CLIMATE SECURITY EXPERT NETWORK

CLIMATE-FRAGILITY RISK FACTSHEET

# THE SAHEL

*The Sahel has been identified as one of the regions where climate change is most likely to undermine security and trigger violent conflict. This is a function of the region's history of recent political instability and its vulnerability to climate change, itself a result of poverty, low levels of development and climate-dependent livelihoods, such as rainfed agriculture and livestock herding. This factsheet outlines the key climate security risks facing the region, scope for institutional response – with a focus on UN and African Union (AU) peace operations, and priority entry points for action.*

## 4 CLIMATE FRAGILITY RISKS IN THE SAHEL

The links between climate change and violent conflict are not automatic. However, there are at least four pathways through which climate change could increase fragility in the Sahel:

**1** **Risk 1: Farmer-herder conflicts**

Historically the population of the Sahel was made up of semi-nomadic pastoralists, with some farmers practising agriculture where the soil and rain conditions permitted. However, over the past few decades, rapid population growth has expanded the amount of land under agriculture, while **climatic variability** has **shifted the routes herders use** to take their livestock to find new pastures. **Blocked access to pastures for herders** and **damage from livestock** for farmers have become the norm in many places, and **tensions have risen**, particularly where local institutions and jurisdictions are unable or unwilling to resolve the issues.

**2** **Risk 2: Tensions related to climate-induced migration**

A number of factors – including population growth, poverty, poor governance and the proliferation of the means to travel – are already increasing the rates of **irregular and forced migration**, both within countries and across borders. **Climate change could exacerbate this trend** by placing new stresses on populations and landscapes. There is a **strong link between the rapid, unmanaged movements of people into new areas and the emergence of violent conflict**. One study of civil wars found that of 103 ethnic conflicts, 32 included violence between members of an ethnic minority resident in a particular region and recent migrants from other areas.

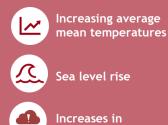**3** **Risk 3: Tensions and disputes over water allocation**

In many areas, climate change will likely cause changes in rainfall. Even if the effect is moderate, the **change in precipitation could have an outsized impact on water availability and predictability**, with potentially serious implications for the management and allocation of that water as well as the economies and the livelihoods of the people who rely upon it. **Water scarcity and competition in river basins** is strongly associated with **low-level conflict at a community level**. In the case of **Darfur**, there is a robust correlation between the probability and intensity of violence and long-term changes in the availability of water and fertile land. There is considerable debate over the extent to which shrinking water resources can trigger **international disputes**.

**4** **Risk 4: Impacts on state capacity and the growth of armed opposition groups**

The impacts of a warming climate on **water security, food production and the intensity of natural disasters** could undermine rural livelihoods, worsen poverty and force a larger number of rural residents to move to cites. This in turn could make the **provision of basic services** more challenging, potentially increasing **frustration with governments** and encouraging disenfranchised members of society, especially young men, to join the **armed opposition groups** that are already a cause of significant **instability across the region**.

## CLIMATE CONTEXT

Over the last 50 years average temperatures in Africa increased by 0.5 degrees centigrade (IPCC, 2014). The climate that the region can expect in future depends, in large part, on the level of continuing emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) and their complex interactions with the interlinked factors (land cover, pollution levels, tipping points etc) that combine to determine average temperatures and precipitation levels.

**Increasing average mean temperatures**

**Sea level rise**

**Increases in evapotranspiration and reductions in rainfall in some areas (annual average precipitation is expected to remain largely stable)**

Under a high-emissions scenario the mean average temperature across Africa may rise by more than 2°C by the end of the 21st century, increasing heat stress on people, plants and livestock. Some currently inhabited areas may become unable to support populations. Meanwhile, sea level rise and possible reductions in the flow of the Nile could have significant impacts on Egypt, in particular the area around the Nile.

