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Climate Change, Conflict, & Gender

Insights and Perspectives from the Middle East and North Africa

Climate Change, Conflict, & Gender: Insights from the Middle East & North Africa

Four guest authors offer valuable insights into the complex interplay of climate change, conflict, and gender across various contexts in the MENA region highlighting the impacts of nexus challenges and the multifaceted roles that women play in fostering resilience, advancing peacebuilding efforts, and driving climate mitigation strategies.

Conflict and climate change disproportionately affect different groups of people, with women and marginalized communities often bearing the brunt of these impacts. Climate change acts as a risk multiplier, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and intensifying conflicts. Similarly, conflicts can heighten climate vulnerability by undermining governance, resources, and social cohesion.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is widely recognized as one of the most climate-vulnerable and conflict-affected areas in the world. A complex interplay of environmental fragility, protracted conflict, and entrenched and systemic gender inequality exacerbates the region's exposure to the interconnected risks of climate change, insecurity, and social exclusion. Addressing this triple nexus requires integrating gender-sensitive approaches into climate adaptation strategies and peacebuilding efforts to mitigate risks and promote resilience.

Women play diverse roles within the climate-conflict-gender nexus, and are often key actors for resilience, peacebuilding, and sustainable resource management. Despite facing disproportionate vulnerabilities due to entrenched gender inequalities, women are often uniquely positioned to address challenges. This briefing provides insights into the complex links between climate change, conflict, and gender in the MENA region:

Chapter I highlights the role of women 'insider mediators' and their critical roles in addressing resource-based conflicts and governance. Examples of women's roles in addressing disputes over water access in Yemen, as well as women's roles in natural resource governance to address resource related conflict in Sudan are used.

Chapter II discusses the food security, climate change, and conflict nexus in Yemen and highlights the impact on women as well as key opportunities for gender-responsive strategies that empower women as agents of change.

Chapter III examines the 2023 Derna Flood disaster in Libya analyzing its causes, the impacts on women, the contributions of women's groups and civil society organizations (CSOs), and a forward-looking vision for Libya to address the systemic issues that exacerbated the disaster's impacts.

Chapter IV focusses on the impacts of decades of conflicts, forced migration, and population growth on natural resource management in Iraq. It examines the impacts of these interconnected issues on diverse groups of women as well as the roles that women play in community dialogue and local conflict resolution mechanisms.

Author Bios

Khulood Al-Saidi is an experienced peacebuilding and conflict resolution practitioner with extensive expertise across the MENA region, including Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Tunisia, and Lebanon. She has led reconciliation and capacity-building initiatives for UN agencies and other distinguished international organizations, focusing on training peace agents and local mediators, integrating conflict and gender sensitivity approaches, and advancing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. She is a Chevening Scholar with an MA in Advanced Practice in Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution from the University of Bradford, UK.

Dr Nadia Al-Sakkaf is a renowned independent Yemeni researcher with expertise in media and digital safety, gender, democratic transitions, climate change and socio-economic development. She was the first woman appointed as Minister of Information and before that was Chief Editor of the country's first English language newspaper, The Yemen Times. She is co-founder of the Connecting Yemen initiative to advocate for accessible and affordable internet in Yemen. Al-Sakkaf is a recipient of many international and local awards, she was also recognized by the BBC as one of 100 Women who changed the world, and one of the World Economic Forum's Young Global Leaders in 2015. She has worked previously as the director of research of the economic think tank, Arabia Brain Trust. Nadia published extensively in the fields of politics, media, and development. She has written many policy and research papers, and book chapters, and has authored two books on Yemeni women's empowerment.

Ayat Mneina is a Libyan researcher, writer, and advocate whose work explores the intersections of social justice, gender equity, and political transformation in the Middle East and North Africa. With a background in public health and global development, her research focuses on the impacts of conflict, displacement, and climate change on vulnerable communities, particularly women and marginalized groups. Ayat is the founder of ShababLibya, a platform that amplified youth voices during the 2011 Libyan uprising, and she continues to engage in transnational advocacy on human rights and democratic governance in Libya. Her work has been featured in media, academic and policy spaces.

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I. Women Mediators and Climate Change: Bridging Environmental and Social Resilience

Khulood Al Saidi

Climate change is intensifying rapidly and disproportionately impacting different regions, exacerbating tensions and conflicts in fragile contexts by amplifying resource scarcities, forced displacement, economic instability, and social inequalities. These challenges are often compounded by weak infrastructure and limited societal capacity to address and mitigate the impacts.

