

Integrating climate change into peacebuilding

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Abstract Peacebuilding countries are concentrated in areas of heightened vulnerability to climate change impacts, and almost certainly lack the capacity to manage these impacts. In spite of this overlap, climate change adaptation and mitigation projects are typically excluded from peacebuilding activities. This is particularly alarming given that many analysts believe climate change will trigger, amplify or perpetuate humanitarian crises, population displacement, political extremism and violent conflict in the regions in which most peacebuilding operations take place. This paper investigates opportunities for integrating climate change into peacebuilding. It identifies three obstacles to this integration—the lack of climate change tools and policies that can be easily introduced into typical peacebuilding programming; the skepticism and complacency of the donor community; and tensions between the objectives and timeframes of peacebuilding and those of climate change response. The paper then examines opportunities to integrate climate change into four principal programmatic areas of peacebuilding—socio-economic recovery, politics and governance, security and rule of law, and human rights—and concludes that more attention needs to be given to these opportunities in order to build resilience and reduce the likelihood of more daunting and costly challenges in the future.

1 Introduction¹

In 1992, the United Nations (UN) initiated two multilateral processes targeting two daunting global challenges that threaten the dignity, livelihoods and security of individuals and communities across the planet. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), negotiated at the Rio Earth Summit, focused on fair and effective ways to reduce human impact on the world's climate system, and to manage the adverse social effects of climate change. Almost simultaneously, UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali published *An Agenda for Peace* (UNSG 1992), which introduced a new post Cold War paradigm for peacebuilding. Over the past two decades,

¹ Jamie Agius worked as the research assistant on this paper and made a range of important contributions.

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both processes have become institutionalized, accreting resources, and developing technical expertise and field experience.

One highly visible element of these activities is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which regularly reviews and synthesizes climate science. In its 2007 report, the IPCC emphasized the high sensitivity to climate change impacts of parts of South Asia, the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa (IPCC 2007). These regions are more sensitive than other regions of the world because of geography, poverty, inadequate infrastructure and fragile governance institutions. While unable to invest substantial resources into prevention, adaptation and response, countries in these areas face the prospect of being exposed to more droughts, floods, storms and heat waves than other parts of the planet. Many analysts conclude that under these conditions, climate change will trigger, amplify or perpetuate humanitarian crises, population displacement, political extremism and violent conflict.

Currently (2013) 11 of 12 UN Department of Political Affairs Field Operations and Good Offices Missions are located in Africa or the Middle East. All UN Peacebuilding Commission programs are in African countries, as are the bulk of UN Peacebuilding Fund projects. Since 1948, about two-thirds of all peacekeeping operations have been in Africa, the Middle East or South Asia. At first blush, it might seem obvious that the two processes should be carefully and fully integrated. After all, peacebuilding countries are concentrated in areas of heightened vulnerability to climate change impacts, and almost certainly these countries lack the capacity to manage these impacts.

In fact, climate change adaptation and mitigation are typically excluded from peacebuilding activities. In the following pages, I will provide brief an overview of peacebuilding, argue that some level of integration with climate change adaptation and mitigation is important, offer an explanation for why these have not been integrated yet, and make some suggestions about how to encourage this integration.

2 Peacebuilding

Since the 1992 publication of *An Agenda for Peace*, the concept of peacebuilding has attracted considerable support and criticism. Language poses a significant problem here, because there are no simple criteria universally accepted for identifying a program as peacebuilding per se. Certainly many, if not all, of the approximately 40 major peace related initiatives (typically catalogued as peacekeeping operations) that the UN has managed since 1992 would qualify, because peacebuilding is generally regarded as fairly broad and inclusive.

UN documentation is the obvious starting point for defining peacebuilding (United Nations 2001, 2006; UNDP 1994, 1997; UNGA 2009). This documentation culminates with a statement from the UN Secretary General's Policy Committee in 2007: "Peacebuilding involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding strategies must be coherent and tailored to specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritized, sequenced, and therefore relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives." ([Peacebuilding Initiative website](#))

