

AFRICA WEEK 2017



Concept Note

High-Level Event:

**“Addressing the Climate Change - Migration
Nexus and its Implications for Peace and
Security in Africa”**



**ECOSOC Chamber
United Nations Headquarters, New York
Thursday, 19 October 2017, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm**



I. Introduction and Background

Africa has been affected by some of the major global challenges of our time: climate change, the refugee crisis, conflict and the rise of violent extremism and terrorism. While none of these challenges are unique to the Continent, the unprecedented combination and scale of these crises and emergencies have stretched the resilience and the capacity of many affected African countries. In spite of African and international efforts, each of these challenges has brought death, suffering and displacement to millions in many regions of the African continent. While African regional organizations, Member States and the international community are further strengthening their efforts to address these challenges, the strong and often mutually reinforcing interlinkages – between climate change, forced migration and conflict – have not yet received concerted and adequate attention. In this regard, the 2017 Africa Week will feature a High-Level Event focusing on *“Addressing the Climate Change-Migration Nexus and its Implications for Peace and Security in Africa”*.

The impact of climate change in Africa

In the 2015 Paris Agreement, it is stressed that climate change “represents an urgent and potentially irreversible threat to human societies and the planet”. According to the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Africa is the continent that will be most affected by climate change although it contributes the least to it. With large swaths of desert, widespread poverty, and limited adaptive capacity, many regions in the African continent and their communities are particularly vulnerable. It is envisaged that among other consequences, climate change will lead to increased natural disasters such as floods, mudslides and droughts. It will also negatively impact the quantity and quality of water supply, rivers, lakes and oceans notwithstanding. As a result of unprecedented reductions in rainfall in many areas, the African continent has already been experiencing deforestation and desertification. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the impact of climate change could lead to as much as a 50 per cent fall of crop yields by 2020 in some of the poorest African regions. Moreover, the overall impact on agricultural production, food security, shelter, people’s livelihoods and economic development is expected to be particularly devastating in most hard-hit regions of the African continent.

Climate change and conflict

As climate change can threaten the lives and livelihoods of already vulnerable communities while overwhelming the capacity of local communities, countries and entire regions to mitigate its impact, it is also a major threat to peace and security. In its presidential statement on 20 July 2011 (S/PRST/2011/15), the United Nations Security Council, which has the primary responsibility for international peace and security, feared “that possible adverse effects of climate change may, in the long run, aggravate certain existing threats to international peace and security.” The same concern was also expressed by the African Union Commission in its Draft African Union Strategy on Climate Change. Rather than constituting a direct threat to peace and security, climate change predominantly acts as a multi-dimensional threat multiplier exacerbating conditions and factors that can heighten the risk of conflict, crime and violent extremism. These conditions and factors may include poverty, inequality, unemployment, large-scale displacement, heightened

refugee flows, and increased scarcity of and competition for livestock. Furthermore, climate change can also negatively affect vital resources such as water, food and land, as well as increase competition for natural and extractive resources. Governance failures to address the adverse impact of climate change could further exacerbate social, ethnic or religious tensions as more communities struggle to secure political and economic power and/or access to resources for countering the social, environmental and economic consequences of climate change.

On the African continent, the Sahel region, particularly the Lake Chad Basin, is a topical example where climate change sows the seeds for socio-political tensions and fuels conflict. Lake Chad, which borders Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, has lost over 90 per cent of its size over the last five decades. This trend has affected the livelihoods of millions of people and made local communities more vulnerable to violent extremism and conflict. The Lake Chad Basin is now the main target of attacks launched by the terror group Boko Haram. In its determination to address this multidimensional challenge, the United Nations has been working with the Group of Five Sahel countries (G5 Sahel), namely Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, in supporting the implementation of a UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS). In addition to addressing security, political, social and economic challenges, the strategy focuses on promoting environmental sustainability through natural resource management mechanisms and climate change adaptation and mitigation programmes as one of its key objectives.

