Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

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Policy brief

Doing no harm while doing good

Climate and conflict sensitivity in dryland humanitarian projects

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Climate and conflict sensitivity in dryland humanitarian projects

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR)
Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE)

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A woman cooks on a farm in in Dacawaley Village, near Hargeisa, Somalia.
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This policy brief – a joint initiative by FAO, CGIAR and CARE – sets out to present key policy recommendations on how to invest wisely in humanitarian interventions for sustainable development and peace. It builds on the forestry discussion paper "Deploying a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach: Exploring, strengthening and reviving dryland ecosystems" that was launched at the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021.

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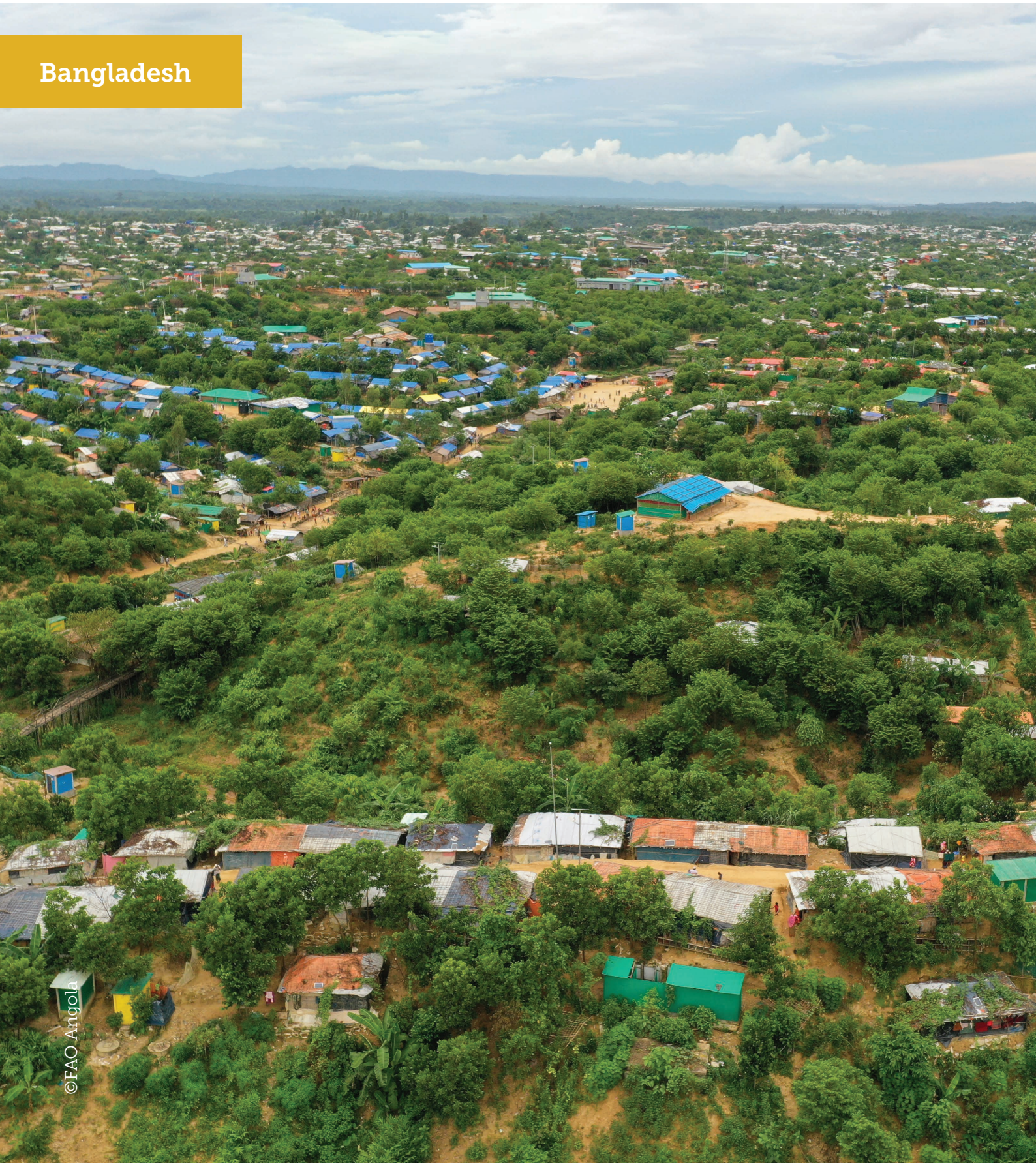
Abbreviations and acronyms

