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CROSS-BORDER CONFLICT
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Policy Brief

Exploring the gender-climate-security nexus in conflict-affected borderlands in the Horn of Africa

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Albert Souza Mulli

Purpose

This policy brief presents the key findings and policy implications of research carried out in May-June 2023 on the gendered dimensions of the climate-conflict nexus, and the effect of climate-induced conflict on gender roles in cross-border conflict systems in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs) in the Horn of Africa.

There is a growing understanding that the pathways linking climate change and intercommunal conflict are gendered, with gender norms and roles intersecting with environmental, social, political, and economic factors to determine individuals' and communities' engagement in violent conflict. However, with few exceptions, the vast majority of research on gender in the climate-conflict nexus remains narrowly focussed on the impacts on women and girls, framing them as victims rather than agents of change. There is also a limited understanding of how the compounded impacts of climate and conflict themselves affect gender norms, and what the implications are for climate adaptation and peacebuilding interventions.
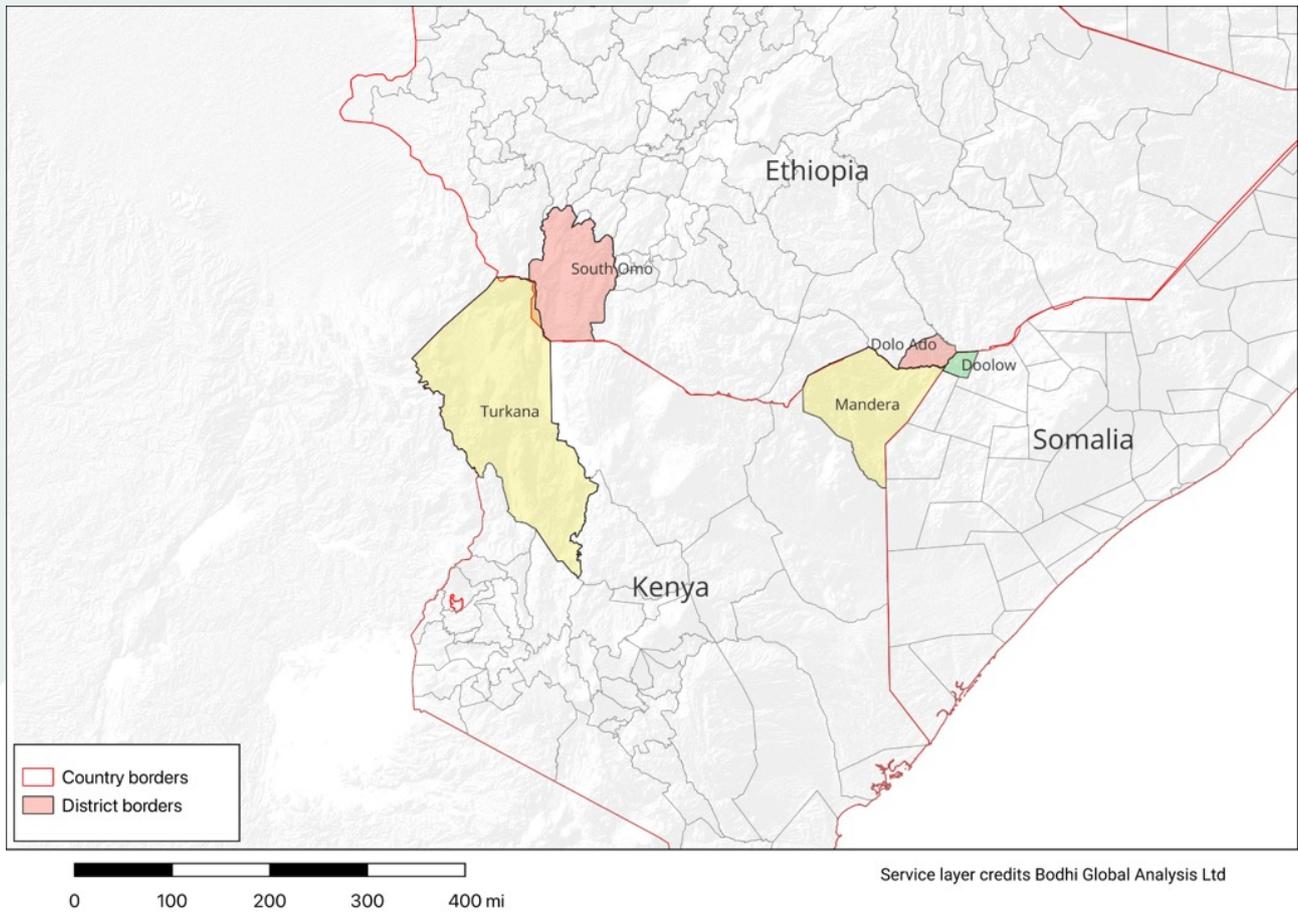
The research focused on two climate-affected cross-border conflict systems in the Horn of Africa: the Mandera Triangle (where Ethiopia, Kenya, and

