

Insurgencies and Climate Change Induced Conflicts in the Eastern and Southern Africa Regions: Examining the Role of Religious and Traditional Leaders in Prevention and Mitigation

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Executive Summary

Climate change is the latest entrant to the long list of challenges that have strained Africa's peace and security architecture (APSA). Other challenges include armed conflicts, religious-inspired insurgencies, terrorism, forced migration, state fragility, political and economic crises, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The most formidable challenges to Africa's peace and security mechanisms currently are forced migration and armed conflicts. Interestingly, most writings on climate change argue that there is no sufficient evidence to attribute armed conflicts to climate change; instead, they emphasise that changes in climate patterns increase the probability or multiply the risk of violent conflict. Through a review of academic studies and grey literature - policy documents, research reports, working papers, and media reports - this paper finds that certain conditions are necessary for climate change to increase the risk or probability of armed conflict. These conditions are pre-existing armed conflicts, pre-existing latent conflicts, or pre-existing conditions that predispose the population or some groups in the population, to violent conflict. The paper further finds that there are three pathways to armed conflict once climate change encounters these conditions. First, the effects of climate change worsen livelihoods and push more people into violent conflict in countries with on-going armed conflicts. Second, changes in climate patterns transform pre-existing latent conflicts into violent conflicts. Third, changes in climate patterns worsen livelihoods and force some groups, especially nomadic pastoralists, to migrate to regions inherited by other groups, such as sedentary farmers. This migration leads to tensions and armed conflicts.

Accordingly, religious and traditional leaders use various intervention strategies when responding to climate-related armed conflicts. This paper divides such interventions into three broad categories: Track II diplomacy, mediation, and capacity enhancements. Track II diplomacy activities include ecumenical diplomacy, confidence-building forums, and humanitarian support for survivors of armed violence. Evidence from Eastern and Southern

Africa provides instances of such activities. Meanwhile, mediation occurs at the international, national, and local levels, as evidence from the Eastern and Southern African regions demonstrates. The third category of capacity enhancement involves building resilience and adaptive capacity of the population to cope with the effects of climate change. These findings lead to the following recommendations.

For governments, regional organisations, and the African Union (AU)

- (1) Resolution of the current armed conflicts in Africa is imperative to stop the interaction between violent conflicts and climate change from pushing more population groups into violent engagements. Resolving existing armed conflicts is also critical because the consequences of such wars worsen the livelihoods of the conflict survivors and, thus, make them more vulnerable to the effects of climate change.
- (2) National governments should improve lower-level conflict resolution mechanisms, especially in regions where movements by nomadic pastoralists have either exacerbated existing armed conflicts or aggravated latent conflicts into acts of violence.
- (3) National governments and the African Union should establish resilience mechanisms starting with the most adversely affected regions to mitigate the populations' vulnerability to the effects of climate change. Reducing livelihood shocks will also lower the risk of violent conflict while strengthening the populations' adaptive capacity will reduce conflict risk.
- (4) National governments and the African Union should devise mechanisms for improving the management of natural resources, which are vulnerable to changes in climate patterns. Improved management of natural resources will decrease violent competition for those resources.
- (5) National governments and the African Union should strengthen regional peace and security institutions. The current interventions by the East African Community (EAC) in the DRC and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Mozambique suggest possible areas for strengthening. This type of strengthening will enable them to resolve climate-related conflicts.

For Religious and Tradition Leaders

- (1) More documentation of the involvement of religious and traditional leaders in the resolution of climate change-induced conflicts is needed. Religious and traditional leaders should lead these documentations to revitalise traditional leadership and indigenous approaches to protecting the environment.
- (2) Initiate programs that provide training for religious and traditional leaders in conflict resolution methods and approaches so that they can integrate these approaches into their faith-based interventions.
- (3) Improve coordination between religious-based interventions and approaches to climate change-induced conflicts and other on-going programs by governments and international agencies. Integrated interventions will achieve more impact as each group of actors adds their strengths to climate work.
- (4) Religious and traditional leaders should initiate programs that build resilience and climate-adaptive capacities for the population. Therefore, their interventions should focus on reducing people's vulnerability to livelihood shocks and lowering violent conflict risks.

For ACCORD, NRTP, and Think Tanks

- (1) More ethnographic and case study research should be undertaken to produce primary data on the role of religious and traditional leaders in the resolution of climate change-induced conflicts. At the moment, a lot of policy and research papers are based on literature reviews and global large-scale data.
- (2) More systematic research on the causal relationship between climate change and armed conflicts should be undertaken. At the moment, there is no data on the relations between the two in most conflict situations in Africa.
- (3) ACCORD and think tanks should focus on strengthening conflict resolution mechanisms and institutional capacities. They should do this by empowering religious and traditional leaders with skills in track II diplomacy and other approaches to conflict resolution. They should also support grassroots interventions by religious and traditional leaders.
- (4) Regional institutions in Eastern and Southern Africa play the biggest role in preventing and resolving armed conflicts, including those caused by climate change. Thus, ACCORD and

think tanks should integrate their work on armed conflicts and climate change with the policy and interventions of these institutions.

- (5) ACCORD and think tanks should support all efforts to strengthen the adaptive capacity of populations in the Eastern and Southern African regions to reduce the risk of armed conflicts.
- (6) As climate change increases the likelihood of resource conflicts, a better understanding of how low-intensity communal resource conflicts escalate or are manipulated will be critical. This is an area of research for ACCORD, NRTP, and other think tanks.

