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Climate Change and Conflict in the Horn of Africa: A Gendered Perspective

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Abstract

Despite much research on climate-conflict linkages, little attention has been paid to the conflict-climate-gender triple nexus. Threats from conflict and climate change, as well as the gendered effects they produce, are quickly accelerating and far-reaching. These are more pronounced in conflict and fragile contexts, with the effects disproportionately affecting women and girls. In the Horn of Africa, a particularly vulnerable region to climate change in its rural communities, gender dynamics place women and girls at the forefront of domestic responsibilities, many of which include natural resources and in turn, making them most affected by the changing climate and its impacts. Despite being on the frontlines of these challenges, gender dynamics further exclude women from participation in natural resource disputes and land ownership, in turn limiting the role of women in climate action. In order to promote the roles and abilities of women in conflict resolution including natural resources and amplify their role in climate action in the Horn of Africa, the paper recommends that first, countries across the region adopt the Women, Peace, and Security National Action Plans. Secondly, civil society groups advocate for the expansion of women's role in community-level climate action. Third, regional bodies such as IGAD, adopts the Women, Peace, and Security Regional Action Plan. Development Partners focus on availing financing for climate change-related initiatives which include women. Lastly, Centres of excellence such as the International Peace Support Training Centre facilitate trainings to build the capacity of women and gender specialists for dialogue and natural resources-related disputes.

Key terms: *Horn of Africa, Climate change, Gender, Conflict*

Introduction

The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, widely considered a cornerstone in the field of women, peace, and security, promotes the participation of women at all levels of conflict prevention, management, and resolution. Having been adopted in 2000, resolution 1325 anticipated and was framed around the context of traditional conflict and security threats and did not factor in emerging security threats such as climate change – in an attempt to bridge this gap, the Security Council adopted resolution 2242 in 2015, which explicitly recognized climate change-related security threats and expressed the need to mainstream a gender-sensitive approach (UNSCR, 2015). This resolution lay the foundation for a climate-security-conscious approach to women, peace, and security and championed gender-sensitive national action plans (NAPs) to address climate change-related security threats.

Climate change is not just an ecological and environmental threat but a security one as well. The poor and conflict-ridden regions of the world, specifically in Africa, including the Horn of Africa, are most affected by climate change-related security threats. These regions experience structural vulnerabilities to climate variability such as “poverty, weak institutional protection and poor physical infrastructure, low resilience (coping and adaptation) capacities, livelihoods which are highly reliant on natural resources, and poor social services” (Jaggernath, 2014; Bob et al, 2014). Gender inequalities in Africa reinforce these structural vulnerabilities which further expose women and children to disproportionate impacts of climate change.

Despite suffering climate change-related effects as a disempowered or marginalized group, women play a key role in the management and use of natural resources. In developing countries, women are involved in the production of 45% - 80% of all food across agricultural, livestock, and aquaculture value chains (Kibria, 2016). Women also play central roles in the fetching of water and firewood. Such gender roles bring women into primary contact, care, and use of natural resources. Gender inequalities and dynamics have excluded women from decision-making, participation, and rights to natural resources, thereby limiting their role of in resource conservation as well as prevention, management and resolution of climate change-related security conflicts. On the contrary, the muted group theory as averred Shirley Ardener in 1975 as cited in Sitawa, Sitienei and Muhidin (2021) She lays emphasis on how the opinions and views as well as the voices of women are disregarded and overlooked in favour of those of their male counterparts. She defines a muted group as people with little

power who have trouble giving voice to their perceptions because they must re-encode their thoughts to make them understood to the public sphere.

Women are therefore a valuable addition to conflict resolution, and evidence from post-conflict societies in which women participated actively in peace processes and post-conflict political processes suggests a positive impact on sustainable peace by this gender. The participation of women in peace negotiations improves the quality and strengthens the stability of the outcomes since women's participation encourages broader societal support for negotiated settlement when marginalized voices such as women are included (Bell & O'Rourke, 2010; Krause et al, 2018). The mainstreaming of gender in WPS National Action Plans in the Horn of Africa will not only fulfil policy requirements set out by Resolution 1325 and 2242 but also recognize the different impacts of climate change security threats on women and the role of women in natural resource management.