Somalia converge) and the southwest Ethiopia-northwest Kenya border area (see map on next page). The research is based on 47 key informant interviews (KIIs) and 20 focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted across both regions. The research also includes two project case studies, one in each conflict system: the 'Building Opportunities for Resilience in the Horn of Africa' project (BORESHA), delivered in the Mandera Triangle in 2018-2021 to build economic resilience among climate and conflict-affected communities; and 'Selam Ekisil' (SEEK), a project delivered in the southwest Ethiopia-northwest Kenya border area in 2019-2023 with the aim of addressing conflict through better and more cooperative natural resource management (NRM).

Key findings

1. Climate change can contribute to natural resource conflict in cross-border ASALs through four indirect causal pathways, each with a distinct set of intervening variables.

All four pathways are triggered by the same initial climate-induced impact – resource scarcity.

Map showing the research locations: the Mandera Triangle and the southwest Ethiopia-northwest Kenya border area.

Pathway 1:

Climate change increases resource scarcity, increasing the risk of conflict over resources. Climate change and climate hazards, such as drought and flooding, are affecting the availability and predictability of key (agro-)pastoralist resources such as grazing land and water sources. This, in turn, can heighten zero-sum calculations and, in the absence of established natural resource governance mechanisms, exacerbate pre-existing drivers of conflict. In Doolow, on the Somalia side of the Mandera Triangle, key informants reported that increasing water and pasture scarcity exacerbates other drivers of conflict, including historical grievances and inequality between clans in access to development projects.[1] In Mandera County, on the Kenyan side, communities reported that drought has led the Garre and Degodia communities to dig more boreholes in disputed territories, which has in turn triggered violence over access and control of these boreholes.[2] Respondents also underscored the central role that manipulation

by local political elites plays, as politicians seek to use climate-induced resource scarcity as a reason to mobilise their constituencies against their rivals.[3]

Community respondents in both South Omo (Ethiopia) and Turkana (Kenya) also reported that climate change has decreased the availability of grazing land and water points, and that this has driven an increase in disputes and tensions between groups in the area.[4] Unlike in the Mandera Triangle, where political manipulation was a central factor, in the South Omo-Turkana borderland, the central factor linking climate change to conflict is the coping strategy chosen by pastoralists who experience loss of livestock due to drought – cattle raiding. Focus group respondents in South Omo underlined that limited access to pasture and water increases the incidence

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1   FGD, Peace Committee (mixed), Doolow, Somalia, June 2023.

2   KII, local government official, Mandera County, Kenya, June 2023 KII, Peace Committee member (man), Mandera County, Kenya, June 2023.

3   FGD, community members (women), Mandera County, Kenya, June 2023. KII, NGO worker, Mandera County, Kenya, June 2023.

4   FGD, community members (men), Turkana, Kenya, 7 June 2023. FGD, community members (men), South Omo, Ethiopia, 16 June 2023.

of cattle raiding, which in turn often triggers cycles of escalating intercommunal violence.[5]

Pathway 2:

Climate-induced resource scarcity drives pastoralists to shift transhumance routes, increasing the risk of conflict over pasture and water sources in the new areas. Climate-induced resource scarcity is forcing pastoralists to shift traditional transhumance routes, many of which are governed by long-established resource-sharing agreements. This shift in turn drives them to compete for access to resources already claimed by local groups in those new areas, with whom they have no established agreements.[6]

In Dolo Ado, Ethiopia, community members reported that water scarcity forces pastoralists to move in search of water, which leads to violent disputes over water points, which are often found and accessed by other, different groups.[7] In Turkana, respondents from the Turkana community recounted that the cross-border movement of Dassenach people from Ethiopia into Turkana in search of pasture is a key driver of conflict, and has been deepening grievances among local groups in Turkana, who respond by taking up arms to safeguard their own access to these resources. The respondents in Turkana attributed this partly to the fact that certain newly arriving Dassenach communities do not have agreements in place for sharing resources with the Turkana.[8]

Pathway 3:

Climate-induced migration enables land-grabbing, increasing the risk of land-based conflict. Communities affected by climate change in both cross-border areas have turned to migration as a coping strategy, settling in new areas where they can better ensure their survival and protect their livelihoods. As they move, other groups have opportunistically moved to claim the land they leave behind, raising the risk of violence linked to territorial disputes.

