

BUREAU FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION AND STABILIZATION

Climate Security

What is Climate Security?

USAID defines *climate security* as **the ways in which the impacts of, and responses to, climate change alter the socioeconomic and geopolitical systems that affect peace and security.**¹ This framing recognizes that climate change and violent conflict collectively undermine national, community, and individual security. Gradually shifting weather patterns, rising sea levels, and extreme weather events intensify conflict dynamics and undermine resilience.

Climate change and conflict interact in different ways.

- Resource competition driven by relative abundance or scarcity coupled with high population growth, geopolitical tensions, or intergroup rivalries, can increase the likelihood or severity of conflict. Clashes over land, water or other climate-affected resources may be localized (e.g., farmer-herder clashes in Nigeria), regional or international.
- Livelihood insecurity driven by changes in weather patterns can lead to shifting migration routes, increased reliance on illicit income sources, higher rates of gender-based violence, and vulnerability to recruitment by violent extremist organizations. For example, in Uganda, the decreasing viability of typically male livelihoods has led some men to appropriate women's resources and businesses, sometimes using physical force.
- Extreme weather events and disasters increase fragility by decreasing economic opportunities and destroying assets, exposing ineffectual governance, increasing marginalization, or displacing certain populations. Populations in fragile states lack the resilience to withstand weather-related shocks or manage conflict. In Somalia, for example, al Shabab is leveraging the ongoing drought to increase its credibility by mediating resource-related disputes.
- Transboundary water management is becoming increasingly contentious and challenging as countries dispute the rights and access to water. Managing water resources will be most challenging in fragile states or where water management decisions are eclipsed by political considerations. Prominent examples include the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, the Blue Nile River Basin, the Jordan River Basin, and the Lake Chad Basin.
- Volatile food prices and rising food insecurity will not be driven by climate change alone. Yet, climate change is already decreasing crop yields and disrupting food production just as countries

¹ [USAID Climate Strategy 2022-2030](#), pg 35.

reliant on imports are vulnerable to global supply and price shocks. Further, every food-insecure country is also affected by climate change. The combined impacts of decreased food security and increased conflict can create dangerous cycles of risk. In Burkina Faso, violent extremist organizations have driven farmers out and prevented harvests from being collected, further compounding food insecurity.

Suggestions for USAID Programming

USAID must overcome siloed approaches to climate and conflict through deliberate interventions designed to address overlapping vulnerabilities and strengthen opportunities for peace and resilience.

1. **Look beyond causality:** Approach the intersection of climate change and conflict as overlapping, interacting stressors in a complex system. Places experiencing or recovering from conflict may experience heightened vulnerability to a variety of hazards.
 - In [Kenya](#), USAID emphasized conservation, data, and local governance to advance joint climate change and peace and security goals.
2. **Integrate conflict sensitivity into climate change programs:** Climate change is both a technical problem in its own right and a conflict dynamic that alters social and political power balances. Climate change, water and land programs may not normally consider the extent to which development assistance can both achieve its core aims and build social cohesion, reduce grievances or address unintended negative programming consequences.
 - In Niger, USAID's [TerresEauVie](#) program brings farmers and herders together to agree on peaceful ways to improve water security, increase land productivity, and help vulnerable groups to withstand natural disasters.
3. **Integrate a climate lens into peacebuilding programming:** Given the higher likelihood of both violent conflict and heightened climate risk in countries that are already fragile, peacebuilding efforts that forge solutions to climate change-related challenges, such as flooding or drought, provide a powerful form of climate adaptation.
 - In Uganda, USAID's [Securing Peace and Promoting Prosperity](#) convenes clan leaders, elders, and government representatives to negotiate grazing land and water resources.

Additional Resources

- [USAID Climate Change Strategy 2022-2030](#)
- [USAID Land and Conflict Toolkit](#); [USAID Water and Conflict Toolkit](#)
- [Environment of Peace: Security in a New Era of Risk](#)
- [Pathways to Peace: Addressing Conflict and Strengthening Stability in a Changing Climate](#)
- [From Rhetoric to Response: Addressing Climate Security with International Development](#)

For more information or assistance, contact USAID's Conflict Prevention & Stabilization Bureau's Center for Conflict and Violence Prevention (CVP) at LLDinternal@usaid.gov.