Introduction

The 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report highlights the risks of climate change in Africa. These are the reduction or irreversible loss of ecosystems and their services, including freshwater, land, and ocean ecosystems; loss of livelihood due to reduced food production from crops, livestock, and fisheries; reduced economic output and growth; and increased inequality and poverty rates. Pointing out that changes in climate patterns are more likely to influence on-going armed conflicts, the IPCC report nonetheless concludes that there is no sufficient evidence to attribute armed conflicts to human-induced climate change.¹ Similarly, the African Union (AU) Strategy on Climate Change (2021, p. 14), observes that climate change "undermines human security and acts as a driver of conflict in Africa under certain circumstances and through different pathways." The Strategy concurs with the IPCC that establishing "a direct causal link between climate change and conflict can be challenging." However, it acknowledges that "climate change undermines human security and drives local conflicts and other types of violence by interacting with other intervening variables" (p. 14). Among the variables mentioned in the report are social, political, and economic grievances; competition for resources, food insecurity and water scarcity; low economic development and

¹This study will use the terms armed conflict, insurgency, and civil war interchangeably, although it will primarily employ the concept of armed conflict. The preference for the term armed conflict is based on International Humanitarian Law (IHL), which defines two categories of armed conflicts: international armed conflicts that involve opposing two or more States, and non-international armed conflicts, between governmental forces and non-governmental armed groups or between such armed groups. In this sense, IHL's definition of armed conflict includes civil wars, insurgencies, violent conflicts, and other low-level forms of violence. However, the chapter acknowledges that academic studies on civil wars and different data sets on armed conflicts, such as the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) at Uppsala University in Sweden, Correlates of War (COW) at Penn State University in the United States, and the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) at Wisconsin, US, offer different conceptualisations of armed conflicts, insurgencies, violent conflicts, deadly conflicts, intractable conflicts, and other forms of violence. Explaining such conceptualisations and their differences is beyond the scope of this paper.

weak institutions; and population displacement and migration. These two positions concur with arguments in the climate change literature that there is no direct correlation between armed conflicts and changes in climate patterns.

Since this paper agrees with the majority of studies that climate change aggravates pre-existing threats and risks, it contends that climate change effects on armed conflicts are contextual and temporal. Therefore, the responses of different actors are also contextual and temporal, even though there are global patterns and similarities. In particular, the paper aims to examine the responses of religious and traditional leaders to pre-existing armed conflicts or latent conflicts that have been exacerbated by changes in climate patterns in the Eastern and Southern Africa regions.² The next section of the paper will explain the methodology of empirical data collection. It will be followed in the third section by an overview of peace and security challenges in Africa, which provides the broader policy context in which interventions on climate change occur. Subsequently, the paper will review the nature and drivers of climate change-related conflicts and insurgencies in the Eastern and Southern African regions, followed by response strategies from traditional and religious leaders. It will end with a conclusion and some recommendations.

Methodology

Empirical data for the paper has been collected through desk-top research, which involved a review of the grey literature and academic studies. While the grey literature includes policy documents, NGO research papers, and media reports, academic studies are peer-reviewed research papers, journal articles, books, and book chapters.

Overview of Africa's Peace and Security

Peace and security issues in Africa vary from country to country, although some concerns apply to many countries. Among the main challenges across the continent are armed conflicts,

² The Eastern Africa region in the context of this paper refers to the countries that constitute the Horn of Africa, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the East African Community. These are Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In turn, the Southern Africa region refers to countries that constitute the Southern African Development Community (SADC), namely, South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, namely, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

terrorism, forced migration, human trafficking, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, state fragility, and political crises. Recent studies have added climate change to the list. The most challenging of these issues are forced migration and armed conflicts. Forced migration involves the displacement of a large portion of the continent's population; it transcends national borders and exerts significant humanitarian, political, social, cultural, and economic challenges on origin, transit and destination countries. According to UNHCR, there were at least 6.4 million refugees and 16.0 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) on the continent by January 2022, which makes up at least 30% of all IDPs in the world. The principal cause of forced migration is armed conflicts, although literature cites other significant contributors, such as disasters and human security issues, including poverty, economic, and political concerns. Most armed conflicts in Africa are interlinked in complex regional conflict systems.

The civil war in Somalia, which has been on-going since 1991, is one of the most challenging in Africa. Over the years, the main combatants, methods of warfare, territorial control, and the involvement of continental and international actors have changed. The current main combatants are the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the Islamist group *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen* (commonly known as al-Shabaab), whose methods of warfare combine guerrilla tactics and terrorism in Somalia and the neighbouring countries. According to UNHCR (2023), there are at least 2,900,000 displaced people in the country and at least 830,000 Somali refugees worldwide, with 80% of them residing in neighbouring countries, such as Kenya (279,200), Ethiopia (250,719), Yemen (69,940), and Uganda (61,853). Such massive displacement and persistent warfare have rendered the population vulnerable to climate change effects such as drought and flood. Not far from Somalia is another armed conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region that started in November 2020. The main combatants are the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Ethiopian federal military forces, which are supported by the Eritrean army. UNHCR (2023) estimates the population displaced by the Tigray war and other previous low-level armed conflicts in Ethiopia to be 2,300,000 as of January 2023. Like in Somalia, violence and displacement has left the population vulnerable to climate change effects.

Ethiopia's neighbours Sudan and South Sudan have also been embroiled in armed conflicts in the last decade. In Sudan, armed conflicts have been occurring in the western Darfur region and in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile regions. Some studies have explicitly linked climate

change to the war in Darfur (De Waal, 2007) and implicitly to the war in South Kordofan (Baalen and Mobjörk, 2017). Nonetheless, the armed conflicts in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile regions are a continuation of the 1983-2005 civil war which led to the secession of South Sudan. While the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) addressed the issue, armed conflicts continued after the secession of South Sudan. The main actors in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile regions are the government of Sudan and the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF). Although the parties have been involved in peace negotiations and signed several peace agreements in August 2019, August 2020, and September 2020, there has been a resurgence of violent clashes in the two regions. UNHCR (2023) documents show that 2,000,000 people are displaced as of March 2023.

