

LOCAL SOLUTIONS, GLOBAL URGENCY

ADDRESSING CLIMATE, CONFLICT, AND FRAGILITY IN THE SAHEL AND HORN OF AFRICA



The homestead of Abdulahi Farah Isse (27) in Somalia during a drought that has, in the five months, led to the deaths of around 40 of the pastoralist's herd of 100 cattle. Credit: Petterik Wiggers/Oxfam Novib.

Climate change, conflict, and fragility converge most acutely in the Sahel and Horn of Africa, creating vulnerability cycles that undermine livelihoods, fuel displacement, and strain already fragile governance systems. Extreme climate events interact with weak institutions and insecurity, disproportionately burdening women, youth, and displaced groups. Yet these same groups are also central to resilience - their leadership and local knowledge are among the region's strongest assets for adaptation, peacebuilding, and mediation. Assessments piloted by Oxfam in five countries confirm that these crises are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing. This Discussion Paper provides contextual understanding as well as programmatic recommendations.

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
INTRODUCTION	6
BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY	7
CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS: CROSS-CUTTING DYNAMICS	9
LOCAL SOLUTIONS & RESPONSES	11
KEY LEARNINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS	13
CONCLUSION	17
Notes	18

ACCRONYMS

AACJ	African Activists for Climate Justice
BEG	Bahr El-Gazal
CCFV	Village Land Conciliation Commission (<i>Commission de Conciliation Foncière Villageoise</i>)
COP28	28th Conference of the Parties (to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change)
FMNR	Farmer-Managed Natural Regeneration
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HDP	Humanitarian–Development–Peace
IBLI	Index-Based Livestock Insurance
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IGAs	Income-Generating Activities
IKI	International Climate Initiative (<i>Internationale Klimaschutzinitiative</i>)
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
NWFP	Non-Wood Forest Products
SACCOs	Savings and Credit Cooperatives
SMS	Social Mediation Structures
VSLAs	Village Savings and Loan Associations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2024 and early 2025, together with partners, Oxfam Country Offices in Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Ethiopia, and Somalia piloted climate–conflict–fragility assessments to better understand how climate change interacts with insecurity and systemic fragility. The process combined desk research, key informant interviews, participatory tools, and validation workshops, placing community perspectives at the centre of the analysis.

The findings show that climate hazards are not isolated environmental shocks. Rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, recurrent droughts, and destructive floods are eroding agriculture, pastoralism, and fisheries while degrading soils and ecosystems. These hazards drive displacement, intensify competition over land, water, and grazing routes, and contribute to growing urban populations as rural pastoralists abandon traditional livelihoods, further straining fragile economies and infrastructures. Insecurity further complicates the picture, with weak formal institutions often unable to mediate disputes or deliver reliable services. Communities rely on customary mechanisms, which can calm tensions but frequently exclude women, youth, or minority groups. Meanwhile, climate finance remains far below what is required, leaving most local priorities unmet.

The inequality of the climate–conflict–fragility nexus

The impacts of the climate–conflict–fragility nexus are highly unequal. Women and girls shoulder heavier workloads as men migrate with livestock in search of water and pasture, leaving women responsible for household management, childcare, and food provision. This increased burden often forces women to travel longer and riskier distances for water and fuel, heightening their exposure to gender-based violence and harmful coping strategies such as early marriage. Youth face unemployment and shrinking opportunities, making them more vulnerable to precarious migration or recruitment by armed groups. Elderly people and persons with disabilities are especially marginalized, while pastoralists and farmers are directly exposed to resource scarcity, leading to recurrent food insecurity.

Yet women and youth also play vital roles in sustaining resilience, leading collective farming, savings groups, peace dialogues, and local planning initiatives. These contributions are often informal and under-recognized but remain crucial to climate adaptation and peacebuilding. Across the Sahel and Horn of Africa, climate, conflict, and fragility interact in reinforcing cycles of vulnerability. Drought-induced displacement increases pressure on host communities, sparking disputes that drive further displacement. Livelihood loss pushes households into environmentally damaging practices that accelerate resource degradation. Floods destroy homes and fields, forcing people to rebuild in ever-riskier areas. Weak early warning and planning capacity mean that communities often react to crises rather than anticipate them.

Communities are key in terms of the response

Despite these challenges, the assessments underline that communities are not passive. They are actively developing responses, from livelihood diversification and customary mediation to women- and youth-led initiatives and participatory planning. These responses are often fragile and under-resourced, but they demonstrate innovation, contextual knowledge, and readiness for support. The assessment process itself highlighted important operational lessons: the need for separate focus groups to ensure women’s and youth’s voices are heard, careful safeguards for participant safety, and continuous triangulation of findings across sources to strengthen credibility.

The strategic implication is clear: Climate change acts as a threat multiplier in fragile contexts, deepening inequalities and fuelling conflict. Yet, as Sherri Goodman has argued, climate action can also serve as a peace multiplier¹ when designed to be inclusive and conflict-sensitive,

strengthening social cohesion and opening pathways for cooperation. Building resilience in fragile contexts demands integrated approaches that link climate adaptation, peacebuilding, and governance, with women and youth central to both design and implementation.

Programmatic response is clear

For Oxfam and partners, the path forward is practical. Investing in inclusive local governance and trusted mediation structures, expanding equitable water access and nature-based solutions, supporting diversified and climate-resilient livelihoods, and embedding gender and youth leadership as non-negotiable priorities can help communities withstand shocks and reduce conflict risks. Strengthening community preparedness and embedding anticipatory action into local and national plans, particularly for rapid-onset crises, is also essential to protect lives and assets before shocks escalate. These efforts need to be tied together through better data, early warning mechanisms, and humanitarian–development–peace aligned planning that connects local priorities to national frameworks and climate finance. If acted on now, these lessons can make programs more conflict-sensitive, advocacy more grounded, and adaptation more just. Resilience will no longer be measured only as a project output but experienced as a lived reality in the Sahel and Horn of Africa.

