UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
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# TOWARD NEW POLICIES FOR THE CLIMATE CHANGE AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM NEXUS IN AFRICA

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been increasing focus on addressing interlinkages between climate change and armed conflict. Tackling climate-related security risks represents a core part of new generation development solutions positing cross-cutting approaches to the nexus – oriented policy and programming on climate change, conflict prevention and sustaining peace. [1] In the *UNDP Africa Renewed Strategic Offer in Africa* climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as peace and security are highlighted as strategic impact areas. [2] The interlinkages between climate change and violent conflict are still not well-understood and the pathways for risk manifestation are highly contextual. Therefore, this policy brief offers new insights into the nexus of climate change and violent extremism in Africa, applying a case study approach that examines links between climate change and violent extremism; assesses prevention and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) approaches, particularly based on climate security perspectives; and provides recommendations to facilitate improved policies and practice. This desk-based research draws upon literature regarding climate security, violent extremism, and intrastate conflict in relation to evidence from cases in the Central Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, Mozambique, and Somalia. The findings also draw from interviews held during November-December 2020.

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# CLIMATE CHANGE IN AFRICA

The African Union *Agenda 2063* recognizes climate change as a major challenge for the continent's development. [3] According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) State of Climate in Africa (2019), the continent continues to experience warming temperatures, rising sea levels and impacts associated with extreme weather and climate events. This is within a continuum of rapidly rising longer-term climate-related risks associated with global warming. Africa is an exposure and vulnerability "hot spot" for climate and socio-economic variability and climate change impacts. [4] The impacts of climate change are not uniform and there can be significant regional differentiation. For example, 2019 marked average temperatures in Africa that were among the three highest years on record, there were two major tropical cyclones and a significant drought in Southern Africa, there was a shift from drought to floods and locust swarms in the Horn of Africa, and there were floods in the Sahel. [5] Climate change can heighten and have adverse impacts on drivers of armed conflict and insecurity.

Despite being responsible for only 4% of the global annual carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions causing climate change, Africa is particularly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. [6] Dependence upon primary commodities, especially agriculture, and a relative lack of economic diversification expose the continent to considerable risks associated with climate change, particularly regarding livelihoods and food security. Africa also has less resources for adaptive capacity than other continents, thus increasing the difficulty of responding to climate change. [7] The African continent also accounts for nearly three-quarters of the countries with the highest level of compound state fragility-climate exposure risk. [8]

Source: UNDP Chad, Lake Chad, Aurelia Rusk

> The African continent accounts for nearly three-quarters of the countries with the highest level of compound state fragility-climate exposure risk.

# CLIMATE CHANGE AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN AFRICA

This section examines potential links between climate change (broadly defined to include increased climate variability and change including extreme weather events) and violent extremism in Africa (see figure 1 below), assessing if climate change contributed to the formation of violent extremist groups in the Central Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, Mozambique, and Somalia. The analysis of these four cases continues through exploring if there may be indirect links between grievances related to climate change – food and water insecurity, unemployment, loss of agricultural livelihoods (which particularly impacts women), [9] migration and displacement, and natural resource scarcity – and recruitment or other forms of support for violent extremist groups. [10] How climate change may have indirectly influenced the viability of violent extremist groups through its impact on state fragility, core-periphery development, border management, and insurgent financing is also considered. [11] The climate security literature refers to the indirect impact of climate change as a "risk multiplier" or a "threat multiplier", increasing risk of tensions and insecurity. [12]