Several scholars have reviewed the evolution of the term and its relationship to other terms such as conflict prevention, peacekeeping and post conflict stability (e.g. Barnett et al. 2007; De Coning 2008). De Coning concludes that, "Whilst there is no single common

definition, approach or model for peacebuilding that is widely accepted, there are some common characteristics that have emerged over the last decade and a half of peacebuilding practice” (2008, 48). De Coning identifies four such characteristics: “the focus on consolidating peace, interdependence, multidimensionality and time perspectives” (2008, 51). The first refers to the overarching goal of securing or consolidating peace, which also lays the foundation for thinking of peacebuilding as a form of conflict prevention and hence as programming that does not have to be limited to post-conflict contexts. By interdependence de Coning means that while UN agencies, humanitarian organizations, foreign governments and other actors might all undertake independent projects intended to contribute to peacebuilding in a given country, there is growing recognition that success requires that these work together in some way. Often this coordinating function falls onto the national government together with the mission-based Executive Representative of the Secretary General.

The concept of multidimensionality has received a fair amount of academic attention. For example, the 2004 Utstein study carried out by the Peace Research Institute of Oslo analyzed 336 peacebuilding projects funded over a ten-year period by Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom (Smith 2004). The authors deconstructed peacebuilding into four mutually reinforcing programmatic areas. This conceptualization has been reiterated by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2008, and in a variety of UN documents (e.g. UNEP 2009). These four areas are (1) social, economic, and environmental; (2) governance and political; (3) security; and (4) truth and reconciliation. Barnett et al. arrive at a similar conclusion, identifying stability creation, restoration of state institutions and socio-economic recovery (2007, 49). De Coning (2008, 47) offers another compatible framework, identifying:

- Security and rule of law
- Politics and governance
- Socio-economic recovery
- Human rights

Finally, de Coning’s fourth characteristic, the time element, has two parts: the widespread recognition that peacebuilding is and must be a long-term process; and the pragmatic understanding that measurable impacts have to be achieved very quickly because there are urgent needs that have to be met, and because these metrics are critical in order to maintain donor interest and support.

Based on the UN’s current thinking about peacebuilding as capacity building for state and society, this probably should be added as a fifth characteristic. Peacebuilding is not about repairing all of the damage caused by war, or addressing all of the root causes of violent conflict. Rather, it is about identifying and delivering the technical and non-technical capacities that a country lacks and that are needed as the platform for recovery, stability and sustainable development.

In short, over the past two decades peacebuilding has evolved into concepts and operations that have a number of key features. But is it successful in achieving its primary goals? Ironically, given how important peacebuilding is, it lacks straightforward protocols for program evaluation. This is partly understandable—the early efforts like Cambodia, Rwanda and Liberia in the 1990s tended to be quite short with simple objectives like holding elections—and are generally seen as unsuccessful. In these cases, for example, Hun Sen quickly took over Cambodia; Rwanda collapsed into genocide while UN peacekeepers were held in check by the Secretary General and was then taken over by Paul

Kagame, after he marched in from Uganda and stopped the violence; and Charles Taylor became a regional warlord almost as the UN mission was packing up. But through these experiences many lessons were learned, and the UN began to redefine peacebuilding in the 2000s. Efforts in places like Sierra Leone and East Timor were far more comprehensive and long-lasting. But in all of these cases, even the later ones, there are ample grounds for declaring failure as readily as success.

The mixed record of peacebuilding has triggered at least two types of criticism (Berdal 2009; Call and Cousens 2008; Chetail 2009; Doyle and Sambanis 2006; Fortna 2008; Howard 2008; Tschirgi 2004). One has to do with resources—the resources available to build capacity in a country that has experienced enormous human suffering and billions of dollars of material damage during perhaps a decade or more of violent conflict are rarely regarded by practitioners as sufficient.² Efforts fail, donor priorities shift, programs cost more than budgeted—the litany of constraints are easy to imagine, universal in application, and extremely difficult to overcome. To illustrate: peacekeeping consumes the largest amount of peace-related resources. In 2013, the UN's peacekeeping budget was \$7.33 billion for operations in 16 countries. As the UN notes on its website, "By way of comparison, this is less than half of 1 % of world military expenditures (estimated at \$1,738 billion in 2011)" (United Nations 2013). The amount is staggeringly small.

A second critique comes from those who tend to see peacebuilding as excessively reliant on Western institutions and practices that are themselves hard-pressed to manage their own economies, provide adequate health care and education to their own citizens, rebuild their own crumbling infrastructures and tackle the complex challenges they have largely created like climate change. Chandler (1999) and Chopra (2000) have argued that peacebuilding operations are too Westernized and actually last too long—they need more local content and control to succeed, and the foreign experts should only be in place for short periods of time. Even stronger critiques have come from analysts who regard peacebuilding as a form of imperialism, as Western powers organizing elections, investing into the natural resource sector, training foreign police forces and militaries, and essentially recolonizing war-torn societies with their own institutions, values and people (Bendaña 2005; Pugh 2008).

