CONCILIATION RESOURCES

GENDER, CULTURAL IDENTITY, CONFLICT AND CLIMATE CHANGE: UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIPS

Report

GENDER, CULTURAL IDENTITY, CONFLICT AND CLIMATE CHANGE: UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIPS

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This report was written by Amy Dwyer and Gabriel Nuckhir. It builds on analysis workshops carried out in collaboration with partners, community members, authorities, and climate change and gender specialists in Kampala, Uganda, and Islamabad, Pakistan, from August 2022 to February 2023, and interviews and analysis conducted by Professor Rufa Cagoco-Guiam in Mindanao, the Philippines, in December 2022.

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INTRODUCTION

Conciliation Resources and our partners bring people together across divides to find creative and sustainable paths to peace. A key ambition of our work is to analyse how gender and other forms of social inequality drive conflict, which we seek to transform as part of more effective peacebuilding responses.

In many of the contexts where we work, our partners have highlighted that climate change is complicating and exacerbating conflict, often in relation to gender and cultural dynamics. In response to this, we carried out a series of participatory workshops to explore how gender and cultural norms, relationships and power structures shape how different people experience climate change, the types of responses they adopt and how this interacts with conflict systems.

The findings presented in this report reflect initial insights from workshops held in Karamoja, Uganda, Pakistan-administered Kashmir (PaK), and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (Bangsamoro), where our partners are interested in testing more integrated approaches to these connected challenges. Emerging lessons aim to inform more gender and culturally-responsive peacebuilding and climate programming and policy.

Rationale and focus of analysis

The climate crisis, gender and social inequality and conflict are three of the biggest challenges of our time. They also form a connected system, wherein each challenge shapes, and is shaped by, the others (see Figure 1). For example:

The **climate crisis** can shape:

A. Gender and social inequality by intensifying vulnerabilities. Women, indigenous peoples, gender and sexual minorities, people living with (dis)abilities and ethnic minorities are especially affected by climate variability and extremes due to legal, economic, educational and social discriminations which limit their access to resources required to mitigate and adapt.[1] This leads to people experiencing natural resource degradation and climate stressors differently, with more adverse outcomes among those who are already marginalised.

B. Conflict dynamics by reducing access to, and increasing competition for, natural resources like fertile land and water, disrupting established patterns of distribution and driving negotiation of new agreements which can favour or undermine certain groups of people.[2] Climate shocks can also break down and stall the recovery of governance systems, triggering violent escalation when perceived failures to adapt position communities and authorities against one another.[3]

Gender and social inequality can shape:

C. The **climate crisis** by impeding the likelihood of relevant, sustainable climate action. Evidence suggests that countries with higher levels of gender inequality are more vulnerable to climate change, experience lower levels of effective climate action and have less adaptive capacity to respond quickly to climate change impacts.[4] When climate change responses are not designed, implemented and owned by women and other marginalised groups, they miss out on vital natural resource knowledge and expertise.

D. Conflict dynamics by forming norms and expectations that can drive men and women to engage in conflict, and creating narratives that invoke violence.[5] Extensive evidence highlights how gender inequality interacts with other socio-cultural factors to perpetuate conflict.[6]

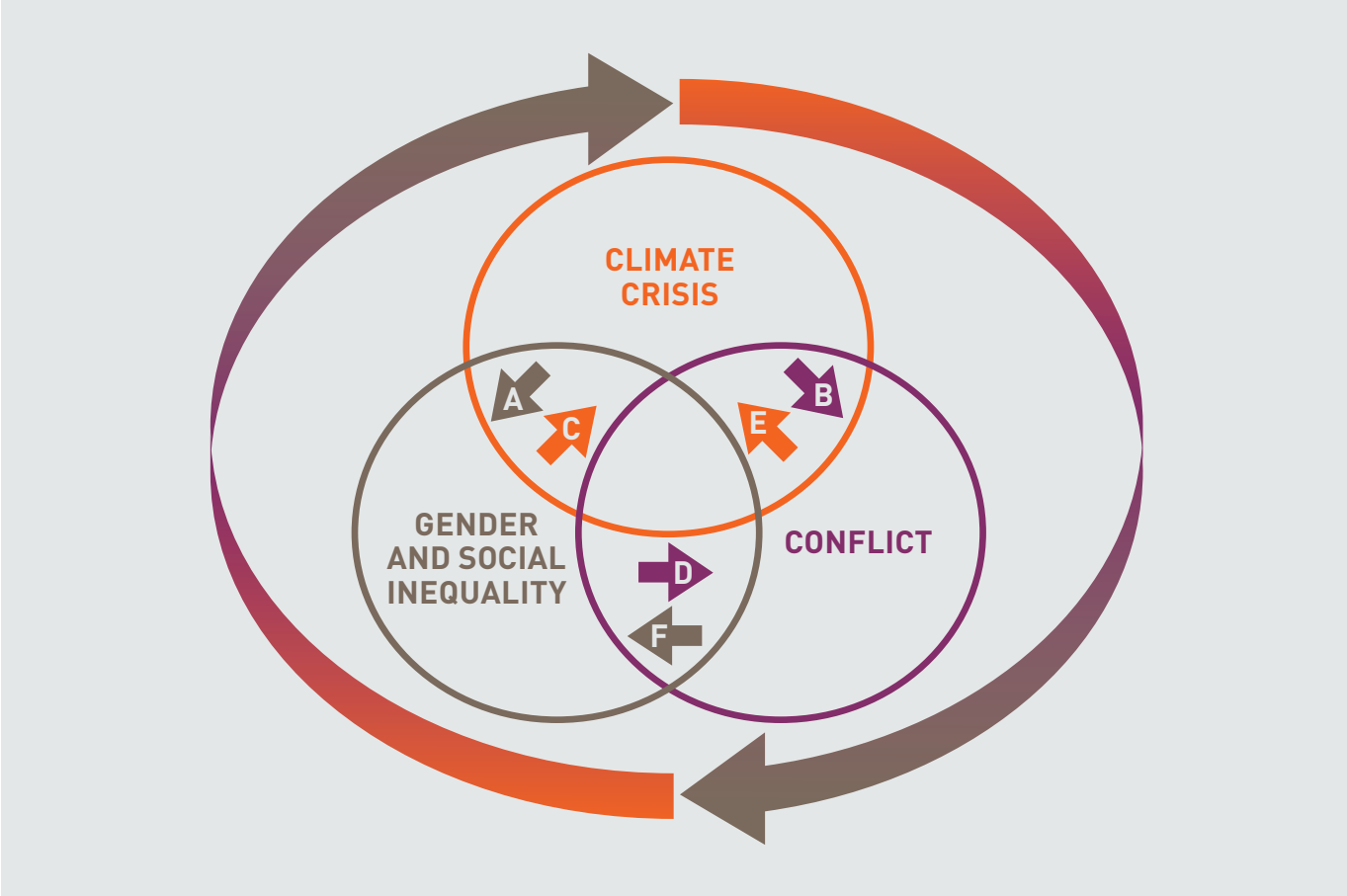
Conflict can shape:

E. The **climate crisis** by damaging natural resource management systems (such as agricultural land sustaining rural areas), uprooting communities, weakening the resilience of people and services to adapt to climate pressures and undermining inclusive cooperation on shared challenges.

