

ON THE ROAD TO COP27: Human Security at the Centre of the Climate Emergency

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The human-induced climate change and its various physical, socio-economic, and environmental impacts, along with the needed response mechanisms, have dominated the multilateral environmental negotiation and treaty making process since the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992. During the last decade, the security implications of climate change have helped to bring climate change to the realm of international policymaking by placing it as a key threat to state, collective, and human security (Heinrigs 2010; Behnassi 2017). There is an evolving narrative – increasingly framed in terms of climate-security nexus – where the two areas are inextricably linked. However, this narrative is still unable to provide substantive evidence, which may support governance systems at all scales in appropriate ways. How climate change impacts security is, therefore, still subject to uncertainty and the debate is still ongoing. In most cases, scientists agree that climate change itself is rarely a direct cause of insecurity or conflict. For others, like Fakir (2022) referring to the African context, the securitization of climate issues neglects the real cause of insecurity, which are often linked to conflicting interests and actors (foreign powers) and a lack of a political solution.

Yet, there is currently ample evidence that the effects of climate change exacerbate important drivers and contextual factors of conflict, fragility, and insecurity (UNEP and UNU 2022). In other terms, there is an indirect link between climate and security since climate change impacts can stress livelihoods, drive displacement, increase resource conflicts, and challenge the security and stability of people and states worldwide. Moreover, it was demonstrated that the climate-security nexus is complex and intertwined with multiple political, economic, social, ethnic, demographic, and other factors. Accordingly, the nexus is highly contextual – it can differ from one country to another and within the same country – and often determined by the interplay of three main elements: the level of exposure to climate pressures and shocks; the vulnerability of societies to these hazards; and their adaptation capacity and resilience. On the ground, according to Amu (2020), when we refer to the climate-security nexus, it is mostly about the ways climate change intensifies poverty, reduces fundamental human rights, and slows achievement of sustainable

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development goals. However, this rarely happens in a vacuum since the impact of climate change on security is most acute in the context of resource scarcity and mismanagement, lack or weak governance settings, limited livelihood alternatives, low climate resilience, and vulnerability of communities to recurrent climate pressures and shocks. These situations are often underpinned by political and economic interests and brewing ethnic and religious tensions. In such contexts, climate change severely affects human security by exacerbating conflict, instability, and displacement. Therefore, climate change, as a driver of conflict and insecurity, is most manifest in hot spots and conflict zones that are already adversely affected by harsh ecological pressures.

The complex and contextual nature of the climate-security nexus implies that the nexus may manifest itself in different manners according to a given setting. In the Lake Chad Basin, for example, climate change has amplified existing armed conflicts in an already vulnerable region highly affected by terrorism, climate-induced drought, resource scarcity and overuse, and population growth. These dynamics, mainly affecting the survival of farmers, herders, and fishing communities, were believed to be the reason behind the decision to join Boko Haram by many young people. In West Africa, climate-induced security risks are often associated with human security, as opposed to national security, since the impact of climate change on the livelihood and survival of the individual is more pronounced, especially in places where the state is absent and lacks capacity to respond. In the Sahel, communities are left to rely on their own capacities to face climate risks and manage related conflicts. Hence, a greater burden is placed on them, both as a victim of climate change impacts and as a first responder to them. In the Global North, climate-related security risks are mostly an international and national security concern; the state is often the first responder to and protector against climate change. Climate-related security issues are also increasingly a focus of the military since climate-induced extreme events often destroy military bases, affecting the safety of military installations and personnel worldwide (Amu 2020).

In the Mediterranean region, which is a climate hotspot, it is currently demonstrated, albeit with insufficient empirical evidence, that climate change provides profound state and human security challenges to governments and people, particularly in the Southern shore known by its weak emission potential and increased climate vulnerability. Scarcity of vital resources in food, water, sanitation, and health – combined with political instability and conflicts, corruption, ethnic divisions, governance problems, democracy deficit, rapid population growth and urbanization, rising inequality, livelihood insecurity and environmental degradation – has challenged political and economic structures, infrastructure and integration in many parts of this region. Climate change in the Mediterranean is, therefore, an imminent threat to human security and reverses progress towards sustainability and development. The security agenda of the Mediterranean – which is highly linked to the Africa's – is affected by the far-reaching implications of the deteriorating environmental conditions and a changing climate.



So, what are the appropriate and relevant governance options that have the potential to appreciate the linkages between climate change and security in the Mediterranean context and how can these options better inform adaptation and mitigation – and loss and damage – measures that should be implemented at the Mediterranean, national and community level?

Governance agendas in the Mediterranean should move towards integrated approaches to complex risks, including the explicit manifestations of the possible links between climate change and security. This calls for an effort to unpack the climate-security nexus and to frame it in terms which facilitate its efficient and inclusive governance. The climate-security discourse should have a real impact in terms of programming priorities and budget allocations within existing or new governance frameworks.