For its part, South Sudan has been in a civil war since December 2013, two years after attaining independence from the Republic of Sudan. The main combatants are the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in government led by President Salva Kiir Mayardit and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in Opposition (SPLM-IO) led by the former Vice-President, Dr. Riek Machar Teny, although there are other armed groups in the country. Since 2018, the main parties have been struggling to implement the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Another round of peace negotiations with other armed groups is currently taking place in Rome, Italy. As of March 2023, the displaced population in South Sudan is at least 2,200,000 IDPs and 2,300,000 refugees (UNHCR, 2023).

Similarly, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is in the middle of an armed conflict in its eastern North Kivu region. Parties to the conflict are the DRC's *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (FARDC) and the March 23 (M23) insurgents. The war is rather complex because it is a continuation of the second DRC war (1998 - 2003) that ended in 2003. The M23 revived its insurgency in November 2021 after an eight-year break. The war has created a humanitarian crisis and has the potential to spread beyond North Kivu into other regions of the eastern DRC. To prevent the war from pulling the neighbouring countries, especially Rwanda and Uganda, into prolonged proxy killings, the East African Community (EAC) has deployed a regional force comprising of 12,000 troops from the members states (Wambui, 2023) and initiated a series of diplomatic interventions. These interventions include Heads of State summits on 23 November and 4 February 2023 (al-Jazeera, 2023) and the Nairobi Peace Process whose third round occurred in December 2022 (Wambui, 2022).

UNHCR (2023) reports show that at least 5,700,000 people are internally displaced in the DRC, the highest number in the world.

To the north of the DRC, the Central African Republic (CAR) has been in turmoil since 2004 despite changes in government and the various warring parties signing peace agreements in 2008, 2012, and 2019. Conflict issues in the country include religious and ethnic identities, agriculturalists vs pastoralists, control of natural resources (mines), and conflicting interests by international actors, including France and Russia. The clash between agriculturalists and pastoralists links the conflict to climate change effects. UNHCR (2023) data shows that at least 510,000 CAR citizens are internally displaced and at least 700,000 are refugees in neighbouring countries. CAR's neighbour, Cameroon, is also facing a separatist insurgency in its north-west and south-west regions. While these regions have in the past experienced episodes of violence, the current insurgency started in October 2016 and escalated in January 2018, as the insurgents want their regions to secede and form a separate country known as the Ambazonia Republic. The conflict has so far displaced more than 500,000 people (UNHCR, 2023).

The other major armed conflict on the continent is in the Cabo Delgado region in northern Mozambique. Starting in October 2017 as a series of attacks on security installations by a radical Islamist group, which calls itself *Ansar Al-Sunna* (the local population refers to it as *al-Shabaab* and *Al-Sunnah Wal-Jama'ah*), the conflict developed into an insurgency that claims to draw inspiration from Islam. According to UNHCR (2023), at least 940,000 people were internally displaced as of 31 December 2022. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has deployed the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), which consists of 2,270 troops from member states. Meanwhile, the government of Rwanda has deployed 1,000 soldiers in a bilateral arrangement with the government of Mozambique (AFP, 2021). According to ICG (2021), Rwandan and SADC soldiers have driven insurgents out of many locations, but continental and international actors fear that some insurgents may have moved to Tanzania where they may evolve into an Islamic State (IS) cell in East Africa and escalate terrorist violence in the region.

That linkage with IS turns attention to the challenge of religiously inspired insurgencies. In particular, attention turns to the central Sahel region where armed Islamist groups affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP) have escalated violence in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in the last few years. Various reports show that Islamist groups in the

Sahel destroy religious shrines, schools, health facilities, food reserves, water storage facilities, and critical infrastructure such as bridges. The insurgency in the central Sahel had by December 2022 displaced at least 2,500,000 million, of which 1,900,000 have been displaced in Burkina Faso alone (UNHCR, 2023). Other countries that have faced the challenge of an Islamist insurgency are Nigeria, Cameroon, and Chad, as they have been attacked by Nigeria-based Boko Haram since 2009. Some studies claim that these insurgencies have worsened the situation in the central Sahel and the Lake Chad region because the region has been affected by climate change (Nagarajan et al., 2018; Vivekanada et al., 2019).

In summary, therefore, the combination of armed conflicts and Islamist insurgencies has pushed the African continent to the limit. As the AU (2021) notes, climate change's multiplication of the frequency and intensity of conflict and human security issues in Africa will probably create protracted and multifaceted humanitarian and security crises that will strain the organisation's peace and security architecture. There is no doubt that climate change and its related threats and problems have added additional strains to the continent's peace and security mechanisms.

The Nature and Drivers of Climate-Induced Conflicts and Insurgencies

Policy documents and academic studies on climate change argue that changes in climate patterns increase the risk of armed conflict in some geographical locations (Hendrix and Glaser, 2007; Eriksen et al., 2008; Gleditsch, 2012; Baalen and Mobjörk, 2016, 2017; African Union, 2021). Therefore, certain conditions are necessary for climate change patterns such as droughts, disruptions in rainfall, drying rivers, cyclones, and rising sea levels to increase the likelihood of armed conflicts (Gleditsch, 2012; Mobjörk, 2016, 2017; Erbele et al., 2020). These conditions include pre-existing armed conflicts that climate change aggravates, pre-existing latent conflicts that climate change patterns escalate into armed violence, or pre-existing conditions that predispose the population to armed violence (Brown et al., 2007; US Aid, 2013; Baalen and Mobjörk, 2016, 2017; Koubi, 2019). Literature identifies several pathways to violence when climate change patterns encounter these situations.

