



CLIMATE AND SECURITY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

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POLitical violence has a long history in the Horn of Africa. Political movements and insurgent groups have fought for state power at the national level and over land and natural resources at the local level. Sometimes these battles have spilled across borders. National governments have interfered in the politics of neighbouring states, sending troops, sponsoring proxies or exploiting the grievances of cross-border communities.

Regional and international actors, motivated by the human and economic costs of (and commercial interests in) these conflicts, but also by the Horn's geo-strategic importance, have tried to resolve successive crises, with mixed results.

The three-way dispute between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile, which has drawn in several other states in the region and beyond, is critically testing these efforts at brokering and renegotiating regional agreements. Success or failure could set a template for the continent and beyond for how to address climate-related disputes and mitigate risks of conflict.

In spite of a pattern of overlapping climate exposure and political fragility in the region, researchers caution against suggesting a causal link between climate change and conflict in the Horn of Africa.

There is no evidence of direct causality, even if it is now generally accepted that climate change may increase the risk of conflict in certain circumstances. The following Q&A, which synthesises three reports focusing on climate change and conflict in the Horn of Africa*, looks at these links.

* Sagal Abshir, "Climate Change and Security in the Horn of Africa: Can Europe Help to Reduce the Risks?", *Climate Diplomacy*, July 2020; Florian Krampe, Luc van de Goor, Anniek Barnhoorn, Elizabeth Smith and Dan Smith, "Water Security and Governance in the Horn of Africa", *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, March 2020; David Mozersky and Daniel M. Kammen, "South Sudan's Renewable Energy Potential: A Building Block for Peace", *United States Institute of Peace*, January 2018. *International Peace Research Institute Policy Paper 54*, March 2020; David Mozersky and Daniel M. Kammen, *South Sudan's Renewable Energy Potential: A Building Block for Peace*, *United States Institute of Peace Special Report 418*, January 2018.

A. What issues arise from climate change in the Horn of Africa?

The Horn of Africa is defined here as the eight member states of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD): Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. Three factors make the Horn particularly vulnerable to climate change, which has taken the form of more erratic rainfall patterns in the region, causing both droughts and floods.

First, approximately 70 per cent of the region is made up of arid or semi-arid lands, which receive less than 600mm of rainfall annually.

Second, agriculture is the backbone of the Horn's economy and employs 80 per cent of its population. The Horn's

population is growing fast: it is projected to reach almost 440 million in total by 2050, from a little over 230 million today. This makes the region all the more dependent on a reliable access to food, water, land and energy, all resources that are particularly vulnerable to climate change.

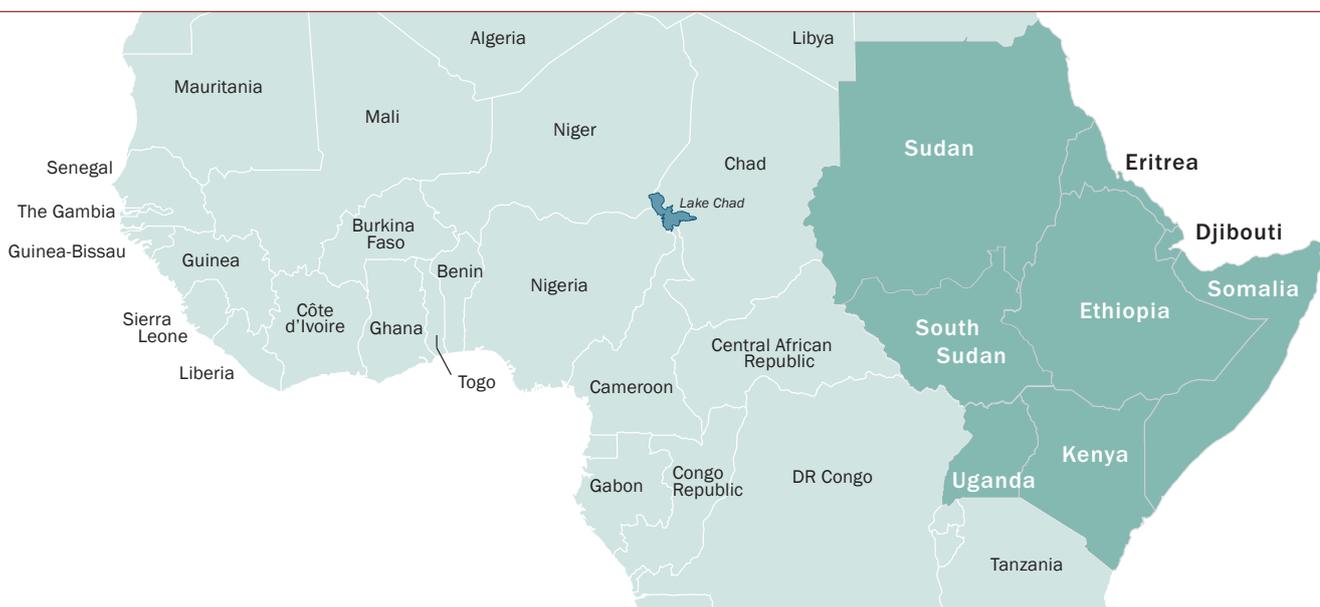
However, the Horn has some substantial, if unequally distributed, water and maritime resources. Access to, as well as management and sharing of, these resources is a high-stakes political game, as decisions made by some states potentially have negative effects on other states.

