# Conflict-sensitive water management is key to climate-resilient peace in Africa



Climate change is intensifying pressures on water supplies across many regions, increasingly contributing to tensions within and between communities, according to recent insights shared by CGIAR. The Pacific Institute’s Water Conflict Chronology has recorded 184 instances of water-related conflicts in north and sub-Saharan Africa since 2020, primarily manifesting at local levels where competition over scarce resources is most acute.

Such conflicts tend to escalate when the rate of environmental or social change—driven by factors such as rapid population growth, market fluctuations, policy reforms, or extreme weather events like droughts and floods—surpasses the capacity of local institutions to manage water resources effectively. When water management systems are unable to adapt quickly to these changes, existing tensions can become heightened, potentially leading to disputes.

In response to these challenges, sustainable and conflict-sensitive water management arrangements offer a pathway not only to improved resource stewardship but also to fostering social cohesion and contributing to climate-resilient peacebuilding. Key benefits of such approaches include enhanced communication and transparency through participative planning and management processes that allow for inclusive decision-making and consideration of diverse stakeholder interests. Additionally, incorporating local knowledge fosters greater accountability and community engagement, while rights-based frameworks ensure that vulnerable groups are meaningfully included and their specific needs addressed.

Recognising the growing importance of adapting water management to concurrent climate and social pressures, CGIAR’s FOCUS Climate Security team recently delivered a multi-module training course centred on conflict-sensitive water management frameworks. This training formed part of the 29th Regional Annual Diploma Course on Hydraulic Engineering in River Basins, organised by the Nile Basin Water Resources Coordination Centre (NWRC). The programme brought together over 35 water engineers and professionals from countries including Kenya, Uganda, Somalia, Sudan, and Rwanda, spanning backgrounds in engineering, academia, research, and government ministries.

Supported by CGIAR’s Climate Action Science Programme (CASP), the course introduced participants to the complex interplay between natural resource management and socio-political dynamics under climate change scenarios. It emphasised that climate change acts as a multiplier of existing tensions rather than a direct cause of conflict, highlighting the necessity for robust risk management and adaptive strategies.

The practical module equipped attendees with tools essential for designing and implementing water projects that are sensitive to conflict risks. These included:

* Integrated stakeholder engagement to bridge knowledge gaps between technical experts and local communities, fostering collaborative project planning.
* Comprehensive vulnerability assessments addressing climatic risks, infrastructure integrity, and socio-economic dynamics affecting resource distribution.
* Conflict sensitivity informed by thorough analyses of power relations and grievance sources, combined with the establishment of community-based conflict resolution mechanisms.
* Adaptive management frameworks aimed at responding dynamically to environmental and social changes through real-time data and ongoing community feedback.
* Development of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems that incorporate social indicators alongside technical performance metrics to ensure equitable access across different demographic groups.

An essential theme throughout the training was the promotion of gender-responsive water management. Given the central role of women in water collection and related activities—especially in developing countries—the inclusion of gender-specific vulnerability analyses was underscored as vital. These analyses help to account for gendered disparities in resource access, participation in decision-making, and roles in water management processes.

The course culminated in a collaborative exercise where participants applied their newly acquired knowledge to a hypothetical water management project. They identified strategies to mitigate risks, planned for gender-transformative and peace-positive outcomes, and outlined approaches to evaluate social impacts.

By the conclusion of the training, participants expressed increased confidence in integrating socio-economic and conflict considerations into their professional work, recognising how water management projects can become instruments for peace as well as environmental sustainability. CGIAR has expressed commitment to ongoing collaboration with the NWRC to continue advancing conflict-sensitive and peace-supportive water management practices across the region.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.cgiar.org/news-events/news/integrating-climate-water-and-food-security-in-settings-affected-by-conflict-and-displacement-examples-from-the-mena-region/> - This URL supports the idea of integrating climate, water, and food security challenges, particularly in conflict-affected regions, which is a central theme in addressing tensions related to water scarcity.
* <https://www.cgiar.org/portfolio-narrative/impact-area-focus/climate-change/> - CGIAR's focus on climate change aligns with insights about the intensifying pressures on water supplies due to climate change, highlighting the interconnectedness of environmental challenges.
* <https://www.cgiar.org/news-events/news/world-water-day-2025-protecting-glaciers-for-water-security/> - This article emphasizes the importance of glacier protection for water security due to climate change, supporting the broader discussion on climate-related water challenges.
* <https://www.pacificinstitute.org/water-conflicts/> - The Pacific Institute's Water Conflict Chronology provides evidence of water-related conflicts worldwide, supporting the claim about tensions arising from water scarcity.
* <https://www.cgiar.org/flagshipreport2025/climate/> - CGIAR's use of technology like AI and digital twins supports the development of adaptive strategies for managing water resources in the face of climate change.