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GIS	geographic information system
HDPN	humanitarian-development-peace nexus
LPG	liquefied petroleum gas
RESPECT	Reducing the Suffering of People Affected by the Cross-border Conflict
RRR	Resource Recovery and Reuse
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

Bangladesh



Key messages

Natural resources are frequent sources of conflict, and their protection cannot be treated as an optional extra when it comes to humanitarian interventions. Environmental protection should be seen as a key part of any humanitarian approach. Displaced people impact the local environment and compete with the host community for scarce natural resources, which may make them a target for violence.

Financing peacebuilding in humanitarian and development projects requires a sound understanding of the local context, including an environmental assessment. This will ensure that interventions receive the required amount of financing, facilitate flexible management, and enhance staff commitment to a peacebuilding approach with environmental benefits.

Environmental data should thus be collected at the beginning of any humanitarian project and monitored throughout. Humanitarian actions in providing for displaced people should conduct a baseline environmental assessment or screening of local fuelwood, land, water, and other resources as appropriate. This recommendation is costly, but necessary for human protection and to promote climate change resilience.

Actions to promote peace within humanitarian interventions can be implemented whether or not a project has an explicit peace component. Staff training for peace promotion, along with local knowledge and collaboration, can lead to flexible and responsive actions by humanitarian actors that build bridges between communities without being explicitly designated as conflict resolution measures.

The Niger

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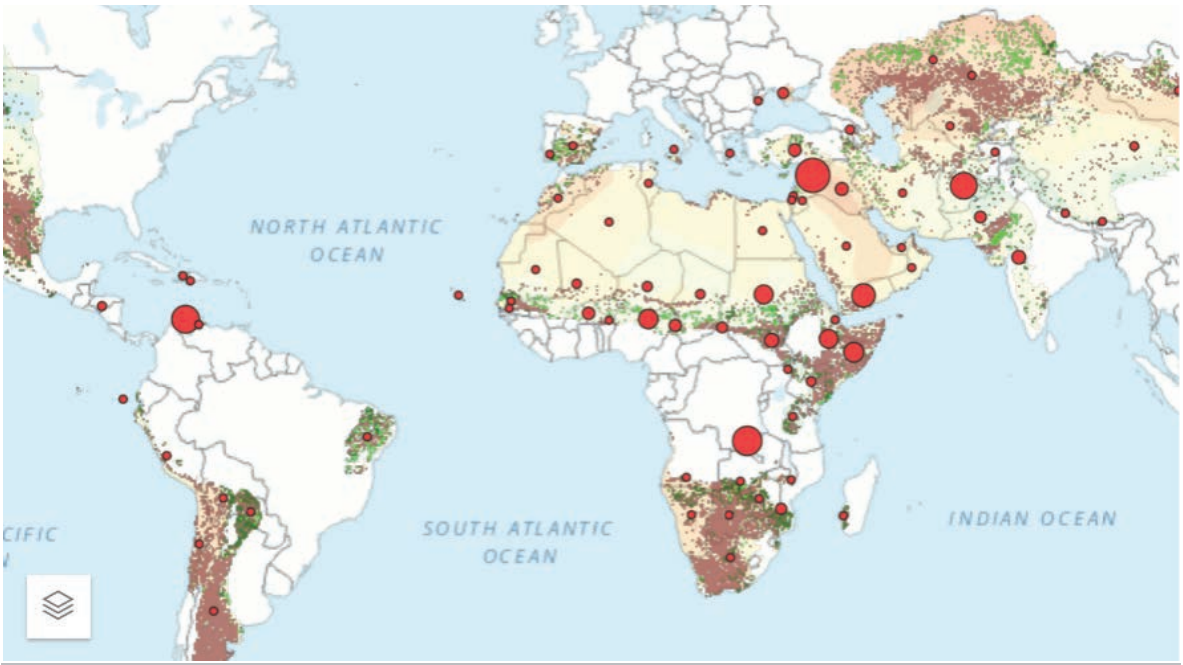
Introduction: underscoring the urgency of environmental peace

While humanitarian assistance remains essential to securing the lives and livelihoods of dryland communities undergoing conflict and crisis, anticipatory and collective actions and synergies with climate action are required, especially in ecologically fragile environments, such as drylands, which host large numbers of people displaced by violence. According to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), desertification and droughts lead to forced migration (UNCCD, 2016). The impacts of climate change are increasingly compounding these challenges, thus further harming communities' ability to cope. The 2022 Global Report on Internal Displacement showed that 59.1 million people are internally displaced: 53.2 million of these have been displaced by conflict and violence and 5.9 million as a result of natural disaster. The top ten countries in terms of numbers of displaced people are in dryland agrosilvopastoral areas, and this is expected to increase as the frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters intensify. Figure 1 shows the number of displacements distributed between different dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems.

