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From silos to synergies

Advancing the UNSC climate security agenda

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From silos to synergies

ADVANCING THE UNSC CLIMATE SECURITY AGENDA

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) does not have a climate security resolution that formally places the matter on the council's agenda, nor a dedicated budget for this area. Yet, the climate security agenda has still advanced through collaborative networks at mission and regional levels. As Denmark assumes a non-permanent UNSC seat, it should commit to a flexible approach to strengthen these networks, emphasising nexus approaches that integrate climate adaptation support, climate finance and peace efforts.

The UNSC has acknowledged the link between climate, peace and security on numerous occasions and included climate security language in several resolutions. However, the formal integration of climate security into the UNSC agenda has been contested.

KEY FINDINGS

- Traditional military and security solutions are ill-suited to address the root causes of climate-related insecurities. A more inclusive security approach is needed to consider interconnected risks, including human, food and environmental insecurities.
- Initiatives within UN missions to strengthen interagency collaboration and adopt nexus approaches should be upscaled to enhance synergies between climate adaptation support, climate finance and peace and security efforts.
- Regional climate security frameworks provide key entry points for the UN and UNSC to enhance international–regional partnerships to address climate-related security risks.

Despite the absence of a formal thematic resolution and a dedicated budget, the climate security agenda has advanced through networked approaches at both mission and regional level, in particular on the African continent. This is illustrative of the agenda's adaptation to a contested political landscape.



Evidence is mounting that climate change does impact security by contributing to complex sociopolitical and ecological risks.



For Denmark, as it assumes a non-permanent seat on the UNSC, navigating these developments and utilising entry points to advance the climate security agenda in a manner that positively contributes to peace and security is crucial.

Drawing on insights from ongoing climate security efforts, this brief advocates strategies that promote a more inclusive politics of security. It calls for engaging broader networks surrounding the UNSC and integrating knowledge and responses that address the interconnected challenges of security, peace, climate adaptation, and access to climate finance. Such approaches are particularly crucial in regions most affected by climate change and armed conflict, which highlights the need for regional collaboration and anchoring (Moe 2024).

Climate security: a contested agenda

The climate security agenda has gained support from a growing number of UN member states but has also faced significant opposition, in particular from Russia, China and India when the draft UNSC resolution on the security implications of climate change was tabled in 2021.

The opposition questioned the link between climate change and conflict, raised concerns about the securitisation of climate issues, and emphasised the need to address climate change within development frameworks. Ultimately, Russia vetoed the resolution. Observers have noted that the opposition to the climate security agenda may also be shaped by geopolitical interests in keeping climate change off high-level agendas and avoiding the associated costs (McDonald 2023).

Meanwhile, evidence is mounting that climate change does impact security by contributing to complex sociopolitical and ecological risks (Krampe et al. 2024). These include land degradation, loss of livelihoods, food insecurity and related dynamics of displacement, wider human insecurity, and sociopolitical tensions.

Populations in conflict-affected areas are particularly exposed to climate impacts, yet often receive the least support due to donor risk aversion (Moe & Cold-Ravnkilde 2022; Chambers & Kyed 2024).

It is therefore critical, as also emphasised in a series of climate, peace and security events at COP29, to prioritise a climate security agenda that addresses context-specific climate change impacts in regions affected by conflict, where climate change intersects with an array of insecurities. However, in doing so, warnings against securitising climate change remain valid. Traditional military and security solutions cannot tackle underlying drivers of climate-related insecurity.

Integrating climate security, adaptation and finance

Climate change calls for broadening approaches to security to focus on intersections between conflict prevention, human security, and environmental security. Accordingly, the climate security agenda should not direct resources away from climate financing and adaptation efforts and towards security-focused mandates. On the contrary, synergies should be strategically pursued through interagency collaboration and strategic coordination. This should happen both at headquarter levels (e.g. between the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the UNSC) and at regional scales, including within missions.

Advocacy networks and interagency collaboration

Despite policy silos and multiple competing priorities in current international politics, as well as unstable funding for the UN climate security agenda, efforts towards collective advocacy and interagency collaboration on the climate security agenda are underway.

For example, climate security advocacy networks, particularly the Informal Expert Group on Climate and Security, established in 2020, and the Group of Friends of Climate and Security, established in 2018, have stepped up their advocacy after the 2021 veto, and play an important role in advancing the climate security agenda. They facilitate knowledge exchanges among UN and UNSC representatives, researchers, and regional and local actors in mission settings, playing a key role in integrating climate security language into the mandates of several UN missions.

These efforts, along with statements and advice offered to the UNSC, contribute to discussions on a more inclusive climate security agenda, promoting nexus programming that bridges climate adaptation, climate finance, and peace and security efforts. A strong example of this is the introduction of UN climate security and environmental advisors at mission level, with the first such advisor appointed to United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) in 2020. The advisor has played a central role in strengthening Somalia’s national capacity for implementing climate policy, coordinating climate security efforts across UN agencies, national, regional and INGO actors, and mainstreaming climate issues

across security, peace and development, as well as adaptation support, with a current focus on climate–peace dialogues (for details, see Moe forthcoming). Moreover, as a key mechanism for advancing nexus programming in practice, the UN’s Climate Security Mechanism – established in 2018 as an interagency platform for pooling expertise – brings together the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the UN Development Programme, the UN Environment Programme and the UN Department of Peace Operations. It also supports climate security efforts at the regional and mission levels, such as through UNSOM and the UN Mission in South Sudan.

Strengthening regional climate security mechanisms

Enhancing the UN’s response to climate-related peace and security risks requires committed engagement with context-specific, regionally anchored knowledge and frameworks. The process the African Union (AU) initiated in 2022 to develop a Common African Position on Climate Security can serve as an opportunity to enhance partnership between the UN and the AU. Notably, on the same day that the UNSC climate security resolution was vetoed, the AU Peace and Security Council issued a communiqué advocating climate-sensitive planning in peacekeeping and



UN and IGAD participants visit the Groundwater Access Facility (GAFA) in the in Jigjiga in the Somali Region of Ethiopia, 2024. Photo: UNICEF Ethiopia/2023/Ayene

“ Enhancing the UN’s response to climate-related peace and security risks requires committed engagement with context-specific, regionally anchored knowledge and frameworks. ”

post-conflict reconstruction (Mattheis et al. 2023). It also emphasised the importance of early warning systems for climate insecurity.

At the subregional level, institutional developments and initiatives focused on climate security require increased support and engagement. This support will also enhance UN agencies’ understanding of the context-specific ways in which climate change impacts security and will help identify the specific needs for localising assistance.

For example, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has shown significant leadership in seeking to institutionalise climate security measures that meet local and regional needs and has also actively contributed to COP29 by leading a related knowledge-sharing event. The Drought Monitoring Centre – Nairobi, has evolved into the IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC), which established a climate security coordination mechanism in 2022 to enhance climate-related responses.

These institutional efforts of IGAD have been strengthened through close collaboration with the UN Office of the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa and the Climate Security Mechanism. Prioritising such collaborations is essential for coordination, to help ground climate security efforts and enhance coordination across sectors.

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Coverphoto: UN peacekeepers walk through water, after heavy rains and floods forced hundreds of thousands of people to leave their homes, in the town of Pibor, Boma state, South Sudan, November 6, 2019. REUTERS/Andreea Campeanu/Ritzau Scanpix

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