PRACTICE PAPER

Addressing the linkages between climate, conflict and natural resource management

Reflections from practice in Kenya and Central Asia

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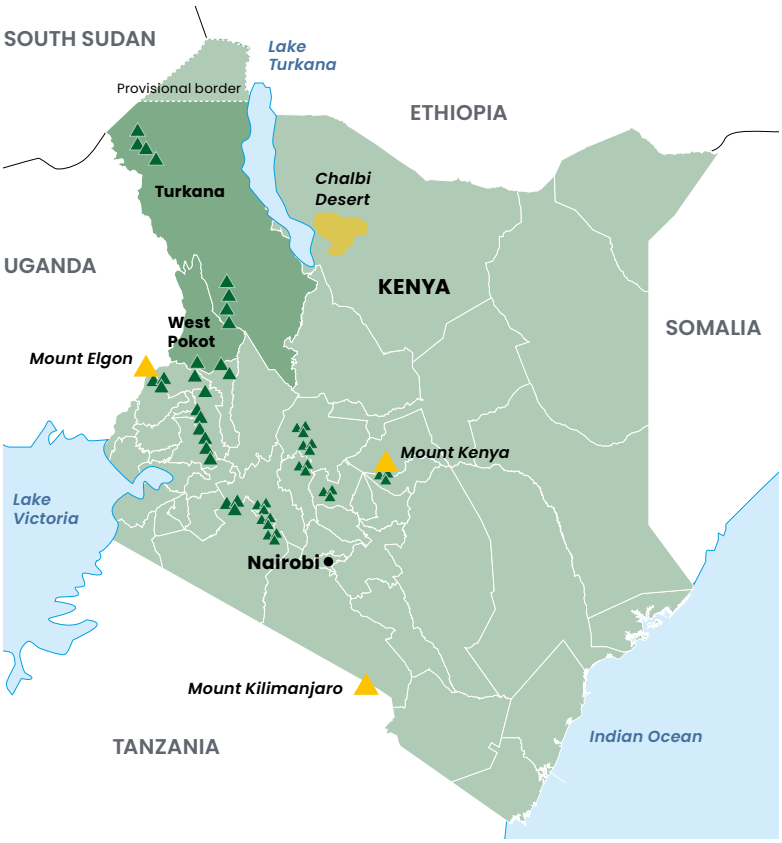
Kenya



Central Asia

Note: The boundaries and names shown on these maps do not imply endorsement.

Farmers harvesting grain in the Ferghana Valley, Kyrgyzstan. The fertile Ferghana Valley, which crosses Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, is experiencing desertification due to excessive water usage and rising temperatures. © REDA &CO srl/Alamy

Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increase in international attention on the exposure of vulnerable populations to intertwined climatic impacts and conflict risks. The broad practice and policy space around 'climate security' is evolving rapidly. At International Alert, through our on-the-ground programming and close partnerships with local organisations, we are seeing increasing evidence of the compounding and destabilising effects of climatic change and environmental degradation on conflicts related to the availability of natural resources.

This paper presents insights and learning from recent work in northern Kenya and Central Asia addressing the links between climate, (in)security, conflict and natural resources. For more than 15 years, we have been working at the crossroads of climate, environment and conflict by improving research, analysis and responses to climate and natural resource-related conflicts. Here we share our reflections on how a peacebuilding organisation can work effectively on climate adaptation and natural resource conflicts.

Our experiences in Kenya and Central Asia highlight several areas for reflection by practitioners around developing climate security interventions, as well as mainstreaming conflict and gender sensitivity into climate action more broadly.