Climate change in the Horn of Africa

The Horn of Africa also referred to as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region – comprised of Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan and South Sudan – is vulnerable to climate variability and security-related threats such as violent conflicts. These are as a result its food insecurity and its predominantly fragile livelihood systems being pastoral or agro-pastoral which are vulnerable to climate change (Mkutu, 2018). In Somalia and South Sudan, pastoralists make over 50% of the population, 30% - 40% in Djibouti, and about 20% in Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan and Uganda (Mkutu, 2018). The vast territories under pastoralism are either arid or semi-arid hence they have “very high temporal and spatial rainfall variability” (Catley et al, 2016) which is a risk factor for vulnerability to climate change.

The adverse changes in rainfall and weather patterns due to climate change have led to prolonged and recurrent droughts in the Horn of Africa (Perry et al, 2010; Hendrix & Glaser, 2007). Droughts have exacerbated famines and the scarcity of pasture and water resources thereby mostly affecting pastoral communities which inhabit the least favoured agricultural areas (LFAAs) (Barbier & Hochard, 2018; Mkutu, 2018). Agro-pastoral areas are also affected by droughts which cut down agricultural production and cause natural resource imbalance for the agro-pastoral livelihood system.

As pastoralists incur losses of livestock and poverty, they are forced to migrate into agro-pastoral areas, which increases stress, competition, and tension between the two communities over scarce natural resources, ultimately, environmental or resource-based

conflicts (Hendrix & Glaser, 2007; Catley et al, 2016). Such conflicts are about control of economic and strategic resources, especially natural resources at community and household levels. In the Horn of Africa, the Fur, Somali, Afar, Baggara and Karamajong pastoralists have had to migrate southwardly in Sudan, Kenya and Uganda (respectively?) where climatic conditions are moderate with savannah, and toward water sources in Eritrea, Somalia and Ethiopia (Mkutu, 2018).

The tensions boil into community-level conflicts experienced in northern Kenya (among the Pokot, Turkana, Keiyo, Marakwet and Samburu) and southwestern Kenya (Laikipia, Kajiado or Transmara) and Uganda (Karamoja and Karamajong), and cross-border communities in the Karamoja triangle in northern Kenya and Uganda. It is worth noting that certain pastoral communities in the triangle practice cattle rustling as a method of replenishing lost stock and helping young men to pay bride price, which in turn fuels inter-community violence over livestock (Mkutu, 2018; Ensor, 2013). This is most evident in the Nuer and Dinka in South Sudan, the Karamojong in Uganda, and the Pokot and the Turkana in Kenya who are involved in inter-ethnic conflicts resulting from cattle raids.

Climate change-related livestock losses, therefore, exacerbate inter-communal tensions and make community-level violence intractable. In Sudan, for example, the 30% drop in rainfall distribution in over 30 years has stoked tensions between pastoralists and agricultural farmers (Brown et al, 2007). In fact, the Darfur conflict in Sudan had its origins in the water and pasture scarcity and the competition that arose between farmers and migratory herders (Brown et al, 2007). However, the competition for resources such as water points and pasture is not only between herders and farmers or among the herders, but also between richer ranchers and the herders. Richer ranchers control or privatize water points and pasture, which are invaded by herders hence creating conflicts on ranches too, as herders migrate from commonly grazed lands (Catley et al, 2016). The situation can be observed in Kenya's Laikipia County, where rich livestock keepers and herders are engaged in recurrent conflicts over pasture and water resources to the extent of threatening the security of the entire county and neighbouring counties, by paralyzing education, health and other social services and infrastructure and causing displacement of people.

The Horn is also conflict-prone and surrounded by other conflict-ridden countries of Chad, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Yemen, Libya and to an extent Burundi – at least 63% of the region's countries are either locked in state-level conflicts or post-conflict fragility. The illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons from state-level conflicts further fuels community-level conflicts related to

climate change in 75% of the region's countries (Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan) (Mkutu, 2018). In the wake of competition for scarcer resources and the emergence of new conflicts in the space of pastoralism due to climate change, "fringe pastoralism" has emerged as a new security issue - the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) refers to this as the involvement of pastoralists in "illicit mineral exploration and trade, and transnational jihadist (Al Shabaab in the Horn of Africa, Boko Haram in West Africa and other Al Qaeda and Islamic State groups), human trafficking and drug trafficking networks in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa" (UNECA 2017). Fringe pastoralism results when the natural resources to sustain pastoralism dwindle and pastoralists seize the marginalized territories of states to promote criminal enterprises such as human trafficking.

The other source of vulnerability emanates from the low capacity to respond, mitigate, cope, and adapt to, in the affected communities as a result of historical state marginalization. The capacity of institutional and physical infrastructure is generally poor in the affected areas, as health services, early warning, food systems, economic opportunities are severely limited (Bowles et al, 2015). This further adds another structural layer of vulnerability for affected communities. Marginalization has therefore destroyed the capacity of affected groups to absorb, cope, adapt and recover from climatic shocks including conflicts.

