesson from the UNSOM experience is that a climate-security adviser provides the mission with dedicated expertise that enables the mission to improve its focus and capacity in this area. Such an advisor also helps the mission to improve its analysis, planning, programming, coordination, partnerships, and reporting related to its portfolio of climate-related peace and security tasks.

UNSOM remains the exception for the time being. Elsewhere, missions have sought to mainstream climate security into their analysis and operations. The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), for example, has established dedicated focal points (adding this to other existing responsibilities) and task forces on climate-related security issues. The mission's Joint Mission Analysis Center (JMAC) regularly incorporates climate-related security risks into early warning and risk assessments, for example, looking at the potential implications of weather forecasts and past migration patterns on peace and security, and uses this analysis to inform mission decision-making across the mission. However, institutional mechanisms to translate early warning into timely actions can be further improved.

Responses to climate-related risks often build on activities already undertaken by missions—for example, addressing resource conflict and transhumance-related violence by UNMISS—but requires understanding these issues from a new angle. This entails better linking the mission's peace and security work with the country in question, with its international partners' climate adaptation efforts, as well as their development and humanitarian programming. In South Sudan, however, siloed approaches are still a challenge in some areas and there is still room for improvement when it comes to the coordination of joint analysis, assessment, planning, and programming (possibly due to the absence of dedicated lead). In Somalia, by contrast, UNSOM's latest common country assessment and development cooperation framework includes environmental peacebuilding and inclusive politics; climate security, climate governance, and environmental mediation; sustainable economic growth; and social development, resilience, and mitigation.

Multi-donor trust funds have also served to connect the climate, peace, and security dimensions of UN Security Council mandates to analysis, planning, and programming across peace and security, development, and humanitarian actors. This can help address some of the disconnect between analysis and response, while also building on and pulling together capacities on these issues that exist in the UN country team.

Partnerships beyond the UN system is also critically important—with host governments, civil society, and international and regional counterparts and partners. Specific configurations will differ from mission to mission. Working with and building regional capacities on data and early warning, including of the African Union and Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), have proven particularly important in addressing locusts and transboundary waters.

An enhanced ability to temporarily deploy expertise from UN headquarters or regional hubs could provide much needed advice, training, and mentoring in the absence of, or complementary to, dedicated climate-security positions in missions. The Climate Security Mechanism, a joint initiative of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), the UN Development Program (UNDP), and the UN Environment Program (UNEP) is providing guidance and advice on integrated risk analysis and response. Both DPPA and the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) have established dedicated focal points that convene regular exchanges of information and practices across missions, and identify gaps. These capacities, alongside expertise in the Mediation Support Unit (e.g., on intercommunal conflict) and in the Peacebuilding Fund secretariat (on climate-related project funding), provide important reach-back for missions and UN country offices. Missions would also benefit from regionally-based expertise (with greater familiarity with the context and shorter deployment horizons), for example, shared across multiple missions or operating out of regional offices, e.g., the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel and its counterpart in Central Africa, or regional development offices in Addis Abba or Libreville, or the UN Office in Nairobi (where UNEP has its headquarters).

Addressing Gaps: Next Steps

Despite this progress, missions continue to face challenges, including translating guidance from headquarters. For mission staff—often comprised of versatile generalists—tackling climate, peace, and security can be intimidating, and its entry points difficult to grasp given its cross-cutting nature. Climate-related security risks can seem like a stretch of job descriptions; one that needs to compete with other priorities. Missions are requesting additional training and capacity building in climate-related risk analysis and programming for their own staff, as well as to provide accompaniment for partners in government and regional entities.

The establishment of dedicated climate-adviser positions, budgets for training and capacity building, and temporary deployments have resource implications that require Fifth Committee approval, subject to negotiation over competing priorities and finite resources. By articulating responsibilities for analysis of and response to climate, peace, and security risks in the operational paragraphs of mandates, for example, the Security Council would clearly convey the priority of this issue and increase the prospects of member state approval. More regular reporting by missions to the Council on how climate-related security risks affect mandate implementation would also demonstrate to the Council why such analysis matters.

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This article is drawn from a recent closed-door roundtable organized by SIPRI, NUPI, and IPI—part of a series to examine how UN mediation, peace operations, and peacebuilding efforts respond to climate-related security risks.

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