The first pathway involves cases where there are on-going armed conflicts. Practically, this pathway follows three directions. One direction is when changes in climate patterns worsen the livelihood conditions of the population and, thus, exacerbate existing armed conflicts by pushing more people into violent engagements. For example, the 2011 drought in Somalia saw

an escalation of violence between different population groups and the al-Shabaab militants (Abshir, 2020; Baalen & Mobjörk, 2017). While the drivers of the civil war were varied, al-Shabaab's decision to block international relief agencies forced the affected population to fight back against the militants. On 24 July 2011, for instance, pastoralists in the Jazira region on the outskirts of Mogadishu fought al-Shabaab militants who tried to block them from leaving (Jamestown Foundation, 2011). Subsequently, some villages and neighbourhoods around Johwar town in the Middle Shabelle Region battled al-Shabaab militants on 27 July 2011 for demanding taxes and forcefully recruiting children (Jamestown, 2011). Encouraged by the popular resistance against al-Shabaab, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) sent reinforcements to support the local population. Such deployments increased the level of armed violence in the region. A similar escalation of armed violence has also been observed in the northern Tigray region of Ethiopia, where the TPLF exploited drought to escalate battles with federal forces and Amhara regional forces (Mutambo, 2022). The proximate reason for the battles was control of certain territory in the Amhara region that the TPLF wanted to occupy because it considered the area to be a crucial corridor for its fighters and supporters to access the outside world through the Republic of Sudan.

Another direction is when armed groups exploit climate change consequences such as drought, famine, floods, or cyclones, to recruit more combatants. For example, al-Shabaab militants in Somalia took advantage of the worsening livelihood conditions and the population's vulnerability to the 2010-2011 drought and famine, including livestock losses and inability to farm, to forcefully indoctrinate and enlist children into its ranks (HRW, 2013, 2018). Outside the Eastern Africa region, the pattern is documented in the Lake Chad Basin, where armed groups, *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (JAS) [People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad] and *Wilayat al Islamiyya Gharb Afriqiyyah* [the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP)] have exploited vulnerability induced by climate change patterns to recruit more militants from the affected population (Vivekananda, et al., 2019 and Nagarajan et al., 2018). In this case, young people are most affected by the nexus between climate change and armed conflict because armed groups exploit their vulnerabilities to recruit them.

A third direction occurs when the consequences of armed conflicts such as forced displacement, ruined livelihoods, destroyed food security, induced vulnerability, and destroyed ecosystems undermine affected people's capacities to cope with and mitigate the effects of

climate change (Eriksen et al., 2008; Baalen & Mobjörk, 2016; Mobjörk, 2017; Abshir, 2020). In turn, weakening people's coping, mitigation, and adaptation mechanisms makes them more vulnerable to the vagaries of climate change. In South Sudan, for example, massive displacement of the population by the civil war has over the years weakened the population's resilience and adaptation options to the adverse effects of climate change (Mobjörk, 2017; Scheffran, et al., 2019). According to UN OCHA, at least 2,200,000 South Sudanese live in camps as internally displaced while 2,300,000 live in camps as refugees in neighbouring countries as of March 2023. In turn, due to the displaced population's dependency on firewood for energy, deforestation around IDP camps contributes to changes in climate patterns (IOM, 2021).

A similar pattern has been observed around IDP camps in other areas, including the Darfur region of western Sudan (Spröhnle, et al., 2016; ACCORD, 2019) and the DRC (Al Jazeera, 2023), as well as the refugee camps in West Nile, Uganda (Win, 2018). In all these cases, displacement has weakened people's capacities to respond to the effects of climate change; in turn, their own practices of clearing forests for firewood have affected climate patterns. There has been evidence of the same trend in southern Africa, where the displaced population in IDP camps in Cabo Delgado and Nampula provinces, both in northern Mozambique, where an insurgency has been raging since 2017, was unable to respond to the devastating effects of cyclones Gombe in March 2022 and Idai and Kenneth in 2019 (UNHCR, 2022). International climate change trackers have flagged Mozambique as vulnerable to the consequences of climate change such as cyclones, tropical storms, floods, and drought (Sturridge et al., 2022; UNHCR, 2022; WFP, 2021). According to Sturridge et al (2022), destruction of livelihoods for the over 800,000 people in IDP camps also means disruption of social networks and other society mechanisms that they could rely upon to cope with the effects of the cyclones.

The second pathway concerns cases where there are no on-going armed conflicts, but there are latent conflicts. Conflict resolution literature refers to latent conflict as a situation in which individuals, groups, organisations, or nations have differences, incompatible goals, or contradictions, but those contradictions have not reached the stage of direct violence (Galtung, 1996; Jeong, 2008; Ramsbotham et al., 2016). Such contradictions lead to armed conflict when a triggering event occurs. Thus, the seeds of direct violence exist, but incompatibility only turns into violent conflict after a triggering event. Conflict resolution literature further highlights that the basis of violent conflict may exist for long periods in some cases without transforming into

direct violence, and other situations where armed conflicts may erupt and be resolved, but the resolution process fails to eliminate the root causes, resulting in the parties returning to latent conflict (Jeong, 2008; Ramsbotham et al., 2016). There are also cases where armed conflict never emerges despite the persistence of latent conflict. Drivers of latent conflict include structural conditions, such as economic inequality, competition over access to natural resources, unequal access to political power, or agency-centred issues, such as differences in value systems, statuses, religious beliefs, or cultural practices. In situations of latent conflicts, therefore, patterns of climate change impact those drivers and, consequently, transform latent conflicts into armed violence. This transformation follows two directions.