Fisherfolk communities are almost among the communities most affected by climate change in low-elevation coastal zones and elsewhere in the region (around in-land water sources (Barbier & Hochard, 2018). In the Horn of Africa, the fisher-folk communities heavily rely on fisheries resources from fishing, as their main livelihood system which is otherwise exposed to climate variability. Climate change has, however, increased sea levels, ocean acidification, and water temperatures, while reducing oxygen levels for aquatic life and drying lakes such as Lake Turkana in Kenya (Jaggernath, 2014).

Such aquatic threats are reducing the fish stock, threatening fishing productivity and increasing the chances of new conflicts and security threats as seen in the rise of piracy off the Somali coast, which further finances the violent extremist groups in Somalia.

The Climate Change -Conflict- Gender Nexus

As discussed previously, women play a major role in the management of natural resources, on which the pastoral and agro-pastoral communities over-rely. Women are also the most affected group or most vulnerable victims of climate variability and related conflicts. Conflict affects economic and social systems, especially in communities which have a high reliance on natural resources and where women's livelihoods are built on the natural resources,

household poverty increases, agricultural productive capacity declines, and women's livelihoods are destroyed by violent conflicts and displacement due to migration and conflict (Sitati et al, 2021).

Gender inequality further exposes women to vulnerability given that “women lack equal rights of ownership and control over land, property and other productive and survival assets” (Smith et al, 2021). Such levels of disempowerment among women undermine their capacities to cope, recover and adapt to climate change shocks such as drought, famine and violent conflict. The reality of marginalization of the vulnerable (pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in the Horn of Africa), further exposes women to vulnerability to climate variability shocks and security threats (Prior & Henämäki, 2020). This is because the nexus between gender inequality or traditional gender norms and the structural marginalization of affected communities leaves women as the most marginalized and exposes them to double vulnerability of exclusion.

Finally, climate change-related conflicts and displacement affect women at household levels by altering gender roles and household structures (Smith, 2020) - when men die in conflict and cattle raids, or when men migrate with livestock in search of pasture and water in the Horn of Africa, women are left behind as heads of households. The women, therefore, have to strive to provide for their homes despite already strained resources such as the productive capacity of the land, the lack of land tenure due to customary disempowerment and sometimes, the communal structure of land tenure (Smith, 2020).

Women who are left behind by men as they pastorally migrate are also exposed to security risks as they lack necessary physical protection. Similarly, because women are involved in collecting water and firewood, climate change exacerbates the scarcity of these resources hence increasing the distance and harshness of conditions in which women find water and firewood, which further expose them to gender-based violence on their journeys (Smith, 2020). These are just a few examples of the way women are differently affected y

Despite women being differently affected by climate change-related security threats and shocks, women are not only victims but are also primary stakeholders in natural resource management. This is because women are involved, as discussed previously, in agricultural production, collecting water and firewood. Such traditional division of labour puts women in positions in which they make use of natural resources. However, these same traditional gender norms exclude women from resources and opportunities, which denies them capacities for resilience (Le Masson et al, 2019). Women should therefore be considered as critical players in the discussion of environmental or natural resource conservation, and

climate action as well as climate-related disputes and conflict prevention, management and resolution. The inclusion of women is thus a question of building resilience in affected communities (Le Masson et al, 2019).

The Need for Inclusion of Women in Climate Change Peacebuilding in the Horn of Africa

The exclusion of women in response mechanisms geared towards climate change-related security threats does not only emerge from traditional gender norms in the affected communities in the Horn of Africa. Women are yet to be adequately recognized in peace and security literature, in national security policies and even in the WPS National Action Plans (Ide et al, 2019; Krause, 2018). There are complex layers of exclusion that women suffer and consequent inadequate appreciation of women's role in natural resource management, and the gender differential impacts of climate change-related security effects.

Entry points of inclusion of women in climate change-related conflict response should actually be centered around the sources of vulnerability and exclusion. Unfortunately, this is not the case as at the community level, social norms and customs exclude women based on the gender roles which set them apart from men in decision making and conflict prevention and resolution. At the national and regional levels, women are excluded by institutional and policy biases or gaps which fail to promote the participation of women in all levels of decision-making, conflict prevention and conflict resolution. However, the leverage here is not only that women are an excluded gender that might add value to the response to climate change-related conflicts and security threats, but also that women's livelihoods rely significantly on natural resources and that the division of labour in the region puts women in the primary position of managing natural resources. As such, there are various levels of inclusion and participation of women in conflict prevention, management, and resolution, especially in response to climate change-related impacts on competition and control over natural resources.