This is evident in two cases. Firstly, the GERD, built on the Nile River, which will double Ethiopia's power output once operational but is seen by Egypt and Sudan as a threat to their water supply. Tensions over plans to fill and operate

the dam have steadily risen, with climate change adding to them. Agreement on a drought mitigation mechanism remains a point of contention in the continuing negotiations between the three states. Secondly, the maritime boundary dispute between Kenya and Somalia has worsened bilateral tensions, potentially destabilising the political settlement in southern Somalia.

Climate change in the Horn is often described as a "threat multiplier", aggravating pre-existing conflicts or existing factors that might lead to conflict.

In South Sudan, flooding in the Lakes, Pibor and Jonglei regions has exacerbated ongoing conflicts between the area's ethnic groups while also restricting food and aid distribution. In Darfur, the early phases of the war happened in areas that had experienced increased precipitation and attracted greater in-migration



and cohabitation between different ethnic groups that lacked common conflict resolution mechanisms.

The link between climate change and conflict might also be usefully looked at from the other direction, with conflict resulting in environmental degradation that aggravates the effects of climate change. Al-Shabaab in Somalia thus fuelled its war effort by dominating the illicit charcoal export market and contributing to significant environmental degradation before an international ban was adopted.

Importantly, insecurity and displacement can also affect the capacities of people and institutions to adapt to climate change. Somalia's chronic political instability has adversely affected both its ability to develop the Juba-Shabelle basin and cooperation with Ethiopia, with which it shares this "breadbasket". The war in Yemen also constrained the local authorities' ability to control the first swarms of locusts before they crossed over into the Horn of Africa and further aggravated food insecurity in the region in 2020.

B. What responses have there been so far to the challenges posed by climate change?

Addressing the adverse effects of climate change has long been a concern for international

and regional actors in the Horn of Africa. IGAD was founded in 1986 as the Intergovernmental Authority against Drought and Development before taking on a broader security and development agenda in the 1990s.

More recently, IGAD has adopted a number of initiatives meant to address the effects of climate change. In 2002, it equipped itself with a Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN), which focuses most of its early warning work in the borderlands and pastoral regions of the Horn, where tensions are often caused by resource competition.

CEWARN has recently started drawing on weather and climate data from a sister agency, the IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC), in order to better predict increased tensions related to climate. In 2020, a Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons and a Protocol on Transhumance in the IGAD Region were adopted at the ministerial level to facilitate smoother cross-border mobility for the pastoralist communities that are often the first affected by climate change.

Formal partnerships between riparian states, high-level meetings and negotiations, under the auspices of regional and international organisations, have aimed to broker agreements on the sharing of resources and on coordinating responses to climate change. The Nile Basin Initiative was formed in 1999 to provide a forum for the cooperative development and management of the Nile waters. There have been many rounds of high-level talks and expert panels

between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan since the start of the GERD's construction in 2011 in an effort to resolve their differences peacefully.

At a more technical level, international and regional actors are undertaking programs to strengthen local communities' resilience in the face of climate change. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has a number of programs in the region, such as the Food and Nutrition Security Resilience Programme, which aims at building more resilient food systems to deal with protracted crises in Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. In Sudan's Darfur, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has implemented the Wadi El Ku Catchment Management Project for Livelihoods, Development and Sustainable Peace to encourage better water management and cooperation.

The Horn has also become part of a response to climate change in other parts of the world. The Gulf states, notably Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have invested heavily in agriculture and farmland in the region in order to secure their own food supplies.

C. Where have responses to climate change failed and why?

The historically high level of distrust between countries in the Horn makes it all the more difficult to reach and

implement agreements, as is demonstrated by the tripartite negotiations over the GERD. Relations between the three countries, notably over the Nile River, have been tense ever since the British recognition of Egypt's natural and historical rights to Nile waters in 1929, and the absence of an agreement after ten years of negotiations underlines the weight of this historical distrust as well as the complexity of the issues involved.