INTRODUCTION

In the second half of 2024, Oxfam Country Offices in Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Ethiopia, and Somalia piloted climate–conflict–fragility assessments to better understand how climate change is shaping local conflict dynamics and amplifying systemic fragility. Completed in early 2025, these assessments combined desk research, key informant interviews, participatory tools such as resource mapping, seasonal calendars, and problem/solution trees, and, in Ethiopia and Somalia, validation workshops using systems–thinking approaches. This methodology placed communities at the center, ensuring that the analysis was grounded in their lived experiences and priorities.

The results highlight a shared reality across diverse contexts: climate hazards such as droughts, floods, erratic rainfall, and rising temperatures are not just environmental shocks. They directly undermine livelihoods, fuel resource competition, and strain fragile governance systems.

In Chad’s Lake and Bahr El-Gazal provinces, recurring droughts and floods deepen displacement and violent competition over water and pasture.² In Ethiopia’s Somali Region, extended droughts are driving shifts from pastoralism to agro-pastoralism, altering gender roles and exposing new vulnerabilities.³ In Niger’s border regions, climate variability interacts with the presence of non-state armed actors, contributing to pressures on local resources and increasing the risk of inter-communal tensions, while also challenging the coping strategies of affected communities.⁴ In Burkina Faso, similar dynamics are observed, where climate variability exacerbates insecurity and armed group activity, driving community conflicts and forcing women and youth to migrate toward regional capitals as internally displaced persons.⁵ In Somaliland and Somalia, cycles of drought, flooding, and displacement reinforce fragility and strain already weak governance structures.⁶ In several areas, these shocks have also destabilized local markets, causing sharp declines in livestock value, rising food prices, and deepening food insecurity that push pastoral households to de-capitalize their assets. Across all cases, women, youth, and marginalized groups bear disproportionate burdens while also acting as key drivers of local adaptation and peacebuilding.

Beyond documenting risks, the assessments surface entry points for resilience and peace. Communities are experimenting with livelihood diversification, customary mediation, and women-led peacebuilding initiatives. Local solutions demonstrate both innovation and deep contextual knowledge, pointing to opportunities for Oxfam and partners to strengthen adaptation, social cohesion, and governance in ways that are inclusive and conflict-sensitive.

This synthesis report brings together findings from the five country assessments, identifying cross-cutting patterns, community-driven solutions, and strategic recommendations. It is designed to serve a dual purpose: to support internal learning and sustainability planning for initiatives such as the African Activists for Climate Justice (AACJ), and to inform external advocacy, fundraising, and positioning. By consolidating insights across the Sahel and Horn of Africa, the report underscores a central message: building resilience in fragile contexts requires addressing climate, conflict, and governance together, not in isolation.

By consolidating lessons across diverse contexts, this report aims to support Oxfam and partners in strengthening program development, advocacy, and external positioning, while contributing to sustainability strategies. More broadly, it seeks to inform the growing body of work at the intersection of climate, conflict, and fragility, an area of urgent importance across the African continent.

BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

WHY CLIMATE, CONFLICT, AND FRAGILITY MATTER IN THE SAHEL AND HORN OF AFRICA

The Sahel and Horn of Africa are among the regions where climate change, conflict, and fragility converge most acutely. Globally, 18 of the 25 most climate-vulnerable countries are also affected by conflict, and all 37 fragile and conflict-affected states fall in the bottom quartile for climate vulnerability.⁷ The Sahel and Horn illustrate this convergence in stark terms: rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, recurrent droughts, and destructive floods are eroding livelihoods and ecosystems. These shocks interact with long-standing inequalities, weak governance, and persistent insecurity, locking communities into cycles of vulnerability.

The country assessments illustrate this convergence clearly. In Chad's Lake and Bahr El-Gazal provinces, drought and flooding have displaced more than 400,000 people, sparking violent disputes over land and water.⁸ In Ethiopia's Somali Region, prolonged droughts are pushing pastoralists toward agro-pastoralism, reshaping gender roles and exposing women and girls to greater workloads, food insecurity, and protection risks.⁹ In Niger's border regions, climate variability compounds armed group activity, intensifying inter-communal disputes and undermining coping strategies.¹⁰ In Somalia, the nature of climate hazards differs across regions. In Togdheer, severe and recurrent droughts are the main challenge, while in Hiran both droughts and periodic riverine floods disrupt livelihoods and exacerbate resource pressures.¹¹ Across both regions, these shocks heighten competition over pasture and water, fuel clan-based conflicts, and are compounded by recurring livestock and human disease outbreaks as well as the influx of displaced populations.

Women, youth, and displaced groups carry disproportionate burdens within this nexus. Women and girls face greater risks when securing water and fuel, youth confront shrinking opportunities and the lure of armed groups or precarious migration, and displaced households struggle with exclusion and competition over resources. At the same time, these groups are central to sustaining resilience and driving local peacebuilding.

The convergence of climate, conflict, and fragility makes the Sahel and Horn of Africa critical regions for understanding these pathways. Lessons from Oxfam's AACJ program and pilot projects in the Horn highlight that resilience cannot be built by tackling climate or conflict in isolation. Instead, adaptation, peacebuilding, and governance must be approached as interlinked pathways that shift as shocks, coping strategies, and governance gaps interact. Viewing the nexus as a system helps avoid siloed analysis and better reflects the lived realities of affected communities, where climate interventions that overlook power dynamics can create new tensions, just as peacebuilding efforts that ignore climate stressors often fail to endure.

COMMON METHODOLOGY ACROSS COUNTRIES

To explore these dynamics in depth, Oxfam Country Offices in Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Ethiopia, and Somalia piloted a shared five-step methodology between mid-2024 and early 2025. The aim was to ensure comparability across contexts while remaining flexible enough to capture local realities.

