



Roots of Resilience: Building Peace in an Era of Food and Climate Shocks



Key Takeaways

1. The food-climate-conflict nexus disrupts ecological and food systems, exacerbates conflict over scarce resources and amplifies forced migration, increasingly fuelling a vicious cycle of unsustainability and destabilization from sub-Saharan Africa to Southeast Asia.
2. Building resilience at the food-climate-conflict nexus is a critical step toward peace in times of rising global instability. Evidence from the humanitarian frontlines in the Sahel, Lebanon, Iraq and Myanmar shows that investments in one area of the nexus, such as sustainable agri-food systems, yield dividends and co-benefits in climate adaptation and conflict resolution.
3. Integrating climate into security frameworks across defence, development and humanitarian domains (and vice versa) is critical to addressing these interlinked challenges. Such integration can enhance the effectiveness of responses, promote stability, and ultimately reduce global food insecurity.

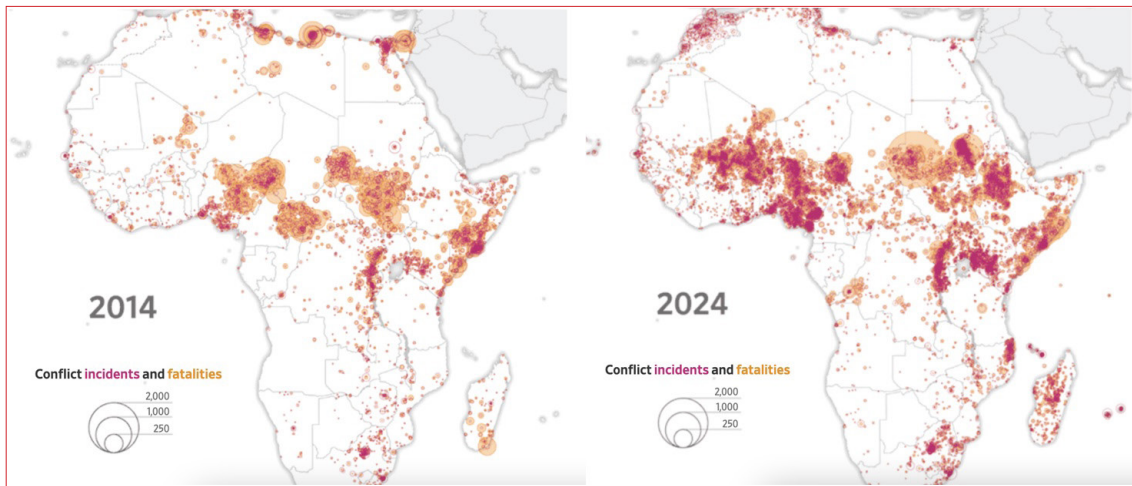
Introduction

In the context of the 2025 Munich Security Conference (MSC), it is critical that leaders, understandably consumed with state-centric geopolitical disruptions, pay close attention to transnational and systemic risks – one of the most significant of which is the *food-climate-conflict nexus*. This background paper unpacks the nexus and its associated risks while presenting near-term solutions, that range from the promotion of sustainable agri-food systems to empowering climate champions in defence institutions.

The Food-Climate-Conflict Nexus

The food-climate-conflict nexus represents interconnected challenges wherein climate change disrupts ecosystems and food production, resulting in greater risks of malnutrition, hunger and conflict over dwindling natural resources. The nexus also fuels the vicious cycle of unsustainability in a belt of countries from sub-Saharan Africa to Southeast Asia. This convergence of cascading risks has already had serious security implications. For example, a recent analysis from Uppsala University in Sweden and Norway's Peace Research Institute Oslo has shown that Africa is now experiencing more conflicts than any time since 1946, with 28 active state-based conflicts across 16 of the continent's 54 countries and double the number of inter-community conflicts since 2010.¹

¹ Gabriele Steinhauser, Andrew Barnett and Emma Brown, "Africa Has Entered a New Era of War", in *The Wall Street Journal*, 31 December 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/world/africa/africa-has-entered-a-new-era-of-war-c6171d8e>.



Source: ACLED / [Wall Street Journal](https://www.wsj.com).