F. Gender and social inequality as mortality and destruction can shift the dynamics of communities and households, including traditional gender roles. While the mortality burden tends to fall disproportionately on men, women frequently face displacement, heightened levels of labour and responsibilities and entrenched intergenerational poverty as a result.[7]

Policy and practice which addresses each of these challenges therefore has the potential to reinforce or undermine progress in the other.

FIGURE 1: CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE CLIMATE CRISIS, GENDER AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND CONFLICT



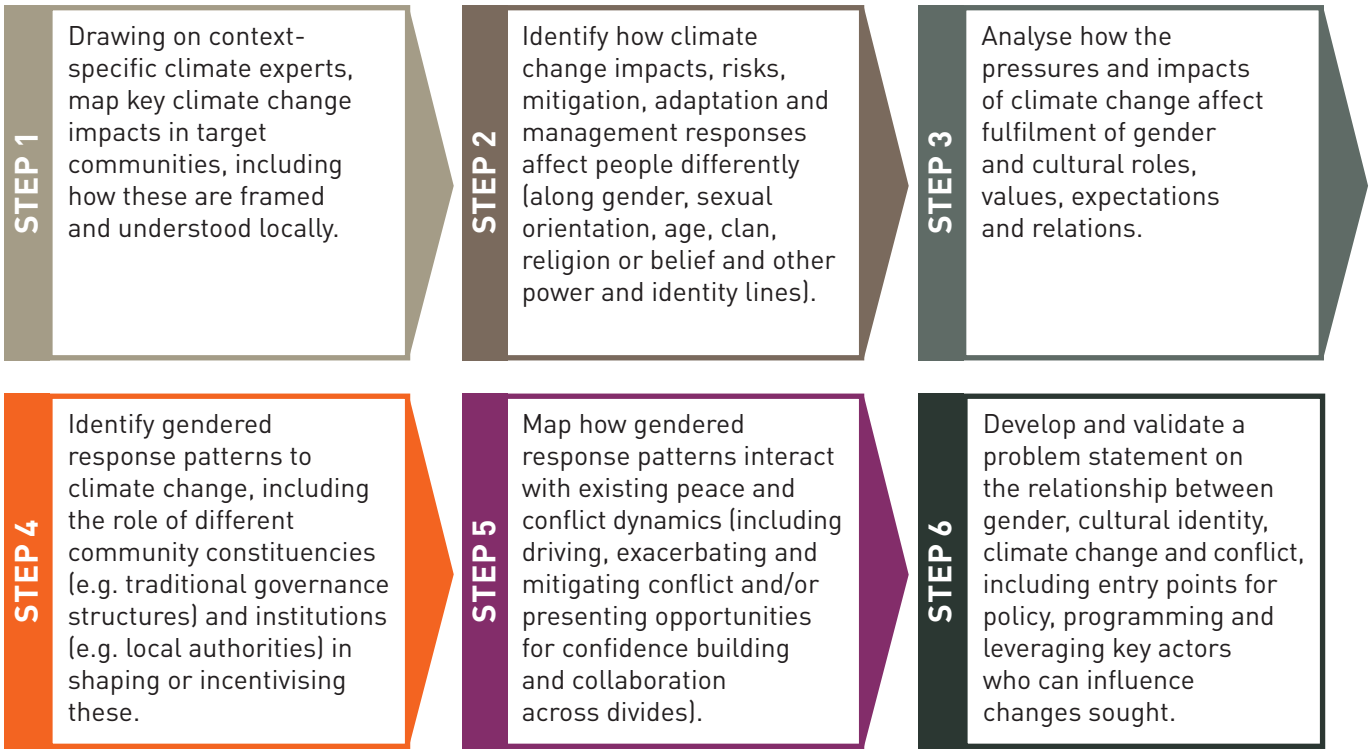
Despite clear connections between each challenge, there is a gap in evidence on how all three interact in practice. UN agencies, gender and peacebuilding networks, the Environmental Peacebuilding Association and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)[8] all call for more comprehensive analysis on the links between gender and social inequality, climate change and conflict. Conciliation Resources' recent practice paper[9] highlighted that gender and cultural identity is largely absent in analysis of climate change and conflict, despite driving climate-related insecurity. Emerging practice predominantly focuses on women and girls' exposure to climate change, rather than gender as a key variable that can help us to better understand how climate change contributes to conflict.[10]

Methodology

In response to this, Conciliation Resources and our partners piloted a participatory gender, climate and conflict analysis tool to understand how gender – deeply rooted within cultural identities, values and practices – shapes different people's experiences of climate change, their responses and how this interacts with conflict systems. The tool facilitates inter-community dialogue, joint problem identification and shared vision-building, actively creating spaces for women and other marginalised groups to play leading roles in this. It involves six key steps, illustrated in Figure 2.

Sixty-four people took part in the analysis. A five-day workshop in Kampala brought together male and female pastoralists, elders, young people, representatives from women's associations, gender and climate specialists from district governments and Area Land Committee members. A three-day workshop in Islamabad included Kashmiri youth groups, gender and climate change academics, environmental journalists, women mediators, Disaster Risk Management Officers, Azad Jammu and Kashmir's Environmental Protection Authority and the Cultural Heritage Board. Interviews in Mindanao were carried out with male and female Moro and indigenous peoples, people living with (dis)abilities and representatives from the Disaster Risk Reduction Management Division, Bangsamoro Planning and Development Authority, Bangsamoro Women Commission and Bangsamoro Transition Authority.

FIGURE 2: GENDER, CLIMATE AND CONFLICT ANALYSIS TOOL



BOX 1: CASE STUDY CONTEXTS

Research was carried out in three contexts where gender and social inequality, climate change and conflict define communities' lives on a daily basis:

Uganda: In Karamoja, governmental evidence and community insights highlight that new weather patterns caused by climate change, including increased frequency, duration and severity of droughts, are threatening to intensify food insecurity.[11] Pastoralist communities taking part in workshops explained that unpredictable rainfall and flooding is leading to pests, diseases and soil erosion, contributing to livestock mortality and depleting fertile land for cultivating crops. Because cattle ownership is deeply linked to masculinity, cultural preservation and food security for pastoralist communities, it creates a powerful incentive for some young men to engage in armed theft and raiding on other cattle-owning communities, which can trigger violent retaliation and places women at particular risk.

Pakistan: Although our programming covers Indian-administered Kashmir (IaK) and Pakistan-administered Kashmir (PaK), analysis for this report focused on PaK. Climate specialists in workshops highlighted that rapidly warming land and melting of glaciers have increased the variability and severity of rainfall, contributing to an increase in climate-related shocks such as flash floods, landslides, avalanches and wildfires.[12] This frequently occurs close to the Line of Control (LoC), where Kashmiris who are dependent on livestock production (such as divorced and widowed women and young male herders) remain largely excluded from shaping natural disaster and climate responses. As they increasingly navigate fertile land closer to the LoC's vicinity, they can be exposed to cross-fire, shelling and accusations of deliberate infiltration which raise cross-border tensions.