One direction concerns situations where conflicts may be latent at the moment, but such cases have a history of violent conflict. This direction has been documented in Kenya, where the frequency of ethnic violence, banditry, and cattle rustling in the northern regions has increased over the years (Ember, C. R. et al., 2012; Adano et al., 2012; Schilling et al., 2012; Ide et al., 2014). The same trend also appears in northern Uganda, especially in the north-eastern and northern regions where conflicts between the local population and the nomadic pastoralists, locally known as *Balaalo*, over grazing lands, have intensified over the years (Monitor, 2018a; The Independent, 2021). Although these regions have a history of violence, climate change consequences have increased the frequency and intensity of armed violence. Similarly, it was the case in the Darfur region of Sudan before the eruption of a full-scale civil war in 2003. Darfur studies show that sporadic low-level violent conflicts occurred in the past, but the communities resolved those conflicts through traditional mechanisms (De Waal, 2007). As it were, climate change - the encroachment of the desert and declining rainfall - exacerbated the latent conflict into devastating armed violence by forcing the nomadic Arab communities to migrate further south into the wetter areas inhabited by African ethnic groups (De Waal, 2007).

A second direction involves cases where there has been no history of violence but the impacts of climate change transform the existing latent conflict into armed violence. The difference between this direction and the previous one is that the pre-existing latent conflict has never degenerated into direct violence. Thus, it is the effects of climate change that aggravate this pre-existing latent conflict and transform it into direct violence for the first time. An example of this case is the armed violence in Western Equatoria in South Sudan, where changes in climate increased tensions between the local sedentary farmers and herders from the neighbouring Bahr el Ghazal region who moved to western Equatoria in search of grazing lands

(Koos, 2014; Jok et al., 2017; ICG, 2021; NUPI, 2022). Although tensions between these groups have been recorded in the past, it is only in the last 10 years that they have turned into armed violence (Koos, 2014; Jok et al., 2017). Another example is central Ethiopia where drought-induced resource scarcity has led to increased competition and violent clashes between Karrayyu and Afar herders, yet the two groups have in the past shared grazing rangelands (Baalen & Mobjörk, 2016; Ali et al., 2022).

The third pathway refers to cases where the effects of climate change worsen livelihoods and force people to move from their traditional locations to other locations. Such migrations trigger tensions and low-level violent clashes between communities (Reuveny, 2007; Blackwell, 2010; Branch, 2018; Eberle et al., 2020; McGuirk and Nunn, 2020a, 2020b; Ndesanjo, 2021). Since the majority of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa depends on subsistence and climate-sensitive sectors like rain-fed agriculture, livestock farming, and fishing, climate change has affected every aspect of livelihoods. However, the most affected groups are agro-pastoralists, nomadic pastoralists, and transhumant pastoralists who engage in seasonal migration. Historically, such migrations have been a cultural coping mechanism against annual seasonal fluctuations (Blackwell, 2010; Adano et al., 2012; McGuirk and Nunn, 2020a).

In recent decades, however, and as climate change has altered seasonal fluctuations and predictability, these three groups of pastoralists have changed their seasonal migration patterns in terms of the timing and location of their movement (Ide et al., 2014; Eberle et al., 2020; McGuirk and Nunn, 2020b). Their migration from traditional areas, grazing areas, and water routes into locations occupied by sedentary farming and other pastoralist communities has led to increased tensions and armed conflicts. In central Uganda, for instance, conflicts between farmers and nomadic cattle keepers have historically been low-level. In recent years, however, violent clashes have been documented (Branch, 2018). The same pattern appears in Kenya, where there have been violent conflicts in Tana River County over access to the Tana River water (DN, 2012; Al Jazeera, 2012) and different districts in Tanzania where locations such as Kilosi, Katavi, Kigoma, and Morogoro have reported increasing clashes between herders and farmers (Mwasha, 2016; Walwa, 2020; Ndesanjo, 2021). Similarly, climate change related effects, especially drought, have increased competition for pasture and grazing lands in southern Ethiopia and, thus, increased conflicts (USAID, 2013).

It is important to note at this point that when the nexus between armed conflicts and climate change encounters entrenched gendered inequalities, which are rampant in all the cases cited

in the preceding sections, the effects are devastating for women and girls for several reasons. First, armed conflicts worsen gender inequalities and violence against women and girls. In contexts of armed conflicts, women and girls disproportionately face various forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Therefore, climate change escalates violence against women and girls in these contexts. Second, displaced, poor, and marginalised women have less adaptive capacities due to fewer resources; consequently, climate change pushes them into more vulnerabilities. Third, the traditional role of women makes them heavily dependent on natural resources. Because climate change depletes these resources, these women are forced to move long distances from camps for the displaced population; such movements expose them to SGBV risks. Various forms of violence near IDP camps have been documented in Sudan, South Sudan, and Somalia.