In Mandera County, Kenya, a respondent recounted that Degodia and Murrule communities have been using and settling on land in Mandera previously settled by Garre communities, many of whom are thought to have moved to Nairobi, Kenya's capital, and other Kenyan towns outside of the Mandera Triangle.[9] This Degodia/Murrule migration has created tensions with members of the Garre community who have remained in the area. Respondents in Mandera added that local politicians have been supporting these land grabs, reporting that communities from outside Mandera County were being given "contracts" by local politicians to construct on vacant land,[10] exacerbating existing conflict between the dominant Garre clan and the Degodia and Murrule over local territorial claims and land rights.[11]

Pathway 4:

Climate change disrupts pastoralism, forcing pastoralists to diversify livelihoods. The increasing incidence of drought, spurred by climate change, is contributing to reductions in the water levels of Lake Turkana and the Omo River delta, where the Omo River feeds into Lake Turkana. The Omo River delta has traditionally served as a natural border between Dassenach and Turkana territory, but lower water levels have spurred a southward recession of the lake into Turkana territory in Kenya. As a result, many Dassenach groups from Ethiopia have moved further into Turkana territory to access arable land (for growing crops), grazing lands, and water points near the lake, increasing territorial disputes, and raising tensions and the risk of violence with Turkana communities on the Kenyan side of the border.[12] In addition, Dassenach pastoralists who lose livestock due to the impacts of drought are increasingly migrating to Turkana to be able to diversify their livelihoods away from livestock herding. In fact, many Dassenach are turning to fishing in local rivers and

5   FGD, community members (men), South Omo, Ethiopia, 16 June 2023. FGD, community members (women), South Omo, Ethiopia, 16 June 2023.

6   Transhumance is the seasonal migration of livestock for access to different grazing lands. It is a central part of the livelihoods of pastoralist communities in the two target locations, where this migration occurs across borders. See: Sebastian van Baalen and Malin Mobjörk, *A Coming Anarchy? Pathways from Climate Change to Violent Conflict in East Africa* (Stockholm University, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute & The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2016), https://www.statsvet.su.se/polopoly_fs/1.282383.1464852768!/menu/standard/file/van Balen %26 Mobj%C3%B6rk 160511.pdf

7   FGD, community members (women), Dolo Ado, Ethiopia, June 2023.

8   FGD, community members (mixed), Turkana, Kenya, June 2023.

9   KII, local government official, Mandera County, Kenya, June 2023.

10   FGD, community members (mixed), Mandera County, Kenya, June 2023.

11   Interpeace (2017), *Mandera County Note: Voices of the People - Challenges to Peace in Mandera County*, Interpeace, https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2017-ECA-Kenia-Mandera-County-Note.pdf

12   Jesse Creedy Powers, *Climate Change and the Turkana and Merille Conflict*, ICE Case Studies No. 238, July 2011, Inventory of Conflict and Environment (ICE).

moving southward into Kenya to access fisheries in Lake Turkana.[13]

Together, these dynamics are increasing competition over the lake's increasingly scarce fisheries, further raising the risk of violence as the impacts of climate change become more pronounced.[14] As one respondent in Turkana explained, "there is no food, and they [the Dassenach] move to our territories to look for food which results in conflicts between us the Turkana and the Dassenach."[15]

2. Women are not just passive victims of conflict, but actively engage in conflict – albeit differently to men.

While most of the literature on women and conflict focuses on conflict's impact on women, tending to frame them as passive victims, we found that in both conflict systems women actively engage in conflict.

In both conflict systems, women are reported to incite and encourage men to engage in conflict, particularly to undertake revenge killings once clan members have been attacked.[16] A female respondent in the Mandera Triangle explained how women subscribe to and reproduce an "if you don't fight, you are not a man" narrative, and during times of conflict, women use dirges and songs that are often 'derogatory' and 'inflammatory,' targeting other clans.[17] In Turkana, male respondents reported that women use songs and jokes to shame and humiliate men who do not fight. At times, this includes veiled threats by women who threaten to marry men from the winning clan, in case their own clan loses during episodes of

violent conflict.[18] Another male respondent, in Mandera, reported that women supply food and water to community-based armed groups ahead of raids and during cycles of intercommunal violent conflict.[19] This was also reported in South Omo, Ethiopia, where women provide fighters with resources ahead of raids, sheltering them during cycles of violence, and preparing special meals for men after a successful cattle raid.[20] And in the Gedo region of Somalia, women reportedly contribute to land conflict by grabbing land in the name of their clans.[21]

3. Women play a limited role in decision-making processes around resource-based conflict resolution and natural resource management.

