

CLIMATE
SECURITY
BRIEF

ASSESSING CONFLICT AND FRAGILITY RISK IN NIGERIA



Summary

Nigeria is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change-related extreme weather events and associated impacts such as heatwaves, seasonal flooding, drought-related incidents, food security, biodiversity loss, deforestation and so on; despite its low contribution to greenhouse emissions and global warming. The impact of climate change on these socio-environmental factors aggravates resource scarcity, livelihood losses and poverty—which in turn fuel social tension, armed conflicts and humanitarian crises.

The adverse impacts of climate change on fragility, peace and security are also closely knitted with the country's population explosion, governance deficit and developmental challenges. These trends are evident in the protracted violence between herders and farmers in the North-West and Central regions as well as the insurgency ravaging the North-Eastern region of Nigeria. These conflicts have caused the death of thousands of people, destroyed livelihoods and displaced millions from their ancestral communities.

The integration of climate, environment and peace nexus into security interventions of the Nigerian government provides a unique opportunity to address the socio-economic and developmental drivers of armed conflicts. This approach focuses on land restoration, sustainable agricultural livelihood practices and the management of environmental resources as de-escalators of brewing climate-security conflicts.

Such program approaches have the capacity to improve living conditions and development in at-risk communities, which in turn will reduce grievances and contribute to peacebuilding efforts.

However, this approach needs to be part of a broader security strategy that addresses other root causes of instability such as weak governance and poor policy implementation. Adoption of such an approach is highly dependent on having the appropriate policies at national and sub-national levels in addition to adequate resources, especially financing from domestic and international sources.

Nigeria, entrenched with climate security risks, can take the initiative in creating a mechanism sustained by a funding facility that supports initiatives geared towards addressing climate and security threats in Nigeria, and the broader Sahel. Additionally, the upcoming Loss and Damage negotiation at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) creates an important avenue for the international community, specifically countries in the Global North, to support climate, peace and security programs in vulnerable countries like Nigeria.

Background

Nigeria, like many other vulnerable countries, are disproportionately affected by climate extreme weather events and associated risks.

The consequences of climate change-related extreme weather events have become threat multipliers contributing to fragility and multidimensional human security challenges affecting economic, food, health and political security. The 2023 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) sixth synthesis report estimates that 3.3 to 3.6 billion people are highly vulnerable to adverse impacts of changing climate. For instance, deaths recorded due to floods, droughts and storms between 2010 and 2020, were reportedly 15 times higher in highly vulnerable regions, than regions with very low vulnerability¹.

Among these estimates, one of the most at-risk regions is West Africa, where natural resources scarcity, loss of livelihoods and shift in migration patterns as a result of climate variability are reinforcing deeply rooted social, economic and political vulnerabilities. The region is also projected to experience unprecedented changes in temperatures and precipitation by the late 2030s and early 2040s². The IPCC synthesis report highlighted the implication of 'climatic shock' on global security and also warns that further warming will aggravate the complexity and difficulty in managing the harsh conditions induced by climate extremes³.



Photo Credit: Surge Africa

¹ IPCC, 2023: Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 184 pp., doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.

² Tarif K., "Climate Change and Violent Conflicts in West Africa: Assessing the Evidence" SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security, 2022

³ IPCC, 2023: Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 184 pp., doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.

Climate Security and Fragility Risk In Nigeria

Nigeria, like many other vulnerable countries, are disproportionately affected by climate change extreme weather events, impacts and associated risks⁴. As evident in 2022, when the country experienced its worst flood disaster in decades which led to the death of over 600 people and affected more than two million.

The severe flooding caused significant destruction of farmlands and homes, which amplified the prevailing food insecurity and displacement crises in the country. Some of the affected communities were already struggling with the effects of insecurity including the recurring violent clashes between nomadic herders and farmers induced by varying factors, such as environmental degradation and climatic shocks.

The drivers of this growing confrontation include encroachment into farmlands and grazing areas – especially during seasonal migration, as both parties compete for the available land resources which has led to bloody conflicts.

The security implications of climate extremes are pronounced in the Northern region with a climate that ranges from a hot semi-arid climate to a tropical savanna climate. The region is at the frontline of drought, desertification and desert encroachment, which shrinks the availability of environmental resources such as arable land, pasture and water. These harsh conditions cause changes to mobility patterns, disrupt livelihoods, and increase competition for resources— thereby causing fragility and social tension in rural communities.