- In developing climate security initiatives as a peacebuilding organisation, we identified a clear need to establish **shared narratives among stakeholders on conflict and climate change**. Climate security initiatives need to make use of the relevant climate science, but critically also acknowledge and understand people's perceptions, fears and stories about climate change and how its links with conflict and security are perceived. Creating space for actors in conflict-affected areas to come together to engage on these issues helps **build consensus on climate-related conflict and security vulnerabilities and risks** and start identifying ways to address the climate, natural resource and conflict nexus.
- In our efforts to **mainstream conflict and gender sensitivity into climate change adaptation programmes** (our own and those of others), we have identified several factors that support this process effectively. Building conflict sensitivity into the project logic from the outset of an initiative is key, as is prioritising community-centred and locally-led approaches. Multiple, complimentary strategies are needed for effective gender mainstreaming, particularly if it is to go beyond simple inclusion.
- **Supporting and empowering local female leaders** and representatives of groups such as women's organisations to advocate for this is key for the legitimacy of gender-inclusive messages in highly patriarchal spaces. Longer-term approaches are needed to find ways to address the dynamics of conflict, power imbalances and exclusion of women and other marginalised groups such as young people (defined in policy terms as those aged between 18 and 35). Climate change adaptation can contribute to transforming the structural causes of conflict and exclusion.
- Our findings, however, also highlighted the **enduring challenges** that we, and hopefully others working in this space, will find ways to address in the future. The technical topic of climate change and its effects on natural resources can provide an entry point for dialogue. Yet, since the effects of climatic changes are happening in highly politicised conflict contexts, including around contested and scarce natural resources, it remains challenging to take the outcomes of this dialogue to the political level where there is power to effect wider political and sustainable changes towards peace.
- A further challenge is how communities can sustain their meaningful participation and impact where effective mechanisms for participatory and inclusive governance are lacking. While it is possible to support communities to engage on these issues, they are often working in contexts of weak governance characterised by inefficient or even absent institutions and state services, corruption and clientelism.

It is these questions and challenges that International Alert and others working in the growing field of climate security hope to find ways to address.

Part 1: Successful assessment and approaches to climate, conflict and security risks

As a peacebuilding organisation, International Alert has long recognised the need to understand and address the complex interactions between climate change, natural resource management and conflict dynamics.[1] Impacts of climate change such as prolonged drought or increased flooding, paired with weak governance, can intensify existing conflicts over natural resources like water, pasture, forests or farmland. In fragile contexts, weak or absent institutions and vulnerable communities struggle to resolve conflicts and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Through our peacebuilding programming, we have learnt that improving cooperation around natural resource management and climate change adaptation can be a critical aspect of a peacebuilding theory of change. Climate adaptation and natural resource management are sometimes seen by outsiders as a technical, non-sensitive topic for dialogue between parties. In practice, access to and control over natural resources are often key drivers of hostilities and division. Nonetheless, the urgency of the shared threat of climate change to human security and the social cohesion that emerges from this have the potential to play a role in peacebuilding processes by bringing parties to the table who would otherwise be reluctant to engage with one another.

In light of this, our work in Kenya and Central Asia focused first on assessing climate security and conflict challenges and then used this to foster cooperation across conflict divides, and between government and community and civil society stakeholders. We supported the creation of new spaces for conflict parties and other relevant stakeholders to learn together, exchange information and experiences, and start cooperating.

Through this work, we identified several critical factors for strengthening cooperation in climate security programming. We learnt how to introduce the evidence and facts on climate change and balance them with a sensitive approach to local perceptions and fears. We also explored how to create a shared narrative around climate security in fragile contexts.

Building community consensus over climate-conflict challenges in northern Kenya

Unpredictable weather patterns and climate shocks in Kenya's northern arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL), including both drought and flooding, have increased food insecurity and heightened competition for resources such as water and pasture, particularly for pastoralist communities. Evidence shows that long periods of drought motivate raids by pastoralists to replenish decimated

Shepherds leading their herds in search of pastures in Turkana, Kenya. Severe drought in the region has led to increased food insecurity and heightened competition for resources such as water and pasture. © Sipa US/Alamy Live News

herds and heightens the risk of cycles of retaliatory violence.[2] These inter-communal conflicts, which often traverse country borders and county boundaries, are not new and are often rooted in historical grievances related to land ownership and management, and access to natural resources. The climate crisis has heightened these conflicts by increasing competition over resources. Resolving or mitigating these tensions has been hampered by weak structures and institutions for peacebuilding and a lack of coordination between the different levels of government.