As an initial point of inclusion, women can be included in two ways at the community level: customary structures such as the traditional authorities which involve the settling of disputes through methods such as mediation – this is seen often in Kenya's county of Tana River where village elders help settle conflicts (Smith et al, 2021). Women could also be included through statutory mechanisms at the community level – this usually involves government partnership with local communities around natural resources and establishing a

local association of the surrounding community to conserve and manage these natural resources when carrying out their normal agricultural and pastoral activities.

Women could also be included at the national policy level where individual Horn of Africa countries should fast-track the development of WPS National Action Plans and link the National Action Plans to UNSCR 2242. The WPS National Action Plans provide policy and institutional mechanisms for the inclusion and participation of women in a broad range of peace and security issues, including climate change-related conflicts. The National Action Plans also ensure that women are able to participate in all levels of decision-making, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, from an empowered and norm-transforming perspective which helps women overcome the barriers of traditional norms and socio-economic conditions (Baranowska, 2020). The Peace Women national action plan database shows that only 50% of countries in the Horn of Africa (Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan and Sudan) have adopted national action plans

Of the four NAPs in the region, only Kenya's second NAP 2020 – 2024 has made commitments on climate change, gender-based violence and humanitarian disasters; the NAP however falls short of arms control and disarmament. Uganda has had three NAPs (2008-2020, 2011 – 2015 and 2021 – 2025) with the current one making commitments to man-made and natural disasters, which is not express reference to climate change, among other commitments such as good governance, gender-based violence, arms control and disarmament, peacebuilding and conflict resolution (Peace Women, 2021). Sudan's NAP focuses on priority areas such as peace-building, peacekeeping, peace negotiations and decision-making, women's rights and gender-based violence as well as relief, reconstruction and development (Peace Women, 2021). Regional countries, therefore, have to review their National Action Plans or conclude them and incorporate climate change to allow them to be climate-change responsive in relation to women, peace and security.

The third level applicable to the Horn of Africa is the regional level. Regional action plans (RAPs) are another entry point for the inclusion and participation of women. Regional Action Plans help to cover the gaps in National Action Plans or gaps caused by the absence of NAPs in certain regional countries, hence helping to achieve regional commitments to WPS. So far in Africa, only the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS - 2020), Southern African Development Community (SADC – 2018-2023), Great Lakes Region (2018-2023) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS – 2020-2024) have developed and adopted RAPs (Peace Women, 2021). The Horn of Africa

through IGAD should therefore adopt RAPS to help the rest of the countries without NAPs to begin implementing WPS specific to climate change.

The Case Study of North Kordofan in Sudan

Given decades of civil war in Sudan, and the Kordofan and Darfur territories being the main theatres of the conflict, there is a high presence of arms in civilian hands in North Kordofan – the area also experiences extreme weather events or conditions such as low rainfall and high temperatures which create drought and desertification. The population of North Kordofan depends heavily on pastoralism and rain-fed agriculture which constitute 80% of the livelihood system in the area (Salome, 2011). The compounding effects of low rainfall and droughts have been poor crop productivity and drying up of water and pasture resources.

Climate change has further worsened the existing poverty and food insecurity conditions and created pressure on few available resources such as pasture, land and water between pastoralists and farmers in North Kordofan (Smith et al, 2021). The increase in competition over the natural resources in North Kordofan has led to a series of violent conflicts between pastoralists and farmers as evidenced by the violent clashes between July 2016 – April 2018 which led to the killing of 24 people (Smith et al, 2021). Conflicts related to climate change impact women differently in North Kordofan – men migrate either with cattle or to urban areas and leave women as female heads of households which exposes women to the vulnerability, physical insecurity and food insecurity given that they lack rights to access and use land except through their migrated husbands and male relatives (Smith et al, 2021). Water scarcity also affects women whose traditional role is to fetch water; the distances and personal security risks (against violence and rape for example) involved while fetching water multiply with climate change.

Despite the involvement of women in natural resource management and the impacts of climate change and related conflicts on women, the women in Sudan have had marginal participation in peacebuilding. In the two state-level peace negotiations of 2006 (Darfur Agreement) and 2016 (Two Areas), women only represented 8% and 15% of the negotiators respectively (Smith et al, 2021). At the community level, traditional structures such as *Joyeda* which is made up of local mediators who resolve conflicts at the community level also excludes women totally (Smith et al, 2021).