# CLIMATE SECURITY - SCOPE FOR ACTION & COOPERATION BY THE UNITED NATIONS (UN) AND AFRICAN UNION (AU)

**1** **AU and UN Peace Operations in the Sahel:**

There has been an increase in the number of military actors and initiatives aimed at bringing peace and stability to the Sahel region in recent years. Currently, the two types of forces present in the Sahel are multilateral and individual state operations, although some states operate at both levels.

The multilateral forces include the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the G5 Sahel force (JF-G5S) that combats violent extremism and organized crime in the Sahel. Further, the UN currently leads several peace operations in the region, such as the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) and the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Alongside these UN missions, African Union-led peace operations include the AU mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL). Beside these, there is the French Operation Barkhane, as well as United States, German, Belgian, British and Italian soldiers, both within MINUSMA and in the framework of bilateral agreements with countries of the Sahel. Climate change is referenced in the mandates of the AU MISAHEL mission, as well as in the UN MINUSMA and UNMISS missions, but there is no mention of climate change in the mandates of the UNISFA, MNJTF or JF-G5S missions (see Tables 1 and 2).

**Table 1: Language related to climate change in AU Peace Operations in the Sahel:**

| Name | Mandate | Troop size (2020 estimate) | Language related to Climate Change in Mandate |
|------|---------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) | Mandate 28.11.2019[1] | ~10.000 | No mention of climate security |
| JF-G5S (Joint Force of the G5 Sahel) | Mandate 13.04.2017[2] | 5.000 | No mention of climate security |
| MISAHEL (AU Mission for Mali and the Sahel) | AU Strategy for the Sahel, 2014[3] | - | *"The factors that affect development prospects in the region are many, ranging from human factors (…) **natural factors, such as the degradation of the environment caused by climate change and other natural disasters such as droughts and floods**."* [p.17] |

**2** **The importance of investing in climate change risk analysis and response as part of civilian, conflict prevention and mediation efforts:**

Despite the plethora of current stabilization efforts in the region, progress towards stability has not been convincing. It is increasingly apparent that multilateral and individual military responses which focus on kinetic force are not having their desired outcome. It is clear that climate change is integral to the African peace and security agenda. The security and humanitarian situations are deteriorating, socio-economic inequalities and environmental degradation are increasing and cross-border risks such as terrorist group movements, or drug and arm trafficking are on the rise. This is compounded by climate change impacts, the threats posed due to rising tensions between pastoralists and farmers, high youth unemployment rates, gender inequality, and unprecedented peaks in food insecurity. However, peace operations have yet to effectively address climate-related security risks. It is thus increasingly clear that to have any sustainable impact on peace, stabilization efforts need to be increasingly focused on addressing climate change-related security risk and inequality, including through the empowerment of women and youth.

The AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) showed that while peace operations may be able to temporarily stabilise a situation by winning selected battles and by controlling some towns, long-term success required provision, by the Government of Somalia, of better security, governance, and socio-economic opportunities than their opponents Al Shabaab. This shows the importance of integrating military operations into larger networked stabilization, resilience and development strategies, as they would not be able to achieve their missions on their own.

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[1] https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/psc898commrenewal-mnjtf-mandate-28-11-2019.pdf
[2] http://www.peaceau.org/uploads/679th-com-g5sahel-13-04-2017.pdf
[3] https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/auc-psc-449.au-strategu-for-sahel-region-11-august-2014.pdf

These lessons should have resulted in efforts to embed the G5 force and the MNJTF as well as UN and AU missions into larger regional stabilisation strategies that are politically-led and that include development, socio-economic, governance and rule of law dimensions, such as the Lake Chad Stabilization Facility. In principle, there are steps towards this, but coordination by the AU and the UN across the various stabilization and resilience initiatives in the region remains a challenge. There is thus an important role for the AU and the UN here in coordinating their efforts to better link peace operations within the relevant regional resilience and stabilization strategies and networks. Here, the AU can take a lead in coordination, making use of the African Peace and Security Architecture to this end, for example through the African Standby Force when it comes to carrying out non-combat activities.