However, while all regions of Africa have experienced the effects of climate change, not all of them have seen armed violence. Literature on climate change in Southern Africa, for example, observes that, like the rest of Africa, the region has also felt the impacts of climate change (WFP, 2022; SIPRI, 2022). Indicators of these effects include prolonged drought (Angola and Madagascar), depletion of arable farming lands (Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi), cyclones (Madagascar, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Malawi), floods (Mozambique, Zambia, and Comoros), and locust invasion (Namibia). Further, the region is grappling with climate change-related issues such as water scarcity, reduced agriculture productivity, and food insecurity (Swain et al., 2011; WFP, 2022). Nevertheless, except for Mozambique, climate change effects have not yet reached the level of armed violence or insurgencies like in the Eastern Africa or the Lake Chad region. Therefore, while religious and traditional leaders and other interveners in the Eastern African countries are responding to the twin challenges of violent conflicts and climate change, those in the Southern African region are responding only to the consequences of climate change.

Stakeholder Strategies and Responses to Climate Induced Conflicts and Insurgencies

Since the linkage between armed conflicts and climate change has varied from country to country in the Eastern and Southern African regions, interventions by religious and traditional leaders have also varied from country to country. However, all interventions can be classified into three broad categories: track II diplomacy, mediation, and capacity enhancements. Other

interventions have been mentioned in the literature, such as humanitarian relief and psychosocial support in contexts of ongoing armed conflict, and dialogues and community reconciliation in post-conflict contexts, but these interventions are subsets of the three broad categories.

The first category, *track II diplomacy*, refers to interventions by non-state actors, including religious and traditional leaders and national and international non-governmental organisations. Examples of track II interventions include fact-finding missions, special envoys, confidence-building activities, dialogue forums, peace and human rights monitoring, and humanitarian support for survivors of armed violence. Religious and traditional leaders have been involved in such activities across the Eastern and Southern African regions as informed by their countries' challenges. In Ethiopia, for example, the Catholic Bishops Conference of Ethiopia (CBCE), led by His Eminence Berhaneyesus Cardinal Souraphiel, decided to reach out to the leaders of the federal government and the TPLF while at the same time offering humanitarian support to the displaced population in Tigray (AMECEA News, 2020). Additionally, the Bishop and his team appealed to the international Catholic NGO, Caritas, and International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity (CIDSE), an umbrella organisation for Catholic development agencies from Europe and North America, to lead the relief interventions in Tigray and other regions of Ethiopia. From an international perspective, Pope Francis supported the Ethiopian Catholics and appealed to the country's leaders to negotiate (Vatican News, 2022).

This paper interprets the two interventions as *ecumenical diplomacy*, which is an aspect of track II diplomacy. Track II efforts such as these aimed to build confidence between the federal government leaders and the TPLF, encourage a ceasefire, and promote dialogue. Following the same line, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission (EECMY-DASSC (EECMY-DASSC), Ethiopian Orthodox Church Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (EOC-DICAC), and Lutheran World Federation Ethiopia (LWF-ETH) also initiated and engaged in ecumenical diplomacy to build confidence, silence the guns, and promote dialogue (Act Alliance, 2021). While the focus of all these interventions has been the war in Tigray, this paper suggests that they have equally been seeking to resolve the effects of climate change in the region, as these effects are nested in the national conflict. The Ethiopian Catholic Church, for instance, has in the past convened national meetings on climate change. It has also worked with its partners, such as Catholic

Relief Services (CRS) and the Caritas network, to implement humanitarian projects focused on food security.

Similarly, religious leaders from neighbouring countries also conducted ecumenical diplomacy interventions to resolve the armed conflicts in South Sudan and the DRC. In South Sudan, the head of the Catholic church, Pope Francis, was accompanied by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev Justin Welby, and the General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Rt Rev Dr Iain Greenshields, on an Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Peace in February 2023. Moreover, South Sudan Catholic bishops have been building confidence and encouraging dialogue between the national leaders. In August 2021, for example, Catholic bishops led by the Archbishop of Juba, His Eminence Stephen Ameyu Martin, met President Salva Kiir and encouraged the government to involve religious leaders in all peace negotiations (ST, 2021). Similar ecumenical diplomacy interventions have also occurred in the DRC. In June 2022, for instance, the Anglican Archbishop of Uganda, Dr Stephen Samuel Kaziimba Mugalu, the Anglican Archbishop of Rwanda, Most Rev Dr Laurent Mbanda, the Anglican Archbishop of the DRC, Dr Ande Georges Titre, and the Mufti of Uganda, Sheikh Shaban Ramadhan Mubaje Mufti, met in Kampala to plan their interventions on the conflict in North Kivu and then later travelled to Goma in the DRC (Angurini, 2022). They also expressed their intention to participate in the internationally mediated peace process for the DRC and their plan to accompany international and national political leaders when they engage in peace missions in the North Kivu region.

The second category is centred on *national and community mediation*. Both national and local community mediations are common responses by religious and traditional actors to armed conflicts and climate change-induced violence. As of February 2023, the Community of Sant'Egidio, a lay Catholic movement based in Rome, Italy, has been hosting and mediating peace talks between the Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) of South Sudan, the South Sudan Opposition Movements Alliance-South Sudan United Front/Army (SSOMA-SSUF/A) and SSOMA-Real Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SSOMA-Real SPLM), in Rome (CNA, 2023). The parties have signed several peace agreements since 2019 when mediation started. Moreover, religious and traditional leaders in South Sudan have been mediating conflicts at the lower levels since the fratricidal wars of the 1990s, as well as providing psycho-social and humanitarian support and promoting grassroots reconciliation over the years (Modi et al., 2019). Their most successful and well-documented

intervention was the Wunlit Peace Conference of 1999, organised by the New Sudan Council of Churches (NSCC), which ended the Nuer-Dinka ethnic killings (Redekop, 2007; Hutchingson, 2009; Ryle and Johnson, 2021). In the neighbouring DRC, Christian churches, Catholics, 3^{me} *Communaut Baptiste au Centre de l'Afrique* (3rd Baptist Community in Central Africa), and *Arche de l'Alliance* (Ark of the Covenant), have been involved in grassroots peacebuilding, which covers humanitarian support, healing, community mediation, and grassroots conciliation, in North Kivu and other regions of eastern DRC (Alfani, 2019). Although interveners in South Sudan, DRC, and Ethiopia have packaged their work as peacebuilding, this paper suggests their interventions also target climate change-related effects because such effects are embedded in other conflicts.