Philippines: In the Bangsamoro, slow-onset hazards caused by climate change – such as rising, warming sea levels and droughts, combined with extreme flooding – are displacing households, harming indigenous species and impacting farming, corn and rice production.[13] Women described being left behind while their husbands migrate for alternative livelihoods, having to cross unsafe routes to access scarce resources. Increased instances of *carabao* (water buffalo) theft and competition to plant crops in former wetland areas is triggering *rido* (feuds) between indigenous and Moro men. Tensions also exist between communities and authorities, which have relocated indigenous peoples on sacred land and in gender-blind resettlement facilities.

Key findings

1. **Gender and cultural expectations, power systems and conflict influence how people experience climate change.**
   i. Gender roles become harder to fulfil due to the effects of climate change. This makes it increasingly difficult for communities to maintain and develop their cultural identities, and can have significant psychosocial effects.
   ii. Climate change compounds pre-existing power inequalities, with particularly severe consequences for people who face multiple forms of exclusion.
   iii. The impact of climate change interacts with the effects of conflict to exacerbate insecurity, making it difficult for marginalised groups to withstand and adapt.

2. **Gendered responses to climate change within communities can drive violence.**
   i. Masculine and high-risk coping strategies are activated in response to climate change and can drive violence at the community level.
   ii. Gender and cultural actors, relationships and processes can incentivise violent responses to climate change.
   iii. Gender roles and expectations can evolve in response to climate pressures, disrupting traditional cultural values and fuelling tensions in households and wider communities.

3. **Gendered dynamics in government responses to climate change shape conflict risks.**
   i. Masculine norms and roles within governmental climate decision-making can escalate conflict and exclude the perspectives of women.
   ii. Government responses to climate change that fail to respond to gendered needs can fuel grievances, further sparking pathways to violence.
   iii. Government responses to climate change which undermine diverse cultural knowledge, rights and values can place communities at extreme risk during natural disasters.

Lessons for practice and policy

1. **Address** underlying inequalities and fragility to strengthen climate resilience and unlock effective, sustainable climate action.
2. **Leverage** climate change initiatives as entry points for peacebuilding and gender and social equality outcomes, with a strong focus on masculinities.
3. **Integrate** an intersectional gendered analysis into peacebuilding and climate change programming, policy development and advocacy.
4. **Advance** gender and culturally-responsive climate action at governmental levels.
5. **Invest** in programming that prevents climate and gender-related conflict and is led by local women and civil society organisations.

A woman peacebuilder in the Bangsamoro
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KEY FINDINGS

1. Gender and cultural expectations, power systems and conflict influence how people experience climate change.

The following three subsections outline how gender and cultural norms and values, power imbalances and prolonged conflict can, respectively, shape different people's experiences of climate change.

i. Gender roles become harder to fulfil due to the effects of climate change. This makes it increasingly difficult for communities to maintain and develop their cultural identities, and can have significant psychosocial effects.

Women and men experience the effects of climate change differently, whether in relation to slow-onset changes, rapid-onset disasters or human-induced responses. This is in part determined by culturally-specific gender roles and expectations assigned to them in their families and wider communities.

In pastoralist communities in Karamoja, a woman's ability to meet traditional expectations around femininity is heavily dependent on a man's ability to attain his. Communities explained that women are expected to marry through traditional ceremonies, take care of their husbands and in-laws and bear multiple children. Each of these relies on men's ownership and provision of cattle, a core marker of masculinity, source of food and essential form of cultural 'currency' used to fulfil dowry (or 'bride price') payments, supply ceremonial resources for weddings and facilitate rites of passage. Yet livestock mortality, crop failures and heightened competition over cattle and grazing land caused by prolonged droughts have made this more challenging.[14] As a result, fewer traditional marriage ceremonies are taking place, more families are opting to downsize and some men are choosing to separate from their wives (particularly those who are elderly or less able to meet traditional expectations) or cohabit with concubines instead of formally marrying,[15] thereby increasing women's insecurity.

The psychosocial consequences of being unable to meet traditional gender and cultural expectations can be severe. In Karamoja, pastoralist women who are not married traditionally or have fewer children can experience ridicule and social stigmatisation, and be made to wear necklaces demonstrating their lower social status. If perceived to be inhospitable and unwelcoming to families (for example, by failing to prepare adequate food due to shortages), women explained that they can be dismissed as 'dark hearted', 'bad luck' or 'unworthy of men'. Pastoralist men, on the other hand, described feeling a loss of authority and being subjected to verbal abuse if they failed to marry their wives, provide for their communities or complete cultural initiation rituals marking transition to manhood (yet largely dependent on available cattle and natural resources depleted by droughts).

> **"In Karamoja, if you don't have land or cattle, you're not a man"**
>
> **Male pastoralist in Karamoja**

In the Bangsamoro, indigenous men highlighted that being unable to meet traditional breadwinner roles in the face of extreme flooding affects their self-esteem and means they have to increasingly rely on their wives' income, resulting in them 'losing face' and withdrawing from public activities. Kashmiri men in PaK, especially those living closer to the Line of Control (LoC), described feeling shame when unable to make rapid decisions required to protect their families after the onset of climate-induced earthquakes, floods and landslides. This makes it more challenging for them to meet religious and moral expectations around readiness to defend community and family honour during times of threat, sometimes resulting in a loss of their respect and decision-making power within communal affairs.

ii. Climate change compounds pre-existing power inequalities, with particularly severe consequences for people who face multiple forms of exclusion.

As a multiplier of conflict and security risks, climate change can exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities, inequality and injustice.[16] This can have devastating impacts in pastoralist, Kashmiri and indigenous communities, where high rates of exclusion define social relations on a daily basis.

For example, in the aftermath of Typhoon Paeng[17] in the Bangsamoro, Teduray Lambangian indigenous peoples described being among those least consulted in relief and rehabilitation efforts led by local government units. It was suggested this can be due to assumptions that they can manage on their own (due to their deep connection to the natural environment) and perceptions that they represent a smaller voting electorate and are therefore deprioritised. They explained that indigenous

peoples living with (dis)abilities and older people were among the first to die, and in the greatest numbers, largely due to being less mobile within remote, uphill locations. Local weather announcements highlighting the presence of a wind shear which accelerated the typhoon's speed were also not translated into local languages. Similarly in Karamoja, communities described how elders and people living with (dis)abilities – already marginalised due to a lack of access to health facilities and labour markets – have been most affected by malnourishment and neglect as a result of droughts and associated climate migration.