**Table 2: Language related to climate change in UN Peace Operations in the Sahel:**

| Name | Mandate | Troop size (2021 estimate) | Language related to Climate Change in Mandate |
|---|---|---|---|
| **MINUSMA (UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali)** | Resolution 2531 (2020)[4] | 16.443 | *"Emphasizing the need for adequate risk assessment and risk management strategies, by the government of Mali and the United Nations, **of ecological changes, natural disasters, drought, desertification, land degradation, food insecurity, energy access, climate change**, among other factors, on the security and stability of Mali"* [p.2] |
| **UNISFA (UN Interim Security Force for Abyei)** | Resolution 2550 (2020)[5] | 3.687 | No mention of climate-related security |
| **UNMISS (UN Mission in South Sudan)** | Resolution 2514 (2020)[6] | 19.078 | Not climate-security related but reference to extreme weather events: *"Recognizing the **adverse effects of extreme weather events on the humanitarian situation and stability** in South Sudan, and emphasizing the need for adequate risk assessments and risk management strategies by the GoSS and the UN relating to these events"* [p.5] |
| **MNTJF (Lake Chad Resolution)[7]** | Resolution 2349 (2017)[8] | - | *"Welcomes (…) the Lake Chad Development and Climate Resilience Action Plan of the LCBC"* *"Recognises the adverse effects of climate change and ecological changes among other factors on the stability of the Region, including through water scarcity, drought, desertification, land degradation, and food insecurity, and emphasises the need for adequate risk assessments and risk management strategies by governments and the United Nations relating to these factors."* (p.7) |

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[4] https://minusma.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/s_res_25312020_e.pdf
[5] http://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2550(2020)
[6] http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2514
[7] Whilst the MNJTF is not a UN mission, the UNSC Resolution 2349 on Lake Chad calls for greater multilateral and bilateral support to strengthen the capability of the MNJTF and the language on climate change can be seen to be advisory for the MNJTF.
[8] https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/863830

**3** **Strengthening mandates and opportunities for action on climate change related security risks:**

Climate-related security risks are not explicitly mentioned in most AU Peace Operation mandates in the Sahel region (see Table 1). Most UN Peace Operations mandates on the other hand do include references to climate change. But in practice, little has been done to operationalize the language in the mandates to assess or address climate-related security risks.

Most AU- and Regional Economic Community (REC)-led peace operations to date have included political and civilian components that have the task of providing the mission leadership with advice and support on the roles these missions should play in the political and civilian realms, as well as in participating in the larger regional and international networks that are needed to achieve their missions' mandate. The value of course lies in the extent to which these are operationalized. But this is nevertheless good practice that could be built upon within UN missions – which arguably require stronger diplomatic links to other multilateral organisations in the region to better tackle root causes of instability which are exacerbated by climate change.

Over the past decade and a half, the AU and the RECs have developed significant peace operations capacity which has been used to deploy AU, sub-regional and ad hoc coalition peace operations, and have contributed significantly to UN peace operations. The inclusion of climate change into these mandates would help ensure peace operations take account of climate-security risks. Whilst AU peace mission mandates may not include language on climate change, African institutions have developed the ability to coordinate international, regional and sub-regional networks, as well as to align its political, diplomatic and peace operations efforts, to prevent and manage crisis and conflicts. UN peace missions on the other hand may include language on climate change within their mandates, but to date have not always been so effective in aligning with civilian resilience and stabilization strategies. Coordination and collaboration with the AU and RECs could help UN peace missions address this gap.

There is great scope for cross-learning and cooperation in the field of climate change. What is needed are pragmatic multilateral solutions in order to effectively address climate security risks in the region. The obvious starting point is to support efforts for the United Nations and the African Union to closely work together on better climate and security risk assessment and responses in the advancement of the "Silencing the Guns" initiative. Whilst there is no explicit reference to addressing climate change-related risks to peace and security in the UN-AU Joint Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, the lynchpin for operationalizing of "Silencing the Guns", this framework nevertheless suggests a number of concrete opportunities for cooperative action. For example:

1. **Information sharing for conflict analysis:** exchange of information and analysis towards developing a greater common understanding of the root causes of conflict, as per the joint framework, could include exchanging climate-security information, namely climate-security risk assessment tools, methodology, data and analysis.

