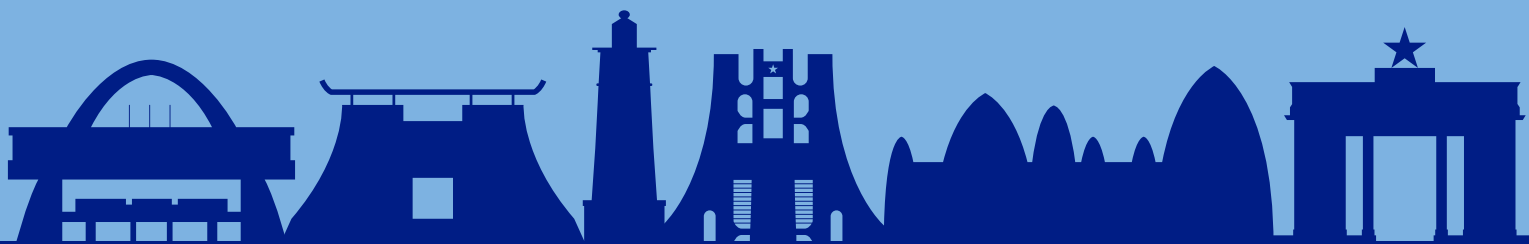


BACKGROUND PAPER

Integrating climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies into peace operations and peacebuilding efforts



ABOUT THE EVENT

The 2025 Challenges Annual Forum (#CAF25Accra) will contribute to the United Nation's Secretary General's Review of the Future of all Forms of Peace Operations by examining how conflict and instability are evolving, define key political and operational prerequisites for success, and generate concrete, innovative proposals to adapt and strengthen peace operations, with a particular focus on West Africa and the Sahel. The event is co-hosted by the Challenges Forum's Ghanaian partner, the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center (KAIPTC), in Accra on 14–15 October. Challenges Forum is a global partnership that uses its convening power to generate innovative ideas and promote results for more effective peace operations.

Challenges Forum consists of Partners from:

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Climate change is increasingly affecting conflict dynamics and posing significant obstacles to building peace around the world. Peace operations should use climate security to engage with communities and national actors in ways that help prevent and mitigate conflict. Doing so requires greater coherence with UN country teams, ensuring that political, security, and development efforts are mutually reinforcing. It also calls for deeper collaboration with regional organizations, whose proximity and contextual knowledge can strengthen climate-sensitive peace initiatives. This paper argues that the impact of climate change on already fragile countries, calls for a review of the UN's climate security focus.

Peace operations and climate security

Seventy percent of the most climate-vulnerable countries are also among the most fragile contexts.¹ For example, in the Sahel, conflicts between farmers and herders, and between different pastoralist groups revolve around issues of different land use (grazing v. crop cultivation) and access to water. At times these conflicts are triggered, or exacerbated, by drought-induced movements of pastoralists.

The adoption of climate-sensitive approaches in peace operations can help prevent and manage conflicts. While efforts to integrate climate considerations into peace operations mandates have begun, they remain insufficient to address the full scope of these risks.²

Peace operations have the potential to play a transformative role in mitigating climate-security risks, particularly when combined with innovative approaches to strategic analysis and planning, programme design, resource allocation, partnerships and implementation.³

In 2018, The Climate Security Mechanism (CSM)

is composed of the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Department of Peace Operations (DPO). The CSM aims to help the United Nations to more systematically analyse and help Member States address the linkages between climate change, peace, and security. The CSM works directly with UN field missions and country teams, as well as with regional and sub-regional organizations to build capacity, exchange knowledge, and achieve results for countries and communities most affected by climate-related security risks. To date, ten Climate, Peace and Security Advisers (CPSA) have been deployed across a range of missions and regional and sub-regional organisations to contribute to more coherent approaches to climate-related peace and security concerns.

Although there are many positive examples as showcased by the CSM Survey of Practice, the increase of mandates and programming activities on climate change is not always resulting in integration of climate-sensitive programming

1. International Alert. (2023). Making climate finance fit for a world in conflict.

2. Climate and environmental factors have been incorporated into mandated tasks nine times and are referenced in four of the eleven current peacekeeping operations. See El-Ghassim Wane, Paul D. Williams and Ai Kihara-Hunt, *The Future of Peacekeeping, New Models, and Related Capabilities* (United Nations, 2024).