The steps included:

1. **Preliminary desk study** – Reviewing existing data on climate stressors, conflict dynamics, and governance systems.
2. **Key informant interviews (KIIs)** – Engaging local leaders, civil society representatives, government actors, and technical experts.

3. **Participatory group exercises** – Using tools such as seasonal calendars, community resource mapping, and problem/solution trees to capture lived experiences and community perspectives. Women-only and youth-only groups were organized where relevant, ensuring inclusion and safety in line with feminist principles.
4. **Validation workshops** – All five country teams conducted validation workshops or community restitution meetings to triangulate findings with local stakeholders. In Ethiopia and Somalia, a systems-thinking approach was additionally applied to map reinforcement loops and validate results with communities, partners, and Oxfam staff.
5. **Final reporting** – Each country produced a comprehensive analysis feeding into this synthesis.

This methodology built in both rigor and participation. By combining structured research with locally led tools, it created space for communities to articulate not just the risks they face, but also the strategies they are already using to adapt and maintain peace.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE ASSESSMENTS AND SYNTHESIS

The assessments were designed as exploratory pilots. They provide rich insights into how climate, conflict, and fragility intersect at community level, but they are not exhaustive. Several limitations should be noted:

- **Geographic coverage:** Each assessment focused on selected provinces or districts (e.g. the Koulssé region and the Centre-Nord region in Burkina Faso; Lake and Bahr El-Gazal in Chad; Jarar Zone in Ethiopia; Diffa, Tillabéry, and Tahoua in Niger; and Togdheer and Hiran regions in Somalia). Findings therefore reflect local realities rather than full national trends.
- **Data constraints:** In fragile and insecure contexts, reliable quantitative data are limited. The assessments relied heavily on qualitative inputs, community discussions, expert interviews, and observation. This provides depth of perspective but makes cross-country comparison more indicative than statistical.
- **Security and access:** In several locations, insecurity restricted movement and limited fieldwork. For example, access to parts of Lake Chad, Niger's Tillabéry region, and several localities in Burkina Faso was constrained by insecurity, forcing the mission team to conduct most interviews in urban centers.¹²
- **Sensitivity of topics:** Discussions on conflict, fragility, or governance could not always be explored in depth, as some participants preferred to limit the level of detail for safety reasons or out of caution when speaking about sensitive issues.
- **Synthesis constraints:** This report draws exclusively on the five assessment reports and supporting documents such as the International Climate Initiative (IKI) concept note. No new field data were generated, and national policy reviews were outside the scope.

Despite these limitations, the participatory methodology and consistency across five diverse contexts provide a strong evidence base. Taken together, the assessments offer valuable insights into recurring patterns, context-specific dynamics, and locally grounded solutions that can inform Oxfam's programming, advocacy, and positioning on climate security.

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS: CROSS-CUTTING DYNAMICS

The five assessments collectively show that climate change, conflict, and fragility intersect in ways that reinforce one another and erode resilience across the Sahel and Horn of Africa. Four cross-cutting nexus dynamics stand out, closely linked to the areas where communities are already developing responses: livelihoods, governance, inclusion, and collective adaptation.

LIVELIHOODS UNDER PRESSURE

Recurring climate shocks, including rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, droughts, and floods, are undermining agriculture, pastoralism, forestry (including beekeeping and non-wood forest products - NWFP) farming, and fisheries. The strong dependence of agrarian systems on rainfall and natural resource availability, across crop and livestock production, fishing, hunting, and the exploitation of Non-Timber Forest Products, makes these livelihoods highly sensitive to climatic variability. In many areas, unsustainable harvesting and land use practices are further degrading ecosystems, amplifying the effects of climate change and reducing the capacity of communities to recover. Across the Sahel and Horn, loss of harvests, dying herds, and degraded soils are leaving households with fewer options, forcing many into precarious or harmful coping strategies such as charcoal production or unsustainable cultivation. In Somalia, for example, repeated droughts have eroded livestock herds to the point where many families can no longer meet subsistence needs or recover between shocks. This erosion of productive assets, combined with rising food prices and limited market access, has plunged households into debt and heightened malnutrition, particularly among children and pregnant women. According to a key informant in Kongoussi: "This year, the problem is serious. The rain started late and stopped suddenly. We didn't have enough rain in July and August. In September, it didn't rain at all. There are a lot of people who didn't harvest. In addition, the winds destroyed our houses."¹³ Livelihood insecurity, in turn, fuels competition, migration, and tensions between groups.

GOVERNANCE STRETCHED THIN

Climate pressures are not creating new conflicts in isolation, but they are intensifying existing fault lines. Fragility and weak governance compound these pressures. In many areas, the availability and accessibility of essential services such as security, justice, health, transport, finance, and education decline sharply with distance from political and administrative centers. This uneven state presence is most visible in remote and border zones, which have become breeding grounds for civil insecurity and the expansion of armed groups. Countries in both regions consistently rank among the most fragile in the world. Resource competition over land, water, and grazing corridors is the most common pathway through which climate stress becomes conflict. Where governance systems are under-resourced or absent, disputes escalate more easily. In Ethiopia's Jarar Zone, repeated clashes between the villages of Yo'ale and Daror over grazing land left five people dead in 2023, with the assessment noting that these conflicts occur in areas where formal governance is weak or absent.¹⁴ In such contexts, communities fall back on customary mechanisms, which provide short-term stability but can exclude women, youth, or minority groups, creating new grievances. Fragile economies, inflation, and poor infrastructure further exacerbate vulnerabilities, while climate finance remains far below what is required. As shocks multiply, even traditional safety nets and communal support systems are eroding, leaving families increasingly isolated and exposed to risk.

Beyond land, water, and pasture, new pressures are also emerging around mineral extraction linked to the global green energy transition. If poorly managed, these dynamics risk replicating patterns of exclusion, environmental degradation, and conflict already seen in natural resource governance.