Lower-level mediations are also common in Kenya. Indeed, all mainstream religious organisations have departments or commissions dedicated to grassroots peace work. Among these are the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC), the Anglican Peace & Justice Network, the Anglican Development Service(S), and the Justice, Peace & Reconciliation Committee (JPRC) of the Presbyterian Church. Also, the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM), the umbrella body of Muslim organisations, the Organisation of African Instituted Churches (OAIC), the representative body of African Independent and Instituted Churches (AICs), and the National Council of Elders (NCE) that brings together all councils of elders, regularly involve themselves in grassroots peace work. Therefore, this paper contends that interventions by religious and traditional leaders target all categories of violence, including climate change-related violence. Part of the evidence that supports this position is the fact that the Anglican Church's ADS focuses on climate change adaptation, and all the mainstream churches in Kenya have been regularly commenting on climate change issues.

A similar pattern exists in Uganda. Each of the mainstream churches, the Church of Uganda (Anglicans), the Catholic Church, and the Orthodox Church, has a department responsible for peace and justice. The three churches have also teamed up in the Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC) which implements grassroots peacebuilding work that targets all violent conflicts, including climate change-induced clashes. In addition, they supported the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), which undertook peacebuilding work in the Acholi sub-region at the height of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) war in the region in the 1990s and 2000s (Khadiagala, 2001; Kasaija, 2011). The same arrangement exists in Tanzania

where one of the mainstream Christian denominations, the Catholic Church, has peace and justice departments in all its dioceses while the other mainstream church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT), has placed issues of peace and justice at the centre of its work. For example, both the Catholic Church and ELCT advocated for peace during the 2015 elections and 2020 elections and ELCT founded the Zanzibar Interfaith Centre (ZANZIC) which promotes Christian-Muslim relations in Tanzania. In Madagascar, communities in rural areas trust church leaders as resolvers of local disputes (Féron and Razakamharavo, 2016). Thus, this paper deduces that religious leaders from these institutions use church platforms to conduct community mediations and peacebuilding work to resolve climate change related conflicts.

A third category, *citizen-to-citizen* engagements, has been conducted in Mozambique. This form of response has been informed by the reality of a religious-based insurgency and the lack of a national peace process or internationally mediated peace negotiations. When explaining their interventions, for example, three Anglican Bishops, Carlos Matsinhe of Lebombo Diocese, Vicente Msossa of Niassa Diocese, and Manuel Ernesto of Nampula, noted that they opted to provide humanitarian and psycho-social support to the displaced population, show solidarity with violence survivors, and pursue citizen-to-citizen engagements to promote dialogue between followers of different religions and restore broken relationships as dictated by the reality of the situation (Anglican Alliance, 2021). Other religious leaders from the Mozambican Islamic Council, the United Methodist Church, the Christian Council Mozambique, the Mozambican Episcopal Conference, and the Methodist Church of Southern Africa have also followed the same approach (WCC, 2021). Since one of the effects of displacement is to destroy the population's capacity to respond to and mitigate the effects of climate change, this paper suggests that these interventions aim to help the population heal from violence and adapt to climate change.

Lastly, religious and traditional actors in all the other countries, particularly those in the Southern African region, have implemented *capacity enhancement* programmes. Their choice of these programs arises from the fact that these countries have experienced the consequences of climate change, but these effects have not resulted in armed conflict or community violence. The aim of capacity enhancement is to build communities' resilience and adaptive capacity to cope with the effects of climate change, as well as to empower them with the skills to mitigate such effects, and to maintain effective communication regarding climate change. These

interventions also prepare communities to deal with potential violent conflicts resulting from climate change. The United Church of Zambia, for instance, engages in empowerment activities such as training the population on climate change using biblical principles and promoting environmental care and education, climate-smart agriculture, and conservation farming (Mkandawire, 2022).

In Malawi, the Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development (JCED) undertakes activities that promote advocacy for ecological justice and empowerment of communities to improve their livelihoods through sustainable agriculture (SJES, 2022). One form of empowerment includes a reforestation campaign, climate agriculture, and the use of energy-efficient stoves. Other religious organisations, such as the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM), the Evangelical Association of Malawi (EAM), and the Malawi Council of Churches (MCM), have teamed up in a mass campaign for climate justice (Nyasa Times, 2012). A similar campaign has been ongoing in South Africa where the South African Council of Churches (SACC) (SACC, 2009) and Catholic dioceses, such as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) of Johannesburg, have been involved in environmental justice advocacy and campaigns (ACIA, 2022).

In addition to the mentioned interventions by mainstream religious organisations, there exist networks of faith-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the region that work on climate change issues. These networks include the Southern African Faith Communities Environment Institute (SAFCEI), Diakonia Council of Churches, and the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA). Examples of their work include SAFCEI's Faith Leaders Training Program (FLEAT) which trains faith leaders on climate change and environmental degradation and develops their advocacy capacities on eco-justice, and Diakonia's strategic pillar of environmental justice.