We worked with communities and local governments in the counties of Turkana and West Pokot in northern Kenya. These communities are heavily impacted by drought and its consequences for their food and water security. Pastoralists, farmers and fishing communities experience the climate crisis as a livelihood issue. It is well understood that drought cycles are getting longer and hotter and precipitation is reducing in frequency and intensity, but when it rains it often causes flash flooding.[3] At the same time, communities are also experiencing violence with raids and armed incidents against property, cattle and people.

We found little awareness among communities and local government officials about the links between drought and violent attacks, nor on the potential for adaptation and livelihood programmes to address both challenges under an integrated strategy. Local government narratives and plans centre on containing localised violence through negotiated local agreements between conflict parties, ignoring the root causes such as the links to climatic changes and mismanagement of natural resources. Separately, local government climate change policy focuses on livelihoods. For example, Turkana's County Climate Change Policy (2020) concentrates heavily on adapting and diversifying livelihood strategies, particularly for livestock pastoralism.[4] The challenges of climate change and violent conflict are addressed in isolation because there is no integrated approach – neither in the form of climate and environment-sensitive conflict prevention and resolution, nor conflict and gender-sensitive climate action.

Therefore, a central pillar of our approach was to increase the understanding of climate change and climate-conflict links. Through community-level training, facilitators raised awareness among participants drawn from across the target areas and across different identity/social groups (women, youth, elders) on the nexus between climate change, natural resources, conflict and insecurity. We used the scientific facts around climate change as a starting point, but we recognised the need to reflect on diverse local perceptions and stories about climate change and how people see the relationship with conflict and security. These local narratives highlighted people's fears and needs regarding the changing climate and its impact on their living conditions, food security and livelihoods. Raising awareness and linking perceptions and climate change knowledge with concepts on local adaptation helped communities to realise how they can be part of the process of addressing climate change and related insecurities, from planning to implementing climate action initiatives. Equipped with knowledge and a new narrative about climate and conflict risks, communities felt empowered to contribute to climate programmes.

Furthermore, we observed through engagements with community structures that bringing different communities together increased empathy and opened possibilities for joint action around climate change adaptation. Highlighting the exposure and vulnerability to climate change of all rural communities – pastoralist, farming and fishing communities alike – created mutual understanding between communities who are often in conflict based on ethnicity and competing livelihoods. This process allowed for reflection beyond the preoccupation with the visible effects of local conflicts, such as the patterns of violent raids and counter-raids taking place between communities in Turkana and West Pokot. The reflection on a shared narrative around climate security helped to shift communities' focus and energy towards understanding the deeper causes of climate and conflict risks – and most importantly that these threaten everyone's livelihoods and peaceful coexistence.

Building consensus on climate change as a common threat to people's livelihoods and as a factor intensifying natural resource conflict was critical to community engagement in local climate adaptation processes. It started to spur collaborative action to move beyond local-level conflict management. Communities began to explore ways to take advantage of opportunities that the climate agenda offers, particularly around the management of grazing resources, to sustainably and sensitively address issues of access and utilisation, through investment in water facilities, rangeland reseeding and other processes.

Fostering dialogue for joint action on regional natural resource management in Central Asia

The southern part of Central Asia is being severely affected by the climate crisis, with shifting precipitation patterns, droughts, rising temperatures and melting glaciers.[5] The fertile Ferghana Valley, which crosses Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, is dependent on access to water from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers. It is experiencing desertification due to excessive water usage, especially for cotton production, and rising temperatures. The conflict risks are high due to the intersecting issues of water scarcity, livelihood and energy dependence on water, dense and fast-growing populations, ethnic fragmentation, disputed border demarcation, and numerous 'enclaves' within the three countries.[6] The underlying cross-border tensions repeatedly escalate into violence. The first incidents of cross-border conflict between the then Soviet Republics of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan date back to the 1970s. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the situation deteriorated

and armed clashes broke out repeatedly. The most recent escalation happened in April 2021 in the Tajikistan's Sughd region and Kyrgyzstan's Batken region.[7]

Agreements over the allocation and usage of transboundary water basins – some dating back to the Soviet Union – have not been updated and do not reflect current water usage and protection needs, leading to poor enforcement and frequent violation. Although there have been efforts at water diplomacy in the region, such the Blue Peace programme supported by the Swiss government or the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's work in the Chu-Talas river basin,[8] there are still limited spaces for transboundary dialogue and cooperation on climate security, particularly in the current context of frosty regional relations.