Increases in internal displacement tend to severely impact the food security status of affected

Figure 1: The distribution of displaced people in dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral areas, (based on UN World Map 4170/r19/oct20)



Source: **FAO.** 2021. "Evaluation of FAO's contribution to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus 2014-2020 " In *Programme Evaluation Series*. Rome.

people and undermine their welfare and wellbeing. The 2022 edition of the Global Report on Food Crisis shows that the severity and numbers of people in crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) are at their highest level for over six years and warns that 70 percent of the total numbers were found in ten countries and territories located in dryland regions. With the urgent call for global commitments to restore at least one billion hectares of land in the next decade, 250 million hectares can be restored to produce food. However, the complexity of the relationship between the cost of restoration and conflict and achieving environmental peace must be navigated. While dryland degradation has been valued at USD 6.3 trillion to USD 10.6 trillion per year, the direct economic impact of internal displacement worldwide was more than USD 21 billion in 2021 (IDMC-GRID, 2022).

When providing humanitarian assistance, there is an urgent need to face the threat of increased displacement numbers and their complex economic status – and to do no harm while doing good. Humanitarian interventions need to address the environmental impacts of displaced people to reduce conflict and protect natural resources in the context of climate change which, together with violent conflict, has led to large numbers of people living in densely populated settlements in fragile environments such as drylands and protected areas. This impacts local ecosystems and can lead to conflict when displaced people are in competition with host communities for scarce resources.

Yet, despite these challenges, little change has occurred in the way humanitarian interventions are conducted. This is particularly apparent in the area of food security, where repeated calls for the provision of cooking energy in humanitarian interventions (Caniato, Carliez and Thulstrup, 2017; Gianvenuti, Guéret and Sabogal, 2018) have been ignored, and displaced people frequently have no choice but to collect fuelwood, making them vulnerable to violence, as well as depleting local resources.

This policy brief aims to provide decision makers with potential ways in which the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (HDPN) can be implemented in humanitarian activities in dryland, ecologically fragile environments. It is based on a thorough review of three innovative projects implemented by FAO, CGIAR and CARE, and several consultations with think tank organizations in Africa and Near East, along with practitioners on the ground. The next section introduces the HDPN, followed by a discussion of three cases which illustrate the key findings, and recommendations that can help indicate how humanitarian interventions can be effective while doing no harm to both the environment and local livelihoods.

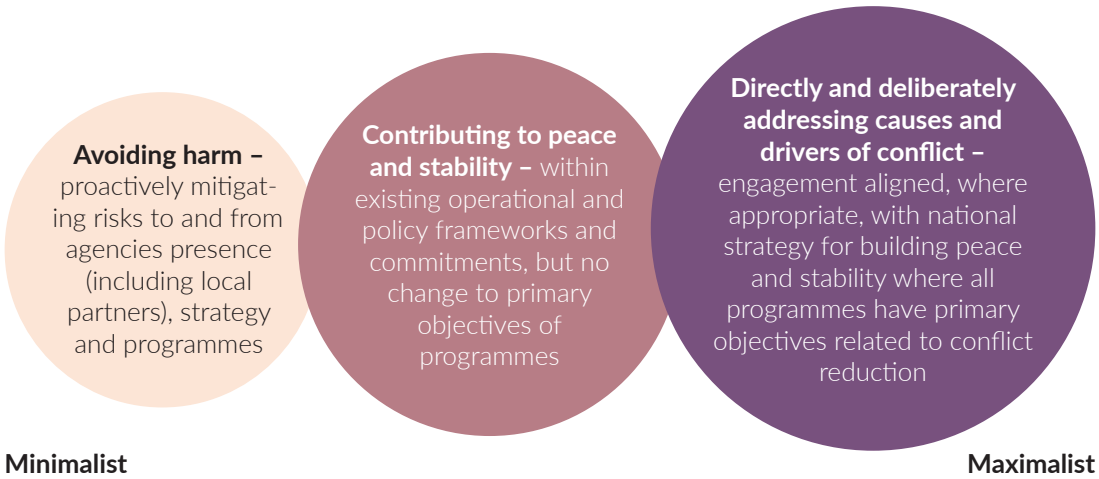
What is the humanitarian-development-peace nexus?

