

Climate, Peace and Security in Mauritania

Executive Summary

Mauritania ranks as one of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations.¹ The effects of climate change represent a growing risk as Mauritania pursues its substantial investment in peace and development, including its unique national conflict prevention model that was presented to the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission on 20 March 2024 and commended by Member States.² The escalating impacts of climate change and environmental stressors could further complicate sustaining peace efforts in Mauritania by compounding existing challenges, including high poverty and food insecurity rates, persistent gender inequality, limited social services, and an expanding youth cohort that is encountering difficulties in accessing viable employment opportunities.

At the request of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Mauritania, a study was conducted by the Policy and Mediation Division (PMD) in the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), in partnership with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and the Climate Security Mechanism (CSM) at the UN, which aims to build a better understanding of the linkages between climate change, peace and security in Mauritania and presents possible entry points for integrated UN action to assist the government and people of Mauritania in anticipating, mitigating and managing these climate-related peace and security risks.

Analysis of the interlinkages between climate, peace and security in Mauritania

Drawing on a review of publicly available literature as well as a field visit throughout the country, which benefitted from interviews conducted with local communities, members of the UN Country Team, and government officials, this study analyzes the exposure and vulnerability of Mauritania to the growing impacts of climate change, taking into account factors such as geography, history, and social dynamics. It also looks at existing coping capacities, such

as communal committees and Government-led efforts to implement disaster risk reduction and climate action policies.

Following an overview of the major climate stressors in Mauritania and their multiple and overlapping manifestations, the report examines how these climate stressors interact with different dimensions of vulnerability and coping capacity. On this basis, it explores the main pathways through which climate change may affect peace and security in Mauritania:

¹ According to the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) index, which assesses countries' vulnerability to climate change and their readiness to improve resilience. Source: University of Notre Dame. ND-GAIN Country Index: Rankings (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative, 2023), <https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/rankings/>
² <https://dppa.un.org/en/week-dppa-16-22-march-2024>

- Tensions between Malian refugees (outside Mbera camp) and local communities, driven by longstanding resentments and competition for grazing areas.
- Issues related to representation and integration among recent refugees and those who have been in the country for an extended period, potentially leading to discord over resource access, including water.
- Friction between local communities and Mauritanian returnees fleeing Mali, particularly concerning land ownership (while refugees are often tolerated due to their lack of land claims, returnees are perceived as potential contenders for local lands).
- Conflicts between farmers and herders, as well as among different herding communities, due to shifting rainfall patterns that have altered traditional transhumance practices.
- Tensions and competition over water use within and between communities, including between fishermen and herders.
- Increased marginalization faced by women and youth, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and exposing them to heightened security risks as climate change disrupts their livelihoods, drives displacement, and challenges community resilience.



Policy recommendations

The study concludes with recommendations on potential avenues for UN engagement to support national efforts in building resilience to climate-related peace and security risks in Mauritania. Consideration of the differentiated impacts of these risks on women, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and youth cuts across the various sections. Recommendations include:

- **Promote and facilitate Mauritania's access to climate finance as well as financial tools aimed at supporting countries facing different kinds of Fragility, Conflict and Violence (FCV) risks.** The PBF can serve as a "tugboat" for other donors/vertical climate funds to make an impact at scale. Work with relevant partners (e.g., vertical funds, international financial institutions, bilateral donors, private sector) to assist the Government in navigating climate finance mechanisms and processes.
- **Support the Mauritanian government in formulating and implementing its national conflict prevention model,** which was showcased to the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission on 20 March 2024 and commended by Member States, with a particular focus on integrating climate-sensitive approaches. This would be in line with the recommendations in the Secretary-General's Policy Brief on A New Agenda for Peace.
- **Foster closer regional cooperation,** including between UNOWAS, ECOWAS, and the AU on climate-informed peacebuilding efforts in the region.
- **Commission further studies on potential implications in the event of the discovery of large oil and gas deposits.** Significant gas reserves were found in the Grand Tortue Ahmémim field and discussions are ongoing with regard to the development of the Banda gas field off the coast of Nouakchott. Given that the processes around oil exploration, extraction, and distribution can create grievances among segments of the population, it is recommended that a more in-depth study be conducted, especially in the event of identifying a massive deposit.

Additional ideas for consideration and possible further discussion with the UNCT and Mauritanian authorities include:

- **Continue to support the development of an overarching vision to build social cohesion while considering the undermining effects of a changing climate.**
- **Build the capacity of national and local authorities in sustainable water management** and train WASH technicians on the effective installation, use, and maintenance of hybrid- and solar-powered water pumps.
- **Invest in enhanced water access through programs in rural communities focusing on equitable water sharing**, with proposed mechanisms for inclusive conflict resolution and sustainable resource management. This could include leveraging traditional and cultural practices as well as traditional irrigation systems and water conservation methods.
- **Plan and establish transhumance corridors** that ensure the sustainable movement of livestock while minimizing environmental impact.
- **Ensure the extension of essential services** such as food, water, healthcare, and education to not only refugees but also to local communities, defusing deep-rooted resentment by promoting a more inclusive approach.
- **Implement gender-responsive and youth-inclusive programming at both local and national levels, that focus on addressing inequalities, fostering economic empowerment, and building resilience.** This can include access to microfinance, vocational/entrepreneurship training, and promoting women-led cooperatives and income-generating activities.
- **Implement targeted initiatives to raise awareness about the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation** (including deforestation for firewood energy) and develop effective strategies for disaster preparedness and response.
- **Strengthen early warning systems** to alert communities about impending hazards such as bushfires, floods, and droughts.