In both borderlands, prevailing patriarchal gender norms – the informal rules in a society, which define how people of a particular gender are expected to behave – assign women mostly domestic roles, while the men are responsible for decision-making at the community and household levels.

As a result, women are under-represented in decision-making structures, whether at the household, community, or clan level, or in formal roles, denying them crucial decision-making powers.[22] This means that despite being the ones who, due to their gender roles, collect and use natural resources such as firewood, water, and agricultural outputs, women play a limited role in making decisions around how these resources are managed.[23] Indeed, a number of respondents who reported that women are not involved in community-level decision-making around natural resource management, also recognised their

13   FGD, community members (women), Todonyang, Turkana, Kenya, June 2023.

14   Varalakshmi Vemuru et al., *From Isolation to Integration: The Borderlands of the Horn of Africa* (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank 2020), https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/167291585597407280/the-borderlands-of-the-horn-of-africa. European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Stability and Addressing the Root Causes of Irregular Migration and Displaced Persons in Africa, *Cross-Border Analysis and Mapping: Cluster 1 - Southwest Ethiopia-Northwest Kenya* (August 2016), https://blogs.soas.ac.uk/ref-hornresearch/files/2020/02/Cross-border-cluster-1.pdf

15   FGD, community members (women), Loarengak, Turkana, Kenya, June 2023.

16   FGD, community members (mixed), South Omo, Ethiopia, June 2023. FGD, Community-Managed Disaster Risk Reduction (CMDRR) committee members (mixed), Mandera County, Kenya, June 2023.

17   KII, community member (woman), Mandera County, Kenya, June 2023.

18   KII, local government official, Lorwateng, Turkana, Kenya, June 2023. KII, church representative, Todonyang, Turkana, Kenya, June 2023.

19   KII, national government security official, Mandera County, Kenya, June 2023. KII, INGO staff member, Mandera County, Kenya, June 2023.

20   FGD, community members (men), South Omo, Ethiopia, June 2023. FGD, community members (men), South Omo, Ethiopia, June 2023. KII, community representative (woman), South Omo, Ethiopia, June 2023.

21   UN-Habitat, *Land and Conflict in Jubaland: Root Cause Analysis and Recommendations* (2020), https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/09/20-01079-gltn-land-and-conflict-in-jubaland_final.pdf

22   Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, *Realising Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights in Kenya: A myth or reality?* Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (April 2012), http://www.knchr.org/portals/0/reports/reproductive_health_report.pdf

23   FGD, Peace Committee (mixed), Doolow, Somalia, June 2023.

intimate knowledge of, for example, water management and soil conservation.[24]

4. The impacts of climate change are contributing to changing gender roles in communities in both conflict systems, driving women to take on responsibilities traditionally associated with men.

Climate change has driven men to stay away from their communities for longer periods of time as they search for pasture and water further afield. Climate-induced conflict has also contributed to this, as men spend more time away from their households, engaging in raiding and conflict. As a result, women are forced to step into the head-of-household role, traditionally associated with men, for longer periods of time.[25]

Climate-induced conflict is also increasing the number of widows, driving a rise in permanent female-headed households.[26] As a result, women have increasingly taken on new responsibilities in natural resource management, including pasture conservation, rearing of smaller household livestock, fishing, and engaging in income-generating activities.[27] Men's absence has also led women to take responsibility for making decisions which men would normally make. This includes decisions around water, land and soil use, and conservation.[28]

5. A change in gender roles in climate and conflict-affected communities presents both a challenge and an opportunity, which multi-actor interventions could leverage for better outcomes across the gender-climate-security nexus.

Changing gender roles have burdened women with roles and responsibilities traditionally undertaken

by men, in addition to the roles and responsibilities traditionally allocated to women. But in Doolow and Turkana, this is reportedly providing – and being seen as – an opportunity for women to engage in local decision-making processes, gaining more agency as a result.

The experience of both the BORESHA and SEEK projects confirms that approaches focused on increasing women's participation are not sufficient and are unlikely to contribute to substantive change unless they address the factors underlying the gender norms that exclude them. Interventions across the gender-climate-security nexus should, rather, adopt approaches that aim to shift gender norms by engaging with and seeking to disrupt prevailing perceptions held by men about women's roles. This can have positive outcomes not just for women's empowerment and gender equality, but also for climate resilience and peacebuilding

Policy implications

Drawing on the research findings, below are five key recommendations for policymakers and practitioners shaping policies and delivering interventions along the gender-climate-security nexus in climate-affected cross-border conflict systems in ASALs.