Our work aimed to fill this gap in transboundary dialogue and we started to engage climate scholars and legal experts focused on natural resources from Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. We set up a Working Group on Climate Security, involving environmental scientists and legal experts on water issues – a mix of those who are respected in their fields in their respective countries. We identified experts to join the working group through an open call and with the support of our local implementing partners.

Through the working group, experts and scholars shared insights and study results on the impacts of climate change in the region. Additionally, they conducted new joint analysis around climate security beyond the economic, agricultural and environmental dimensions to including the social and conflict dimensions of the climate and natural resource dynamic. As had been our experience in Kenya, enhancing and using scientific knowledge, and considering perceptions and needs, helped to create a shared narrative across historic divides. We had to be sensitive to the historic dimensions and grievances between countries and communities. Regarding the scientific evidence for climate security, partners and stakeholders lamented that relevant research is predominantly available in English, limiting the accessibility and ease of using this information as a basis for constructive cross-border engagement.[9] We provided training on conflict and gender sensitivity. This was crucial to expand experts' perceptions of the cross-boundary water challenges beyond the scientific lens and include the societal dimension around people's vulnerabilities, such as dependency on shrinking water resources for livelihoods, and associated insecurities and conflict risks. This was key to creating a new, shared narrative on climate security. A report, published by Alert, on the impact of climate change on the dynamics of conflicts in the transboundary river basins was based on a jointly agreed analysis by local experts working across divides and tensions between the different countries.[10] The recommendations of the report were addressed to all the regional governments, calling for cooperation and providing concrete steps for conflict-sensitive, cross-border water governance.

The working group was successful as a 'Track 2 dialogue'.[11] It provided a safe space for communication and joint action, even at a time of crisis when the Tajik and Kyrgyz governments were experiencing diplomatic tensions in 2021. A crucial aspect of this was the participation of officials from technical departments in the different regional governments because this created a link between governments and the experts.[12] The working group was able to obtain feedback from government officials on the expert analysis indicating a strong buy-in from governments.

Melon vendors in the Kyzylkum desert, situated between the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers. The region is dependent on access to water from the two rivers, with conflict risks high due to water scarcity and other intersecting issues. © Mauricio Abreu/Alamy

Reflections on practice – part 1

Our experiences in Kenya and Central Asia highlighted several critical factors for developing climate security interventions at different levels.

- **Establish shared narratives on conflict and climate change that resonate with diverse local stakeholders:** Knowledge-generation on climate security (and indeed climate science) remains largely dominated by think tanks, academia, international institutions and international non-governmental organisations from the Global North. The scientific facts on climate change and its compounding effects are necessary for effective adaptation and environmental peacebuilding, but it is also critical to acknowledge and understand diverse people's perceptions and stories around climate change and how people see its links with conflict and security.
- **Build consensus on the meaning of climate security:** In Kenya, we used local learning spaces for communities to build consensus around how they experienced climate change and related conflicts and how they could influence policies and programming on climate security and adaption. In Central Asia, the joint analysis between scholars from across the different countries helped create a shared narrative on climate security. In these different spaces for cooperation, we did not use the climate security theme as an entry point for dialogue between conflicting parties, but rather the objective of the dialogue was to understand and start identifying ways to jointly address the climate, natural resource and conflict nexus.
- **Ensure a conflict-sensitive approach to help build trust in climate-security initiatives:** Our interventions in Kenya and Central Asia both featured training for project participants on conflict sensitivity. This was critical to establishing a shared understanding of climate-conflict

interactions and how they impact on different (vulnerable) groups and populations. The conflict-sensitive approach, which looks at how interventions interact positively or negatively with contexts affected by conflict, helps make the connections between climate change impacts and conflict dynamics. It sensitised stakeholders to the power dynamics around access to and use of natural resources and helped foster empathy for the perspectives and needs of all user groups and stakeholders.