The eleven states that bear the brunt of desertification are Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara in the North-West and Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, and Yobe in the North-East. These states struggle with environmental hardship and armed conflicts including clashes between nomadic herders and farmers. The drivers of this growing confrontation include encroachment into farmlands and grazing areas – especially during seasonal migration, as both parties compete for the available land resources which has led to bloody conflicts. The problem has also been amplified by rising population needs, inefficient farming and livestock production practices in addition to the lack of alternative livelihoods.

Other factors like social injustice, arms proliferation, criminality, cattle rustling and lack of development have contributed to an increase in the intensity and frequency of clashes. An Amnesty International report in 2018, provided insight into the violence between farming communities and herders⁶. It also showed how the government's inaction fueled impunity that results in attacks and reprisal attacks, with at least 3,641 people estimated to have been killed between January 2016 and October 2018— 57 per cent of the number recorded in 2018 alone.

⁴ "Nigeria's Nationally Determined Contributions" Federal Ministry of Environment, 2021

⁵ "Nigeria Floods" International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Society, 2022

⁶ "Nigeria: The Harvest of Death – Three Years of Bloody Clashes Between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria" Amnesty International, 2018

Climate Security and Fragility Risk In Nigeria

The North-West is one of the major flashpoints of the complex web of conflict between the two factions. The violence in the region involves herder-aligned armed groups known commonly as bandits raiding communities and engaging in criminal acts such as cattle rustling and kidnapping for ransom. The situation was further complicated by self-defence groups formed to protect farming communities that engaged in extrajudicial actions and abuses.

The International Crisis Group in a 2020 report disclosed that the last decade has seen thousands of people killed in the North-West, and hundreds of thousands displaced, with many fleeing to the neighbouring Niger Republic⁷. The report also noted that the security crisis was due to long-running competition for resources with climate change-related environmental degradation and high population growth intensifying this struggle.

In March 2023, an International Organization for Migration (IOM) assessment identified 1,190,293 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in 191,688 households in Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau and Kaduna (North-Central) and Kano, Sokoto, Katsina and Zamfara (North-West). The displacements were connected to conflicts and flooding, particularly as a result of the opening of the Ladgo dam in Cameroon.

The tension between farmers and herders extends to other parts of the North-East and Central Region including areas with other security threats. The tense confrontation has also escalated in recent years beyond the usual regions into the South where greener pastures are more abundant.



Photo Credit: New America

⁷ "Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem" International Crisis Group, 2020

⁸ "Nigeria – North-Central and North-West Displacement Report" International Organization for Immigration, 2023

Climate Change Related Risk In Lake Chad

The Lake Chad region comprising parts of Niger, Chad, Cameroon and North-Eastern Nigeria has been grappling with over a decade-long insurgency. The situation began as an uprising in the North-East, by Boko Haram in 2009 and snowballed into a regional conflict and humanitarian crisis. More than two million people have been displaced from their homes while over 300,000 people have died from indirect and direct causes⁹.

The fragility and challenges with recovery in the region have been exacerbated by governance issues, underdevelopment and persistent insecurity which has made accessing agricultural resources and livelihood opportunities difficult. These challenges have also affected the ongoing efforts to resettle displaced people in their former communities or in locations that are considered close. Amidst this trend is the adverse impact of climate variability and environmental issues mainly from rainfall patterns, flooding and unstable conditions of Lake Chad.

The United Nations Security Council in 2017 adopted resolution 2349 highlighting the need to address climate-related risks in the conflict ravaging the Lake Chad Basin. The Shoring Up Stability report by the German think tank Adelphi describes the situation in the region as a 'conflict trap'¹⁰. The study notes that severe drought in the 1970s and 1980s had shrunk Lake Chad from a high point of 25,000 sq. km to 2,000 sq. km in the 1990s.

The resulting displacement and undermining of state legitimacy by the droughts helped set in motion a chain of events; from insecurity to migration which is still being felt in the region.

The Lake has reportedly since expanded to roughly 14,000 km² and its size has been relatively stable over the past two decades. In late 2022, the Lake Chad Basin Commission released a hydrological report on higher-than-usual rainfall that was filling up the Lake due to significant flows from the Chari-Logone and the Komadougou Yobe tributaries¹¹.

The unprecedented and mass overflow of the major rivers caused flooding, material losses and affected thousands of people. It also complicated the humanitarian suffering in the region. The unpredictable rainfall pattern and temperature variability in the region are affecting people's lives and livelihoods. This year, there are drought concerns in parts of Borno as a result of the shortfall in rainfall¹².

In addition to all these socio-environmental complexities, the security restrictions due to the activities of insurgents and the ongoing military operations also hinder the ability of the population to use the environmental resources for fishing, grazing and farming. This untenable position alongside the displacement and difficulty accessing humanitarian aid affects recovery and the adaptive capacity of communities, exacerbating implications on resilience, peacebuilding and security.