The HDPN approach evolved from previous thinking on how to better link humanitarian and development responses in light of the twenty-first century realities of climate change, protracted displacement, and the challenge of sustainable development in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The approach signals a change in the way international assistance is planned and funded (Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas 2019), highlighting the need to simultaneously address humanitarian assistance, development and activities that promote peace, rather than conducting them separately or in an iterative fashion (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2020a). The complementarity of these approaches is described by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as follows, "Humanitarian assistance, development cooperation and peacebuilding are not serial processes: they are all needed at the same time to reduce needs, risk and vulnerability. Collaboration can be achieved by working towards collective outcomes, over multiple years, based on the comparative advantage of a diverse range of actors" (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2020b).

However, understanding how development and contributions to peace can occur during humanitarian projects requires a shift in mindset to a more systemic way of thinking and working (FAO 2021a). The principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence must guide humanitarian actions and remain the foundation of the work done by humanitarian organizations and actors.

In many of the climate-sensitive areas that host displaced people, humanitarian actions to promote peace and safeguard natural resources are protection-related. According to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (Figure 2), contributions to peace can occur to different degrees, with the maximalist goals alleviating causes of conflict, promoting social cohesion, and transforming relationships.

Figure 2: The range of actions that contribute to peace in the way it is conceptualized through the HDPN



Source: **Inter-Agency Standing Committee.** 2020a. *"Exploring Peace Within the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (HDPN)."* Rome: Results Group 4 on Humanitarian-Development Collaboration.

Significant guidance has been developed to facilitate the application of an HDPN approach. Reports have highlighted the importance of coordination across projects and platforms. Joint planning can include shared agendas, data and outcomes and a layering of HDPN interventions and programming, which is adaptive, shock-responsive and data-driven (Resilience Leadership Council & Technical Working Group 2022). The UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration calls for enhancing equity to land resources and stresses the importance of educating and creating awareness campaigns regarding the causes and effects of land degradation, and the importance of land use planning for better restoration outcomes (UN Decade Strategy 2020–2030). These efforts should be made with and through local partners and beneficiaries whenever possible, with attention to the specific needs of vulnerable people. Indeed, coordination across agencies and sensitivity to local ecological and conflict contexts surfaced in the research as two key elements of effective humanitarian projects.

Kenya
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Uganda

Three examples of humanitarian intervention and environmental conflict

The HDPN requires simultaneous efforts to provide humanitarian intervention and promote resilience against multiple shocks. Previous work from a joint forestry discussion paper between CGIAR, CARE International and FAO launched at the UN Food Systems Summit 2021: "*Deploying a Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Approach: Exploring, strengthening and reviving dryland ecosystems*" – which evaluated eighteen different projects across dryland agrosilvopastoral areas – highlighted the importance of conflict sensitivity, climate change monitoring and resilience, promotion of food and nutrition security and attention to vulnerable people. An in-depth analysis of three of those projects shows the fragility of ecosystems in humanitarian settings. The three examples below were selected because they were in ecologically fragile areas hosting settlements of people in protracted displacement.

Resource recovery and reuse in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda

The resource recovery and reuse (RRR) project (Project Overview - Resource recovery and reuse (RRR) in refugee settlements in Africa [iwmi.org]) began in 2019 and is currently being implemented in six refugee settlements and their host communities in dryland areas of Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. It is led by the International Water Management Institute as part of the CGIAR Research Programme on Water, Land and Ecosystems. The project focuses on addressing cooking energy needs and food insecurity through the promotion of backyard gardens and improvements to soil fertility. Most of the people in the settlements are women and children who receive food aid in the form of dry food, such as wheat and rice, which takes a long time to cook and requires fuel resources. There is inadequate provision of both food and cooking energy, and households often use their food aid to buy firewood, creating food insecurity (Caniato, Carliez and Thulstrup, 2017). If they do not buy firewood, they must collect it themselves. "Women and children are often required to search isolated areas for firewood, thus exposing them to gender-based violence and other risks. The host communities may have limited access to resources or economic opportunities" (Njenga *et al.*, 2020). The RRR project works with local partners to recycle biological waste into fuel briquettes, which can be used for cooking, so that women do not need as much firewood, thereby protecting both the environment and a vulnerable population. The project also promotes backyard gardens and reforestation.