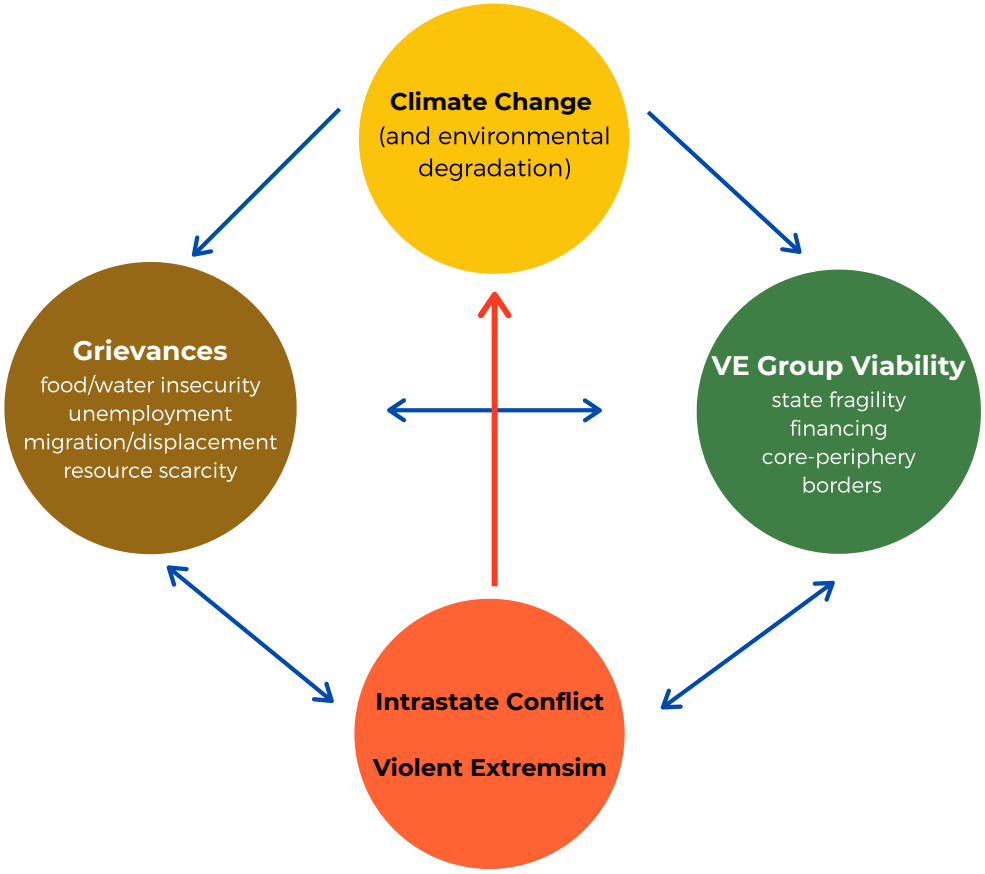


Figure 1: Potential indirect links - through impacting grievances and the viability of violent extremist groups - between climate change and violent extremism in Africa

Climate change does not directly cause armed conflict. [13] The lack of a direct causal link with climate change also applies to violent extremism, which for analytical purposes can be considered a subset of armed conflict to the extent that violent extremist groups function as insurgencies. [14] Low levels of trust in the police, politicians, and military combined with government action such as the killing or arrest of a family member or friend are the most significant variables for explaining why people join violent extremist groups in Africa according to the 2017 UNDP study, the *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment*. [15] This seems to be consistent with the cases covered in this policy brief. In the Central Sahel, real or perceived state abuse has been the most important push factor for joining violent extremist groups. [16] The catalyst for the transformation of Boko Haram from non-violence to insurgency was the killing of 800 members by Nigerian security forces and subsequent death of their leader in police custody in July 2009. [17] The transformation of Al-Shabaab from being the youth militia of the Islamic Courts Union into an insurgency can be traced to the invasion of Somalia by Ethiopia in December 2006. [18] Lastly, while the origins of the violent extremist group based in the Cabo Delgado province of Mozambique remain somewhat ambiguous, the timing of its initial confirmed activity in October 2017 pre-dates the tropical cyclones of March-April 2019. [19]

The Central Sahel – particularly the Liptako Gourma region at the intersection of the Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger borders – is often cited as a prototypical region where climate change has exacerbated resource scarcity and migration, thus increasing risks of violent extremism. While this narrative may be true in some instances, the reality is more nuanced. Conflicts between agriculturalists and pastoralists have been exacerbated by national policies prioritizing the former over the latter, rather than to the assumed impact of climate change *per se*. [20] While climate change can increase desertification, the available evidence indicates increased rainfall and greening in the Sahel since the droughts of the 1980s, which is inconsistent with assumptions regarding the impact of climate change on contemporary conflicts. [21] Nor are farmer-herder conflicts necessarily caused by competition over increasingly scarce resources; they may also relate to access to newly available resources, such as water or land. [22] Nonetheless, a conflict-induced breakdown of customary arrangements for shared use coupled with state in capacity to regulate access to resources and mediate between groups is a critical variable for intercommunal conflict, which can provide an opening for violent extremist groups functioning as "antagonists, mediators or suppressors of violence" depending on the context. [23] To the extent that violent extremist groups can be more effective than the state at imposing law and order, including mediating disputes over natural resources, they gain legitimacy and support. [24]

