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Putting peace at the centre of the 'green recovery' agenda

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Introduction

The year 2021 is a significant one for climate action, with key global stakeholders setting out intentions to accelerate global action on the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change at the UN Climate Summit (COP26).¹ Europe's Green Deal, the biggest in the European Commission's history, alongside recent calls for action from the Climate Summit,² has put mounting pressure on all players to put the climate emergency at the top of the agenda.

Pledges for a greener, sustainable economy were in the works before the onset of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. However, the impact and consequences of COVID-19 have motivated further calls to integrate policy interventions aimed at mitigating the impacts of shocks to the economy, while simultaneously exploring ways to build inclusive and sustainable economies. This is creating a space for green recovery commitments to be at the heart of this, as well as an opportunity to link the existing global climate agenda with green recovery strategies.

This rhetoric of a green recovery has been widely adopted by international donors, UN agencies, governments and international NGOs, where it has been interpreted in various ways and used to fit different fiscal, social or environmental goals. Notably absent from these discussions is the interaction between green recovery strategies, peace and conflict, or any concrete action plans for addressing it. This is disappointing as there is already growing recognition of the intersection between climate and conflict and its impact on diverse groups and individuals, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS) that are often the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change³ and also most often home to the key minerals on which green technologies rely.

As the world attempts to rebuild after COVID-19 and accelerate green recovery, it is critical that these strategies promote conflict prevention and peacebuilding. A greener, environmentally sustainable and inclusive recovery can offer the twin opportunity of tackling conflict alongside building climate resilience. It can be an opportunity to encourage reforms in favour of inclusive governance, transparency and accountability that will mitigate the stresses that risk driving conflict.

It is the responsibility of policy-makers, donors, national governments, international NGOs and civil society to minimise the negative impacts of green recovery strategies

on conflict and to build opportunities for peacebuilding within these. To get this right, we are proposing three considerations:

1. Understand the interplay between recovery approaches and fragility

With a growing recognition of the complex interdependencies between climate variability, institutional fragility, resource competition and intergroup conflicts, any discussion around green recovery from COVID-19 must acknowledge and recognise the need for an integrated approach that consolidates climate action, developmental goals and peacebuilding outcomes. Yet green recovery strategies rarely consider the impact approaches can have on existing conflict dynamics and tensions.

This lack of consideration of conflict dynamics has already been reported as an issue in relation to existing green recovery programmes that pre-date the pandemic, such as the Great Green Wall (GGW) Initiative,⁴ which aims to create a barrier against climate change across the Sahel region using a 8,000-kilometre wall of trees.⁵ While the majority of the participating countries are conflict-affected, few include conflict mitigation as a goal in their related National Action Plans (NAPs) for the initiative.⁶ The impact of this oversight is evident. For example, in Senegal, conflict arose with the pastoralist Fulani community when their movements were restricted by the initiative, as land was made inaccessible, obstructing key grazing routes.⁷

In the Sahel, the rise in violent extremism has been linked to the region's vulnerability to climate change,⁸ yet there has been little mention of the impact the GGW initiative might have in terms of helping to reduce violent extremism or its potential impact on migration. Plans for green recovery will therefore need to strive to understand the environmental, social and political context in which they are taking place and consider how to adapt in contexts where they intersect with political and conflict dynamics if they are to be sustainable and at the very minimum do no harm.

Another example, and one of pressing concern, is the increased need for minerals like lithium and cobalt as a result of the drive for green technologies such as solar energy, electric cars and wind turbines. The World Bank predicts that the demand for some of these minerals



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A poverty-reduction and climate-adaptation project in which water is pumped by a solar-powered pump to irrigate crops in Maradi, Niger

could surge by 500 percent by 2050.⁹ FCAS, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, where many of these minerals are found, already play host to a range of violent conflicts fuelled by poor, untransparent resource governance. A surge in demand could potentially exacerbate old conflicts and drive new ones unless properly managed. This risk demands continuous analysis of political, economic and conflict dynamics to avoid derailing the green recovery agenda.

Peace, conflict and gender analysis needs to feed into recovery strategies, ensuring that conflict assessments and early warning systems are a foundation stone of green recovery approaches. This will help to design strategies that avoid unintended consequences and build peace-supporting opportunities.¹⁰

2. Leverage green recovery as an opportunity to support stability and peace

Understanding the interplay between green recovery strategies and the dynamics in which they take place is

critical to avoid exacerbating existing tensions or creating new ones. However, a green recovery can go much further than taking a do-no-harm approach. These strategies should also aim to have a positive impact on peace.