Refugees are treated with hostility by the local community because of their impact on the environment. They are considered the source of deforestation, which has a negative impact on the host community (Van Laer 2019; Kumssa, Jones and Williams, 2009), or are in competition for vital resources and income generation (Ali, Imana and Ocha, 2017) Women and girls, who are responsible for gathering firewood, become targets for gender-based violence, some of which results from host community hostility to the settlements (Van Laer 2019; Kumssa, Jones and Williams, 2009).

The provision of alternative fuel resources by the RRR project is specifically designed to protect women from fuelwood collection activities that put them at risk of sexual and gender-based violence. The project also incorporates the host communities in a bid to reduce their overall negative sentiments, as well as the environmental impact of the settlements.

Reducing the Suffering of People Affected by the Cross-border Conflict (RESPECT) Project, Diffa Region, the Niger

The RESPECT project in Diffa, the Niger was implemented by CARE Niger and ran from 2017 to 2018. (Project Overview Reducing the Suffering of People Affected by the Cross-border Conflict (RESPECT) Project, Diffa Region, the Niger [care.org]). It targeted people displaced by Boko Haram violence in the area around Lake Chad. The goal was to address food security and the other livelihood needs of displaced people, the host community, and returnees impacted

The Niger, Diffa region

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by the conflict, in six municipalities across the Diffa Region. Displaced people in this area are not encamped in settlements but live among the host community members and returnees. The programme consisted of a cash-for-work component and food security efforts, including the provision of seeds and technical support. The Diffa Region is a dryland area in the southeast of the Niger bordering on Nigeria. Water from the Lake Chad Basin is essential to livelihoods in the area, and the fact that this basin is shrinking from year to year exacerbates tensions between sedentary agriculturalists and pastoralists. Following the attacks by the terrorist group Boko Haram, pastoralists can no longer access the Lake Chad Basin, so they head north to water their herds around other scarce resources in the area. Recurrent water stress is a source of tension between displaced people, sedentary farmers, and pastoralist host communities. Part of the project's mission was to create designated corridors for the passage of animals in areas with both pastoralists and farmers.

The RESPECT project worked in coordination with approximately 30 national and international organizations in the area through a cluster group system to address the various needs of the communities of displaced people and hosts. They also worked with community leaders to identify project beneficiaries.

> In the northeastern part of the Diffa commune, the Nigerien government built a well to allow pastoralists to water their animals and avoid conflict with sedentary farmers. Displaced people settled around this well, drastically increasing the pressure on the only source of water. They then denied access to pastoralists who had previously watered their animals at the well. This triggered violent clashes over access to the well and resulted in the loss of three lives (Sani et al., 2022). In Diffa, host populations view the arrival of displaced persons in their localities in a negative light because of their impact on wooded areas, pastoral rangelands, and agricultural land (Rabiou et al., 2019). This hostility turned to violence. In the month of February 2017 – a few months before starting the project – the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reported 57 violent incidents related to displaced people and returnees in Diffa, which was in fact a decrease from the previous month. 12 percent of these incidents were related to intercommunal tensions over access to energy and natural resources (UNHCR, 2017)

RESPECT project personnel responded with contributions to building social cohesion, such as facilitating a livestock corridor through settled areas and creating more wells (Sani *et al.*, 2022).