UNEQUAL IMPACTS AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND YOUTH

The overlapping crises of climate stress and fragility are not experienced equally, and they intensify each other. Women and girls face heavier workloads and greater exposure to gender-based violence when travelling long distances for water or firewood, dynamics aggravated when livelihoods collapse. Youth contend with high unemployment and shrinking opportunities, leaving them vulnerable to precarious migration or recruitment by armed groups. Elderly people and persons with disabilities are especially marginalized, with reduced mobility and heightened sensitivity to climate extremes and insecurity. Displacement and livelihood loss also disrupt education and health systems, forcing children, especially girls, out of school and increasing women's unpaid care burdens as illness and malnutrition rise. At the same time, women and youth play vital roles in sustaining resilience: women organize collective farming and conflict mediation, and youth contribute to peace dialogues, resource mapping, and local committees. These contributions are often informal and under-recognized, but they demonstrate the importance of inclusion in any durable solution.

COLLECTIVE ADAPTATION AND PLANNING GAPS

Climate stressors and insecurity interact in cyclical patterns that trap communities in downward spirals of vulnerability. Drought-induced displacement increases pressure on host communities, sparking disputes that trigger further displacement. Livelihood loss drives households into environmentally damaging practices that further degrade the resource base and contribute to rising urban migration. Floods destroy fields and homes, forcing people to rebuild in ever-riskier areas. At the same time, the absence of reliable planning and early warning means that communities are often reacting to crises rather than anticipating them. In many areas, limited socio-economic infrastructure such as health centers, schools, and roads further weakens local resilience and deepens fragility, restricting access to services and economic opportunities. Participatory tools such as seasonal calendars and resource mapping exercises have helped communities identify risks and solutions, but without sustained support these remain underutilized.

Taken together, the assessments reveal a shared reality: climate change acts as a threat multiplier in fragile contexts, deepening inequalities, fuelling conflict, and weakening already strained governance systems. As Sherri Goodman has argued, climate action can also serve as a peace multiplier¹⁵ when designed to be inclusive and conflict-sensitive, strengthening social cohesion and opening pathways for cooperation. Vulnerable groups, particularly women, youth, and displaced populations, carry the heaviest burdens but also demonstrate innovation in coping and peacebuilding. Breaking these cycles of vulnerability requires integrated approaches that address climate adaptation, conflict sensitivity, and inclusive governance simultaneously.

LOCAL SOLUTIONS AND RESPONSES

While climate change, conflict, and fragility create reinforcing cycles of vulnerability, the five assessments also revealed a wide range of community-led responses and local innovations. These are often fragile and under-resourced, but they show that communities are not passive victims, they are already adapting, mediating, and rebuilding in ways that provide entry points for Oxfam and partners to strengthen resilience. Four areas of response stand out, which are detailed below.

ADAPTATION STRATEGIES AND LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION

Faced with repeated shocks, households diversify livelihoods to reduce reliance on rain-fed agriculture and pastoralism. Strategies range from small-scale vegetable gardening and casual labour to migration and, in some cases, environmentally harmful practices such as charcoal production. These responses highlight both ingenuity and risk: they provide immediate survival but may also deepen environmental degradation and long-term fragility. Yet, the ability to diversify is often constrained by limited capital, skills, and access to markets, leaving many efforts unsustainable and costly in social and economic terms. As one community member explained: "I could not even secure today's food, even though I knew the charcoal production is harmful to the community, I need money to secure my food and the family needs at the moment."¹⁶

CUSTOMARY AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS

Customary and local institutions remain central to conflict management in the absence of effective state systems. Elders, religious leaders, and village committees mediate disputes over land, water, and grazing corridors. While these mechanisms are often trusted and effective at the local level, they are limited in reach, may reinforce social hierarchies, and lack enforcement power when disputes escalate. Linking these mechanisms with more formal governance structures is critical for sustainability and fairness.¹⁷

Example: In Ethiopia, customary conflict resolution is prevalent. Elders and clan leaders are central to mediating resource disputes using customary law to prevent escalation. The government has even brought in elders from abroad to stabilize conflicts, showing reliance on customary practices.¹⁸

WOMEN AND YOUTH AS AGENTS OF RESILIENCE

Evaluations consistently show that women and youth carry disproportionate burdens, but they also promote adaptation and peacebuilding. Women organize collective farming and savings initiatives, including Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), which enhance financial inclusion and strengthen solidarity at community level. They also lead local peace dialogues and provide crucial knowledge about the use of natural resources.

Example: In the Lac Province of Chad, women, often referred to as "wise," are highly involved in conflict resolution.¹⁹ The president of the Bagasola women's platform explicitly states that "women, through their group, are a considerable support for the local authorities and are strongly involved in conflict management".²⁰ This direct participation in mediation and support for local authorities highlights their crucial role in peacebuilding. However, in the Bahr El Gazal (BEG) province of Chad, women's involvement in public conflict resolution is often indirect, with their views passed on by husbands or brothers, indicating an informal but influential role.²¹

Youth are involved in mediation, resource mapping, and peace committees. These roles remain under-recognized, and participation is often informal or precarious, but they demonstrate the potential for more inclusive and transformative resilience if properly supported.

Example: Young people in Banakeledaga village, Burkina Faso, were actively involved in creating seasonal calendars and resource mapping exercises during focus group discussions²². This participation in understanding and analyzing their community's resources and seasonal challenges is a concrete way they contribute to adaptation strategies.

PARTICIPATORY ADAPTATION PRACTICES

Participatory tools such as seasonal calendars, resource mapping, and problem/solution trees are being used not just to document risks but also to build collective responses. Communities employ these exercises to anticipate conflict flashpoints, plan migration routes, identify safe zones, and prioritize adaptation measures such as water harvesting, soil conservation, and reforestation. These practices strengthen collective ownership of solutions and provide a basis for linking local priorities with external support, offering a model for integrated and flexible responses that move beyond traditional top-down aid toward a nexus approach connecting climate, conflict, and fragility.