Beyond the African continent, instability continues in Yemen, Iraq, India, Myanmar and more, straining the resources of the international community as democratic backsliding, famine and violence persist.² In this context, the international community remains stuck in emergency response mode, with its attention divided by geopolitics and ad-hoc conflict resolution. Minimal progress has been made in addressing the well-known funding and coordination gaps, despite repeated warnings about the resulting security risks. At the same time, staggering debt burdens further marginalize vulnerable countries that pay 850 billion US dollars yearly in interest alone, trapping them in cycles of aid dependency.³

In the so-called “arc of instability”,⁴ this nexus is a challenge for security and development actors alike, particularly given the resurgence of transnational threats. For example, the impacts of climate change in the Sahel have made harvests more vulnerable and forced farmers and herders alike to shift their traditional practices. At the same time, a convergence of climate and conflict factors has increased internal displacement and migration to urban areas, creating cascading risks for conflict and gender-based violence, among other life-threatening risks.⁵ Amidst a series of government coups and lapses in government service delivery (particularly away from urban areas), this has opened the space for violent non-state actors and other extremist organizations to expand their reach, and offered opportunities for external actors like Russia’s Wagner Group to operate more freely.⁶ Similarly, in a post-

² International Rescue Committee, *IRC Emergency Watchlist 2025: A World out of Balance, Sudan, OPT and Myanmar Top of Humanitarian Crisis Ranking - Urgent Action Possible and Needed*, 11 December 2024, <https://www.rescue.org/node/15926>.

³ UN Trade and Development, *A World of Debt 2024*, <https://unctad.org/publication/world-of-debt>.

⁴ Defined by the US government and US National Intelligence Council as “stretching from Sub-Saharan Africa through North Africa, into the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, and South and Central Asia, and parts of Southeast Asia”. See National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*, November 2008, [https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports and Pubs/2025_Global_Trends_Final_Report.pdf](https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Reports%20and%20Pubs/2025_Global_Trends_Final_Report.pdf).

⁵ Gabrielle Daoust, Yue Cao and Jim Jarvie, *Changing Climate, Changing Realities: Migration in the Sahel*, British Red Cross/Overseas Development Institute, 2022, <https://odi.org/en/publications/changing-climate-changing-realities-migration-in-the-sahel>.

⁶ Center for Preventive Action, “Violent Extremism in the Sahel”, in *Global Conflict Tracker*, updated 23 October 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>.

coup Myanmar, a convergence of climate risks, forced migration and ongoing ethnic conflict have created serious human rights and food security risks.⁷ Like the Sahel, Myanmar occupies a geopolitically important position, as bordering Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand offer the country the opportunity to be a key player in the Indo-Pacific.

Amidst this resource-constrained and divided geopolitical context, it is time to reassess how we frame and approach these challenges to strengthen the roots of resilience globally. How can multilateral actors integrate non-traditional approaches to national security, placing people and the environment at the centre of security policy action, while managing conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine? How can actors like the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), defence, private sector and international financial institutions (IFIs) effectively collaborate and invest in the most vulnerable regions? And, how can policymakers mitigate the trade-offs between geopolitics and climate action (or the perception of them)?

Barriers to Addressing the Nexus in Practice

Addressing the challenges of the food-climate-conflict nexus requires both a reassessment of traditional approaches to security and a commitment by key multilateral players to innovative, collaborative and inclusive solutions. Actors like the UN, EU and NATO have traditionally focused on state-centric or conflict-driven security paradigms. Historically, their security doctrines lacked explicit integration of climate-related threats, treating them as secondary to conventional military or political risks.⁸ These actors have since developed climate, human security, and gender-informed policy frameworks, but such frameworks often fall short in practice, particularly in fragile contexts where governance is weak and resources are scarce.⁹

Governments in fragile or conflict-affected settings are often unable and/or unwilling to provide climate and human security. For example, in Ukraine, the intersection of climate risks and food security remains peripheral in discussions dominated by conflict resolution and geopolitical realignment. Whilst ending the war is certainly the top priority, the convergence of a changing climate and over 51 billion US dollars in conflict-related environmental damages will likely require additional development funds or new sources of staple goods for Europe in the interim.¹⁰ Similarly, in the Middle East, water scarcity and its cascading effects on food systems are acknowledged but insufficiently prioritized. In this sense, one of the main obstacles hampering further cooperation on these issues is the false perception that

⁷ Amnesty International, "Myanmar", in *The State of the World's Human Rights*, April 2024, p. 271-274, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/asia-and-the-pacific/south-east-asia-and-the-pacific/myanmar/report-myanmar>.