2. **Collaboration on climate-security inclusive early warning:** The UN and AU collaboration on early warning analysis could include climate-fragility risk assessments, sharing of climate-security related early warning from relevant third parties, and joint development of common approaches to reduce climate-security risks.

3. **Climate-security diplomacy:** UN Security Council and AU Peace and Security Council can better facilitate the exchange information, consultation and cooperation on climate security through periodic formal and informal meetings on the issue.

4. **Collaboration on climate-security mediation:** AU and UN cooperation in the inclusion of climate-security within mediation processes, including joint efforts to incorporate climate and natural resources related issues into AU-UN Mediation Guidelines, mediation efforts of UN and AU Special Envoys.

5. **Climate security in peace operations:** The AU and UN could conduct joint assessments around climate and security risks, partake in joint efforts to ensure technical missions adequately integrate climate-related security risks and collaborate in the inclusion of climate-related security risks in evaluation, analysis and assessment and identification of mission challenges, operations and mission management.

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*Political instability is widespread across the region. In 2018 every country with the exception of Eritrea was experiencing a violent crisis of one sort or another.*

# 4 ENTRY POINTS TO ADDRESS CLIMATE FRAGILITY RISKS

Climate change may not be the single biggest factor affecting the evolving prospects of the Sahel region, but it should be seen as a significant obstacle to peace that can worsen existing conflicts and compounding situations of fragility.

There are four priority entry points for national governments, donors and multilateral agencies, such as the UN and AU, in addressing climate-fragility risks in the Sahel:

**1** **Climate-fragility risk assessments** should be carried out as part of conflict analysis to support and inform early warning systems. Under the UN-AU Joint Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security, UN and AU actors can practically collaborate to cross-fertilise existing tools, analysis and expertise, for example linking UN Climate Security Mechanism's guidance tools and in-depth climate security risk analysis and the AU's Continental Early Warning System; share climate security analysis from third parties, such as risk assessment tools, methodology and data in order to facilitate the anticipation and prevention of conflict.

**2** Beyond early warning, **climate-related security risks** should be **integrated in the evaluation, analysis and assessment of mission challenges, peace operations and mission management.** The AU and UN could partake in joint assessments and operationalise climate security language in their mission and peace operation mandates.

**3** Efforts should also be made to by all actors to **incorporate climate-related issues into mediation processes and guidelines.** The UN and AU specifically should collaborate to increase natural resource and climate-related risks into AU-UN Mediation Guidelines, as well as in mediation efforts of UN and AU Special Envoys. Employing climate and security experts within the framework of peace operations would further facilitate such efforts.

**4** International bodies can drive **climate-security diplomacy** through periodic informal and formal meetings on the issue. While the Group of Friends on Climate and Security provides a good entry point for multilateral collaboration, the UN and AU Security Councils would benefit from frequent regional and sub-regional exchanges in order to facilitate knowledge sharing, consultation and collaboration on the climate-related security risks in the Sahel.

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTS

- The Sahel region is incredibly diverse in terms of culture, politics, ethnicity, economics and climates. Sahelian countries are generally less developed than North African countries.

- The countries have dramatically different water "budgets" in terms of the quantity of annual renewable freshwater resources found within their borders, from just 20m3 per capita in Egypt to 12,000m3 in Cameroon.

## POLITICS & SECURITY

- The Sahel region is seen as highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. This results from its reliance on rainfed agriculture, decreasing land productivity, low levels of development, and high exposure to natural disasters and economic shocks.

- But the Sahel hasn't always been a byword for poverty, conflict and famine: until the twentieth century, the Sahel was largely self-sufficient in terms of food security.

## FURTHER READING

- Brown, Oli (2019). Climate-Fragility Risk Brief: North Africa & the Sahel
- Scheffran, J., Link, M. P. and Schilling, K. (2019). Climate and Conflict in Africa. In Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Climate Science.