Safe Access to Fuel and Energy Plus Livelihoods (SAFE +) Programme, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Small numbers of Rohingya refugees have been leaving Myanmar and arriving in Bangladesh for decades. (Project Overview Safe Access to Fuel and Energy Plus Livelihoods (SAFE +) Programme, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh [fao.org]). In 2017, that trickle became a surge of three-quarters of a million refugees into the Cox's Bazar area of Bangladesh, creating one of the largest refugee settlements in the world. A multi-agency response addressed the humanitarian needs of the refugees and host community. The Cox's Bazar area is a fragile environment, prone to landslides and on protected forest land under the control of the country's Department of Forestry. Beginning in 2018, FAO engaged in collaborative work to reverse the degradation of hundreds of acres of land, reduce the landslide risk, and provide alternative fuel resources to refugees and host communities to reduce their dependence on fuelwood. FAO coordinated with other UN agencies, international partners, host community and refugee representatives and Government of Bangladesh agencies through the Energy and Environment Technical Working Group on a land restoration programme involving the refugee and host communities and the provision of cooking energy through liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) gas distribution (FAO *et al.*, 2022). The environmental impacts of the programme were restorative and preventative. Reforestation occurred within the settlement area, and project activities ameliorated erosion to prevent landslides (a significant threat in the area, which is subject to heavy winds and rain during monsoon season and frequent typhoons). Prior to the 2017 refugee crisis, FAO had been working with the Government of Bangladesh on a geographic information system (GIS)-based national forest inventory, so there was already a working relationship with the Forestry Department. There was also baseline data on forest resources in Cox's Bazar before the surge of refugees, which could be compared with biomass assessments after the influx and after project activities. These data were essential in both identifying the extent of forest loss and the impact of the programme.

Host communities believe that refugees in Cox's Bazar are the source of exponential increases in demand for resources, resulting in the rapid clearing of forests for housing, unsustainable consumption of firewood and timber, accelerated use of ground and surface water, and excessive fishing (Ahmed et al.,2018; IOM and FAO, 2017). Prior to the biomass restoration project, 25 percent of women surveyed in 306 randomly sampled households reported being harassed or assaulted by members of the host community, Forestry Department, or others while collecting fuelwood (ibid.). The massive arrival of refugees has also increased competition for land. Farmers complain about the loss of agricultural land when the government gives it to humanitarian organizations to extend refugee camps without any financial compensation for the farmers (Ansar and Khaled, 2021).

Addressing the threats to the environment and to displaced people because of fuelwood collection was fundamental to FAO project actions in Cox's Bazar. Not only were alternative sources of fuel provided, but both refugees and host communities were involved in successful reforestation and anti-erosion efforts to protect the communities against landslides (Mahamud *et al.*, 2021).

Kenya

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Evidence from the ground

A detailed investigation of these projects highlights three key findings. First, in all three settings, we see that the fragility of the ecosystems and resource competition led to violence against displaced people. In two cases, where the key resource was fuelwood, violence and the threat of violence was targeted primarily at women and girls who, because of gender norms and power dynamics, do most of the fuelwood collection. In the Sahel, the key resource was water access. In all three cases, these resources are vital to both displaced people and their host communities. Displaced people engaged in activities necessary for their survival are seen as contributing to environmental degradation, creating competition with others in the host community who also need access to those resources. Additionally, displaced people are often seen as privileged in relation to the host community, because they receive livelihood support from humanitarian organizations. From a purely human protection perspective, these cases suggest that humanitarian efforts need to both address and redress the environmental impact of displaced populations.

Second, in each of the three settings, efforts were made by the project staff – even when this was not their specific mission – to address environmental issues and promote social cohesion. These minimalist actions to promote peace by project personnel demonstrate the compatibility of the HDPN approach with humanitarian and environmental protection actions. This is most evident in the RESPECT case where staff exhibited an 'HDPN-friendly' organizational culture on a project explicitly focused on humanitarian objectives. In other projects and in different settings, technical interventions around vital resources provide contributions to sustaining peace by promoting social cohesion across divided groups. A stable staff on the ground with an understanding of existing drivers of conflict and marginalization of vulnerable groups can enable minimal contribution to peace. For example, veterinary service provision in Abyei Administrative Area brought Dinka Ngok and Missiriya silvopastoral communities together for repeated interactions around animal care, thus strengthening social cohesion (FAO, 2017).

Third, in the one case (Cox's Bazar) where we see evidence of ecosystem restoration, this was facilitated by clear baseline data and proof of the impact of the increased population on the local ecosystem. This data on biomass depletion was available because of an ongoing project prior to mass displacement, which happened to provide a baseline. The subsequent project designed to address the environmental consequences benefited refugees and host communities and provided community protections against climate change-related natural disasters (landslides). This finding is consistent with the initial FAO/CGIAR/CARE discussion paper which highlighted the importance of climate-related data for the HDPN (FAO, 2021).

Kenya

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Investing wisely in HDPN: key policy recommendations

There can be no single method of implementing an HDPN in humanitarian settings. Joint planning and data sharing has been highlighted in previous guidance (Resilience Leadership Council and Technical Working Group, 2022), and every opportunity should be taken to coordinate across organizations and HDPN areas. That said, a number of additional practical recommendations clearly emerge from these cases.

