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UN study reveals impact of climate change in livelihoods in Sahel and West Africa



The relationship between climate change, migration and conflict in the Sahel region remains complex

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Climate change is already having an impact in the livelihoods of millions of people in the Sahel and West Africa, according to a new United Nations study released today, which calls for governments to implement policies that will prevent competition for resources, conflict and forced migration in the region.

The study, released during the UN climate change conference in Durban, South Africa, provides new evidence revealing how changing climatic conditions are having an impact on the natural resources available in 17 West African countries.

This change, combined with population growth and weak governance has led to greater competition over scarce resources and changing migration patterns, increasing the risk of conflict.

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“This analysis underlines how competition between communities for scarce resources, especially land, water and forests, is already a reality in West Africa,” [said](#) UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner. “Regional cooperation will be key to diffusing tensions, managing down the risks and curtailing the possibilities of increased conflict and environmentally-induced migration.”

The study calls for more investments in climate change adaptation policies to prevent conflict in the region, adding pressure on governments to reach a new international climate agreement in Durban, where thousands of representatives from governments, international organizations and civil society are meeting to advance ways to cut global carbon emissions and pollution.

The study, *[Livelihood Security: Climate Change, Migration and Conflict in the Sahel](#)*, identifies ‘hotspots’ with changing temperature trends over the past 40 years which have caused severe flooding and droughts, significantly altering people’s livelihoods. Many of these hotspots are in the central part of the Sahel, in Niger, Burkina Faso, northern and coastal Ghana, as well as northern Togo, Benin and Nigeria.

According to the study, the visible consequences of climate change include increased competition for freshwater and land among fishermen and farmers which has led to tensions and conflict, the destruction of crops due to droughts which has forced farmers to migrate and has led to an increase in food prices, and population displacement paired with cattle and crop losses due to floods.

In particular, the study states that areas where there is conflict such as Chad and northern Niger are more vulnerable to the effects of changing climatic conditions, compared to more politically stable areas.

The study recommends implementing adaptation policies that take into account migration and conflict patterns and that promote livelihood alternatives to reduce the population’s vulnerability to climate change, as well as increasing regional cooperation and boosting sustainable farming practices.

Mr. Steiner said the study spotlights “the urgent need for scaled-up investments in adaptation, moving forward on the Green Fund and supportive measures such as reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation as well as realizing the climate finance of \$100 billion a year by 2020.”

The study is the result of a joint effort by the UN Environment Programme ([UNEP](#)), the UN office of the Coordination and Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)), UN University (UNU), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the permanent Interstate Committee for

Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), with technical input from the University of Salzburg's Centre for Geoinformatics.

Climate change adaptation policies have gained increasing attention at Durban. Yesterday, the ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, an international association of local governments committed to sustainable development, signed the Durban Climate Change Adaptation Charter for Local Government.

The charter calls upon local, sub-nation and regional governments to accelerate their adaptation efforts by committing to a series of measures, including conducting impact and vulnerability assessments, aligning with mitigation strategies, creating partnerships, and incorporating adaptation in local government planning.

Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, Margareta Wahlström called it “the best possible start to a critical week in the life of this planet,” and said it was “encouraging to see city mayors and local governments forging ahead and agreeing to mainstream adaptation in local government development planning.”

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