> **"We are indigenous peoples – we expect that they will not provide us any assistance in times of calamities or disasters"**
>
> **Indigenous community member in the Bangsamoro**

Extreme weather events caused by climate change can also surface cultural prejudices, including against gender and sexual minorities.[18] In the Bangsamoro, participants shared examples of community members attributing the deaths of more than 60 people during Typhoon Paeng to two women cohabiting, and blaming them for inviting a disapproving response from God and nature. These patterns have been observed in relation to climate change both historically (for example, following a hurricane in Datu Piang in the 1990s, participants shared reports of the mayor blaming the *sablaw* (curse) on the town's community of gay men holding a beauty pageant) and in more recent years (following the Mt. Minandar landslide in 2022, there were reports of authorities cutting lesbian women's hair to expose them). Some participants felt these tactics are used by political elites to deflect blame for institutional negligence in response to climate change.

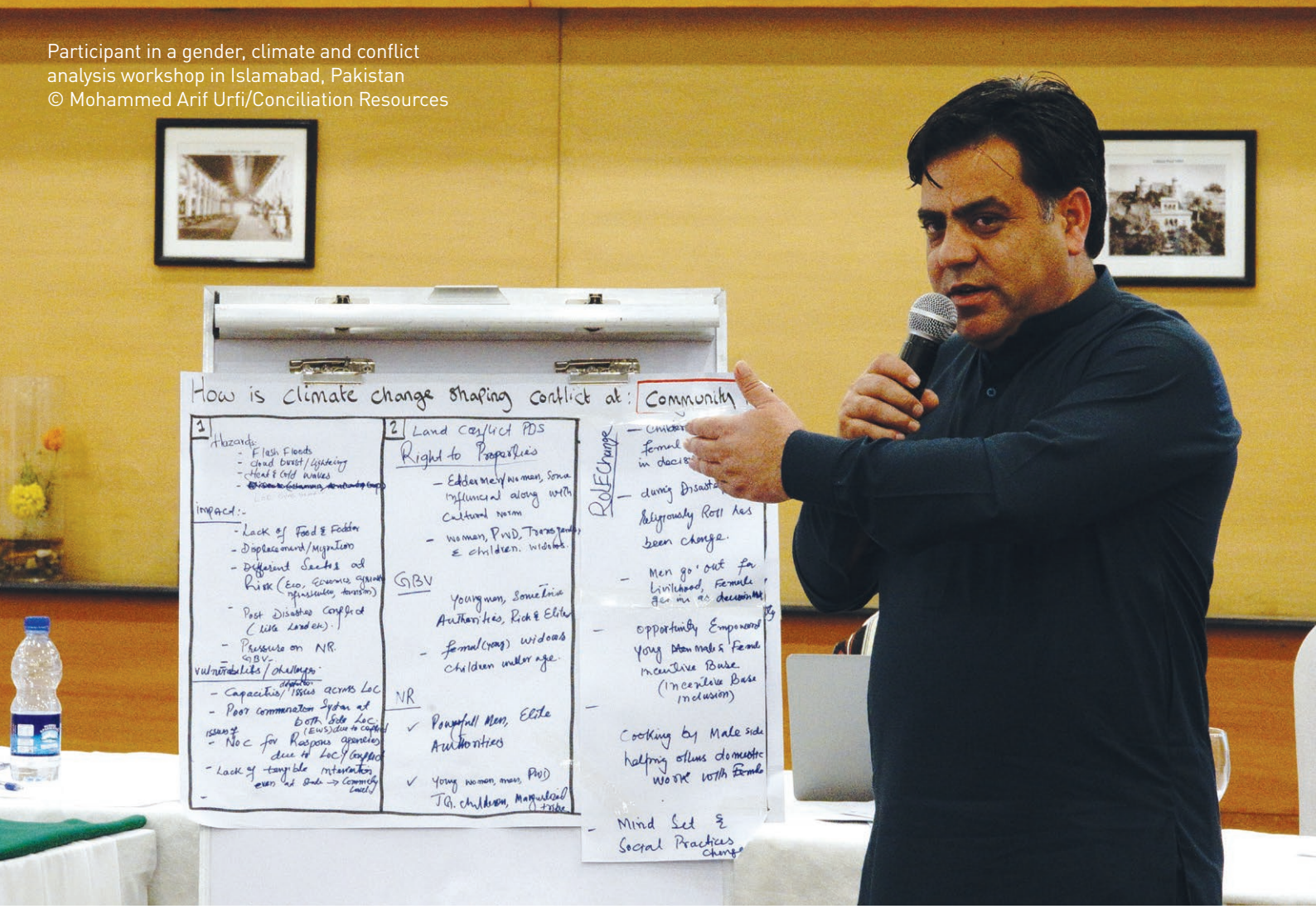
In PaK, some participants felt that climate change has contributed to a regression in gender equality gains made in recent years. They explained that climate change is often interpreted as a significant force of nature requiring adoption of 'survival mode' responses which amplify 'masculine' traits such as protectionism, strength and physical labour (for example, training men to rebuild houses or regain cattle and prioritising sharp, quick decision-making) over more consultative, inclusive approaches (for example, ensuring that women and other marginalised groups are consulted as equal partners in the planning and implementation of disaster prevention and response efforts, supporting them to participate through appropriate accommodations and creating a safe environment for them to contribute authentically). Authorities tend to engage directly with men leading these climate responses, which can impede women from accessing necessary information. Studies by Conciliation Resources' partner KIIR validate this, highlighting significant gender disparities in disaster preparedness. Women surveyed were less aware of how, and less likely, to prepare in the event of natural disasters, partly due to gender norms which restrict their access to male-led disaster management training.[19] This has particularly stark consequences for divorced and widowed women living close to the LoC who, following floods and landslides, are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, damage to agricultural equipment and limitations to trade movement, yet remain largely excluded from disaster mitigation initiatives.

> **"It [climate change] reinforces gender roles and closes space for alternative perspectives – men develop the mindset that all decision-making is their job"**
>
> **Female community member in Pakistan-administered Kashmir**

iii. The impact of climate change interacts with the effects of conflict to exacerbate insecurity, making it difficult for marginalised groups to withstand and adapt.

In all three contexts, the analysis highlighted how climate stressors, such as droughts and floods, can interact with the effects of conflict and violence, such as displacement, weaponry and mismanagement of natural resources, to exacerbate insecurity for marginalised people.

In PaK, climate and peacebuilding specialists described examples of explosive devices, which have been stationary for many years, slipping into new and unmarked land as a result of climate-induced landslides and avalanches, increasing instances of landmines, toy-bomb and cluster-bomb explosions. This most frequently occurs in remote villages close to the LoC, affecting children who play in these areas, farmers (a large percentage of whom are women) and herders (often young boys). Participants also described how the disproportionately high incidence of mortality or life-changing injuries within these groups adds another layer of difficulty to the existing social, political and economic barriers they face, further weakening their adaptive capacity to climate change and environmental crisis.



Participant in a gender, climate and conflict analysis workshop in Islamabad, Pakistan
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In the Bangsamoro, conflict can increase both women and men's vulnerability to climate change by separating and destabilising families. Again, this is most acutely felt by geographically, politically, and economically disempowered communities. Some women explained that they are left behind while their husbands or male family members are conscripted to join armed groups or relocate to avoid vengeance killings, and have little choice during prolonged droughts but to walk long distances and across unsafe routes to access scarce resources like water and firewood.