Most importantly, it is highly imperative at this stage to learn how to use climate change as an entry point for more positive ends: to build climate resilience, disaster, and security risk through a suite of actions, and even the possibilities for conflict transformation in some regions. In terms of institutional arrangements, leadership and governance do matter and it is important to trust science (Gateretse-Ngoga 2022). According to the same author, there is no single entity that can manage the climate-security nexus as it is a cross-cutting issue. Therefore, clusters at the institutional level are needed to bring everyone on board to build on entry points, create solutions to the multilayered challenges, and make smart partnerships with multilateral, regional, and bilateral actors, thus advancing common agendas. A solidarity framework is also needed to foster collective action, secure populations by increasing information sharing and investing in sophisticated capabilities.

Moreover, climate response mechanisms – such as adaptation, mitigation, loss and damage and climate finance – should be driven by human security, resilience, and SDG considerations along with the responsibility to respond and protect the most vulnerable groups and ecosystems. Limiting global warming also means limiting the number of lives affected by climate-generated fragility and conflict. Furthermore, there is emerging evidence that climate response mechanisms, when implemented in a conflict-sensitive and inclusive matter, can bring co-benefits in terms of diversifying livelihoods, opening dialogue spaces, creating trust, increasing cooperation, and ultimately contributing to well-being (Gateretse-Ngoga 2022).

In addition to integration, climate-security nexus driven policies need to be coherent. To do so, overarching frameworks that appreciate the linkages between climate and security in cross-cutting ways are needed. This allows to inform response mechanisms to be implemented at the Mediterranean, national and community level. Creating a Mediterranean platform for ensuring policy integration and coherence, may have the potential to provide adequate responses with regard the climate-security nexus.



Given that the climate-security nexus is so new, the expertise in this area is burgeoning and there is a dire need for experts with excellent knowledge of both climate change science and conflict prevention or security issues. Effectively analyzing and addressing climate change-related security issues require bringing together experts from different fields without neglecting the vital importance of traditional knowledge and citizen science. This is both a challenge and an opportunity. More cross-fertilization across sectors breaks down walls and opens space for new thinking and joint solutions. Moreover, interface mechanisms to facilitate dialogue between the scientific community and political actors in support of governments in the Mediterranean region should be established and fostered. This is especially important in building knowledge, perception, and ownership of the climate-security nexus dynamics at all governance scales. This is also important to counter some of the media reporting on climate change and security in the region, which often builds on secondary analysis and generalizations, despite the contextual nature of this topic.

Equally, a deeper and appropriate understanding of security at the Mediterranean level allows for environmental, social, economic, and political aspects to be prioritized in policy agendas and for individuals and communities as opposed to only states, governments, and the private sector to be inclusively involved in the process. In some instances, according to Dessì and Fusco (2022), the prioritization of climate-security related effects and government-to-government engagements without a similarly sustained focus on human rights, socio-economic exclusion, gender inequality, authoritarian governance and the role of civil society risks undermining the reach and effectiveness of response measures due to a lack of popular buy-in and the weak legitimacy of ruling elites, while also possibly serving to further entrench authoritarianism, corruption and top-down co-optation.

Framing the nexus from a 'climate justice' perspective may emphasize the shared nature of the threat in the Mediterranean and its unequal impacts and implications, with struggling and underprivileged states and societies, mostly located in the Global South, facing the most adverse repercussions even though they are by far the least responsible for the climate crisis. Climate justice helps move beyond the technical realm of emission reductions and new mitigating or adaptation technologies to focus on social justice and how the implications of the climate emergency will further increase socio-political and economic inequalities as well as systemic marginalization, both across and within regions and states. In the Mediterranean, such a reference with all related ramifications should be considered in the governance of the climate-security nexus (Dessì and Fusco 2022).

In the same vein, as the climate crisis will be far reaching, exacerbating pre-existing challenges across Mediterranean states, there is an urgent need for genuine North-South and South-South cooperative solutions to tackle the multidimensional impact of the climate emergency in the Mediterranean, including the security implications. Yet, the genuine cooperation in the area of climate and security is still hindered



by many challenges such as the uneven power relations embedded in the Mediterranean region. While some relevant formal institutional frameworks – such the Barcelona Process, the European Neighborhood Policy, and the Union for the Mediterranean – have been established, they were generally less efficient in promoting more balanced North-South cooperation beyond the remit of governing elites. Over time, many of these frameworks, along with their normative or political ambition, have increasingly promoted economic interests on behalf of large multinational companies in detriment of other challenges. This helped create a conducive environment for further consolidation of authoritarian rule in many southern countries while weakening the reach – or ‘normative appeal’ – of the EU, thus fostering increased trends of division between the two shores of the Mediterranean. This is in a complete contrast with the Europe’s approach to the ‘eastern neighborhood’, where the prospect of EU membership has helped promote reforms and integration (Dessì and Fusco 2022).

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