- **Engage government actors in these spaces:** Government engagement played a key role in our work in Kenya and Central Asia. Government actors provide the link to wider policy development and implementation and can (in certain circumstances) add legitimacy to these spaces. We saw in our Track 2 engagement through the working group that it opened up new channels for engagement by government stakeholders. For example, the meetings provided space for bilateral collaboration between government actors from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. While the urgency and shared challenges of climate change can provide an opportunity to build a space for dialogue, taking these issues to a political level – to ultimately reconcile deeper historic divides and resentments – remains challenging.

Part 2: Effective peacebuilding approaches to locally led climate change adaptation

Any intervention for peacebuilding or climate action, from policy to programme, has to be sensitive to the local conflict context. This includes initiatives aimed at enabling communities to adapt to climatic changes that negatively affect their natural environment, livelihoods, energy, food and water security and health. In practice, conflict-sensitive approaches seek to avoid exacerbating existing conflict dynamics, or creating new ones, through understanding and monitoring the specifics of the conflict context and adapting interventions accordingly. Beyond simply 'doing no harm', the aim is to increase the positive outcomes of activities by considering and responding to local contexts, conflict history, gender roles and norms, power dynamics and relationships.[13] If climate adaptation programmes can impact on the causes and/or drivers of conflict, then they also have the potential to be 'conflict transformative', which means that programmes seek to change the structural causes of violence and conflict and positively alter the relationships between those in conflict. 'Conflict-transformative' climate adaptation extends this to the structural aspect of environmental harm and should factor in the relationships of those in conflict to their environment, including who has power over natural resources.

As a key part of our interventions, Alert's initial analysis and community consultations provided insights into local power dynamics around access to and control over natural resources, as well as the exposure and vulnerability of communities and groups to climate conflict and security risks. Additionally, through our gender assessment, we looked at the gender dynamics, relations, roles, and norms that affect how men and women are impacted by climate security and conflict, as well as the gendered impact of access to and governance of natural resources like water.

Mainstreaming conflict sensitivity into climate change adaptation in Kenya

This section explores the challenges and opportunities we encountered in integrating more conflict-transformative and gender-responsive approaches into climate adaptation initiatives. Through our work in Kenya and Central Asia, we tried to identify what a conflict- and gender-sensitive approach to climate change adaptation looks like in practice and started to identify opportunities for including conflict transformation as an objective in interventions. The case studies in this section focus on the challenges and reflections of mainstreaming conflict and gender sensitivity into climate adaptation programming.

In recognising its vulnerability to climate change, the Kenyan government has established a comprehensive policy framework and is taking measures to mainstream climate adaptation in sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture and infrastructure. At the sub-national level, the county governments are developing climate adaptation plans and policies and establishing County Climate Change Funds.

In identifying entry points for peacebuilding approaches into climate action, we worked alongside the establishment of a World Bank-led initiative, Financing Locally-Led Climate Action (FLLoCA). FLLoCA is a national programme focused on devolving climate finance to county and community level to support locally-led adaptation.[14] Under the initiative, communities will be able to receive funds for climate adaptation through local wards, the administrative unit closest to the community. In the counties of Turkana and West Pokot, our initial conflict assessment revealed that when an initiative such as FLLoCA introduces new financial resources into a local context where competition over government resources is linked to other conflict dynamics around boundaries and retaliatory cattle raiding, there is a risk that it can exacerbate these conflicts.[15]

A critical element in the establishment of FLLoCA was for county governments to set up Ward Climate Change Adaptation Committees to determine how the adaptation funds allocated to the county governments should be distributed – a key feature to ensure the initiative would be locally-led. The conflict assessment highlighted, however, that the local governance context negatively affected how communities would perceive such an initiative. Because resources at the county government level are scarce, there is a desire to control and manage government resources, which perpetuates the marginalisation and exclusion of communities. Politicians have often been conflict actors themselves, using issues of ethnic difference or disputes over boundaries and land to consolidate support. Equally, service delivery or development initiatives can be politicised as a 'favour' from political elites to certain groups. Climate adaption initiatives risk being seen as 'yet another development plan' – another elite-led, top-down, tick-box exercise.[16] Governance challenges create grievances that can drive local conflicts, particularly around elections.