The Lake Chad Basin is another region which is often cited as a case of climate change-induced conflict, indirectly causing violent extremism by Boko Haram and its offshoot Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). However, a closer look reveals a more complicated picture. There is not a linear relationship between the shrinking of Lake Chad since the 1960s, as a result of climate change and catchment degradation, [25] and levels of violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin since 2009. In terms of climate-related risk, it is the uncertainty regarding the ability to predict the scale, intensity and impact of future climate patterns that matter most. [26] According to the 2018 Adelphi report on *Climate-Fragility Profile: Lake Chad Basin*, there is a "self-enforcing feedback loop" of conflict-induced community vulnerability and lack of climate adaptation capacity, increasing conflicts over natural resources such as land and water, and recruitment into violent extremist groups due to livelihood insecurity and financial incentives. [27] ISWAP has been particularly effective at forming a reciprocal relationship with host communities – which includes taxation of fishing, cattle rearing, and trade in exchange for delivery of services – that ensures the group's economic viability and ability to finance new recruitment. [28] Lastly, it should be noted that these violent extremist groups are operating in areas that are not only on the periphery with respect to each of the countries bordering Lake Chad (Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria) but that are also at the intersection of their borders (similar to Liptako-Gourma region). [29] To the extent that climate change matters, its impact may be strongest in peripheral areas where border closures have increased competition over resources and state authority is already weak.

In Mozambique, there appears to be a connection between the tropical cyclones Idai (March 2019) and Kenneth (April 2019) and an intensification of the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) insurgency, which has been active in the northern province of Cabo Delgado since October 2017. [30] Cyclone Kenneth directly impacted northern Mozambique and rendered many people without adequate shelter and food insecure. This damage was compounded by heavy rains and floods from October 2019 to February 2020. [31] While there was an influx of international humanitarian aid actors into Cabo Delgado in the aftermath of Kenneth, the state response in terms of relief and reconstruction has been insufficient in a poor province with already very limited government services. [32] A comparison of the time period up to and during the cyclones (October 2017-April 2019) with that after the cyclones (May 2019-November 2020) indicates a sharp increase in fatal incidents (4.25 to 18 per month) and conflict-related fatalities (15 to 110 per month) in Cabo Delgado. [33] While this correlation is not proof of a causal relationship between the cyclones and conflict intensification, the increased scale and frequency of attacks as well as casualties sustained by ISCAP could suggest that the violent extremist group most likely increased recruitment post-Kenneth. [34] The cyclone may have thus functioned as a catalyst for a combination of threatened livelihoods, increased vulnerability, and frustrated expectations regarding the state's humanitarian response. An emerging sense of socio-economic injustice may have also been amplified by the ongoing multi-billion-dollar development of substantial offshore natural gas reserves, whose benefits have not accrued to local communities. [35]

While climate change has likely had an impact on patterns of small-scale, local, and intercommunal conflict in Somalia, understanding its potential connections with large-scale intrastate conflict and violent extremism requires analysis of Al-Shabaab as a strategic actor. According to a comprehensive review of how climate change affects violent conflict in East Africa, the authors identify five pathways, with the last being most significant for the purposes of this policy brief: worsening livelihood conditions, increasing migration, changing pastoral mobility patterns, elite exploitation of local grievances, and tactical considerations by armed groups. [36] Within this context, Al-Shabaab has proven prone to form instrumental alliances with marginalized sub-clans, including those that may have been disadvantaged by the impact of climate change. This typically takes the form of a reciprocal relationship with a host community, such as providing access to water and land in exchange for recruits. To the extent that climate change may also exacerbate land disputes in the absence of state authority, this has provided further opportunities for Al-Shabaab to intervene, increasing their legitimacy and sustainability. [37] Al-Shabaab's approach to extreme weather events in Somalia, such as the droughts in 2011 and 2017, has shown a strategic evolution from deliberately restricting food access, which caused widespread famine and backfired on the violent extremist group, to instrumentally providing food assistance. [38]