Through experimentation of women's inclusion in local community peacebuilding processes, the United Nations implemented a project in Kordofan between 2016 – 2018, aimed at empowering women to participate in natural resource-based peacebuilding (UNEP,

UNDP & UN Women, 2019). The project established local community forums and committees, through which the project empowered women through training and technical support, to play more active decision-making and leadership roles in natural resource management and in the resolution of natural resource-based conflicts in the communities. The project registered a number of successes and milestones. First, women's capacity and knowledge on key subjects such as natural conflict mediation and resolution, and natural resource management increased (UNEP, UNDP & UN Women, 2019; UNEP, UN Women & UNDP, 2020).

As the project continued, the communities' perceptions toward gender roles and especially toward women's role in decision-making and conflict prevention and resolution were transformed as the project included women to the peace committees (UNEP, UN Women & UNDP, 2020). As a result, women gained more acceptance, inclusion, and participation in natural resource conflict management, to the extent that women themselves began establishing peace committees and mobilizing the communities in other projects aimed at local peacebuilding and natural resource management (UNEP, UN Women & UNDP, 2020). In Nawa area of North Kordofan, women were able to organize and mobilize for the planting of 6,000 tree seedlings to help conserve the environment and mitigate climate change (UNEP, UN Women & UNDP, 2020). The major achievement of the project was perhaps the reduction of conflict in North Kordofan. Natural resources were managed better, and women were actively involved as mediators thereby building stable peace in North Kordofan. Inter-group relations were stabilized, and resource-based conflicts reduced (Krause et al, 2018; UNEP, UN Women & UNDP, 2020).

Centre of excellence at local and regional levels, those such as the International Peace Support Training Centre, should facilitate trainings in an attempt to build the capacity of women and gender specialists for dialogue and the resolution of natural resource-related disputes affecting communities in the Horn of Africa.

Conclusion

The Horn of Africa is a climate change-vulnerable region. The food and livelihood systems are highly exposed to climate variability, given that the region's agriculture is predominantly rain-fed and the region is food insecure. Further, the vast of its territory is under pastoralism, which accounts for over 70% of rural incomes in the pastoral communities. Extreme weather events, especially drought, worsens existing food insecurity and put a strain on natural resources such as water and pasture which sustain pastoralism. The subsequent competition

over control and use of natural resources such as land, water, and pasture, therefore, increases tensions between farmers and herders, and among pastoral communities, leading to violent conflicts. The impacts of natural resource based violent conflicts however have a gendered differential, whereby women are disproportionately affected.

Women occupy an important position in the Horn of Africa and affected pastoral communities, as they are involved in primary agricultural production, and firewood and water collection according to the traditional division of labor and gender roles. Such a position gives women an important role in the management of natural resources. However, the existing gender inequalities have denied women rights to access, ownership and use of natural resources, and excluded them from climate change peacebuilding and conflict prevention. The exclusion of women from preventing, managing, and resolving the conflicts emerging from the vicious competition over natural resources, is not just at the community levels. Half of the region's countries have not developed or adopted WPS NAPs which recognize and promote the role of women in addressing climate change related security threats such as violent conflicts.

Only Kenya's WPS NAP recognizes women as stakeholders in addressing climate change-related conflicts, while Uganda, South Sudan and Sudan NAPs have this gap, which then affects the effective inclusion and participation of women. The regional peace and security body, IGAD, is also yet to adopt RAP for the region to help strengthen national efforts and establish policy guidelines and commitments for member countries especially those who are yet to adopt NAPs. Women's participation and inclusion lend greater legitimacy to negotiated peace outcomes, adds the value of women's knowledge and skills or resources to conflict prevention and management, and creates stable peace among societies. It is therefore important that:

- The Horn of Africa countries increase their level of commitment to developing or adopting WPS NAPs which recognize women's role in addressing climate change-related security challenges.
- The civil society groups in the Horn of Africa play a crucial role in advocating for the expansion of women's role in climate change-related peace and security initiatives especially at the community levels.
- IGAD champions the conclusion and adoption of WPS NAPs which implement UNSCR 2242 and moves with speed to develop and adopt a Regional Action Plan as has been done by other regional blocs on the continent.

- Development partners such as UNDP, World Bank, and donor civil society organization focus on availing financing for climate change-related peacebuilding initiatives in the Horn of Africa, which include women, across regional, national or community levels.

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