The introduction of new regional and extra-regional actors trying to protect their investments in the Red Sea and the Horn is likely to complicate things further.

Weak institutions also account for the failures to offset the effects of climate change and defuse tensions. In the Omo-Turkana basin, where cross-border conflicts between Ethiopian pastoralists and Kenyan pastoralists and fishermen have been intensifying, the lack of training and resources allocated to specially created local peace committees, the absence of integration of traditional conflict mitigation institutions, and weak coordination between local actors have hampered the exchange of conflict information, the organisation of appropriate responses and disarmament efforts.

Some political leaders manipulate disputes triggered by extreme climate events, especially when they involve the historically neglected pastoralist communities. This is a regular occurrence in Kenya, where the Moi regime sought to discredit the push for democratisation by orchestrating violence between pastoral groups and farmers in the early 1990s. More recently, clashes between pastoralists, farmers and conservationists in the central Kenyan county of Laikipia, initially triggered by drought, were worsened by political tensions linked to local elections in 2017.

Competing crises and priorities, even when they are clearly interlinked, can absorb resources and attention or even lead to adverse results. In 2013, the UN Security Council adopted a ban on Somalia's charcoal trade dominated by Al-Shabaab. Illicit trade, however, continued under the control of Jubaland State, with some foreign business people, which has used it partly to finance its fight against Al-Shabaab, further contributing to Somalia's environmental vulnerability.

Likewise, in Kenya, WaTER, a European Union-funded program to protect high-elevation forests that serve as natural water reservoirs, has led to the forced eviction of indigenous communities by the Kenya Forest Service and was suspended in 2018.

D. What are the ingredients of a successful response?

Both political and more technically oriented development responses have shown their limits.

The following lessons can be drawn from recent research:

1. Political negotiations and agreements over resource-sharing and coordinated climate change mitigation mechanisms have sustained a dialogue but rarely achieved long-term consensus and implementation. Negotiations over Ethiopia's dam on the Blue Nile is the outstanding test of these efforts.
2. Development projects have in part mitigated the impact of climate

change and offered new perspectives to local populations but often ignore the wider changes they generate.

3. Information-sharing across communities and borders has increased significantly over the last two decades thanks to specific regional and international programs. Further work is needed to better understand how low-intensity communal resource conflicts escalate or can be manipulated in the Horn.
4. Actors that work in the region should also draw on local knowledge and institutions, including among the often-neglected pastoralist communities.
5. Responses that sit exclusively at either end of the security-development spectrum have shown their limits. It is important that peacebuilders and analysts develop a better understanding of climate risk profiles, the impact of extreme and erratic weather events and the longer-term but also less visible effects of climate change.
6. As underlined by the EU's WaTER program, climate change adaptation efforts need to be conflict-sensitive and take into account their effects on local communities.
7. International and regional actors should beware of security-only responses that may inflame disputes and increase distrust.
8. Governments and international organisations might favour small building blocks for peace that can bring new momentum.

9. The Somalia Stability Fund (SSF), a multi-donor fund, supported a drought emergency response project in the largely pastoral regions of Sool, Sanaag and Bari. The project focused on building and rehabilitating water facilities, small livelihoods investments in local businesses and job creation for women and youth. It helped defuse conflict.
10. In South Sudan, installing solar panels in NGO compounds, health facilities and humanitarian operations could reduce their dependency on expensive diesel imports, provide new opportunities for cooperation and achieve a first step toward a green energy transition.
11. Building more effective river basin-focused institutions, for example in the Juba-Shabelle Basin, would also help find longer-term, coordinated approaches to their management.
12. Lessons could be learnt from other parts of Africa, for example, looking at the Zambezi Watercourse Commission's regional management strategy, or at the Organisation pour la Mise en Valeur du Fleuve Sénégal, one of the most successful river basin models.

Further reading

Louisa Brain and Laura Hammond, [“From Covid-19 to Locusts: The Horn of Africa’s Looming Food Crisis”](#), Italian Institute for International Political Studies, 11 July 2020.

[“Drought and Conflict across the Kenyan-Ethiopian Border”](#), Climate Diplomacy Case Study, no date.

Crisis Group Africa Report N° 271, [Bridging the Gap in the Nile Waters Dispute](#), 20 March 2019.

Murithi Mutiga, [“Violence, Land, and the Upcoming Vote in Kenya’s Laikipia Region”](#), Crisis Group Commentary, 25 July 2017.

Alex Randall, [“Unpacking Climate Change and the Horn of Africa Crisis”](#), Climate and Migration Coalition, no date.

Fredu Nega Tegebu, [“Climate Change-Induced Migration in the Horn of Africa”](#), Africa Portal, May 2020.



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