⁸ For example, NATO has integrated climate into its Strategic Concept but has struggled to overcome a converging lack of political will, scepticism and interoperability challenges. See Katarina Kertysova, "Implementing NATO's Climate Security Agenda: Challenges Ahead", in *NATO Review*, 10 August 2023, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2023/08/10/implementing-natos-climate-security-agenda-challenges-ahead/index.html>.

⁹ Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel and Jean Van Wetter, "The European Union Needs to Stay Engaged in Fragile Contexts", in *GIZ Articles*, 16 July 2024, https://www.giz.de/en/mediacenter/enabel_fragile_contexts.html.

¹⁰ Yale E360, "One Year In, Russia's War on Ukraine Has Inflicted \$51 Billion in Environmental Damage", in *E360 Digest*, 22 February 2023, <https://e360.yale.edu/digest/russia-ukraine-war-environmental-cost-one-year>.

governments can address food and climate risks or maintain geopolitical advantage but not both. Policymakers sometimes view climate action as competing with immediate national security priorities, particularly in conflict zones or contested regions. This misperception leads to underinvestment in initiatives that could simultaneously address climate risks and contribute to stability.

Today, significant (and well-covered) challenges remain in addressing complex crises from a nexus perspective, both structurally (as it pertains to the multilateral and global financial systems), politically, and economically. In the context of the 2025 Munich Security Conference, the key barriers to working at this nexus include:

- *Lack of financial resources:* In the last year, foreign aid budgets in Europe have been slashed as the EU manages strained national budgets and prioritizes resources needed for the green transition. Meanwhile, the new US administration has recently frozen foreign aid and is expected to shift its priorities toward domestic security-driven investments.¹¹ These budget cuts, combined with a rising number of complex crises, are outpacing the capacity of international organizations to respond effectively. However, a whole-of-government investment approach combined with proactive humanitarian aid has the power to reduce costs down the line. In 2023, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) countries invested 25.9 billion US dollars in humanitarian aid for 245 million people, equivalent to 106 dollars per person. At the same time, forced and irregular migration cost donor countries 31 billion US dollars in the same year (7,600 US dollars per person).¹²
- *Geopolitics and strategic competition:* As humanitarian challenges and complex crises grow in scope, key stakeholders find themselves navigating geopolitical divides between the Global North and South and divided over strategic competition.
- *Persistent silos and strategic gaps:* Despite greater recognition of interconnected crises, responses remain fragmented, with a focus on hard security overshadowing long-term challenges like food insecurity and climate impacts. Rigid bureaucracies and overlapping programmes hinder collaboration, while a lack of strategic financial planning and sustainable investments limits the ability of governments and organizations to shift from reactive measures to integrated, forward-looking solutions.



Solutions for Building Resilience

In practice, throughout the belt of instability, action to build resilience at the food-climate-conflict nexus is a critical step towards peace – a core priority for security and development

¹¹ See the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum 25-13: *Temporary Pause of Agency Grant, Loan, and Other Financial Assistance Programs*, 27 January 2025, <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/25506186/m-25-13-temporary-pause-to-review-agency-grant-loan-and-other-financial-assistance-programs.pdf>.

¹² See data from OECD website: *Development Co-operation*, <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/development-co-operation.html>; UNHCR website: *Refugee Data Finder*, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics>, OCHA, *The Pulse of Humanitarian Coordination 2023*, 22 January 2025, <https://humanitarianaction.info/overview/2023>.

actors alike. Programmes dedicated to resilience serve as a tool to address polycrises¹³ by reducing institutional complexity and investing in areas that offer both immediate and long-term benefits to communities – as the case studies below demonstrate. It is, therefore, essential to reframe these challenges as interrelated, demonstrating that an investment in one area of the nexus, such as sustainable agri-food systems, often reaps dividends or co-benefits in climate adaptation and conflict resolution as well. This reframing includes:

- Focusing on sustainable agri-food systems and programmes that end global hunger, given food security's impact on stability and migration.
- Investing in countries not yet in crisis or at climate tipping points, with a particular focus on adaptation financing.
- Developing structured dialogue platforms between the EU, NATO and the USA to harmonize priorities, particularly through joint climate risk assessments and coordinated responses in fragile regions.
- Investing in capacity building at the local level, empowering governments and civil society in fragile regions to manage these interlinked risks effectively.
- Strategic cooperation with the Global South to include joint investments in sustainable agri-food systems, climate adaptation technologies and infrastructure projects, ensuring that climate security efforts align with development goals.
- Reforming international financial institutions and the climate finance ecosystem to reduce risks and debt burdens.
- Building climate champions in defence institutions so security efforts complement those of development actors.