Recognising these risks, we approached the county governments of Turkana and West Pokot to support the establishment of the Ward Climate Change Adaptation Committees, a policy requirement of their respective climate change acts.[17] Through an approach that combined accompaniment and capacity strengthening to communities and the local government, Alert helped to ensure that the establishment of the committees adhered to the relevant frameworks. For example, we sought assurances from the relevant local government departments that the criteria for selection, as described in the Climate Change Act, had been strictly adhered to. By training local government officials, we ensured that there was understanding of the conflict-sensitivity risks in setting up these structures. Furthermore, community participation in the planning process helped to ensure that the duty bearers in local government tasked with overseeing the design of this programme were aware of the risks related to conflict and the appropriate approaches to managing these risks.

Adding a gender lens to conflict and climate adaptation in Kenya

In northern Kenya, patriarchal norms are prevalent and define how women participate in discussions on pertinent issues such as climate change adaptation. These are compounded by political and policy-level shortcomings around public participation that limit space for women to play a role in decision-making processes. The response strategies to climate and security risks, including key decision-making processes and participation, are largely the preserve of men. This means that climate action, particularly strategies to adapt to the impact of climate change, is missing opportunities for women to identify and define the problem from their own perspectives and develop solutions that best suit them.

People giving water to their cows in Turkana, Kenya. Prolonged periods of drought have led to cattle raiding to replenish decimated herds, heightening the risk of cycles of retaliatory violence. © Sipa US/Alamy Live News

To mainstream a gender lens into climate security, we accompanied women's organisations and female community members to raise issues around gender equality, vulnerabilities, and climate adaptation in facilitated spaces such as dialogues and public consultations. We used a dual approach, encouraging women and youth participation in our activities and taking deliberate steps to ensure that they made meaningful contributions in all processes. In addition, we worked with a local women's peace network, POTUMA (Pokot-Turkana-Marakwet), which provides a platform for women across four counties in northern Kenya to participate in community peacebuilding. The network includes women leaders at the forefront of peacebuilding and gender empowerment and those who act as a link between women, youth and decision-makers to enhance integrated climate action and peacebuilding.

In Alert's engagement with communities, however, we found that the barriers to women's participation were highly context specific and that attitudes to inclusion and women's voices varied considerably between Turkana and West Pokot counties. There were often neglected intersectional factors, especially around levels of education and exposure to previous gender empowerment initiatives, which impacted how actively women engaged in discussions. This presented a risk to conveners that these spaces were dominated by a small group of women leaders who always participated in consultative processes around development and peace projects.

Although working in a patriarchal context is challenging, in northern Kenya we found that there were avenues for ensuing greater gender sensitivity. Using gender champions, both men and women, helped shape discussions by having participants who could speak authoritatively on the negative aspects of patriarchy and promote the importance of inclusive processes for addressing climate change and conflict. Having dedicated safe spaces for women – as well as other excluded groups such as young people – to freely engage also helped to increase equitable participation in decision-

making. It is clear from the short timeframe of the project that work to challenge and mitigate harmful gender norms requires sustained engagement with communities.

Using small grants to promote peace-positive climate adaptation in Central Asia

In Central Asia, Alert took a direct approach to mainstreaming a conflict transformative approach into small-scale adaptation initiatives. In the border areas of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, Alert supported representatives of local communities on the use of effective irrigation technologies, crop rotation and prevention of land degradation, accompanied by peacebuilding actions. The communities, who were identified based on the conflict dynamics in the local area, had the opportunity to develop joint initiatives on climate change adaptation and conflict resolution. Among communities along the border, conflicts frequently arise over the regulation, distribution and exploitation of transboundary rivers, particularly in the context of increasing aridity.[18]

Through a competitive call for proposals, Alert offered small grants to farmers to improve their irrigation systems. This included training and technical support in project and grant management, as well as capacity-building around gender issues and conflict resolution related to water usage. A crucial factor for the success of this locally led adaptation initiative was the training component, in which all applicants took part, on how to apply for and manage grants. The financial resources were made directly available to communities and paired with practical competence development and support. This also prepared the communities/farmers to apply for alternative programmes. For example, the heads of agricultural associations in Zhambyl region in Kazakhstan, as well as local self-government bodies, have voiced interest in supporting participating farmers who did not receive grants. The grant programme was accompanied by facilitated dialogues between neighbouring communities, along with activities to strengthen existing networks and platforms for cross-community understanding, trust and cooperation.