While the effects of climate change may constitute a direct challenge to peace and security, conflict and violent extremism can further worsen the environmental conditions of the affected areas. Not only does war disrupt social and economic life, it can also destroy vital agricultural infrastructure and know-how, cause pollution and degradation in land, forests, rivers and lakes, worsen the impact of drought and floods, and hasten desertification. War also tends to erode the ability of countries and communities to protect the environment and carry out activities to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Climate change and forced migration

Legal and voluntary migration increases well-being in both host and source countries. However, in the context of this concept note, reference will be made to forced migration as defined by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as a “migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes”. Environmental factors have long played a significant role in fostering forced migration, a trend that has been further exacerbated and accelerated by recent effects of climate change. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) 2014 report on desertification noted that “climate change [and] desertification [are] increasingly displacing people and forcing them to migrate”. For example, in the Sahel, desertification and deforestation have critically put at risk 67 million people living in the region. The effects of climate change alone are not the only factors pushing people to leave their homes. However, when in many regions of Africa the local, national or regional capacity is weak and communities are already under stress due to poverty, high unemployment or food insecurity, climate change may be a compounding driver for forced migration. Indeed, climate change adaptation and mitigation are the most difficult to achieve in many African countries because of their limited financial, institutional and human resources. Therefore, preventive actions towards climate change mitigation are critical.

Forced migration, like conflict, can also worsen the effects of climate change on concerned communities. A large influx of migrants can exacerbate the overuse and degradation of the soil, increase pollution, impact the access and quality of water resources and hasten deforestation. This is particularly the case when forced migration trends are not temporary and long-term resettlement solutions do not seem feasible.

Conflict and migration

Conflicts have always been a major driver of forced migration globally. War threatens lives, the economy, social fabric, infrastructure and governance in affected communities. For some of the affected populations, the only remaining choice is to flee. A case in point are the conflicts, insecurity and violent extremism in countries such as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan that have pushed millions of people to flee from their homes. In recent years, the severity, magnitude and frequency of such forced displacement and migration has reached unprecedented levels.

While the irregular influx of migrants from Africa into Europe has received much of the media coverage, most who have had to flee actually found refuge on the African continent. Indeed, Africa hosts approximately 4.5 million refugees and 12 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Over 25 per cent of the world's refugees are on African soil while four of the top ten refugee receiving countries in the world are also African. Contrary to common perceptions, refugees are not predominantly male; in fact, 50 per cent of all refugees and displaced persons are women and girls, which underscore the importance of a gender perspective and response in addressing migration and conflict-related situations.

While conflict may be a key driver of forced migration, the opposite can also hold true since migration can also generate instability or even fuel conflict. Also, some African countries sometimes experience outflows of refugees in one region and inflows of refugees in another. Displaced populations can increase pressure on the already scarce resources in destination countries, further sowing the seeds of unrest and conflict. The influx of irregular migrants may test the resources and capacity of host communities and often has long-lasting socio-economic consequences in these countries.

Forced migration can also increase tensions between migrants and indigenous communities and, in some cases, further complicate or exacerbate political tensions or violence. Such was the case in the eastern DRC with the influx of millions of refugees following the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Elsewhere, these tensions have led to an erosion of tolerance and inclusiveness in host countries, sometimes leading to rising economic and political populism and a resurgence of political extremism, or even triggering xenophobic violence. The discrimination and marginalization experienced by migrants may also make them more vulnerable to recruitment by extremists or terror groups, creating a vicious cycle whereby attacks force people to flee only for their migration to trigger discrimination in the host country, making it more likely for them to fall prey to radicalization and turn to violent extremism.

Another spill-over effect of these unprecedented forced migration trends is the relative decline in the financial and technical resources dedicated to official development assistance (ODA). It is alarming that bilateral aid to Africa shrank by 0.5 per cent in 2016 to \$27 billion at a time when net ODA reached record levels globally. One key driver of the ODA increase was the rising in-donor refugee costs. These in-donor refugee costs, which have almost

increased sevenfold during the last decade, represent a sizeable foregone opportunity for Africa since the funds spent in donor countries do not help advance Africa's quest to achieve the SDGs or Agenda 2063.