Like the UNFCCC process, peacebuilding tackles an important issue but is subject to very compelling criticisms.

3 Linking climate change and peacebuilding

At the outset of this paper, I suggested that the large overlap between countries with heightened vulnerability to climate change effects and countries coming out of war provides a *prima facie* case for suggesting that integrating climate change adaptation and mitigation into peacebuilding operations might be an important thing to do. Indeed, as indicated in Fig. 1, prepared by Marc Levy, disaster and conflict often go hand in hand. In fact, in 60 years of peacebuilding operations in 49 countries, in only one case (Kosovo) were there no natural disasters.

But there is another way to think about this linkage that deserves to be discussed—the idea that climate change could in fact be a driver of security problems like violent conflict (Welzer 2012; overviews in Floyd and Matthew 2012; Matthew et al. 2009) Insofar as this is

² Statements about practitioner views throughout this article are based on data collected through direct field observation when the author was a participant-observer on peacebuilding missions in Rwanda and Sierra Leone. This data was gathered on a not for attribution basis.

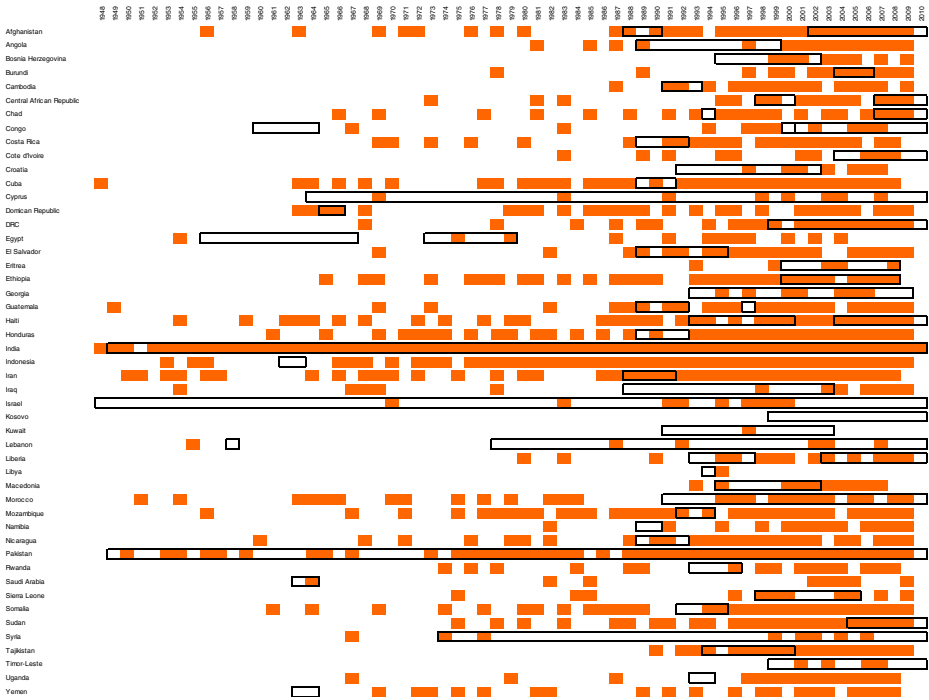


Fig. 1 Natural disasters (*shaded*) and peacebuilding (this figure was prepared by Levy M (April 3, 2012, Personal communication))

true, one would want to be especially attentive to climate stress in countries coming out of war.

Much of this writing is popular and speculative. In 2006, for example, Sir Nicholas Stern suggested that security issues might arise if large numbers of people were displaced permanently by the rising sea levels, massive flooding, and extended droughts predicted by climate science. Stern’s concerns were reiterated by many other analysts as they processed the implications of the 2007 IPCC reports through the lens of national security. In the U.S., for example, CNA released *National Security and the Threat of Climate Change*, a document that imagined a future in which “climate change acts as a threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world” and adds “to tensions even in stable regions of the world” (2007, 6–7). In Europe, the German Advisory Council on Global Change issued *World in Transition: Climate Change as a Security Risk*. Its authors bleakly predicted “Climate change will overstretch many societies’ adaptive capacities within the coming decades” (2008, 1). Dan Smith and Janna Vivekananda of International Alert claimed that there are “46 countries—home to 2.7 billion people—in which the effects of climate change interacting with economic, social and political problems will create a high risk of violent conflict” (2007, 3). In a recent Harvard University report, funded by the Central Intelligence Agency and entitled *Climate Extremes: Recent Trends with Implications for National Security*, (2012) conducted a careful assessment of past research. They agreed that climate change is likely to cause considerable social upheaval in the next few years.