Example: In Burkina Faso, problem/solution trees help communities identify priority needs and propose solutions. For instance, addressing low access to water for agricultural production includes solutions like developing backwaters, setting up water reservoirs to deal with flooding, and tree planting.²³

Across all five contexts, the assessments reveal that community responses combine adaptation, mediation, and innovation, often under conditions of severe constraint. They are fragile, small-scale, and sometimes unsustainable, but they point to clear entry points for external actors. The challenge, and the opportunity, is to amplify what works, promote environmentally sustainable practices such as agroecology and renewable energy, address exclusionary norms and practices (especially the marginalization of women and youth), and connect local responses with broader governance, peacebuilding, and climate finance systems.

KEY LEARNINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The five assessments in Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Ethiopia, and Somalia generated not only valuable findings on the interplay between climate change, conflict, and fragility, but also practical lessons about how such assessments should be carried out and how programming can respond. This chapter synthesizes the key learnings that emerged during the process, followed by a set of cross-cutting recommendations.

KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE ASSESSMENTS

1. METHODOLOGICAL AND OPERATIONAL LEARNINGS

- **Security and access constraints.** Fieldwork was repeatedly hampered by insecurity, particularly in places such as Lake and Bahr El-Gazal (Chad) and parts of Niger. Access often required authorizations, which delayed and increased the cost of data collection.
- **Data limitations and specificity.** One of the most persistent challenges was the lack of precise data linking climate change and conflict in the target provinces. In many cases, researchers had to rely on broader regional information, underlining the need for more locally focused and granular analyses.
- **Reluctance and sensitivity among respondents.** Because questions touched on conflict, violence, and fragility, some community members were hesitant to participate or to share their experiences and opinions openly. Ensuring anonymity and building trust were essential to gather candid perspectives.
- **Triangulation enhances credibility.** Cross-referencing community data with desk research and key informant interviews improved the robustness of findings. This strengthened confidence in the results for both programming and advocacy.
- **Continuous learning matters.** The assessments highlighted the importance of flexibility and adaptation. Even where fieldwork faced setbacks, reflection and adjustment allowed the process to generate lessons that can inform future work.

2. ANALYTICAL AND PROGRAMMATIC LEARNINGS

- **Complexity of local dynamics.** Conflicts are never explained by climate stressors alone. They are shaped by a web of social, economic, political, and environmental drivers that vary across contexts. Oversimplified narratives risk misdiagnosing root causes and missing opportunities for resolution.
- **Participatory tools prove effective.** Community resource mapping, seasonal calendars, and problem/solution tree exercises proved highly valuable in gathering perspectives from women, men, youth, and displaced populations. These tools gave visibility to diverse voices and generated concrete entry points for solutions.
- **Inclusivity, participation, and gender sensitivity are essential.** Separate focus groups for women and youth were critical in contexts where cultural norms would otherwise silence them, while the participation of host communities, internally displaced persons (IDPs), local authorities, and civil society actors ensured diverse perspectives were captured. This inclusive approach made it possible for the insights, needs, and coping strategies of all groups to inform the analysis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings point to an urgent need for integrated approaches that address climate risks, conflict dynamics, and fragility together. Seven areas of action are particularly relevant:

1. STRENGTHEN LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION:

Effective interventions should begin with an integrated analysis of how climate hazards, conflict drivers, and community vulnerabilities interact. This ensures that programming combines adaptation and peacebuilding objectives from the start, for example, that new irrigation systems also establish fair and inclusive water management arrangements to prevent disputes. In other words, governance efforts must apply climate-smart peacebuilding and conflict-sensitive adaptation principles that reduce vulnerabilities without creating new tensions between groups.

- **Traditional Structures:** Invest in programs that reinforce and formalize customary conflict resolution mechanisms and local committees such as Village Land Conciliation Commissions (CCFV), Social Mediation Structures (SMS), and grassroots or communal land commissions where they exist.
- **Capacity Development:** Provide training to traditional and religious leaders, elders, and committee members in conflict resolution, environmental conservation, negotiation, and gender-sensitive approaches, while strengthening organizational capacities to promote the participation of women and youth in non-violent conflict management and resolution.
- **Inclusive Dialogue Platforms:** Create inclusive platforms (community forums, round tables) to promote constructive exchanges and peaceful dispute resolution among different community groups, including farmers, pastoralists, IDPs, and ethnic groups.
- **Policy Advocacy:** Promote policies that support local governance models, ensure fair resource distribution, and ensure the implementation of existing legislation related to decentralized land and natural resource management.
- **Cross-Border Cooperation:** Facilitate cross-border conflict management and collaboration to pool efforts and align strategies for shared climate-conflict challenges, such as transhumance routes, including advocacy through Joint Commission Meetings and other regional coordination platforms.

2. IMPROVING WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE:

- **Infrastructure Development:** Construct and rehabilitate water points (boreholes, dams, berkedes, water reservoirs) to ensure equitable access and increased supply for both human and animal consumption, agricultural production and livestock.
- **Sustainable Water Management:** Promote sustainable water management practices, including wastewater recycling, and support the establishment or strengthening of inclusive water management committees.
- **Nature-Based Solutions:** Enhance the water retention capacity of landscapes and farming systems through nature-based solutions (e.g., terracing, reforestation, restoration of natural water retention areas).
- **Local Maintenance Capacity:** Build local capacities, particularly among youth, to maintain water infrastructure and repair pumping systems.

3. LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT:

- **Income-Generating Activities (IGAs):** Support the development of diverse IGAs and entrepreneurship/jobs for women and youth. This includes training in financial literacy, business development, and improving access to microfinance solutions via district banking models and local savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs).
- **Climate-Resilient Agriculture:** Encourage climate-smart, agroecological practices, the use of improved, short-cycle, climate-resilient seeds, agroforestry, sustainable livestock management techniques, and the promotion of water-controlled crops.