In summary, responses by religious and traditional leaders to the interaction between climate change and armed conflicts in the Eastern and Southern African regions are dependent on the context in a specific country and the actual effects of climate change. Overall, their interventions have followed three patterns. First, in countries with ongoing armed conflicts, interventions have centred on track II diplomacy activities, such as ecumenical diplomacy, citizen-to-citizen engagement, and involvement in national peace processes, because climate change-related violence is nested in national armed conflicts. Second, where armed conflicts, whether caused by climate change or other factors, have occurred at lower levels, religious and

traditional actors have preferred community mediation and dialogue. Third, enhancing the capacities of local communities has been the preferred form of intervention in countries that have experienced climate change effects without experiencing violent conflicts.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the various strategies and interventions that religious and traditional leaders implement to respond to armed conflicts related to or induced by climate change. It started by acknowledging that the African continent is confronting many challenges that have strained its peace and security mechanisms. These challenges include armed conflicts, religious-inspired insurgencies, terrorism, forced migration, state fragility, political and economic crises, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Climate change is the latest addition to this long list. Although the paper agrees that there is no sufficient evidence to attribute armed conflicts to climate change, it has nevertheless argued that certain conditions are necessary for climate change to increase the risk or probability of armed conflict. These conditions are pre-existing armed conflicts, pre-existing latent conflicts, or pre-existing conditions that predispose the population or some groups in the population, to violent conflict. Once climate change interacts with either of these conditions, there are three pathways to violent conflicts. The paper has adduced evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa to show these three pathways.

The first pathway concerns cases where the effects of climate change worsen livelihoods and push more people into violence, pre-existing violent groups exploit the consequences of climate change to recruit more combatants, or armed violence and displacement undermine people's capacity to mitigate, cope with, and adapt to the effects of climate change. The second pathway concerns cases where the effects of climate change transform pre-existing latent conflict into armed violence, while the third pathway covers situations where climate change worsens livelihoods and forces people to migrate to other regions, thus, triggering tensions and armed conflicts. As informed by specific country contexts, religious and traditional leaders use various intervention strategies when responding to climate-related armed conflicts. These include various aspects of track II diplomacy, such as ecumenical diplomacy, citizen-to-citizen engagements, humanitarian support, and other conflict resolution tools, such as participation in national peace processes, local mediation, community dialogues, and capacity enhancements. In summary, strategies and responses are contextual, contingent, and temporal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the analysis and arguments in the preceding sections, the paper makes the following recommendations.

For governments, regional organisations, and the African Union (AU)

- (1) Resolution of the current armed conflicts in Africa is imperative to stop the interaction between violent conflicts and climate change from pushing more population groups into violent engagements. Resolving existing armed conflicts is also critical because the consequences of such wars worsen the livelihoods of the conflict survivors and, thus, make them more vulnerable to the effects of climate change.
- (2) National governments should improve lower-level conflict resolution mechanisms, especially in regions where movements by nomadic pastoralists have either exacerbated existing armed conflicts or aggravated latent conflicts into acts of violence.
- (3) National governments and the African Union should establish resilience mechanisms starting with the most adversely affected regions to mitigate the populations' vulnerability to the effects of climate change. Reducing livelihood shocks will also lower the risk of violent conflict while strengthening the populations' adaptive capacity will reduce conflict risk.
- (4) National governments and the African Union should devise mechanisms for improving the management of natural resources, which are vulnerable to changes in climate patterns. Improved management of natural resources will decrease violent competition for those resources.
- (5) National governments and the African Union should strengthen regional peace and security institutions. The current interventions by the East African Community (EAC) in the DRC and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Mozambique suggest possible areas for strengthening. This type of strengthening will enable them to resolve climate-related conflicts.

For Religious and Tradition Leaders

- (1) More documentation of the involvement of religious and traditional leaders in the resolution of climate change-induced conflicts is needed. Religious and traditional leaders should lead these documentations to revitalise traditional leadership and indigenous approaches to protecting the environment.
- (2) Initiate programs that provide training for religious and traditional leaders in conflict resolution methods and approaches so that they can integrate these approaches into their faith-based interventions.
- (3) Improve coordination between religious-based interventions and approaches to climate change-induced conflicts and other ongoing programs by governments and international agencies. Integrated interventions will achieve more impact as each group of actors adds their strengths to climate work.
- (4) Religious and traditional leaders should initiate programs that build resilience and climate-adaptive capacities for the population. Therefore, their interventions should focus on reducing people's vulnerability to livelihood shocks and lowering violent conflict risks.

For ACCORD, NRTP, and Think Tanks

- (1) More ethnographic and case study research should be undertaken to produce primary data on the role of religious and traditional leaders in the resolution of climate change-induced conflicts. At the moment, a lot of policy and research papers are based on literature reviews and global large-scale data.
- (2) More systematic research on the causal relationship between climate change and armed conflicts should be undertaken. At the moment, there is no data on the relations between the two in most conflict situations in Africa.
- (3) ACCORD and think tanks should focus on strengthening conflict resolution mechanisms and institutional capacities. They should do this by empowering religious and traditional leaders with skills in track II diplomacy and other approaches to conflict resolution. They should also support grassroots interventions by religious and traditional leaders.
- (4) Regional institutions in Eastern and Southern Africa play the biggest role in preventing and resolving armed conflicts, including those caused by climate change. Thus, ACCORD and

think tanks should integrate their work on armed conflicts and climate change with the policy and interventions of these institutions.

- (5) ACCORD and think tanks should support all efforts to strengthen the adaptive capacity of populations in the Eastern and Southern African regions to reduce the risk of armed conflicts.
- (6) As climate change increases the likelihood of resource conflicts, a better understanding of how low-intensity communal resource conflicts escalate or are manipulated will be critical. This is an area of research for ACCORD, NRTP, and other think tanks.

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