

## United Nations Expert Group Meeting on

### **“Natural Resources, Climate Change and Conflict: Protecting Africa’s Natural Resource Base in Support of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development”**

17-18 December 2009, United Nations  
New York, USA

#### **FINAL SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **Introduction**

In the context of Africa’s effort to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and implement the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), “Climate Change” and “Natural Resource conflicts” are two issues that are important to sustainable development and durable peace. While the increasing resource depletion emanating from climate change is a major cause for concern, the devastating consequences of natural resource conflicts are primary causes of anxiety. In short, they have together impeded Africa’s development and have affected Africa’s ability to attain the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

It is against this background that the United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Africa (OSAA) organised an Expert Group Meeting on “Natural Resources, Climate Change and Conflict: Protecting Africa’s Natural Resource Base in Support of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development”. Specifically, the meeting focused on natural resources such as land, water and marine resources, considered as being particularly vulnerable to climate change. The meeting also contextualised “conflict” as being both violent interactions between groups (i.e., violent conflict) or tensions that can ultimately lead to violent conflict.

The meeting also took note of UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/63/281 of 3 June 2009 on “Climate change and its possible security implications” and the mandated follow up Secretary-General’s report A/64/350 which together provided a political mandate and framework for action by the UN system on this issue. It also took note of the Climate Change Conference taking place in Copenhagen, Denmark, 7-18 December 2009, which was of particular relevance to the issues being addressed at the meeting.

##### **Objectives of the meeting**

The meeting sought to:

1. Highlight impacts of climate change on natural resources.
2. Determine the link between climate change and natural resource based conflicts.
3. Identify ways to address the issues of climate change.
4. Make recommendations on the way forward for African countries, including civil society and African regional organizations, as well as the international community, including development partners and the United Nations system, to address this issue.
5. Contribute to the United Nations General Assembly-mandated Comprehensive Review of the recommendations of the Secretary-General's 1998 report on the Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa.

### **Key themes/issues discussed**

Discussion focused on a number of key themes, and the meeting identified a number of fundamental issues to guide future action, as follows:

#### **1. Natural resources, climate change and conflict**

The link between climate change and conflict is indirect - Climate change can contribute to natural resource scarcity, which in turn can exacerbate conflict. Effective structures to handle the impact of climate change might reduce the possibility of conflict. The impacts of climate change on natural resources such as land and water feed on other deeper structural tensions including, inter-alia, ethnicity, politics, and culture. Climate change is a “ticking bomb” for global food security and in particular for food security in Africa. However, not all cases of scarcity can be linked to climate change as there are several other issues that can create scarcity besides climate change.

#### **2. Land**

- Land is the most important natural resource in Africa because it combines economics with other social, cultural and religious considerations.
- Among the key issues connecting climate change to conflict over land are, inter alia, eco-system degradation, desertification, soil erosion and intensified drought.
- Most of the recent conflicts over land are “local” (i.e. between communities within a country), but they can also be regionalized as there are now cases of border disputes between nations, some of which have been further aggravated by the negative impact of climate change. These conflicts have been going on for generations and dealt with at a local level, but have now been exacerbated by climate change.

- The nature and extent of these conflicts often vary, depending on ecological and seasonal conditions. They often feed on pre-existing historical differences between neighboring communities.
- The manifestation of such conflict is often prevalent between pastoralists and farmers, but there have also been cases of conflict between different pastoralist groups, e.g. between herders of cattle and those of goats.
- Different perceptions of land by pastoralists viz a viz farmers have been a source of conflict in a number of countries. Pastoralists believe that land is communal, while farmers would want to own land individually. Moreover, pastoralists regard farmers as an ally of the government in its attempts to force the former into conformity.
- Cultural practices that have often caused conflicts (like cattle rustling) are further compounded by climate change, with reduction in grazing land further causing perpetrators of these practices to embark on more violent raids. Conflicts can also be caused when pastoralists, as part of their nomadic traditions, fail to respect international boundaries.
- Conflict over land for farming and pastoralism in Africa have been further compounded by the massive proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the continent.
- Population displacement and refugee problems exacerbated by climate change could further increase the propensity for conflict in many African countries.
- The increasing foreign acquisition of large expanses of land in Africa is a major cause for concern as it will invariably increase tensions between “local claim” and “international interest”.

### **3. Water and Marine resources**

- Climate change has now resulted in a situation where tensions among African states over water and marine resources are now likely to escalate, even if in the past this has not occasioned violent inter-state conflicts. There is a link between increasing global temperatures, water temperatures and land degradation.
- Water tends to magnify and amplify existing tensions found in society. It is crucial to conflict because it is also a means of identity, as there are countries and regions in Africa named after major rivers and also because there are communities in Africa where sources of major rivers have particular religious significance.
- Water scarcity is likely to be impacted by climate change especially through prolonged drought. The shortage in the supply of water for domestic and

agricultural use can lead to conflicts in Africa. Also the increasing tendency to privatize water, although welcome in some circles like the World Bank, is seen in some African societies as being incompatible with African culture that sees water as a “free” gift from God.