These early arguments laid the foundations for some policy action. For example, prior to the start of its most recent term on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Germany

declared that it would work towards having climate change accepted within the UNSC. In 2009, the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) Ban Ki Moon released “Climate Change and Its Possible Security Implications.” This report identified five ways in which climate change may be linked to international security: by increasing human vulnerability to things like water and food insecurity; obstructing and undermining economic development; increasing the risk of violent conflict; displacing large numbers of people or posing an existential threat to some states, such as those that could literally disappear under sea level rise; and contributing to international tensions by overwhelming bilateral and multilateral forms of cooperation in areas such as shared water basins. Similarly in the U.S., the *2010 National Security Strategy* explicitly identifies climate change as an important security threat. This view was endorsed in the *2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, which foresees the possibility of climate change induced global conflict. However, whether there is much empirical support for arguments linking climate change to conflict and national security is a controversial topic in the academic literature (see Benjaminsen et al. 2012; Gartzke 2012; Slettebak 2012).

From these studies one might conclude that isolating climate change as a driver of violent conflict and other security issues is not easy, although it likely plays some role. The historical record is unclear, but the salience of the historical record is also unclear. Imperfect as the research is, a prudential conclusion would be that some attention to climate change makes sense in the set of peacebuilding countries. But even if climate impacts do not play out through violent conflict, there are at least two other reasons why it might be desirable. One reason is to build capacity for assessing, preventing and responding to other possible adverse climate change effects such as disaster, displacement, economic constraints and public health setbacks. A second reason is to position the peacebuilding country to participate in climate change meetings, negotiations and funding opportunities such as Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), REDD+ and REDD++.³

4 The challenge of integrating climate change programming into peacebuilding

Given that these two processes emerged at the same time, have matured in the same organization, and largely regard the same countries as their priority cases, why has there not been any systematic and sophisticated integration of them? There is an obvious answer to this question. There is no process or structure or vision that would support this integration. Consider the four sectors for capacity building identified by de Coning: security and rule of law, politics and governance, socio-economic recovery, and human rights. These are populated with ideas, values, processes and institutions derived from local practices or informed by Western practices. Climate change adaptation (CCA) and mitigation (CCM) are generally not part of either of these feedstocks. So, when programs are designed to build capacity for a central bank or a public health ministry or a newspaper or a youth employment center, the available models typically do not have a meaningful climate dimension to them.

³ REDD, which originated in 2005, seeks to protect forests. Since that time, elaborations have evolved: REDD+ in 2007 focused on ensuring that local communities and indigenous people were not hurt by sustainable forest management and conservation practices; in 2009 REDD++ emerged to protect low carbon, high biodiversity lands from being transformed into agricultural lands because of REDD protecting other areas from conversion.

Unfortunately, the UNFCCC process has not delivered tools or systems that can be readily fit into any of these sorts of projects or programs.

Imagine experts designing a new central bank because of concerns that the bank in place has been compromised by corruption. The new design would likely incorporate some traditional values and practices, and some global ones, crafting an institution that could be understood and trusted by both citizens and foreign investors. The UN might build capacity by providing computers, training programs and so on. The architects of this bank might want to turn to climate experts for a tool that could be easily used to filter loans and investments for climate risk. But after 20 years of meetings and negotiations, these practical decision-support tools are not available. The countries guiding peacebuilding lack these tools themselves. Germanwatch, for example, which reports annually on what countries are doing in response to climate change, wrote in its 2012 report: “As in the years before, we still cannot reward any country with the rankings 1–3, as no country is doing enough to prevent dangerous climate change” (2011, 4). So the bank will inevitably take shape without any mechanism of screening for climate risk—an omission that might ultimately prove highly costly.

