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STRENGTHENING CONFLICT SENSITIVE APPROACHES TO CLIMATE CHANGE IN MENA

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Introduction: The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is among the world's most vulnerable regions to climate change. The region is projected to experience increasing temperatures, water stress and instances of extreme weather events, with direct consequences for regional food and water security. In addition, a large share of the region's population, infrastructure and economic activity are at risk from sea level riseⁱ. Traditional patterns of migration may also be disrupted in response to climate changeⁱⁱ. The poorest and socially marginalized are the most vulnerable to these changes, particularly where the infrastructure, social safety nets and economic resources, needed to support these groups are insufficient. With climate risks predicted to worsen in the coming decadesⁱⁱⁱ, biophysical impacts coupled with growing demand for food and water, are set to put increased pressure on socio-political systems. Many countries in the region are experiencing various levels of fragility, including violent conflict^{iv}. How will climate risks further exacerbate fragility in these countries and are there adequate policies and tools for countries to build their resilience?

Climate Change and Conflict: The links between climate change and conflict have been much discussed and debated among policy makers and academics alike. Some argue that there is substantial evidence that climatic changes correlate with greater incidences of conflict^v while others find these connections 'inconclusive'^{vi}. The conflicts in Yemen and Syria

are sometimes cited as illustrations of climate-induced conflict, however the forces at play are far more complex and need to account for historical and geopolitical context. There is increasing consensus around a more moderate view that climate change alone will not likely generate conflict, instead, it will more likely serve as a *threat multiplier* that could put pressure on already scarce resources and exacerbate pre-existing issues, such as political instability, poverty, and unemployment^{vii,viii} - underscoring the importance of a conflict-sensitive approach to climate change in this context.



Djibouti's saline Lake Assal
World Bank Photograph

Conflict Sensitive Approaches to Climate Change: A *conflict-sensitive* approach to climate change is based on the idea that adaptation and mitigation measures could indirectly influence conflict. This is particularly important in contexts

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of states that are fragile and/or in conflict where governance structures and institutions are often weak, regardless of climate change. In these instances, there is a risk that ill-informed climate change adaptation and mitigation policies or actions that don't take the comprehensive social, economic, and political realities into consideration may trigger new conflicts or exacerbate existing ones^{ix}. Transboundary water patterns can be used as an illustration. Adaptation measures of an up-river community could result in water scarcity in the down-river community, increasing chances for conflict over the shared resource^x. Also, interventions to rehabilitate rangeland to adapt to climate change could potentially contribute to conflict if there isn't clarity and buy-in from communities and adherence to local laws, customs and social arrangements, about who is able to use and benefit from the land.

The MENA Region's Response: Despite these challenges, MENA countries are taking steps to tackle climate change. Almost every country in the region has submitted a plan for how they will contribute towards the global framework under the Paris Agreement that drives collective action toward a zero-carbon, climate-resilient future^{xi}. To help countries implement these national plans, the World Bank's MENA Region has outlined a [Climate Action Plan](#) aiming to increase the portion of financing dedicated to climate action, with a focus on scaling up support for adaptation and protecting the poorest, i.e. the most vulnerable to impacts of climate change. Two examples of how the World Bank is incorporating climate change resilience into projects in a fragile and conflict state context include the Social Fund for Development in Iraq and the Rural Community Development and Water Mobilization Project in Djibouti.

The Challenge in Iraq: Iraq is highly vulnerable to climate change; particularly, increasing temperatures and water scarcity, decreasing precipitation, and more frequent extreme weather events (i.e. floods, droughts, and heat waves). These changes have direct and immediate impacts on sectors crucial to Iraq's economic and social development (agriculture, water, and public health), in addition to recovery

and reconstruction efforts following decades of conflict. **The Iraq Social Fund for Development**, approved in February 2018, will finance community level subprojects which incorporate climate adaptation into their design, including the rehabilitation and maintenance of irrigation canals, drainage structures and roads, and the construction of small scale water supply and reservoirs. These subprojects are expected to contribute to increased agricultural productivity, enhanced infrastructure resilience to extreme weather events such as more intense and frequent storms and increase the quality and quantity of water resources. Overall, the \$300 million project expects to benefit 1.5 million households and create over 10 million employment days, leading to improved, sustainable access to basic services and increased social cohesion. Inclusive community engagement is a crucial element to prioritizing and then implementing sub-projects in an effective, and conflict-sensitive manner. Local representatives, with a strong showing from women, have already participated in planning and decision-making discussions.

The Challenge in Djibouti: More than 23 percent of Djibouti lives in extreme poverty and unemployment is high at 39 percent. Many, particularly those in rural communities, have limited access to adequate water resources, including safe drinking water. This is further threatened by climate change, which is expected to increase rainfall variability, extreme weather events (i.e. floods and droughts), and sea level rise, all of which impact the quantity and quality of water resources. Water resources are additionally stretched due to population growth, an influx of displaced people from neighboring conflicts and climate change. **The Rural Community Development and Water Mobilization Project (PRODERMO)** aims to increase access of rural communities to water and enhance their capacity to manage water and agro-pastoral resources in the project areas using a participatory approach to community-based development. Project activities target both women and men and include the promotion of innovative approaches to mobilizing surface and groundwater for consumption and small-scale community agricultural and livestock production, including the construction and

rehabilitation of cisterns, open-air reservoirs, wells, and fisheries. It also has worked to strengthen related fragile institutions and public services through capacity building activities at the community level, as well as for regional implementing agencies. So far, more than 6100 households have benefited from water mobilized from the project activities. Women have been particularly impacted by the project, as improved water mobilization has opened time for other productive activities. Inclusive community engagement is a crucial element to prioritizing and then implementing sub-projects in an effective, and conflict-sensitive manner. Local representatives, with a strong showing from women, have already participated in planning and decision-making discussions.

Conclusion: As the two examples above illustrate, progress is being made to address climate challenges in fragile and conflict contexts – with a focus on ensuring ownership by all community members. Projects like these are critical to build credible evidence of best practices and scale efforts to support countries and

communities to build resilience and adapt to climate impacts utilizing a conflict sensitive approach. Furthermore, greater use of technology, big data and advanced modeling present a significant opportunity to inform targeted and appropriate guidance and policy options. With this approach, policymakers and practitioners can be better equipped to anticipate and effectively plan for changes, avoid unintended consequences, while strengthening the long-term viability of the environment and natural resources and encouraging cooperation and strengthened social contract.

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ii *ibid*

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