⁹ Sanni K., "Boko Haram: 350,000 dead in Nigeria – UN" Premium Times, 2021

¹⁰ Vivekananda J., et al "Shoring Up Stability: Addressing Climate and Fragility Risk in the Lake Chad Region" Adelphi, 2019

¹¹ "Brief on the Hydrological Situation in the Lake Chad Basin" The Lake Chad Basin Commission, 2022

¹² "Borno Farmers Resort to Prayers Over Shortage of Rainfall" News Desk, 2023

Conclusion and Recommendation

These efforts would need to be streamlined mutually with solving fundamental issues related to governance, development, social inclusion, and policing.

The complexity around climate, peace and security shows the importance of understanding the nexus between the triads and their implication on stability and development. It also highlights the need to integrate existing climate policies and commitments such as the National Adaptation Plan, Climate Change Act and intended Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) into the broader conversation on protecting human and national security.

Furthermore, adopting climate and environmental policies as part of conflict prevention and intervention would provide a new non-kinetic approach to addressing underdevelopment, social tension and marginalisation in rural communities. This was part of the thinking behind the climate, peace and security draft resolution proposed by Ireland and Niger in 2021, which was assessed in the Security Council report published in December 2022¹³.

The draft encouraged UN peacekeeping operations and political missions to adopt a dedicated capacity for climate security. It also highlighted the increased momentum for aligning the importance of climate resilience and adaptation with peacebuilding and development. The report also stated that discussion on climate financing helped to move the debate in the Council beyond viewing climate change as merely a "risk factor" to be managed.

The security council dialogues and the upcoming UNFCCC COP28 in UAE provide a good opportunity for at-risk countries to push forward the need for assistance with Climate, Peace and Security. These efforts would need to be streamlined mutually with solving fundamental issues related to governance, development, social inclusion, and policing. Similarly, certain actions are also needed from the federal government, subnational governments and humanitarian/development partners.

GENERALLY, A HOLISTIC APPROACH IS NEEDED AS FOLLOWS;



Photo Credit: E-International Relations

¹³

"The UN Security Council and Climate Change: Tracking the Agenda after the 2021 Veto" Security Council Report, 2022

Recommendations

- Prioritize the inclusion of climate, peace and security in the review of the National Security Strategy of the Nigerian government. Adoption of such an approach would make available new resources to complement other efforts to effectively tackle the drivers of fragility and conflict in the country.
- Loss and Damage negotiation at the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) should add climate-induced security risks to its agenda, and provide a critical pathway to respond to climate security in developing countries such as Nigeria and those in the Sahel who are grappling with the double threat of climate and security. Use the platform to seek access to financing for climate resilience and adaptation projects with an impact on peace, development and stability
- Re-inspect the implementation of the Great Green Wall project, which is a cross-country tree planting initiative with the potential to de-escalate farmers' and herders' tension in addition to rejuvenating rural economies. The success of the project lies in access to funds and efficient management including effective implementation, stakeholder engagement, and continuous maintenance.
- Advance smart information and communication technology solutions to enable farmers and livestock herders to navigate information on weather and climatic conditions, essentially reducing the risk of livelihoods being impacted by weather extremes, and improving planning, production output and income.
- The effort to transform farming and livestock production as part of the food security thrust of the government should be focused on sustainable and efficient techniques. This should include promoting sustainable agricultural practices that are scalable and adaptable to farmers, promoting food security, advancing the value chain economy, extending to the adoption of renewable-powered machinery, providing access to climate-smart agricultural practices and insurance mechanisms.
- Authorities and development partners must improve access to new data that supports decision-making on climate and conflict risks. This would require prioritization of research and understanding of the dynamics of conflict and climate-impacted areas to avoid inaccurate situation analysis, waste of resources, and unforeseen consequences of inaction.
- Enable vibrant local governance by providing access to funds, manpower and resources that ensures basic social services such as education, health, water, sanitation and employment opportunities in communities. That is essential for straightening resilience and state legitimacy which is a foundation for addressing grievances and conditions that undermine security.
- The strengthening of climate sensitivity in plans and programs of humanitarian and development partners is integral for sustaining peace and enhancing resource management. It would improve the capacity of at-risk populations, enhance recovery and improve resettlement efforts specifically in the North-East.

Acknowledgement

This climate security brief is developed as part of Surge Africa's Climate Security workstream, feeding into a broader framework that was developed to incorporate climate security policies into climate adaptation and resilience interventions.

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