To achieve this, green recovery strategies must consciously and proactively address governance issues that surround the management and use of natural resources. Reforms are necessary to improve inclusive governance, transparency and accountability. This will open avenues for a type of governance that local communities can engage with and inform policy-makers about the types of green recovery strategies that will provide tangible benefits for those most vulnerable to climate change and conflict.

This starts with using the green recovery itself as an opportunity to open avenues for engagement. Building a consensus among different parts of society on what 'green' or 'sustainable' means and how this may look for different parts of the country is key to designing a national strategy that meets diverse needs and carries people along with it, thereby increasing the likelihood of its sustainability.

A fundamental aspect of this is green recovery funds. These can play a significant role in contributing to addressing drivers of fragility. Macro-plans such as green



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A member of an early warning system task force broadcasts the alarm of an impending flood of the nearby Gandak river to his community in Bihar, India

transport, green jobs and green financing should have conflict and gender considerations at their heart. They should address which groups and geographies should be prioritised for the dual purpose of growing a green economy and tackling causes of inequality and conflict. Criteria for gender and conflict analysis should accompany proposals and be embedded within strategies along with targets for ensuring the inclusion of a gender- and conflict-sensitive approach. This would contribute to broadening the green recovery agenda to play an active part in tackling fragility.

These approaches are key to building a strategy that links local realities and responses to broader governance and decision-making processes. With this in place, responses are more likely to be better suited and adapted to the realities on the ground, making the most of the informal and formal mechanisms that already exist and in their very application work to promote greater inclusion and equality.¹¹ This offers the prospect of building greener, more inclusive, more sustainable societies while mitigating drivers of fragility.

3. Put people first – build mechanisms within green recovery strategies for social accountability and inclusion of diverse groups

Communities and individuals experience the impacts of the climate crisis and fragility in different ways depending on a variety of factors including gender identity, access to power and voice, and social, economic and geographic position. Differences in assets, ownership and use of resources, and gendered division of labour define how men and women, as well as different generations, ethnicities, religions, abilities or sexual orientations, experience and manage risk in the context of climate change and security.

In many FCAS, there are already wide disparities within groups, a trust deficit in terms of institutions and



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Women farmers engaging in participatory research on livelihood security near Kasama, Zambia

governance, and huge gaps between national elites and communities in vulnerable situations. These differences have a critical bearing on how individuals and communities are impacted by green recovery strategies, which in turn can impact on whether recovery is successful or derailed.

Sustainable progress therefore can only be made if it holds at its centre an understanding of how different approaches will impact different groups. To achieve this, the experiences and perspectives of diverse groups must be considered in shaping green recovery strategies. Initiatives should not only reflect community needs but also articulate how they are creating opportunities for people.

Discussions involving donors, national government and the private sector around macro-plans such as green transport, green jobs, financing and different climate funds need to establish mechanisms through which community needs, constraints and voices are taken into account. This is especially important in the situation of those most vulnerable to climate stresses, in particular women and girls in FCAS,¹² and those with scarce resources and poor access to services.

Using capacity-building and information-sharing methods both at a civil society level and with national policy-makers can help build understanding of how green recovery plans will affect women, men, boys and girls and those from a diversity of groups differently, acknowledging the different considerations and the different impacts they may have.

Working with civil society to design the right kinds of spaces and mechanisms to bring a diversity of people into the conversation, for example, through the creation of safe spaces and dialogue, can provide forums in which people can meaningfully contribute ideas, concerns and priorities. This also helps to tease out the complexity of lived challenges in the face of climate and security impacts, along with the resilience and adaptation that already exists.¹³

Finally, the green recovery agenda must create channels for accountability to ensure that interventions are responsive and accountable to communities. This goes hand in hand with putting in place mechanisms for people to engage with processes and participate in outcomes, ensuring that diverse groups have a say in decisions that will affect them and have the space to contribute to solutions.

Conclusion

Peacebuilding and conflict prevention need to be built into commitments and plans for green recovery. This will help to close the gap between the green recovery agenda and the climate and security nexus – building a recovery that in the future can offer a means not only to sustainably recover from COVID-19 but also to prepare and recover from future shocks and stresses.

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About the Peace Research Partnership

Saferworld, Conciliation Resources and International Alert are collaborating on a research programme that generates evidence and lessons for policy-makers and practitioners on how to support peaceful, inclusive change in conflict-affected areas. Funded by UK aid from the UK government, the research focuses on economic development, peace processes, institutions and gender drivers of conflict. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

Endnotes

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