Case Studies

Sceptics of operating in this belt of instability often argue that these states are too fragile or that resources would be better allocated elsewhere. However, the existing programmes of the World Food Programme (WFP) demonstrate potential inroads toward long-term resilience via food security that can be complemented by the efforts of other development and security actors.

West Africa and the Sahel

In West Africa, food insecurity, driven by conflict, displacement, poor governance, economic crises and severe climate shocks, is set to rise to 52.7 million through mid-2025.¹⁴ Particularly

¹³ First coined by philosopher Edgar Morin in his book *Terre-Patrie* (1993), a polycrisis describes a situation in which a multitude of interconnected human and natural crises clash and exacerbate one another, creating conditions that are highly difficult to effectively address.

¹⁴ World Food Programme (WFP), *West and Central Africa Faces Deepening Food Crisis - UN Agencies Call for Enhanced Humanitarian Action and Lasting Hunger Solutions*, 20 December 2024, <https://www.wfp.org/node/29796>.

affected by the convergence of these stressors are the G5 Sahel countries, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania. It is in these states that the United Nations World Food Programme's (WFP) "Sahel Integrated Resilience Programme" extends beyond addressing food security to other regional nexus challenges. Together with local communities with different ethnic-religious backgrounds (farmers, herders, refugees), the programme has rehabilitated over 300,000 hectares of land – an area equivalent to over 400,000 soccer pitches – constructed water-harvesting and retention structures, reforested and protected farmlands and pastures, and improved soil fertility, benefitting 4 million people in 3,400 villages.¹⁵

These interventions don't just reduce food insecurity. They also work in tandem to reduce tension over natural resources, promote equitable access and foster social cohesion in a region marked by high levels of conflict and insecurity. Related studies from Burkina Faso and Niger have found that these investments have created new income streams that have countered the influence of extremist groups.¹⁶ These resilience measures can provide bottom-up solutions to stabilize an entire region and improve the security situation while simultaneously reducing costs for humanitarian aid: 80 per cent of the participating villages in Niger no longer need humanitarian aid – a saving of 54 million US dollars.¹⁷ By 2027, the WFP, together with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), aims to extend these efforts and reach around 8 million people in 6,000 communities and to restore 450,000 hectares of land.¹⁸

Iraq

The exploitation of natural resources by armed groups in Iraq poses an increasing threat to climate, peace and security apparatuses. These groups have become deeply embedded in the country's social, political and economic systems, exerting significant influence over agriculture and land management.¹⁹ By turning these sectors into sources of revenue, they sustain and expand their membership and power. Consequently, efforts to protect land and water resources and implement climate action are being undermined.²⁰ Strong environmental governance therefore needs to be part of Iraq's progress towards bringing armed groups under the effective control of the state.

To begin to close these gaps, in July 2024, WFP launched the three-year Climate Adaptation for Food Security and Stability project, supported by USAID's Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization (CPS). This flagship initiative aims to address Iraq's critical water scarcity challenges by enhancing the capacity of local governments and communities for climate preparedness and risk reduction while fostering resilience in rural agricultural communities.

¹⁵ WFP, *Integrated Resilience in the Sahel*, 9 May 2024, <https://www.wfp.org/node/21872>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ WFP, *WFP Funding Crisis Leaves Millions Stranded without Aid as Dire Hunger Crisis Grips West Africa*, 5 July 2023, <https://www.wfp.org/node/28274>.

¹⁸ WFP, *Germany Supports UNICEF, WFP and GIZ Joining Forces to Boost Resilience in the Sahel amid Worsening Effects of Conflict, Climate and Macroeconomic Shocks in West and Central Africa*, 29 May 2024, <https://www.wfp.org/node/29226>.

¹⁹ UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), *Localised Interlinkages between Climate, Peace, and Security in Iraq. UNAMI Climate, Peace and Security Analysis Report, August 2023-May 2024*, September 2024, <https://iraq.un.org/en/node/278470>.

²⁰ Ibid.

It focuses on promoting modern agricultural practices and technologies, supporting locally-led efforts to tackle water-related issues, and reducing vulnerabilities faced by women and marginalized groups. Additionally, the project works to expand access to finance for agribusinesses and smallholder farmers, enabling the adoption of advanced technologies and improving agricultural productivity.