In Karamoja, the breakdown of traditional governance and official justice mechanisms, proliferation of small arms and violent disarmament campaigns have contributed to decades of conflict. Some young men, having grown up surrounded by armed violence as a conflict resolution mechanism, are increasingly incentivised to adopt violent coping strategies in response to the additional pressures brought about by climate change (such as increased competition over livestock, drinking water and fertile pastures critical for basic livelihoods). Incentives for these responses are further explored in sections 2 and 3.

2. Gendered responses to climate change within communities can drive violence.

As communities struggle to maintain and develop their cultural identities and adapt in the face of climate change, a shift in gender roles and adoption of high-risk coping strategies can contribute towards violence. The following three subsections highlight how these dynamics manifest across contexts.

i. Masculine and high-risk coping strategies are activated in response to climate change and can drive violence at the community level.

In all three contexts, expectations, roles and power structures place major constraints or incentives on people to respond to climate change and associated risks via specific gendered response pathways. These response pathways play a central role in influencing peace and conflict dynamics.

Pastoralist community members taking part in workshops referred to climate change, and its indirect impact on livestock, as an existential threat to their basic survival and physical wellbeing. As the most impoverished region of Uganda, Karamoja has a high dependence on subsistence agriculture that requires rainfall during the critical March-to-October period, and is therefore inherently sensitive to climate conditions.[20] Consequently, around half of the population experience food insecurity. They also outlined the existential threat that climate change and its associated impacts (such as depleting fertile land and increasing pests, cattle diseases and mortality) poses to their dignified continuation of communal life and relations in line with cultural and gender expectations.

Because cattle ownership is so deeply linked to masculinity, cultural identity and food security, this creates a powerful incentive for some young men to engage within the pre-eminent conflict dynamic within the region: cattle-raiding and theft. Climate change is indirectly adding extra pressures for which cattle raiding is often seen as the optimal available resort. This typically includes participating in armed raiding activities on other cattle-owning communities and tribes, actively recruiting other young men to participate, obtaining weapons and munitions and tracking potential targets for cattle raiding. This can have wide-ranging impacts on communities. Pastoralist women described being beaten or sexually assaulted when they encounter raiders, or in other cases, being forced to marry family members of their deceased husbands, sometimes multiple times, due to motivations to keep dowry within families. Participants also explained that a man's in-laws can be made to repay cattle by local Peace Committees, which can trigger retaliatory violence towards committee members.

> **"In a context that is changing and challenging men, women, elders – all struggling for survival, identity and resilience – this is all encompassing. We are struggling to survive, and violence is the by-product of all these elements"**
>
> **Male pastoralist leader in Karamoja**

While men's gendered motivation for engaging in cattle raiding can be linked to a desire to uphold their roles as protectors and providers in the face of climate and conflict pressures (by addressing community food insecurity needs and ensuring the continuation of cultural practices such as seasonal grazing, dowry payments and rites of passage), it can also be understood as an effort to reclaim masculine identity. Retaliatory raids are the primary pathway to regain both cattle and masculinity after a man has fallen victim to a raid.

> **"A man who has been raided becomes a woman. He loses all his animals in just a second and he becomes nothing"**
>
> **Male pastoralist in Karamoja**

In the Bangsamoro, gendered responses to climate change can follow similar patterns and contribute towards conflict escalation. For example, in some communities in Datu Piang, unpredictable rainfall is making land less fit for reliable corn and rice production and earning sufficient income. As a result, some men are engaging in *carabao* (water buffalo) theft during drought conditions, when it becomes easier to pull nooses around their necks. *Carabao* carry important value in the Bangsamoro, often being treated as a part of families due to their role in farming rice paddies and symbol of hard work and perseverance. As with the cattle raiding in Karamoja, participants explained that *carabao* theft can subsequently trigger a cycle of armed retaliation from men in other communities and groups, though there is lack of available evidence on the scale of this.

Extended droughts also mean that some former wetland areas around the Ligwasan Marsh have dried up, resulting in water-borne hyacinths and the trace amounts of soil they carry coalescing to form new fertile land for agriculture. Because these temporary formations do not have formal ownership established, indigenous and Moro men from surrounding communities frequently compete to plant rapidly gestating vegetables which hold significant value given their cultivation during dry periods which negatively impact more permanent agricultural sites. Participants explained that prolonged scarcity of resources and competition to initiate planting fuels *rido* (clan/family feuds). *Rido* forms a latent threat as it can quickly accumulate, represents one of the main causes of armed conflict across the Bangsamoro each year and can be a contributing factor to violent extremism.[21] Participants noted that women are increasingly used in *rido,* sometimes being placed on the frontline when it comes to carrying out acts of violence or retaliation.

In PaK, the biodiversity impacts of climate change have contributed towards a reduction in available fertile land, notably in village pastures earmarked for grazing of livestock (known as *gass charai*).[22] Participants described how this is forcing communities who are dependent on livestock production to more frequently navigate alternative grazing lands at higher altitudes, often in the immediate vicinity of the LoC which is rarely demarcated clearly. Accidental crossing of the LoC exposes Kashmiris to cross-fire and shelling and can raise cross-border tensions and perceptions of deliberate incursion. While this is the case for both men and women who are

A woman peacebuilder in the Bangsamoro
© Zabra Siwa/Conciliation Resources

apprehended, young men are typically treated more harshly on the pretext of perceived infiltration and militancy. This can generate significant media attention and fear-mongering framed in terms of violations of territorial integrity, which further escalates existing tensions between communities across the LoC. The particularly negative politicisation of young men's coping strategies, and their stigmatisation as militant actors, can have significant mental health impacts. Participants suggested this may drive young men from poorer rural areas to engage with the illicit economy and armed groups as a means of alternative income generation.

ii. Gender and cultural actors, relationships and processes can incentivise violent responses to climate change.

While gendered responses to climate change are 'enacted' at the individual level, wider community actors and dynamics play an important role in influencing these responses.

It is important to highlight that these actors are themselves playing roles defined by salient gender expectations and norms in contexts facing insecure livelihoods and a changing climate. Elders and traditional leaders described deep cultural expectations and commitments to stewarding their communities' continued prosperity, pride and traditional ways of life. These motivations, evaluated against the increasingly challenging environments in which to meet them, are fundamental in shaping community-wide processes in response to climate change.

In Karamoja, community representatives explained that young men's engagement in cattle raiding was rarely a decision taken by them unilaterally. Rather, in response to climate change and its indirect impacts on livestock, different community members facilitate young men's engagement in divergent ways – encouraging, supporting, and sometimes shaming them into enacting their responsibilities as male protectors and providers.[23] Councils of male elders are key in sanctioning and defining the parameters of raids, traditionally providing the final say on whether a raid should happen and providing vital contact links and geographical knowledge. As custodians of traditional norms and practices, older women play an important role in situating raids within these social frameworks. Participants explained that older women can call on young men the evening before raids to wish them well and bless those returning from successful raids. They sometimes use influential fortune tellers to predict a raid's success, and can encourage young men to participate by suggesting it will help them to become a 'real man' and avenge the deaths of male relatives killed in raids (sometimes referred to as *blood compensation*).