Reflections on practice – part 2

- **Build in conflict sensitivity from the start:** For a large-scale climate adaptation initiative such as FLLoCA, it is imperative that conflict sensitivity is mainstreamed into the approach beyond the design phase. This could be, for example, by creating mechanisms to monitor conflict dynamics on an ongoing basis and having the flexibility to adapt approaches and activities if conflict risks become apparent.
- **Facilitate community involvement to help mitigate 'elite capture':**[19] Locally-led approaches that involve communities in planning and decision-making can help promote transparency and potentially avoid 'elite capture', including making more financial resources easily available and accessible for communities. This can help climate adaptation initiatives succeed by building trust in the process, as well as reducing the risk of communities feeling excluded from accessing the benefits, which can create resistance against the initiative or resentment against those perceived to be benefitting. Even with robust community platforms, however, initiatives often still operate in a context of weak governance. Practitioners should explore how community initiatives can be supported with governance interventions that strengthen these

institutions to be more effective, or how the platforms themselves can play a role in pushing for more responsive governance.

- **Support conflict-transformative climate action by integrating peace objectives and making finance accessible:** Our work in Central Asia highlighted the transformative potential of giving communities direct access to small grants. By using conflict analysis to identify where to allocate grants for climate adaptation initiatives and combining this with targeted dialogues to address community issues, we started to explore how a peacebuilding approach could aid specific adaptation activities to address conflicts in the border areas of Central Asia. This requires more and longer-term engagement and planning because dialogue needs to be accompanied by action and relationship-building between conflict actors. Conflict transformation needs more sustained action to achieve structural change by addressing underlying grievances, human rights violations and historic resentments. This requires integrating peace objectives into climate projects from the outset. Practitioners should invest in identifying what sort of transformative approaches work in the context of climate adaptation.
- **Develop multiple, complementary strategies to ensure effective gender mainstreaming:** Simply targeting women for participation in activities is insufficient for gender mainstreaming in climate adaptation. Alongside promoting greater inclusion, we used other approaches including identifying gender champions (both women and men) and supporting a women's peace network that crossed conflict lines. This approach provided space for active community leaders to advocate for greater inclusion of women in planning and decision-making around conflict, climate and natural resource management. In northern Kenya, the challenges faced by women stem from governance systems that replicate patriarchal gender norms and are rarely held accountable on commitments to gender equality by their constituents. This can lead to frustration in processes where an empowered community struggles against government actors who feel little urgency to institutionalise processes, which makes it very difficult to achieve sustainable change. Sustained engagement of local government actors is needed around issues of inclusivity and participation of women and other marginalised groups. International initiatives on climate adaptation should reflect this in their approaches.
- **Use intersectional approaches to support gender mainstreaming:** Since gender identities are not homogeneous categories, it is important to understand and take into account how gender identities are shaped by and interact with other systems of power and aspects of people's identities such as class, ethnicity, age, race, religion, social status, sexual orientation, marital status, location and (dis)ability. For example, in Kenya, young people are rarely consulted or included in decision-making. Due to social norms, inter-generational conflicts and stigma, youth struggle to find space to voice their concerns and are rarely perceived as agents for change regarding climate action in local conflict contexts. In Kenya, this is compounded by the perception of youth as instigators of violence and crime. Young people are increasingly challenging these norms within spaces controlled by informal governance institutions such as the councils of elders.[20] By addressing the labelling and discrimination of youth by government and society at large, and by opening spaces for dialogues and action, youth can take a stronger role as 'agents of change' in participatory and sustainable climate adaptation. This call goes out to all parties – international practitioners and local stakeholders alike – to apply a more intersectional lens to gender sensitivity and gender mainstreaming in climate change adaptation.

At International Alert, we look forward to building on these insights and to expanding our support for inclusive, integrated and peace-promoting initiatives for climate change adaptation.

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Cover: A pastoralist counting her goats in Turkana, Kenya. © Joerg Boethling/Alamy