Sustaining Peace in Central Africa through

Addressing the Adverse Impact of Climate Change on Peace and Security

June 2022

CLIMATE SECURITY MECHANISM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Addressing the accelerating pace of climate change has become a strategic priority for policymakers around the world. The interplay of climate change impacts with existing socio-economic, political and security factors exacerbates the vulnerabilities of States and communities and, in some cases, can compound risks of insecurity. Even though it has hardly contributed to climate change, the sub-region of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) – which brings together 11 member states and covers an area of 6.6 million km2, with a population of 181 million people – is among the regions most severely and diversely affected by its consequences. This includes an increase in temperatures above the global average, erratic rainfall patterns, and rapid sea level rise in the Gulf of Guinea.

The United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), in line with its mandate from the United Nations (UN) Security Council as well as requests reiterated by ECCAS, and as guided by the vision of the UN Secretary-General set out in "Our Common Agenda", is undertaking a concerted effort to analyse the security risks related to climate change in Central Africa and reinforce the capacity of regional stakeholders to address them. In this context, the present report, prepared by UNOCA in partnership with ECCAS and the UN Climate Security Mechanism (CSM), outlines key climate change impacts and their implications for peace and security in Central Africa. Building on a desk review, field visits and consultations with UN and non-UN partners across Central Africa, it highlights six main pathways linking climate change and stability in the sub-region. It also presents recommendations to prevent, mitigate and manage resulting security risks, with the aim of reinforcing adaptive capacities and strengthening the link between climate action and peacebuilding in the sub-region.

ANALYSIS OF CLIMATE RELATED RISKS FOR PEACE AND SECURITY

The report identifies the following six main pathways through which climate change impacts peace and security in Central Africa: 1) Increased human mobility: unplanned urbanization, involuntary migration and forced displacement; 2) Increase in inter-communal violence, in particular between herders and farmers; 3) Increase in organized crime and activities of non-state armed groups; 4) Increased pressure on the coasts and rise in maritime crime and piracy; 5) Increased pressure on land and rise in land conflicts and food insecurity; and 6) Growing threat to the Congo Basin rainforest. Analysis shows that across these pathways, climate change acts as a risk multiplier in Central Africa. Without strong and timely action to address these issues and protect populations from the cascading effects of climate change, they can exacerbate risks for peace and security in the sub-region. The most vulnerable, in particular women and youth, are often more exposed to security risks and affected disproportionally, as societal norms often limit their capacities to cope and recover from climate shocks.

EXISTING INITIATIVES AND EFFORTS

In view of the importance of climate-related security risks in Central Africa, efforts to reduce vulnerabilities and strengthen the resilience of States and communities are underway in different sectors, such as food and livelihood security, migration, social protection or peacebuilding, and are led by various actors at the local community level, national governments, sub-regional and regional organizations as well as the United Nations. Collaboration and coordination across sectors, such as humanitarian, peace and development, is critical to maximize synergies and find sustainable solutions. Within the UN, for example, the Peacebuilding Fund supports several climate-informed peacebuilding initiatives, including a cross-border project between Chad and the Central African Republic that seeks to promote inter-communal dialogue between farmers and pastoralists and enhance natural resource sharing mechanisms.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTING RISKS RELATED TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Given the highly contextual impacts of climate-related security risks on States and communities, risk prevention and management strategies need to be carefully devised and implemented, taking into account different vulnerabilities and coping capacities. While States bear the primary responsibility for addressing the security risks associated with the effects of climate change, ECCAS is uniquely positioned to coordinate such efforts across Central Africa. The following recommendations outline steps that UNOCA, ECCAS and other regional stakeholders can undertake to strengthen the ability of climate change and peacebuilding strategies to meet the challenges in the Central Africa sub-region.

Strategic and Regional Level

    1. Encourage collaboration, cooperation and partnership on climate, peace and security and synergy under the leadership of ECCAS: ECCAS can promote co-operation and co-ordination of efforts led by stakeholders across all levels, maximizing synergy between climate action and peacebuilding activities.

    2. Develop a sub-regional vision and framework to strengthen capacities in Central Africa to manage the impact of climate change on medium and long-term stability: Effective management of climate-related security risks requires a regional approach, with operationalization at the national and local levels. A common, coordinated and inclusive response at the regional level that reinforces and optimizes climate action as well as peacebuilding efforts, building on existing local and national solutions, is critical. Under ECCAS leadership, Central Africa should seize an unprecedented opportunity to articulate a shared vision for managing the impact of climate change on peace and security, and to implement it through a common response framework.

3. Systematically share existing strategies and best practices at regional, national and local levels: An active information exchange will allow national and sub-regional decision-makers to study lessons-learned and good practices drawn from various initiatives for climate action and peacebuilding. The creation of a regional center of excellence to facilitate knowledge generation and sharing and closer interregional cooperation, particularly with West Africa, should be considered.

Operational Level

The three strategic recommendations above can be supported by the following recommendations at the operational level:

- Establish a sub-regional coordination platform responsible for operationalizing the above-mentioned strategic recommendations, to be joined by ECCAS, UNOCA, CSM, UN Country Teams, etc.
- Build and improve the capacity of key stakeholders at regional, national, local levels to identify gendered impacts of climate change on peace and security and develop tailored risk management strategies that build resilience and reduce vulnerabilities.
- Develop a mechanism to generate relevant climate data and make it accessible, in order to ensure that decisions and policy making on climate security in Central Africa are scientifically well informed.
- Ensure gender, youth and human rights mainstreaming in addressing climate-related security risks.
- Develop a regional advocacy and communication strategy on climate, peace and security.
- Develop a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to assess progress in the area of climate, peace and security in Central Africa.