Young women are also influential in incentivising cattle raiding responses among young men. Participants noted that some advocate the importance of traditional 'full' marriages and encourage men to raid in order to obtain cattle for dowry. Positive reinforcement in the form of public praise, worship and specific dances to celebrate their bravery can be used for young men returning from successful raids. Negative reinforcement can be mobilised toward men who choose not to raid, in the form of public shaming and negative comparison to *warriors* who have raided.

iii. Gender roles and expectations can evolve in response to climate pressures, disrupting traditional cultural values and fuelling tensions in households and wider communities.

In all three contexts, the research found examples of climate change pressures contributing to the reshaping of gender roles, relations and expectations. In some contexts, this served to further limit the power and agency of women. Conversely, in cases where it presented opportunities for them to take on increasing responsibilities in male-dominated spaces, this often escalated tensions and contributed to conflict.

In PaK, participants observed a reduction in tolerance for women who do not stay on top of domestic responsibilities, and an increased focus on obedience to their husbands or fathers, in the aftermath of climate-induced natural disasters. This can be made worse where disasters render traditional forms of agriculture less feasible, and the jobs of rural women in particular – such as cutting grass and milking cows – become temporarily 'obsolete'. Among men, they observed an amplification in behaviours concerning toughness and pronounced readiness to defend family interests, while 'nice to have' traits such as being supportive and good listeners became less widely valued. This shift in gender norms is consistent with the theory of 'masculinity nostalgia', where situations of instability can create a yearning for traditional gender norms and relations linked to pasts which are perceived as more secure.[24]

However, there is often a paradox between expectations and reality: while more traditional divisions of roles between women and men can be reinforced during natural disasters and periods of extreme weather, the achievability of these expectations also significantly reduces. For men in all three contexts, climate change makes it less possible to provide economically for their family and attain breadwinner roles, with immediate implications for the economic and food security of households. In parallel, new expectations can emerge for women to play more leading social and economic roles. Young pastoralist women have diversified income generation through engaging in trading, mining activities and informal labour, as well as maladaptive practices, such as extracting firewood, grass and charcoal for selling. In the Bangsamoro, indigenous women are often left to manage large or extended families while taking over small farming responsibilities when their husbands migrate for alternative livelihoods.

This pressure to maintain traditional gendered household duties whilst enacting multiple new – and frequently discordant – versions of womanhood places a significant burden on women. While this can bring some positive benefits (for example in the Bangsamoro, women are developing new skills and achieving greater autonomy in family and community affairs), these were described by participants as a 'double-edged sword' because women often have to balance these newfound responsibilities within the limitations of existing patriarchal systems.[25] Any example of a woman's success in the traditionally masculine areas of income generation and community leadership – when many men are struggling to attain these same expectations – can exacerbate tensions by spotlighting compromised gender ideals and 'thwarted' masculine identities.

In the cases studied, women who assumed new responsibilities typically reserved for men were sometimes perceived to be disrupting conventional or religious norms which traditionally anchor men as providers and women as caregivers. Participants shared anecdotal examples of men seeking to reclaim a sense of lost manhood through gender-based violence, or in some cases turning to violent extremism as an alternative pathway to achieving masculinity.[26]

3. Gendered dynamics in government responses to climate change shape conflict risks.

The following three subsections outline how gendered responses to climate change also operate at governmental levels, and can breed mistrust between communities and authorities.

i. Masculine norms and roles within governmental climate decision-making can escalate conflict and exclude the perspectives of women.

Gender norms, roles and behaviours within climate institutions can have important implications for peace and conflict dynamics.

For example, climate change presents a shared threat to both the Indian and Pakistani sides of Kashmir. In principle, there could be potential to accelerate bilateral cooperation on mutually beneficial mitigation and adaptation measures between their respective governments.[27] However, in practice, inter-state rhetoric is more aimed at escalating conflict, including combative sentiments over natural resource competition. This is best illustrated in the case of the Indus Water Treaty,[28] a critical mechanism for managing competition over water usage, hydro energy and construction of dams that can impact water availability in both countries. India and Pakistan are increasingly clashing over the treaty, using dialogue and negotiation techniques described by participants as 'muscular' and oppositional (such as blaming one another for regional water insecurity, flooding, increased militarisation and use of water as a tool of hostility).[29] Analysis suggests such rhetoric risks provoking a conflict over water.[30]

Participants in a gender, climate and conflict analysis workshop in Islamabad, Pakistan
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"Climate change is posing existential questions and challenging the territoriality of the LoC – what happens if cluster bombs move this way or that way, how to manage landslides removing entire villages, what happens to populations living close to the LoC"

Participant in Islamabad workshop

Peacebuilding analysts in workshops suggested that the inter-state 'modus operandi' for addressing natural resource management can itself be understood as gendered. This referred to participants' shared observations that rhetoric by political leadership on these issues reflects dominant masculine modes of engagement in the wider PaK context, characterised by strength, courage, assertiveness and control. This then creates strict parameters for how interactions on cross-border climate change engagement are commonly conducted. This is no coincidence given a majority of actors within national climate infrastructure, including both Water Commissioners for the Indus Water Commission, are male.

This also creates barriers to alternative, more reciprocal models of managing climate change, which can sometimes be dismissed as 'feminine' and less valid for navigating masculine engagement cultures deeply embedded within the functioning of male-dominated organisations.[31]

Participants felt this can contribute to a culture where women and other marginalised groups struggle to be included and accepted as legitimate actors, noting that the few women who occupy climate policy spaces at the state level are forced to 'compensate' by legitimising masculine norms and adopting 'tough' and 'authoritative' approaches.

"More inclusive, productive collaboration on climate change – that's what is required. This enables new visions, new relations, new clarity"

Male participant in Islamabad workshop

ii. Government responses to climate change that fail to respond to gendered needs can fuel grievances, further sparking pathways to violence.

Governmental responses to climate change can shape inter- and intra-community conflict risks, as well as tensions between communities and authorities responsible for leading climate responses.

One pathway through which government responses exacerbate risks of violence is the implementation of gender-blind climate action. In the Bangsamoro, communities' grievances following climate relocation programmes often focused on a lack of government

attention to women and girls' needs. Transitional and evacuation shelters frequently fail to provide adequate privacy for breastfeeding mothers and pregnant women or appropriate hygiene and sanitation facilities. This has fuelled high levels of mistrust within communities – largely between men who perceive it as their responsibility to protect female community members – but also grievances between male community leaders and the state.

The severity of tensions can be understood through *maratabat*, a concept which reflects pre-Islamic cultural traditions and a deep sense of personal honour, dignity and reputation.[32] Because *maratabat* is closely linked to the need to uphold one's descent line, it is a key feature in guiding and maintaining men's social standing. Piqued *maratabat* can strongly incentivise retribution, which is often expressed through violent retaliation. Participants explained that government responses to climate change and natural disasters that failed to meet women's needs not only heightened women's vulnerability but placed 'male *maratabat* in the spotlight'. This creates a powerful pressure for men to protect the dignity of women and, if they are unable to do so, can degrade their respect within the community.