Thus while integration might sound appealing, there is very little to be integrated that would be appropriate to the needs one encounters in peacebuilding contexts. The needs—for assessment tools, decision support tools, planning tools, community resilience and response systems, efficiency and management systems, mediation and negotiation support and so on—are very real, but meeting these needs is very difficult.

Further complicating matters, the architects of peacebuilding may convey the Western attitude of skepticism and uncertainty about how soon the really negative events and trends described by climate science are likely to affect a particular community (Lomborg 2001). Behavioral science research suggests that action is likely to be very modest on issues that are perceived to be far away spatially (Fujita et al. 2005), or temporally (Lieberman and Trope 1998), or as having a low probability of occurrence (Todorov et al. 2007), or as likely to be experienced through a third party (Eyal et al. 2008). The more local events and trends are, the more resources we are willing to assign to them and vice-versa. We know that climate science has failed to attract a critical mass of people willing to authorize significant resources to CCA and CCM—so it seems likely that this mentality would infiltrate peacebuilding operations in some measure (Hulme 2009).

Informal discussions on this issue while serving on UN peacebuilding missions in Rwanda and Sierra Leone suggest to me that the predominant attitude currently is that integrating climate change would basically constitute an additional cost that would be unlikely to generate quick benefits. People are not opposed to it in principle, but will tend to rank it low in the competition for scarce resources. Peacebuilding is a domain characterized by urgent needs, high stakes, a quick impact mentality, a large number of actors and complexity, all of which can work against new ideas and especially the long-term perspectives embodied in CCA and CCM.

Finally, there are some tensions between the goals and timescales of peacebuilding and those of climate change response. For example, after the 1994 genocide, the government of Rwanda had to quickly resettle some two million people, some of whom had been living outside the country for years. Very quickly, farming and other activities began in marshy areas and steep hillsides, and protected areas were opened up to settlement. While it is easy to understand the urgency of getting people settled and back to work, some areas of the country are today more sensitive to climate change impacts than they might have been had this concern informed some of the early decisions and policies.

“what is good for peacebuilding may not always be good for climate adaptation, and vice versa. For example, settling people around Virunga National Park was critical to jump-starting livelihoods and stabilizing communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as it permitted access to forest resources for construction, fuel, food, and medicinal needs. The resulting degradation of ecosystem services, however, may have undermined the longer-term adaptive capacity of the system.... In sum, climate change adaptation (like development in general) involves trade-offs, some of which may directly conflict with peacebuilding initiatives.” (Hammill and Matthew 2012)

5 Moving the agenda forward

Integrating CCA and CCM into peacebuilding requires addressing the three obstacles identified in the preceding section. The first challenge is having appropriate content to integrate. Although the technologies of CCA and CCM have not kept pace with the science of climate change, there is much that can be done to fill this gap. Ideally, general principles, perhaps designed along the lines of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) principles for effective engagement in fragile states (2007), will be developed that can support broad planning and decision-making activities. Given the diverse ways climate change can affect a society, and the diverse ways in which societies respond to stressors, effective CCA and CCM programming probably cannot be fully prepackaged, but instead will have to be developed or at least customized within the broader reconstruction framework that is unique to each peacebuilding country. At the same time, an inventory of practical tools ought to be established and easily accessible to the many architects of reconstruction and capacity-building. For example, Conservation International has rapid assessment tools that allow the quick identification and evaluation of hotspots, critical ecosystems and natural capital. Engineering schools and private companies have vast stocks of technology that might be applied to address fundamental issues in core sectors such as water, agriculture, energy, transportation, buildings and surveillance. Bridges need to be constructed between the silos of ingenuity and the ravaged landscapes of post-conflict societies. Integration is unlikely without an adequate supply of robust, affordable, and effective tools that can be updated, customized and repurposed as conditions change.

The second obstacle to overcome is the scepticism and complacency of the donor community combined with the attitude that CCA and CCM are a cost that might best be avoided so more pressing needs can be met. As noted earlier, IPCC assessments and predictions see adverse climate change effects arriving with greater speed and severity to parts of the Middle East, Africa and South Asia than to the rest of the planet. This means that many of the people and institutions focused on peacebuilding may have little or no actual experience with addressing climate change, or even very much concern about it. In contrast, they understand very well and have extensive experience with banks, roads and job training programs. How could one possibly expect people to integrate an issue that is for them fairly abstract, possibly quite remote and fraught with uncertainty? There may, however, be some grounds for cautious optimism, or at least an opening that ought to be seized quickly.