The illicit trade in charcoal from Somalia, which further demonstrates Al-Shabaab's capacity for tactical flexibility, represents a prototypical case of intrastate conflict causing environmental degradation. Charcoal exports, which had been banned since 1969 under domestic law prior to state collapse in 1991, became an increasingly important source of financing in Somalia's war economy. Intending to reduce Al-Shabaab financing, the United Nations Security Council banned the export of charcoal from Somalia in 2012 with resolution 2036. [39] Despite this, Al-Shabaab was estimated to derive $7.5-10 million per year as of 2017-2018 from the illicit export of charcoal, principally through the taxation of trucks in transit between production sites and port stockpiles. [40] However, in a tactical shift intended to cut off financing to its rival, the regional Federal Member State Jubaland, which was also dependent upon revenue from illicit charcoal exports, Al-Shabaab had temporarily banned cutting down trees in areas under its control during 2015-2016. [41] Nonetheless, deforestation in southern Somalia, which has been driven principally by illicit charcoal exports rather than legal domestic charcoal consumption, totaled 10%-18% during 2011-2017, as an estimated eight million acacia trees were cut down to produce 16 million bags of charcoal. [42] There remains a risk of a self-perpetuating cycle of conflict and environmental degradation, which is however analytically distinct from climate change as a key factor influencing conflict dynamics.

Some tentative conclusions can be drawn from the preceding analysis. First, climate change did not directly cause violent extremism in any of the four cases but functioned as a risk or threat multiplier in some instances, consistent with the literature on this topic. Second, as indicated in the Central Sahel and Lake Chad Basin, the assumed effects of climate change on violent extremist dynamics may have been over-emphasized to the detriment of other driving factors; and as explained in the former case, nor are conflict patterns necessarily consistent with the presumed fundamental role of natural resource scarcity. Climate change, however, can contribute as a driving factor to influence armed groups in their strategic decisions on recruitment and tactics. Third, as shown by cyclones in Mozambique and drought in Somalia, extreme weather events may function as a catalyst for exacerbating state illegitimacy and can be strategically instrumentalized by violent extremist groups. [43] Lastly, as all four cases indicate, violent extremist groups are strategic actors whose viability is mainly determined by state weakness, insurgent financing, core-periphery patterns of development, and border regions. To the extent that grievances caused by climate change do have an impact upon violent extremism in Africa, it is principally within this context.

# CLIMATE SECURITY, COUNTER TERRORISM, AND P/CVE IN AFRICA

The following paragraphs concern state, regional, and international responses to violent extremism in the Central Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, Mozambique, and Somalia. This includes military approaches to counter-terrorism, which are assessed in the contexts of the Lake Chad Basin, Mozambique, and Somalia but are not a focus of the analysis regarding the Central Sahel where the examples mainly concern national authorities. [44] This section also considers development initiatives, particularly those that were evidently based upon a climate security perspective, but it does not cover approaches to PVE explicitly based upon a climate security lens as this has not yet been well established as an area of practice. [45]

In the Central Sahel, state efforts regarding climate change, farmer-herder conflicts, and violent extremism have often been counter-productive and plagued by unintended consequences. For example, an operation to support Fulani herders though drilling new wells in the Mopti region of central Mali had the unintended consequence of attracting new Dogon farmers to the area and exacerbating tensions between herders and farmers. These disputes over water reserves have been interrelated with fresh violence between self-defense groups and violent extremist groups. [46] Similarly, an effort to improve rice production in the Soum province of Burkina Faso attracted non-native farmers from the Fulsé and Mossi ethnic groups, who then clashed with local Fulani landowners who perceived they were pushed off their land without adequate compensation. The local Fulani population was then recruited by violent extremist groups offering to restore access to the land. [47] Recruitment by violent extremist groups has also been provoked through rent-seeking and the harassment of Fulani pastoralists by state actors, such as the Forest Service in Mali, whose purpose should be environmental protection. [48] Likewise, tensions between local communities and the government regarding the enforcement of land use policies in eastern Burkina Faso have provided an opening for violent extremist groups who portray themselves as a more ecologically permissive alternative to the state, attacking water and forestry agents and collaborating in deforestation and poaching for their own economic benefit. [49]