3. *The Future of UN Peacekeeping in a Changing Climate*.

in peace operations. The operational effectiveness of climate-sensitive programming has in some contexts been poor.⁴ This is a result of the siloed approach which the CSM has tried to overbridge adopted towards climate security by different units in peace operations, instead of a holistic approach that is linked to the mission's political and security mandate.⁵

Climate security operations

Efforts to integrate climate security into peace operations have recorded successful results. The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has reduced conflict potential by systematically embedding climate risk assessments into strategic planning and reporting, constructed critical flood protection infrastructure, and facilitated local dialogues to manage seasonal cattle migrations.⁶ Seasonal climate projections have been incorporated into operational plannings which informs the pre-positioning of supplies in flood-prone communities to overcome the challenges faced when floods cut off roads and supply channels.⁷

"The mainstreaming of climate-risk assessments across all peace operations is important for a preventive approach."

The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) however, often had a more reactive approach towards climate security. After floods in Kidal, for example, MINUSMA worked with engineers to build a dam to prevent future disasters.⁸ A more proactive role could have been played if the mission had a Climate, Peace and Security Adviser

by systematically mainstreaming climate-risk mitigating strategies into the mission's operational framework.

Mainstreaming climate-related security concerns across a flexible toolbox

The mainstreaming of climate-risk assessments across all peace operations is important for a preventive approach. Incorporating climate-risk assessment into conflict analysis, mission planning cycles, and mandates will highlight not only the climate-related risks to conflict, but also the climate-induced operational challenges for peace operations and suitable responses for intervention.

Predictable funding and political support. Predictable and sustainable funding for climate-security and environmental peacebuilding approaches, including climate change mitigation and adaptation, remains a challenge. Renewed investment in climate security and environmental peacebuilding approaches go to the heart of what many communities view as their most pressing human security concerns and factors that contribute to persistent conflict and competition. Political support for regional and transboundary strategies is also key to adequate climate-security responses, including early warning mechanisms.

Partnerships. Prioritizing partnerships for climate interventions will avoid unintended consequences or the perception of driving an external agenda. Peace operations are temporal interventions while climate-risks often are transboundary and may aggravate over time. It is therefore important to prioritize partnerships with local, national and regional actors to promote resilience and preservation of adopted strategies. Working closely with civil society actors, including women's and youth organizations, ensures that responses are more inclusive and locally owned.

4. Scartozzi, C. (2022). Climate-Sensitive Programming in International Security: An Analysis of UN Peacekeeping Operations and Special Political Missions, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 29, NO. 3, 488–521.

5. Brown, O. (2021). *Peace Operations and the Challenges of Environmental Degradation and Resource Scarcity*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

6. Ibukun, T. (2025). Integrating Climate Security into the Future of UN Peacekeeping in Africa, CGIAR, Climate adaptation & mitigation.

7. Matambo, R. (2025). Responding to Climate Change in African Peace Operations: From Risk to Resilience, ACCORD. CONFLICT & RESILIENCE MONITOR.

8. Hegazi, F., Krampe, F., & Smith, E. (2021). Climate-related Security Risks and Peacebuilding in Mali. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Policy Paper No. 60.

People-centered approaches. A people-centered approach to climate security requires shifting the focus from states to communities and individuals most affected by environmental change. Ensuring that climate-related hardships and grievances do not escalate into wider insecurity or conflict demands approaches that address both conflict risks and climate vulnerabilities. Peace operations can play a vital role by tackling the structural drivers of fragility and supporting societies in building resilience. Integrating the climate–security nexus more systematically into peacebuilding and development programming can help communities better manage risks and reduce the likelihood of conflict.

Gender-climate-security nexus: Climate-related security concerns affect men, women, boys and girls differently, which needs to be factored into the conflict analysis and climate-risk assessments of peace operations. For example, an assessment made by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia's (UNSOM) found that the lack of infrastructure and security as a result of water scarcity, increased the exposure of women and children to sexual violence, harassment and abuse. Climate change adaptation and resilience can also be used as an entry point for greater inclusion of women and youth in local governance and decision-making processes.

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Catalytic support. Finally, peace operations should adopt a catalytic role. Beyond addressing immediate security risks, they can foster social cohesion, support local development, and connect with public–private initiatives that enhance innovation and resilience. In doing so, climate challenges can, rather than become triggers of division and instability, be transformed into opportunities to strengthen cooperation and trust.

Guiding questions

- 2035 Vision → What would a peace operation that effectively contributes to climate resilience and peacebuilding look like in 2035?
- Near-Term Actions → What decisions should be taken between 2025 and 2027 to make that success possible?
- Partnerships & Resources → Which partnerships, financing mechanisms, or technologies are critical to promote climate resilience and peacebuilding by 2030?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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