Natural resources are frequent sources of conflict and their protection cannot be treated as an add-on in humanitarian interventions. The 'D' development and 'P' peace components of the HDPN are not negotiable. Displaced people might impact the local environment and could compete with the host community over scarce natural resources if their needs are not considered in a responsive manner. They add pressure to fragile ecosystems, and this may make them a target for violence. Local conflict over scarce resources was evident in all the case studies, and violence targeted vulnerable people. Environmental protection should be seen as a necessary part of human protection. Inclusive participatory approaches that include mechanisms for conflict management can contribute to peace and environmental protection. Both development and peace components to the HDPN tend to follow a different (longer) timeline than the yearly allocations of humanitarian funding. Developing ways to coordinate across different timelines will be important.

Financing peacebuilding in humanitarian and development projects requires a sound understanding of the context, including through an environmental assessment. As the above case studies demonstrate, food security is not just about access to food but also cooking energy. Ignoring cooking energy in humanitarian interventions forces displaced populations to provide for themselves by using charcoal or fuelwood, which triggers the environmental and conflict issues highlighted above. Caniato, Carliez and Thulstrup (2017) have noted the necessity of budgeting for cooking energy in humanitarian interventions. FAO and UNHCR have already suggested strategies for assessing and responding to fuelwood needs in humanitarian operations and have emphasized the need for early assessments of fuelwood resources (Gianvenuti, Guéret and Sabogal, 2018). The projects highlighted in the case studies suggest two different methods for addressing the need for cooking energy. In Cox's Bazar, LPG gas distribution was used to protect vital forest resources, while the RRR project was specifically designed to address cooking energy issues and the environmental impact of settlements by teaching people how to recycle crop residues and animal waste into fuel briquettes. These are just two possible solutions to the larger problem.

Environmental data should thus be collected at the beginning of any humanitarian project and monitored throughout. In order to avoid the sorts of conflicts cited above, humanitarian actions in providing for displaced people should be able to access a baseline environmental assessment of local fuelwood resources, environmental risks, land, water, and other resources as appropriate. This aligns with Recommendation III(1) by the Development Assistance

Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, for "joined-up humanitarian, development and peace planning and programming on the basis of a joined-up or joint multistakeholder analysis of the risks, needs, vulnerabilities and root causes of conflict for the context, as well as Indigenous capacities, including for conflict and dispute resolution, utilizing data and/or qualitative analysis that has been collected in a transparent fashion." ("Development Assistance Committee Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus", 2019). The goal is to identify baseline data before the arrival of the displaced population for comparison. GIS data is available through Google Earth Engine and other public satellite data, as well as through private sources. Tree cover/biomass indicators should be assessed everywhere, but other indicators should also be added based on the ecology of an area. For example, in drylands, wells and water access are important natural resources, while agricultural land use and green spaces are important in other settings. In the Cox's Bazar case above, landslides were a source of danger to people, so mitigation efforts became essential. The impact of displaced people on the local ecosystem should then be assessed throughout the project and mitigated wherever possible. This is costly, but necessary for human protection and to promote climate change resilience.

Actions to promote peace within humanitarian spaces can be implemented with or without an explicit peace component of a project. In order to prevent against clashes emerging, whenever possible a baseline conflict analysis should be conducted at the beginning of a project involving community and government officials, particularly for new activities and projects. Actions to promote peace can thus emerge from the responsive actions of humanitarian organizations. The example above from the Diffa Region in which the staff allocated funding to provide additional water sources and develop a livestock corridor to reduce violence is an excellent example of this. These CARE Niger staff knew the populations in the area, and they knew the sources of conflict. They used their knowledge and capacity to solve the problems they saw. Similarly, in the case of the Abyei Administrative Area, the provision of technical services was done in such a way as to promote the social cohesion and interaction of two communities that had been in conflict. These examples resulted from knowledgeable and creative staff looking for ways to address conflict, as well as from collaboration with local actors and other organizations. Contexts can change rapidly; practitioners need to be aware of how a conflict situation is evolving to make sure they are aware of current circumstances and opportunities. Additional training in peace promotion may be necessary for humanitarian staff. Several tools, such as the Green Negotiated Territorial Development model, are available for the assessment of conflict and engagement of appropriate actors where it has not previously occurred.

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