- **Market Systems and Value Chain Development:** Strengthen agropastoral and pastoral value chains through a market systems lens. This includes improving access to markets, enhancing product standards, and supporting small producers, particularly women and youth, to participate in higher-value segments. Building inclusive value chains can generate employment, increase incomes, and enhance climate resilience across local economies.
- **Traditional Pastoralism and Alternative Livelihoods:** Apply a multi-pronged approach that supports livestock health and management, improves market linkages, and creates viable alternative livelihoods for households affected by asset loss or displacement.
- **Vocational Training:** Provide vocational training (e.g., masonry, tailoring, agribusiness, maintenance of renewable energy equipment) and skill-building initiatives for youth to address high unemployment rates and reduce their involvement in illicit activities like charcoal production.
- **Food Security and Local Production:** Subsidize agricultural inputs and equipment, strengthen producers' capacities on new technical routes, and implement local market gardening projects.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AND LAND MANAGEMENT:

- **Community-led Regreening and Restoration:** Promote community-led regreening efforts and Farmer-Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) approaches to strengthen local ownership of restoration processes. Organize reforestation campaigns, establish community orchards and sacred groves, fix sand dunes, and facilitate the recovery and rehabilitation of degraded agricultural and pastoral lands.
- **Harmonization of Land Governance Systems:** Work with traditional leaders and clan elders to align customary land management systems with formal government policies. This harmonization helps reduce land-related conflicts and ensures that restoration and land use interventions are culturally appropriate, legitimate, and accepted by communities.
- **Sustainable Land Management Practices:** Promote sustainable and conflict-sensitive land management practices, including integrated crop-livestock production systems, the cultivation of drought-tolerant fodder species to reduce pressure on natural rangelands, and the adoption of alternative energy sources to curb reliance on charcoal production.
- **Anticipation of Emerging Pressures:** Strengthen governance frameworks to manage mineral extraction linked to the global green energy transition. Without safeguards, such activities risk replicating existing patterns of exclusion and conflict; with inclusive planning, they can instead contribute to equitable development and resilience.
- **Transhumance Corridor Management:** Establish and ensure the respect of transhumance corridors to prevent conflicts between farmers and pastoralists over land use.
- **Waste Management and Circular Economy:** Raise awareness about proper waste management and promote circular economy practices that encourage reuse, recycling, and sustainable waste-to-resource solutions. Construct and maintain drainage systems (gutters) to mitigate flooding.
- **Water Harvesting and Management:** Expand the use of both traditional and modern water harvesting techniques, such as constructing *birqas* (underground cisterns), *birkas* (surface ponds), and check dams to collect and store rainwater for human and livestock consumption. These practices have proven effective in pilot projects and are critical for increasing community resilience to drought.

5. DATA, EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS, AND INTEGRATED PLANNING:

- **Continuous Climate–Conflict Research:** Conduct ongoing scenario-based climate, conflict, and fragility research, integrating traditional knowledge with scientific data to inform decision-making.
- **Early Warning and Anticipatory Action:** Facilitate access to and promote the use of weather forecasting and early warning systems to improve anticipatory action in communities.
- **Disaster Risk Financing:** Strengthen access to insurance mechanisms such as Index-Based Livestock Insurance (IBLI) and crop insurance to mitigate losses from climate-related shocks. Embedding disaster risk financing within community planning can reduce vulnerability, enhance preparedness, and protect livelihoods against recurring crises.

- **Integrated Planning:** Strengthen the capacities of local communities and local and national decision-makers to integrate climate and conflict data into broader climate planning (e.g., National Determined Contributions, National Adaptation Plans) and local development plans.

6. GENDER AND YOUTH INCLUSION:

- **Women's and Youth Empowerment:** Empower women economically and socially, promoting their active participation in decision-making processes and leadership roles within their communities.
- **Financial Inclusion and Self-Help Groups:** Promote self-help groups and VSLAs as entry points for economic empowerment and collective resilience. Over time, these groups can evolve into community banks or microfinance institutions, bridging financial gaps, reducing marginalization, and strengthening governance and social cohesion.
- **Protection Mechanisms:** Strengthen gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response systems, provide safe spaces, and address specific risks faced by women and girls during resource collection and displacement.
- **Youth Engagement:** Create youth-specific programs focused on climate action, conflict resolution, vocational training, and leadership opportunities to harness their potential as agents of change.
- **Literacy and Education:** Provide functional literacy training for women and young people to enhance their access to opportunities

7. HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-PEACE (HDP) NEXUS

APPROACH:

- **Joint Analysis and Collective Outcomes:** Humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors should conduct joint risk and needs assessments to identify shared drivers of vulnerability and conflict, for example, drought cycles and food insecurity (humanitarian), lack of services and degraded livelihoods (development), and competition over land and water (peace). This analysis should inform a common set of collective outcomes and coordinated responses.
- **Integrated Multisectoral Programming:** Adopt a holistic, multisectoral approach that links climate adaptation, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding, encompassing water, food, health, education, and governance systems. Promote a syndicated approach to resource pooling and collaboration across sectors to strengthen coordination and reduce skills gaps within implementation teams.
- **Contingency Funding:** Establish contingency funds to respond effectively to emergency situations and ensure coordination with existing humanitarian actions.
- **Local Institutional Ownership:** Build the capacity of local authorities, traditional leaders, and community organizations to lead nexus programming, ensuring that interventions are context-driven and sustainable.
- **Multi-stakeholder Coordination:** Create multi-stakeholder coordination forums at regional and district levels, bringing together government, UN agencies, civil society, and community representatives, to improve information sharing, prevent duplication, and align activities across sectors.
- **Syndicated Implementation Approach:** Promotion of pooled resource management and cross-sector collaboration to reduce capacity gaps among implementing teams.

Across the Sahel and Horn of Africa, climate hazards are intensifying, conflicts are deepening, and fragility is persistent. Yet the assessments show that communities are actively responding, and these efforts can and should be amplified. The key is to work holistically: combining adaptation, conflict sensitivity, and inclusive governance, while ensuring that women, youth, and marginalized groups are central to both design and implementation.