Lebanon

WFP's operations in Lebanon prioritize strengthening the resilience of vulnerable communities and refugees. Efforts focus on making the country's food system more sustainable while promoting conflict-sensitive and integrated resilience-building approaches.²¹ These initiatives aim to enhance the ability of communities, households and individuals to absorb and adapt to increasing shocks and stressors in a fragile and conflict-affected situation.

For example, WFP's conditional cash-based transfers (CBT) programme has provided vulnerable households with short-term food assistance to bridge the food gap while enabling individuals to participate in livelihood activities.²² These activities contribute to social cohesion by fostering spaces for intergroup interactions between Lebanese and Syrian communities. At a systemic level, CBT serves as a cornerstone for resilience-building in a market-based society. This is achieved through a combination of cash injections that stimulate local markets and targeted training in marketing, finance, and legal frameworks. In 2024, WFP supported the Government of Lebanon Emergency Social Safety Net, which supported almost 800,000 people and injected 180 million US dollars into the Lebanese economy.

The UN's January 2025 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report identifies conflict as the primary driver of food insecurity and displacement within Lebanon.²³ Despite the announcement of a ceasefire on 27 November 2024, the IPC forecasts that the residual repercussions of the conflict will further increase the number of people requiring food and livelihood assistance. This highlights the critical importance of addressing immediate needs while simultaneously building longer-term resilience among Lebanon's most vulnerable populations. For example, WFP has prioritized the hardest-hit areas of southern Lebanon such as Bekaa and Nabatieh. These initiatives primarily focus on providing cash assistance to smallholder farmers and offering capacity-building programmes for farm workers most affected by the violence.

Myanmar

Violent conflict is the primary, proximate driver of displacement in Myanmar. However, climate change and extreme weather events are highly interrelated with migration and mobility.²⁴ In conflict-affected areas, restricted mobility can exacerbate people's vulnerability to climate change when they are unable to leave severely disaster-affected regions. Displaced people, ethnic minorities, women and children – those most vulnerable to food insecurity – are the

²¹ WFP, *Lebanon Country Strategic Plan (2023-2025)*, 13 October 2022, <https://www.wfp.org/node/27566>.

²² Kristina Tschunkert, "The World Food Programme's Contribution to Improving the Prospects for Peace in Lebanon", in *SIPRI Policy Reports*, September 2021, <https://www.sipri.org/node/5560>.

²³ IPC, *Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, October 2024-March 2025*, 17 January 2025, <https://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1159456/?iso3=LBN>.

²⁴ Kyungmee Kim et al., "Myanmar: Climate Peace and Security Fact Sheet", in *SIPRI Fact Sheets*, May 2024, <https://www.sipri.org/node/7014>.

focus of WFP's integrated relief and resilience activities.²⁵ However, in relatively stable areas, WFP is enhancing livelihoods and building long-term resilience through projects that develop community assets, including roads, terraced lands, irrigation canals, flood protection dykes and home gardens.

As disaster management policies evolve at the national level, development partners are working with the government to enhance community resilience through Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programmes.²⁶ These interventions highlight the importance of a multi-stakeholder and multi-sector approach to enhancing resilience.



Conclusion

The 2025 Munich Security Conference (MSC) has a lot on its plate, given the multiple geopolitical and security crises underway across the globe. However, as nations deliberate on the security landscape, they should not make the mistake of ignoring transnational, systemic risks because of immediate state-driven and conflict-driven crises. By paying close attention to, and addressing, risks that flow from the food-climate-conflict nexus – starting with the recommendations and case studies included in this backgrounder – the international community can help remove an important barrier to peace.

²⁵ WFP website: *Myanmar*, <https://www.wfp.org/countries/myanmar>.

²⁶ Myanmar Institute for Integrated Development, *Strategic Review of Food and Nutrition Security Myanmar: In support of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 - Roadmap to 2030*, June 2018, <https://www.wfp.org/node/4929>.



Nexus²⁵ is a joint project of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) in Rome and the Center for Climate and Security (CCS) in Washington, DC. The project, led by Dr. Nathalie Tocci at IAI, Erin Sikorsky at CCS and Dr. Michael Werz at the Center for American Progress (CAP), is funded by Stiftung Mercator in Germany. This discussion paper was written as input for the Nexus²⁵ and WFP side event at the 2025 Munich Security Conference, and was prepared by Siena Cicarelli, Luca Cinciripini, Lukas Eichelter, Philip Novaković-Wilke and Lena von Zabern.

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January 2025

Front cover: NEXUS challenges in the Sahel - Nexus²⁵ project.

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