In Siemens and McGraw Hill Construction (2009) partnered to produce a report on the “Greening of Corporate America.” Two hundred three firms were surveyed and the basic conclusion was that the past few years have witnessed a rapid and widespread deepening of corporate commitment to sustainability. What was once regarded as behaviour required in order to comply with costly government regulation has developed into behaviour pursued because it supports the profit mission of corporations, responds to market signals and

customer needs, and encourages loyalty among employees. Much of this behaviour to date emphasizes energy efficiency. If this shift is authentic, and this is a serious question, then there may be an opportunity to build on it and begin to embed CCA and CCM into the ways in which many people think about recovery and development.

Finally, the third obstacle concerns real or potential tensions between the two processes of, on the one hand, CCA and CCM and, on the other, peacebuilding. Here the characteristics identified by de Coning are instructive: “consolidating peace, interdependence, multidimensionality and time perspectives” (2008, 51). Insofar as consolidating peace is concerned, it is easy to imagine that CCA and CCM might delay benefits in ways that would create or amplify tensions. Peace arrives with great expectations as people look forward to safety and work and land. Imagine the challenge of settling two million returnees in Rwanda in 1994 if the decision was made to disallow settlement in the already scant forested areas. Today, of course, the loss of forest cover in Rwanda translates into the loss of buffer zones and natural resilience, and means farms face greater threats from soil erosion and flooding. Balancing needs, mediating tensions and negotiating trade-offs is certainly a skill set that would have to be brought into the peacebuilding process and success on this front would like require some significant funding.

The independence/interdependence dilemma can only be magnified by adding another layer onto the exceedingly complex and under-resourced domain of coordinating peacebuilding activities. An important part of the solution lies with developing general guidelines that can be integrated into Poverty Reduction Strategies and National Plans for Reconstruction.

At least in theory, multidimensionality could provide a range of entry points. To illustrate this I have constructed a very simple table with de Coning’s four peacebuilding areas on one axis, and a range of climate change activities based on work with Anne Hammill along the other. I have filled in the boxes with examples of what integration might look like on the ground (Table 1).

Finally there is the challenge of different perspectives on time. The literature reviewed on peacebuilding suggests that de Coning is correct in identifying a tension between the need to deliver immediate results and the sense that to succeed requires long-term thinking and planning. Clearly, CCA and CCM would bolster the latter attitude.

Table 1 Opportunities for integrating CCA and CCM into peacebuilding

Peacebuilding area CCA/CCM type	Socio- economic recovery	Politics and governance	Security and rule of law	Human rights
Identification and assessment of climate sensitive sectors	Vulnerability of agricultural livelihoods	Integrated into national plan for reconstruction	Areas vulnerable to climate related disasters	Impacts of water scarcity on women
Climate sensitive general capacity building	Transportation	Screening tools for government agencies	Community resilience and response	Property rights
Climate change specific CCA and CCM capacity building	Urban flood dynamics modelling	Energy policy	Dedicated disaster response programs	CCA and CCM education
CCA and CCM capacity building requiring bilateral, regional or global cooperation	Regional trade associations	Transboundary water management	Regional response planning	Participation in climate justice dialogues

6 Conclusions

Given what is known about climate change, there are some forms of climate relevant expertise and capacity that are important to every society—such as gathering and analyzing weather data and filtering infrastructure projects for climate risk—and it would be negligent not to include these in peacebuilding operations. Moreover, it is clear that the geography, climate and economics of some countries put them at greater risk than others. Many peacebuilding countries appear to be likely candidates for heightened risk and therefore more extensive CCA and CCM programs are critical in these cases. This heightened vulnerability may offer some important opportunities insofar as people are already innovating ways to manage climate stress. Some of these will be transferable and scalable and could undergird larger initiatives. Others may not be sustainable and should be replaced or redirected.

Perhaps the greatest challenge of the next decade or two will be to build strong partnerships across two communities—peacebuilding and climate change—that have suffered from resource deficiencies, coordination problems, constant criticism and skepticism, and vulnerability to being trumped by other priorities. But the science is compelling—peacebuilding countries are experiencing climate related disasters, and the stress is likely to increase in the years ahead. Post-conflict societies are perhaps the most fragile societies on the planet, and to try to assist them while ignoring the insights of climate science would be irresponsible and dangerous.

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