CONCLUSION

The assessments unequivocally reveal that in the Sahel and Horn of Africa, climate change is both a threat multiplier and a potential peace multiplier. On the one hand, it deepens inequalities, fuels conflict, and strains already fragile governance systems, creating reinforcing cycles of vulnerability in which women, youth, and displaced populations bear the heaviest burdens. On the other hand, when climate action is designed to be inclusive and conflict-sensitive, it can strengthen cooperation, foster social cohesion, and open pathways for peace.

Communities are not passive victims; they are actively innovating and adapting, leading efforts in local adaptation, customary mediation, and women-led peacebuilding. Therefore, building resilience and peace in these contexts demands integrated, holistic approaches that simultaneously address climate adaptation, conflict sensitivity, and inclusive governance, with the empowerment of women and youth central to both their design and implementation. The key is to amplify what works at the local level and connect these community-driven solutions with broader governance, peacebuilding, and climate finance systems.

For Oxfam and partners, the path forward is practical and within reach. Invest in inclusive local governance and trusted mediation structures. Expand equitable water access and nature-based solutions. Support livelihood diversification and climate-resilient production while curbing harmful coping strategies. Make gender and youth leadership non-negotiable in design and decision-making. And stitch it all together through better data, early warning, and HDP-aligned planning that links community priorities to national frameworks and finance.

If we act on these lessons now, amplifying what communities already do, correcting exclusionary practices, and connecting local solutions to sustained resources, programs will be more conflict-sensitive, advocacy more grounded, and adaptation more just. That is how this synthesis should land: as a practical mandate to integrate climate, peace, and governance, so that resilience is not a project output but a lived reality. This requires moving beyond siloed interventions toward systemic approaches that recognize how different pathways interact and reinforce one another. Framing the nexus as a system helps identify leverage points where climate action can both reduce risks and multiply peace, turning adaptation into an opportunity for cooperation rather than conflict.

These findings also resonate with global policy debates. At COP28, governments endorsed the Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace, signalling growing recognition of the climate–conflict–fragility nexus. Yet climate finance remains far below what is needed, with fragile and conflict-affected states consistently left behind. Situating local resilience within these global commitments highlights the urgency of ensuring that climate action is not only scaled up but also deliberately designed as a vehicle for peacebuilding.

NOTES

- ¹ S. Goodman. (2024). Keynote Address: Moving From Climate Change as a 'Threat Multiplier' to Climate Action as a 'Peace Multiplier'. Wilson Center. Accessed September 2024. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/keynote-address-moving-climate-change-threat-multiplier-climate-action-peace-multiplier>.
- ² Oxfam. (2024). Chad Climate, Conflict and Fragility assessment. Internal report.
- ³ Oxfam. (2024). Ethiopia Climate, Conflict and Fragility assessment. Internal report.
- ⁴ Oxfam. (2024). Niger Climate, Conflict and Fragility assessment. Internal report.
- ⁵ Oxfam. (2024). Burkina Faso Climate, Conflict and Fragility assessment. Internal report.
- ⁶ Oxfam. (2024). Somalia Climate, Conflict and Fragility assessment. Internal report.
- ⁷ M. Weber et al. (2023). Climate change and hotpots of conflict in the world. Accessed September 2024. https://defenseclimat.fr/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Note_Foyers-conflits_monde_FR-1.pdf
- ⁸ In 2024, severe flooding affected an estimated 2 million people across Chad, including refugees and internally displaced populations in the Lake and Bahr El-Gazal provinces. The floods compounded the effects of ongoing droughts, deepening displacement and livelihood losses among farming and pastoralist communities. See J. Davatzes. (2024). Catastrophic Flooding and its Impact on Displaced People in Chad. Wilson Center. Accessed July 2024. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/catastrophic-flooding-and-its-impact-displaced-people-chad>
- ⁹ In Ethiopia's Somali and Borana zones, recurrent droughts have devastated pastoralist livelihoods, causing widespread livestock loss and displacement. The UNFCCC estimated that 68,866 households—approximately 372,000 people—were displaced in Borana, while the Somali Region faced hundreds of thousands of new displacements in 2023, followed by localized flooding later in the year. See UNFCCC. (2023). Ethiopia: Drought Impacts and Displacement Assessment. Accessed July 2024. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/Ethiopia_LDC%20Group_Ethiopia%20drought%20impacts.pdf; F. Tufa. (2024). Conflict, climate change and displacement in the Somali Region of Ethiopia. Humanitarian Practice Network. Accessed July 2024. <https://odihpn.org/en/publication/conflict-climate-change-and-displacement-in-the-somali-region-of-ethiopia/>
- ¹⁰ In Niger, floods during the June–September rainy season in 2023 alone affected ~170,000 people, particularly in regions like Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri. Additionally, in 2023 floods affected 5,680 individuals in Maradi, Tahoua, and Tillabéri, and broader trends suggest that about 250,000 people per year are impacted by floods in recent years. See ReliefWeb. (2023). Niger Assistance Overview. Accessed July 2024. <https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/niger-assistance-overview-november-2023>; ACAPS. (2024). Flooding in Niger briefing note. Accessed July 2024. https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20240830_ACAPS_Briefing_note_Flooding_in_Niger.pdf
- ¹¹ In late 2023, Somalia experienced one of its most severe flooding events in decades during the Deyr season, affecting an estimated 2.48 million people, displacing 1.2 million, and causing at least 118 deaths across several regions, including Hiran. Togdheer and neighbouring areas, meanwhile, continued to suffer from recurrent drought conditions that devastated pastoral livelihoods. See: UNOCHA. (2023). Somalia: 2023 Deyr Season Floods Situation Report No. 5. Accessed August 2024. <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/somalia/somalia-2023-deyr-season-floods-situation-report-no-5-24-december-2023>; SODMA. (2023). Deyr Floods 2023 – Situation Report. Accessed August 2024. <https://sodma.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/SoDMA-Deyr-Floods-2023.pdf>
- ¹² Oxfam. (2024) Burkina Faso Climate, Conflict and Fragility assessment. op. cit.
- ¹³ Ibid. p.19.