Participants suggested that armed groups recognise the significance of these grievances as powerful push factors for men to engage in violence, and are capitalising on them within their recruitment tactics. For example, it was suggested that groups such as the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters and Ansar Khalifa Philippines are leveraging narratives around poor responses by authorities to displacement and emphasising gendered themes of women's indignity and mistreatment and of male responsibility and *maratabat* to urge men to 'take things into their own hands'.

iii. Government responses to climate change which undermine diverse cultural knowledge, rights and values can place communities at extreme risk during natural disasters.

The analysis identified examples of governmental responses to climate change disregarding the diverse gender and cultural rights, needs, interests and values of communities, resulting in climate action which further entrenched their vulnerabilities and grievances.

For example, indigenous peoples in the Bangsamoro hold a deep material and spiritual connection to the natural environment and to specific territories that they have traditionally inhabited (with some tribal names originating from nearby lakes). When relocated as a result of climate change, they are unable to enjoy the traditional way of life that is integral to their identity.

During the research period, members of the Teduray Lambangian indigenous community explained that they were ordered by the local mayor, who belongs to the majority Magindanawan ethnic group, to relocate to *Sitio Tinabon* on the slopes of Mt. Minandar with little opportunity for consultation. The community formally complained to municipal officials that the relocation site sits on a lower part of the mountain's slope, forming a concave space which they know can easily become a catch basin during heavy rains, causing risks such as landslides. The relocation site also holds deep cultural significance for Teduray Lambangian communities, who believe it is a sacred passageway for their ancestors riding on a mythical boat from *Sitio Tinabon* across to the sea in Kusiong as they transition into the afterlife.

Nevertheless, complaints made on the grounds of indigenous knowledge, traditions and belief systems were disregarded by the local government who maintained that *Sitio Tinabon* was the safest part of the area for them to relocate to. Failure to include Teduray Lambangian concerns in decision-making, in contravention of the principle of free, prior and informed consent enjoyed by indigenous peoples under international law,[33] subsequently heightened their risk to natural disasters. During Typhoon Paeng, *Sitio Tinabon* became a natural receptacle for landslides (rocks and mud) carried by strong floodwaters, resulting in the deaths of more than 60 people, mostly from the Teduray Lambangian community. Participants suggested that these same dynamics of neglect, marginalisation and compounding community vulnerability heighten grievances and conflict risks in a similar way to *maratabat*.

> **"It is expected that a government chief executive, who belongs to the Datu class, would not respect the traditions and belief systems of the non-Moro indigenous peoples in the region"**
>
> **Former community organiser in the Bangsamoro**

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Gendered responses to climate change operate at multiple levels – from households and communities to regional and national governmental institutions. These responses further entrench inequalities and can breed mistrust within and between households, communities and governments, creating ongoing conflict cycles.

As communities increasingly struggle to maintain and develop their cultural identities, masculine expectations centred on bravery and defence can heighten and drive high-risk responses such as armed cattle raiding or propensity to extremist sentiments. Community actors and structures – themselves highly gendered and under increasing pressure – play an influential role in shaping these responses.

Government-led climate responses can undermine diverse gender and cultural rights, needs and perspectives, such as by relocating indigenous peoples on sacred land and in gender-blind facilities. Community grievances – both in response to government actions and increased competition over natural resources for grazing cattle and planting crops – can heighten retaliatory actions. Adversarial approaches to climate change employed by authorities, such as blaming adverse weather events on marginalised groups, adopting hyper-masculine approaches to dialogue and politicising young men's coping strategies, further sparks tensions.

Pre-existing power inequalities become further solidified within these responses. Within pastoralist, Kashmiri and indigenous communities, women, older people and people living with (dis)abilities are among those most affected by climate shocks and subsequent response patterns, yet remain largely under-represented in climate decision-making, policy and action.

Peacebuilding and climate change action which fails to analyse and respond to gender and cultural dynamics risks missing unique insights from communities, amplifying or introducing new grievances, and exacerbating existing inequalities and conflict dynamics. The analysis also surfaced a number of opportunities for initiatives to advance gender and social equality, which are outlined in the next section.

Community members taking part in a climate change awareness raising walk in Pakistan-administered Kashmir
© Mohammed Arif Urfi/Conciliation Resources

LESSONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

As the urgency surrounding the climate crisis intensifies, studies suggest the impetus to work on more inclusive solutions risks stalling.[34] At the same time, more militarised, 'masculine' approaches – for example, centred on protecting territory, increasing military threats and adopting combative approaches to land energy and natural resource management – are gaining legitimacy. These challenges are likely to be further compounded as global anti-gender movements continue to proliferate.

This section provides recommendations for practitioners and policymakers working on peacebuilding and climate change initiatives in conflict contexts. It offers lessons on how actors in each field can integrate gender and culturally-responsive actions into their work, building on the findings presented.

1. Address underlying inequalities and fragility to strengthen climate resilience and unlock effective, sustainable climate action.

Carefully designed climate interventions which use collaborative models of consultation can help to reduce structural vulnerabilities to climate change while reconciling diverse needs and perspectives towards more equitable and just outcomes for different groups.

Climate practitioners should first recognise, and promote, the understanding that more effective climate outcomes can be achieved by alleviating pre-existing inequalities and fragilities based on gender, age, culture, ethnicity, (dis)ability and other factors. Secondly, they should design and implement interventions which explicitly aim to address factors which limit the ability of people and structures to mitigate and adapt to climatic changes and shocks. This could include coordinating more closely with relevant social protection initiatives; budgeting resources for communities to use as required (such as on disaster mitigation training or alternative income generation models); supporting marginalised groups to meaningfully engage in climate-related consultations (by ensuring accessible locations, timing and translation, and compensating people for their time and childcare arrangements); ensuring more equal distribution of decision-making within the constituencies they support (whether community or governmental bodies); and connecting scientific evidence with indigenous expertise to better identify climate hazards and plan anticipatory actions.

Peacebuilders have a key role to play in supporting climate practitioners to achieve this through facilitating participatory analysis to understand the underlying drivers of inequality and fragility; identifying methods for shifting these through locally-defined approaches and expertise; creating safe spaces for confidence building between communities and those in positions of power; and supporting authorities to facilitate more meaningful participation of marginalised groups in climate responses.

Policymakers can accelerate progress in this area by prioritising climate action which explicitly aims to identify and shift underlying causes of inequality and fragility. Practically, donor-funded initiatives need to include realistic budgets and timeframes required to analyse and shift these factors, facilitate the meaningful exclusion of marginalised groups, and accompany those in power to shift their attitudes and approaches. Flexible approaches to project design and management can help to ensure that activities are continually adapted based on the emerging needs of those consulted.

2. Leverage climate change initiatives as entry points for peacebuilding and gender and social equality outcomes, with a strong focus on masculinities.