1. **Adopt a multi-dimensional and integrated gender-climate-security nexus approach to climate-vulnerable and climate-affected cross-border conflict systems.** Piecemeal approaches, in which different projects aim to address different conflict drivers, will not achieve sustainable peace unless they are working in close collaboration and coordination under a coherent strategy. In these contexts, climate and conflict solutions need to be framed and pursued together – and must integrate gender. Gender is a key intervening factor in the climate-conflict nexus, so understanding its role and integrating a gender-sensitive approach is integral for effective and sustainable results.

2. Going further, **adopting a gender-transformative approach will enable programming to contribute to shifting the gender norms that limit women's meaningful engagement** in decision-making around natural resource management and conflict. An explicit approach requires moving beyond tokenistic efforts to ensure women are simply represented in activities. It requires using analysis to identify and target communities where the impacts of climate change and conflict are driving a shift in gender dynamics. This includes supporting women in those communities – particularly female heads

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24   FGD, community members (women), Dolo Ado, Ethiopia, June 2023. FGD, community members (mixed), Dolo Ado, Ethiopia, June 2023.

25   KII, clan elder (male), Mandera County, Kenya, June 2023. KII, INGO staff member, Doolow, Somalia, June 2023.

26   FGD, community members (mixed), Todonyang, Turkana, Kenya, June 2023. FGD, community members (women), Loarengak, Turkana, Kenya, June 2023. FGD, community members (male), Todonyang, Turkana, Kenya, 7 June 2023.

27   FGD, adult community members (mixed), South Omo, Ethiopia, June 2023. KII, Peace Committee member (woman), Todonyang, Turkana, Kenya, June 2023.

28   KII, clan elder (male), Dolo Ado, Ethiopia, June 2023.

of households and other female leaders – to leverage these shifts to gain more agency.

3. **Engage with influential men to secure their buy-in and catalyse opportunities for addressing patriarchal norms** – which are also detrimental to men – to allow women to play a greater role in natural resource management and decision-making processes associated with them, including around conflict and peacebuilding. Educating men on the useful natural resource management knowledge that women have, and the benefits of their meaningful participation in decision-making, can help to create male champions and allies for addressing harmful gender norms. In more conservative areas, such as Doolow (Somalia) and Dolo Ado (Ethiopia), where male respondents reported that women are not involved in conflict, engaging men may require a more culturally sensitive approach, which is situated in and uses local language and beliefs to open discussions about women's roles and the benefits – including for men – of more meaningful inclusion of women

4. The **gender-climate-security nexus needs to be integrated into international policy frameworks.** A growing call for integrating conflict into climate adaptation frameworks and programmes needs to be broadened to include gender, ensuring climate-conflict policies, frameworks, and targets are gender-sensitive and, where feasible, gender-transformative. Women are at the coalface of the climate-conflict nexus, and male allies need to be included in policy discussions, heeding the growing call for localisation and locally-led initiatives.

5. **Continue to invest in more, and more regular, research on the gender-climate-security nexus, particularly by female researchers.** Understanding how gender roles and norms contribute to natural resource conflict is crucial to addressing conflict and peacebuilding. Ongoing local-level analysis of the gender-climate-security nexus is essential to further policy and programme actors' understanding of climate change and conflict's contribution to shifting gender norms, and how these changes can be capitalised upon for more effective, gender-transformative climate change adaptation and environmental peacebuilding outcomes. Providing funding for local, particularly female researchers interested in this field will ensure this knowledge is locally produced, locally-owned, and can actively contribute to strengthening women's agency in addressing discriminatory gender norms.

About XCEPT

About the author

Albert Souza Mulli is Head of Conflict and Peace-building at Bodhi Global Analysis. He has over 12 years of experience in conflict and political economy analysis, and stabilisation and peacebuilding policy and programming.

Prior to joining Bodhi, Albert was the Peace Responsiveness Advisor at Interpeace, where he advised UN agencies (FAO, ILO, and IOM) and donor governments (ECHO, Denmark) on strategies and processes for integrating conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding into their humanitarian and development programmes. Before that, Albert worked for eight years as a Conflict Adviser in the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO) and Department for International Development (DFID) in Pakistan, Myanmar, Libya, and South Sudan.

Albert has an MA in International Affairs from the Graduate Institute in Geneva and a BA in Political Science and Latin American Studies from Vassar College in the USA.

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