- ¹⁴ Oxfam. (2024). Ethiopia Climate, Conflict and Fragility assessment.
- ¹⁵ Goodman. (2024). Keynote Address: Moving From Climate Change as a 'Threat Multiplier' to Climate Action as a 'Peace Multiplier'. op. cit.
- ¹⁶ Oxfam. (2024). Ethiopia Climate, Conflict and Fragility assessment. p.19. op. cit.
- ¹⁷ In Burkina Faso, traditional mediation also involves a range of influential local actors beyond elders. Village and land chiefs, as well as blacksmiths, are recognized as powerful mediators due to their symbolic authority as "masters of the earth" and "masters of fire." In Kongoussi, women also play a distinct role in conflict resolution through the poug-tampa (groups of aunts and sisters-in-law), who intervene in intra- and inter-family disputes and are respected for their capacity to restore social harmony. See Oxfam. (2024) Burkina Faso Climate, Conflict and Fragility assessment. pp. 37–38. op. cit.
- ¹⁸ Oxfam. (2024). Ethiopia Climate, Conflict and Fragility assessment. p.6. op. cit.
- ¹⁹ Oxfam. (2024). Chad Climate, Conflict and Fragility assessment. p.33. op. cit.
- ²⁰ Ibid. p.46.
- ²¹ Ibid. p.33, 47.
- ²² Oxfam. (2024) Burkina Faso Climate, Conflict and Fragility assessment. p.54-55. op. cit.
- ²³ Oxfam. (2024) Burkina Faso Climate, Conflict and Fragility assessment. op. cit.

Oxfam Discussion Papers

Oxfam Discussion Papers are written to contribute to public debate and to invite feedback on development and humanitarian policy issues. They are 'work in progress' documents, and do not necessarily constitute final publications or reflect Oxfam policy positions. The views and recommendations expressed are those of the author and not necessarily those of Oxfam.

This paper was written by Adina Nerghes with input and feedback from Thomas Reeve. For the development of this paper and the original country assessments on which it draws, Oxfam acknowledges the assistance of Oxfam Hong Kong, Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), CONAJEC (La Coördination Nationale des Jeunes pour l'Environnement et le Climat), Centre pour la Recherche Humanitaire (CRH), Elijah Mulumba (Candlelight), Hawo Yusuf Isse, Hussein Abdi, Mukhtar Hussein Ali (Ethiopia Somali Development Association), Action pour le Développement des Initiatives Locales (ADLI), Abdourahamane Malam Saley, Inti Alher, Raynatou Sita Yacouba, Yabilan Saibou Oumarou (International Alert), Siad Darwish (Wayfare Consulting), Nguyen Quang Thai, Séverin Wangre, Patricia Ouedraogo, Haoua Ouattara, Nassiri Nikiema, Nina Tapsoba, Azeita Koussoube, Ousmane Diallo, Sosthene Konate, Ramatou Kane, Ali Tchiroma, Moustapha Moussa, Issoufou Abdou Djibo, Awaiss Yahaya, Tahp Yassine Fadoul, Nimaan Arab Ali, Alemayehu Lebeta, Edelegnaw Agegn, Elias Kebede, Rahel Bekele, Muktar Hassen, Ahmed Abdi, Mohamed Haibe, and the local authorities and technical services responsible for the environment, agriculture, water, and humanitarian action in the communes of Bama and Kongoussi. Finally, this paper was partly funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for which we would like to express our appreciation.

For more information, or to comment on this paper, email treeve1@oxfam.org.uk.

© Oxfam International 2026

This publication is copyright but the text may be used free of charge for the purposes of advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, provided that the source is acknowledged in full. The copyright holder requests that all such use be registered with them for impact assessment purposes. For copying in any other circumstances, or for re-use in other publications, or for translation or adaptation, permission must be secured and a fee may be charged. Email policyandpractice@oxfam.org.uk.

The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.

Published by Oxfam GB for Oxfam International in February 2026. DOI: 10.21201/2026.000117

Oxfam GB, Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford, OX4 2JY, UK.

OXFAM

Oxfam is a global movement of people who are fighting inequality to end poverty and injustice. We are working across regions in more than 70 countries, with thousands of partners, and allies, supporting communities to build better lives for themselves, grow resilience and protect lives and livelihoods also in times of crisis. Please write to any of the agencies for further information or visit www.oxfam.org.

Oxfam America (www.oxfamamerica.org)

Oxfam Aotearoa (www.oxfam.org.nz)

Oxfam Australia (www.oxfam.org.au)

Oxfam-in-Belgium (www.oxfamsol.be)

Oxfam Brasil (www.oxfam.org.br)

Oxfam Canada (www.oxfam.ca)

Oxfam Colombia (www.oxfamcolombia.org)

Oxfam France (www.oxfamfrance.org)

Oxfam Germany (www.oxfam.de)

Oxfam GB (www.oxfam.org.uk)

Oxfam Hong Kong (www.oxfam.org.hk)

Oxfam Denmark (www.oxfam.dk)

Oxfam India (www.oxfamindia.org)

Oxfam Intermón (Spain) (www.oxfamintermon.org)

Oxfam Ireland (www.oxfamireland.org)

Oxfam Italy (www.oxfamitalia.org)

Oxfam Mexico (www.oxfammexico.org)

Oxfam Novib (Netherlands) (www.oxfamnovib.nl)

Oxfam Québec (www.oxfam.qc.ca)

Oxfam South Africa (www.oxfam.org.za)

Oxfam KEDV (www.kedv.org.tr)

Oxfam Pilipinas (www.oxfam.org.ph)