- Lack of access to safe drinking water has impacted on various issues like health, agriculture and food security. Water is central to appreciating conflicts because a number of killer diseases, including cholera, malaria and river blindness, are waterborne. Moreover, water-constraint economies can lead the population to migrate. These migrations can be a cause of conflict.
- Climate change is now altering the course of some international rivers, and nation states that have historically used this for demarcation of boundaries are increasingly finding themselves in potential conflicts over the “shifting” boundaries.
- The management of international river basins is likely to be a major cause for concern in the years ahead. With climate change already affecting the flow of international rivers, managing relationships among riparian states is likely to increase tension.
- There are many agencies and Unions formed along River Basins which have assisted in ensuring harmonious relations between states. While there are still differences, these Unions have tried to reduce the propensity for conflicts.
- There is, however, the need to build the capacity of existing River Basin institutions so that they are more responsive to the challenges of climate change.
- The illegal activities of international fishing trawlers are seen as another external interference in the process of resource extraction in Africa. Increasingly, it is beginning to manifest as a clash between “local claim” and “international interest”.

#### **4. Governance of Natural Resources**

- From the discussion, it came out strongly that there have been many instances of mismanagement of natural resources leading to situations of possible conflicts. It is in fact believed that Africa is a continent “rich in resources but poor in governance”.
- Corruption was identified as a major issue in the politics of natural resource management in the continent. It was however noted that the corruption issue was not only on the part of political elites but also on the part of civil servants and even external actors who sometimes sit in judgment in their condemnation of African countries.

- From the discussions it came out that there are indigenous capacities in relation to remedies to climate change issues over land that need to be explored.

## **5. International Policy Initiatives**

- There are a number of policy initiatives on the link between climate change and conflict in Africa and many of these have offered extensive insight into the complexities of the problem. Some of these have come from the United Nations itself as well as from major bilateral and multilateral development partners.
- Although some of these studies have been extensive, the extent to which they take into consideration inputs from African local population is minimal. More often than not, they only relate with African regional organizations.
- On the whole, it was felt that externally sponsored initiatives often do not take into consideration local knowledge, especially those that proved time-tested over generations in the handling of conflicts.
- The United Nations departments and agencies such as the Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have been deeply involved in addressing challenges relating to Natural resources and conflict. Some of these agencies have collaborated with the Office of the Special Adviser (OSAA) in this work and the hope is that this mutually beneficial relationship will continue in the years ahead.
- There is an urgent need to address the negative ramifications of international interest in the exploitation of Natural Resources, which has exacerbated violent conflict over these resources in Africa.

### **Cross-cutting recommendations**

#### **To African countries:**

1. Encourage countries to undertake studies on the link between climate change and conflict over natural resources like land, water, pastures and marine resources.
2. Share local knowledge and lessons learned in natural resource governance and economic development between countries.
3. Undertake land reforms especially including re-organizing land tenure systems with a gender perspective.
4. Consolidate policies that have been owned by the local population.

5. Consolidate activities of the government, regional organizations, and civil societies towards avoiding duplication in mitigation of climate change to avoid duplication.
6. Governments of the region should undertake comprehensive and parallel disarmament as the entry of new weapons has increased the magnitude of the conflicts in Africa.
7. Increase capacity in analysis of information and understanding climate change as a potential indirect cause of conflict.
8. Create policies which will enhance the lives of pastoralists, including education, health and security.
9. Develop mechanisms which allow more equitable sharing of natural resources.
10. Develop a cross-sectoral approach to climate change.
11. Consolidate the activities of the various ministries and government departments overseeing issues relating to natural resources.
12. Develop policies that promote the use of renewable energy resources, including solar energy.
13. Mainstream climate change adaptation and mitigation policies into all relevant national development policies.

#### **To African sub-regional organizations**

1. Give encouragement to existing regional initiatives aimed at managing shared natural resources and also addressing conflicts such as Nile River basins and Mano River Union.
2. Strengthen existing regional conflict resolution mechanisms.
3. All African regional economic communities (RECs) should establish natural resource secretariats which should have a human security based approach to climate change.

#### **To the African Union**

1. Establish a desk that focuses on natural resource governance dealing with mapping of the vast natural resource endowment of the continent.

2. Assist Africa countries in implementing existing conventions in the area of natural resource management.
3. Build effective capacity for assessment, early warning and monitoring progress on issues of resource management.
4. Make use of NEPAD/African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) to include the link between climate change and natural resource management in evaluating governance.

### **To the international community**

1. Member States of the United Nations should be encouraged to undertake detailed and comparable national studies on Natural Resources management, and support development of policy themes related to inter-linkages of climate change.
2. Resource-based conflicts over land and water should be taken more seriously by the international community and researchers because even though they may seem to be low-intensity conflicts, they are often the underlying causes of major conflicts in Africa.
3. Donors should scale up aid towards adaptation to climate change in African countries, but this should be additional to existing levels of Official Development Assistance (ODA). This should include support to building capacities in African countries and institutions to deal with this.

### **To civil society**

1. Civil Society in Africa has a very important role to play on issues of mitigation, adaptation and conflict prevention and resolution. In this regard, it is important to mobilize support, including financial resources, for community-based institutions, focusing on natural resource management, adaptation efforts and peacebuilding.
2. Support the effective use of indigenous knowledge and practices in natural resource management, and in mitigation and adaptation to the impact of climate change.
3. Undertake inventory of such indigenous knowledge and practices.
4. Consolidate civil society activities in order to avoid duplication and to more effectively use resources.