The analysis highlighted how climate responses have the potential to exacerbate existing inequalities and conflict dynamics. However, it also surfaced opportunities for climate action to contribute to transforming conflict systems and advancing gender and social equality. Because climate change is commonly understood as a pre-eminent threat to livelihoods, cultural identity and human security, it requires unique levels of collaboration within and between communities, with authorities and across borders.

In contexts where there is a high degree of consensus on the need for collaboration, peacebuilders should leverage environmental peacebuilding methodologies as an entry point to preventing conflict escalation and fostering confidence. Approaches could include facilitating dialogue between conflict parties on transboundary natural resource issues, promoting inclusive and climate-resilient governance and livelihood models, and de-escalating tensions directly linked to the environment. In contexts where there is not yet consensus, peacebuilding and climate practitioners can work together to establish a case for mutual cooperation. Participatory analysis is one key way of building understanding among communities and authorities on the connections between climate change and conflict systems.

Peacebuilders should also seize the potential for climate initiatives to serve as a vehicle for transforming gender and other forms of social inequality. Across case study contexts, the pressures caused by climate change force renegotiation of roles for women and make it more challenging for men and women to deliver on traditional expectations. This opens up spaces to reflect on and, where appropriate, redefine more restrictive norms (for example, those which pressure young men as providers and protectors to engage in high-risk coping strategies, or limit women's agency in climate processes). These efforts must be designed with and owned by local communities, and could include facilitating dialogues on how gender and cultural expectations shape response to climate pressures (and the implications this has for continuing cycles of violence and blocking effective climate collaboration); diagnosing the underlying individual and community factors incentivising these strategies; identifying alternative, non-violent strategies for meeting community needs; and accompanying influential actors, such as elders and customary leaders, to endorse and promote these approaches.

Donors should incentivise interdisciplinary work required to address the overlapping challenges of the climate crisis, conflict and entrenched gender and social inequality. A key starting point would be to create platforms for learning exchange between climate practitioners and peacebuilders in conflict-affected contexts, focused on building capacity, relationships and joint planning.

3. Integrate an intersectional gendered analysis into peacebuilding and climate change programming, policy development and advocacy.

Gender expectations, relations and power dynamics shape responses to climate change at household, community and governmental levels. Analysing these can help to provide a more nuanced, person-centred perspective on how climate change is collectively experienced by communities, including insights into the relational pathways from climate change to elevated conflict risks.

Analysis also clearly highlights how gender behaviours are expressed differently across cultural contexts. An intersectional approach, often weak or non-existent in conflict and climate change analysis, can help to ensure initiatives meet diverse community priorities, while guiding entry points for influencing different actors' response strategies – including those that fuel conflict or restrict effective climate action.

Peacebuilding and climate change practitioners should work closely with gender advisors to integrate intersectional analysis into the planning, consultation and design phases of any interventions. This could include integrating the six-step tool (outlined in the Introduction) into established gender-sensitive conflict analysis toolkits[35] (ensuring a more explicit focus on climate change as a key driving factor of conflict, and opening up greater space for reflection on cultural identities, values and power dynamics within this); embedding key criteria or checklists based on the six steps into project cycles, and building on existing resources as a foundation for analysis (such as country-level Climate Change Gender Action Plans, which identify gender-specific priorities within climate sectors).

Policymakers should use intersectional analysis to identify the role of power dynamics in shaping different groups' climate resilience, adaptation and coping strategies, and ensure this informs relevant performance indicators in climate security policies and women, peace and security National Action Plans. Donors should include minimum standards on intersectional analysis in proposals and reporting, and ensure flexibility in project inception phases to enable fully participatory, community-led analysis.

4. Advance gender and culturally-responsive climate change action at governmental levels.

Government responses to climate change can undermine diverse gender and cultural needs while further marginalising community perspectives. Rather than simply adding women to problematic climate processes and structures, policymakers and practitioners should prioritise shifting the gendered cultures which currently define and limit these.

Peacebuilding and climate practitioners have a key role to play in supporting governments to design and deliver climate action which responds to gender and culturally-specific concerns and avoids escalating tensions. This could include providing guidance on carrying out participatory planning and consultations (in line with free, prior and informed consent and other related procedures); sensitising authorities to the importance of integrating diverse perspectives and demonstrating the practical benefits this can bring to existing climate priorities; accompanying authorities to analyse gender and cultural needs and identify practical steps for integrating these within current climate, disaster risk reduction, natural resource management and development plans; facilitating mutually beneficial connections with civil society working on gender, conflict and climate issues; and challenging limiting attitudes around women's roles within these processes by ensuring women are at the forefront of all efforts.

Governmental bodies responsible for climate decision-making should consider undertaking initiatives to understand and address gender norms and organisational cultures inhibiting inclusive climate responses. Addressing militarised and adversarial dialogue management presents a number of opportunities, including creating operational cultures more conducive to effective cooperation on climate measures, and decreasing the risk of climate responses exacerbating grievances towards authorities. This could be done by strengthening gender and cultural diversity in relevant posts; introducing criteria to guide more inclusive decision-making; creating appropriate consultation opportunities for marginalised groups' networks; and shifting organisational cultures through awareness raising, nominating 'champions' of more inclusive behaviour and introducing complaint mechanisms.

An emerging priority for policymakers and donors is to invest in pilot initiatives that identify 'what works' in engaging power-holders to advance gender and social equality within climate change spaces. Beginning to establish an evidence base on how to most effectively influence traditionally non-supportive actors, or even resistors, to take action on gender and cultural power imbalances, norms and modes of engagement would address a key knowledge and practice gap.

5. Invest in programming that prevents climate and gender-related conflict and is led by local women and civil society organisations.

There is a critical need to support communities in preventing climate and gender-specific conflict risks from escalating. Local civil society is best placed to identify climate hazards, mitigate associated signs of conflict and work with communities in ways that are sensitive to local gender dynamics.

Workshop participants highlighted that future programming should prioritise building collaboration between communities and authorities on conflict prevention and advocating for gender, cultural and conflict-specific priorities in climate responses. Civil society has a key role to play in creating safe spaces for communities and authorities to discuss the impacts of climate change on different people; build understanding of tensions arising from current climate responses (including harmful narratives or legitimisation of violence towards certain groups); and developing and embedding conflict prevention approaches within climate action (for example, by exchanging data with climate specialists to feed into early warning indicators; utilising mediation and dialogue to de-escalate environmental tensions, and integrating community concerns into climate action sensitively and from an early stage).

Peacebuilders and climate practitioners can support civil society to organise, monitor and hold authorities accountable to more inclusive climate action and avoid grievances escalating. This could include developing culturally sensitive advocacy tools; tailoring communications strategies to facilitate successful uptake of recommendations by different bodies; and establishing mechanisms for civil society and authorities to engage in more structured dialogue and monitoring of relevant commitments.

It is important to avoid disproportionately burdening local communities, and particularly women, with climate action responsibilities without resourcing them to properly advance structural change. Donors have an important role to play in providing dedicated, flexible funding to local civil society and women's organisations and supporting adaptive, conflict-sensitive approaches. Global urgency for climate action needs to be balanced with the time and patience required to work within complex community systems and to engage with communities in culturally appropriate ways.

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