In the Lake Chad Basin, state and regional responses to Boko Haram and ISWAP have evolved from a heavy-handed counter-terrorism approach to planning for regional development. In addition to human rights violations during counter-insurgency operations by national contingents and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), the use of states of emergency, including certain restrictions on movement and economic activity, created resentment and undermined livelihoods. [50] Border closures, initially for security reasons and subsequently in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, have also had the unintended consequence of exacerbating competition for land and increasing intercommunal farmer-herder conflicts. [51] Nonetheless, with the joint adoption of a Regional Stabilization Strategy by the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the African Union Commission in August 2018, there has also been a realization on the need for development to complement security. [52] The Inter Basin Water Transfer project, a 2,400 km canal from the Ubangi river in the Democratic Republic of Congo to Lake Chad estimated at a cost of $50 billion, is Nigeria's proposed solution. However, it is based on a false premise regarding links between a shrinking Lake Chad and violent extremism, it would pose substantial risks regarding state corruption and insurgent financing, and it would obscure accountability for governance failures. [53]

The government of Mozambique's response to the threat posed by ISCAP, which thus far has been predominantly focused on security to the exclusion of development, has been ineffective. Overall, attacks by ISCAP and government forces have significantly affected civilians, with civilian targeting accounting for more than half of the total fatalities attributed to organized violence events in Cabo Delgado from October 2017 to November 2020. [54] Part of the problem has been that the security forces (i.e. police, rapid intervention unit, and army) have lacked the required operational capacity (i.e. training, equipment, logistics, command and control) to deter and respond to ISCAP attacks. [55] The security forces have also been alleged to be involved in extrajudicial killings, disappearances, arbitrary detention, and torture; counter-terrorism operations have thus been self-defeating in terms of how civilians perceive state legitimacy. [56] The government has belatedly started to address the assumed underlying causes for violent extremism in Cabo Delgado with the recent creation of the Agency for Integrated Northern Development (ADIN). [57] However, there are also risks that donor financing channeled through the state could exacerbate corruption and that an influx of new development projects would represent a fresh target for extortion by ISCAP.

In the midst of an ongoing, large-scale intrastate conflict in Somalia, efforts to incorporate a climate security perspective face difficulties posed by the realities of Somalia's war economy and further risk being overshadowed by the environmental failures of counter-terrorism forces. [58] One initiative that may help negotiate this difficult terrain has been the precedent-setting inclusion of an environmental advisor within the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM). [59] As for military approaches, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was initially instrumental in capturing the port of Baraawe from Al-Shabaab in October 2014, thus curtailing Al-Shabaab's ability to directly export charcoal. [60] However, subsequent corruption and complicity in the illicit charcoal trade have facilitated Al-Shabaab financing and undermined counter-terrorism efforts. [61] As the rate of deforestation has been driven much more by illicit charcoal exports than by domestic consumption, progress toward effectively implementing useful natural resource management initiatives such as the Programme for Sustainable Charcoal Reduction and Alternative Livelihoods (PROSCAL) – a collaboration among FAO, UNDP, and UNEP with the Federal Government of Somalia – ultimately remains contingent upon consistent enforcement of the charcoal export ban. [62] Perhaps most fundamentally, progress toward P/CVE in Somalia requires tackling insurgent financing which remains integral to Al-Shabaab's viability.

The preceding analysis suggests the following conclusions regarding efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism. First, as outlined regarding the Lake Chad Basin and Mozambique, human rights violations by military forces coupled with restrictions on freedom of movement and economic activity are counterproductive as they drive recruitment for violent extremist groups. Second, as most evident with respect to AMISOM in Somalia, war profiteering by military forces may be linked not only to financing violent extremist groups but also to environmental degradation. Third, as most clearly shown in the Central Sahel, development policies intended to mitigate natural resource scarcity risk unintended consequences, including provoking armed conflict; while extortionary and arbitrary enforcement of environmental conservation policies pose similar risks. Fourth, as mentioned regarding the Lake Chad Basin, Mozambique, and Somalia, infrastructure projects within a context of large-scale intrastate conflict, including those intended to adapt to climate change, risk exacerbating state corruption and insurgent financing. Fifth, all four cases emphasize the centrality of governance for preventing and countering violent extremism. Finally, these cases also underline the importance of integrated conflict and climate sensitive mitigation policies to address the drivers of fragility and build resilience along the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus. While noting the impact of climate change, it is important to comprehensively analyze the push and pull factors for violent extremism in order to identify appropriate entry points for integrating a climate lens within programming.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The ten recommendations below regarding climate change and violent extremism in Africa are intended to provide guidance to the following: national governments and development actors; prevention of violent extremism practitioners; national, regional, and international forces; United Nations peace operations; and researchers.