II. The Climate Change, Migration and Conflict Nexus

While climate change, conflict and forced migration greatly affect the African continent, these challenges are not separate or isolated phenomena but part of one interconnected nexus. Climate change is both a driver of forced migration and conflict, while conflict is also a major driver of forced migration. Moreover, forced migration can sometimes increase the likelihood of conflict, while migration trends and conflict tend together to worsen the impact of climate change on people's livelihoods. Each of these dimensions typically reinforces the other, thereby creating a vicious cycle. The graph below illustrates these linkages and the nexus.

Figure 1: Interlinkages between climate change, conflict and forced migration



A better understanding of each challenge and its linkages to the other two challenges is necessary. Despite these strong interlinkages, responses to these challenges have been largely fragmented and designed to individually target each one alone instead of addressing the nexus as a whole. Especially in regions where forced migration, conflict and climate change are strongly intertwined, such as the Lake Chad Basin or the Horn of Africa, integrated, holistic and comprehensive approaches are needed to tackle these challenges and improve the prospects for communities in affected regions. Developing and implementing holistic and integrated approaches would enhance effective coordination of a large spectrum of stakeholders at the local, national, regional and international level as well as break down the usual silos between issues of migration, peace and security, and climate change. Finally, if they are to be successful responses to the forced migration, conflict and climate change nexus, they should preferably be guided and driven by local communities. However, much more needs to be done in enhancing the capacity and providing financial resources for the initiatives and activities involving local actors to enable them to effectively fulfil their important role on the ground.

III. Overall Objective

Against this backdrop and in the context of advancing the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063, a High-Level Event on "Addressing the Climate Change-Migration Nexus and its Implications for Peace and Security in Africa" will take place on 19 October 2017 in the ECOSOC Chamber at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The main purpose of the meeting is to provide a platform to raise awareness and discuss the nature, impact and possible responses to the climate change, migration and conflict nexus in Africa. The High-Level meeting will further seek to foster integrated policies and strategies, deepen cooperation and partnerships, and enhance support for African efforts to address the nexus.

Moreover, the meeting will bring together high-level officials from various organizations working on migration, peace and security and climate change, including representatives of African Member States, the African Union, African Regional Economic Communities, civil society organizations, the UN System, international partners and academia.

IV. Specific Objectives

- I. Increase understanding of the nature and impact of conflict, migration and climate change nexus in Africa and the interlinkages between these three challenges;
- II. Share best practices and lessons learned with regard to breaking the linkages and reducing the impact on the African continent of the three dimensions of the nexus;
- III. Highlight opportunities to foster integrated, holistic and comprehensive responses to the nexus in Africa;
- IV. Develop concrete recommendations of how to enhance cooperation and coordination between institutions working on the three pillars of the nexus in Africa as well as between local, national and international state and non-state actors; and
- V. Strengthen international support for African institutions, tools and efforts to address the nexus, especially at the local level, in the context of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063.

V. Guiding Questions

- I. How can the international community better understand the nexus and the impact of forced migration, conflict and climate change on each other?
- II. How can the obstacles of “business-as-usual” and “silo-thinking” be overcome in order to develop integrated, holistic and comprehensive approaches to these three interrelated challenges?
- III. What works and what does not in mitigating the negative impact of the nexus on the livelihoods of people in affected areas? What positive examples and best practices exist in Africa in this regard?
- IV. What are some of the concrete measures that can be taken to build or reinforce effective partnerships and enhance coordination in addressing the nexus in Africa, especially at the local and regional level?

- V. How can the international community enhance its support for African efforts and initiatives to address the nexus between forced migration, conflict and climate change, especially at the local level and regional level?

VI. Format and Featured Speakers

The event will be structured in two parts, consisting of both a keynote address and a substantive session including a discussant. Featured expected speakers will include: the President of Liberia and Chairperson of the High-level Panel on International Migration in Africa; Representatives from the African Union Commission; the Executive Director, UNEP; the Director General of the IOM; the Chief Executive Officer of the APRM Secretariat; the UNDP Administrator; the CEO of International Rescue Committee; as well as representatives of the private sector, civil society and academia. The event will be co-moderated by the Executive Secretary for the Economic Commission for Africa and the Chair of the African Group for the month of November.