## National Governments & Development Actors

- Recognize that governance is the most critical variable determining whether climate change risks translate into intrastate conflict and violent extremism. In addition to incorporating a long-term perspective on national climate change adaptation, state-building should geographically extend state authority and mitigate core-periphery patterns of development.
- Ensure that climate change interventions in fragile and conflict affected contexts are conflict-sensitive, particularly with respect to anticipating the unintended consequences of development programs which could escalate and/or perpetuate conflict, including through indirectly providing new sources of financing for violent extremist groups.
- Assumptions that intrastate conflict and violent extremism are largely caused by an external factor, such as climate change, risk obfuscating other domestic causes which may be more relevant. Policymakers should also be aware that this can impede national political accountability.

## Prevention of Violent Extremism Practitioners

- Through coordination with climate actors and a targeted focus on the evolving needs of local communities, especially in high climate exposure contexts, development programs could build community resilience to the impact of climate change, particularly for marginalized groups. This could facilitate the prevention of violent extremism and reduce financing opportunities for violent extremist groups.
- In terms of unit and level of analysis, more focus should be on violent extremist groups as strategic actors, including how they instrumentalize extreme weather events. Policymaking should also recognize that factors such as state weakness, insurgent financing, core-periphery development, and border areas determine the viability of violent extremist groups.

## National, Regional, International Forces

- Counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, and peacekeeping deployments should 'do no harm' with respect to the environment and the components of climate change adaptation; and where mandates permit, military and security forces should enforce UN sanctions and domestic laws consistent with protecting the environment. Enforcement should be neither extortionary nor arbitrary, which risks exacerbating grievances.
- Efforts to inhibit the financing and operations of violent extremist groups, such as restrictions on economic activity and freedom of movement, should also consider the livelihoods of civilian populations or they may exacerbate the potential adverse impacts of climate change, create a backlash against the authorities, and increase support for violent extremist groups.

## United Nations Peace Operations

- The · UN Secretariat should incorporate climate security analysis within Technical Assessment Missions for peace operations; and UN Security Council resolutions should address relevant climate security issues through peace operation mandates and staffing (e.g. UNSOM).
- Addressing climate security challenges, including in regard to violent extremism, requires a nuanced understanding of each unique conflict, especially at the local level. The UN should prioritize engaging sub-nationally, making better use of local knowledge, partnering with domestic peacebuilders as appropriate, and supporting mediation of intercommunal violence.

## Researchers

- Further research should help to better identify specific causal mechanisms and contexts for how, when, and where climate change may function as a threat multiplier or risk multiplier for violent extremism. This should include comparative studies of countries that experienced similar climate change effects but had different outcomes in terms of violent extremism.

# CONCLUSION

Source: UNDP Mozambique, Brenda Hadak

Climate change is real, and there may be long-term risks in relation to violent extremism in Africa, but we need to know more about how these connections work in order to have a more strategic and informed engagement.

Through reference to the Central Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, Mozambique, and Somalia, this policy brief has examined the potential links between climate change and violent extremism and further analyzed approaches to countering and preventing violent extremism, particularly those that are based on a climate security perspective. To the extent that grievances caused by climate change influence violent extremism, they are best assessed within a contextualized analytical framework that also incorporates the impact of climate change on the viability of violent extremist groups. Thus far, approaches to countering violent extremism premised upon assumptions regarding the impact of climate change have risked causing unintended consequences and obscuring governance failures. However, this is not to suggest that one should not take into account climate change as a variable influencing violent extremism but rather that there is room for improvement in taking an integrated approach to conflict analyses, policymaking, and programming. Climate change is real, and there may be long-term risks in relation to violent extremism in Africa, but we need to know more about how these connections work in order to have a more strategic and informed engagement.

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