Gender norms and other identity factors affect how different groups experience climate change impacts. Different groups of women, men, children, indigenous people, elderly and disabled people are impacted differently. Men may experience a loss of livelihoods, economic pressures, and forced migration, resulting in them being involved in disputes and violent conflicts. Indigenous communities suffer displacement from rising sea levels in coastal and forested regions. Children are at higher risk of malnutrition, disease, and displacement, as well as disrupted education during disasters, which has long-term effects on their development. Elderly and disabled people face high risks during extreme weather events due to mobility challenges, health conditions, and limited access to emergency services. [1]

Women, especially in the global South, experience climate change impacts differently and more acutely, often due to traditional gender roles and greater reliance on natural resources for livelihoods. As farmers and caregivers, they need to provide food and care for children and elderly family members, which puts them on the frontline of climate change impacts and, in some cases, resulting in a higher risk of hunger and vulnerabilities. Despite women's significant contributions to sustainable resource management and climate-resilient communities, they often lack equitable access to resources and decision-making roles.[2]

Addressing these interlinked challenges requires a climate-conflict-gender nexus approach incorporating gender-sensitive and inclusive strategies to enhance community resilience.

By empowering women and vulnerable groups through inclusive participation in conflict resolution and resource management, societies can promote environmental sustainability, equitable resource distribution, and social stability. Recognizing diverse perspectives and leveraging unique insights can help address the root causes of climate-related tensions and foster resilient communities.

This chapter elaborates on the role of women mediators in climate-related conflicts, discusses the integration of climate change impacts on women, peace and security agenda and mediation, looks at examples from Yemen and Sudan, speaks of the obstacles to the inclusion of women in such negotiations, and offer steps forward.

The Role of Women Mediators in Climate-Related Conflicts

Women mediators play crucial roles in community conflict resolution, particularly in disputes over water and land, offering inclusive and empathetic perspectives. Evidence shows that involving women in peace processes increases the likelihood of long-term peace by 35%. [3]



Women's Inclusion in Peace Processes. Source: UN Women

Women's contributions extend far beyond addressing women's rights and social issues. Women frequently emphasise inclusive approaches, championing the involvement of marginalised groups such as youth, minorities, and civil society organisations. Their participation fosters trust-building among conflicting parties and within communities. Additionally, women mediators draw attention to essential issues like education, healthcare, and the needs of children and vulnerable populations—topics often neglected in traditional peace negotiations.

By being deeply rooted in local communities, women are also instrumental in recognising early signs of conflict, enabling them to voice grassroots concerns effectively. They mediate various disputes, including ceasefires, intertribal conflicts, and resource access, often leveraging their social status and personal connections. Their roles range from negotiators to dialogue initiators and relationship builders, enhancing the effectiveness of peace processes.[4] [5]

“When women were part of the negotiation processes they brought our attention to the issues we did not thought about it as negotiation topics such as access to health and education”

- Male member of Libyan Mediation Network

Integrating Climate Change Impacts into Women, Peace and Security Agenda and Mediation

Since its adoption in 2000, UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security has highlighted the importance of women in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding, and post-conflict recovery. It advocates for their equal and meaningful participation in decision-making and positions mediation as a key mechanism within the WPS framework.

Women are critical in responding to climate change due to their local knowledge and leadership in sustainable resource management and/or leading sustainable practices at the household and community level. Nevertheless, only in 2020, and for the first time, does the annual report of the UN Secretary-General on Women, Peace, and Security include a dedicated section on climate change and its peace and security implications.

The report urges governments to integrate climate change considerations into national action plans for women, peace, and security. It also stresses the importance of providing dedicated funding to women on the frontlines of linked climate-security crises.

The SIPRI Insights paper (2020) analysed how the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) National Action Plans (NAPs) from 80 countries address the intersection of climate change and security. The study revealed varied approaches among these states. Seventeen countries explicitly reference climate change in at least one of their plans, with three (Finland, Ireland, and the United States) outlining more specific goals and activities related to climate change across their plans. [6]

Women mediators are essential in addressing the complex challenges posed by climate change. Their unique perspectives and community ties enable them to foster collaborative solutions that address environmental and social dimensions of conflict, paving the way for sustainable peace and resilience.

Women's participation at the political level has resulted in greater responsiveness to citizens' needs, often increasing cooperation across political parties, ethnic groups and minorities, delivering more sustainable peace. At the local level, women's inclusion in leadership has improved outcomes for climate-related projects and policies. On the contrary, if policies or projects are implemented without women's meaningful participation, they can increase existing inequalities and decrease effectiveness. [7]

Women Mediators in the MENA Region

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region remains the world's least peaceful region; it is home to four of the ten least peaceful countries, including the two least peaceful, Sudan and Yemen. [8] Women across the MENA region have played pivotal roles in conflict resolution at various levels, including mediating local disputes, negotiating ceasefires, ending sieges, and addressing wartime violations, such as the recruitment of child soldiers or prisoner releases and addressing social disputes related to gender-based violence, inheritance, and early marriage. Women mediators have leveraged community ties, forming coalitions and partnerships with local leaders and excel in traditionally male-dominated local spaces and decision-making mechanisms.

MENA Women mediators often act as "Insider Mediators." Insider Mediation is an approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding that has gained significant traction recently as an effective method for addressing local conflict and tensions. It is a grassroots approach that involves trusted community members, as individuals or groups, who are connected to a dispute and who are trusted and are perceived as credible by the conflict parties.

As insider mediators, women consistently exhibit two key traits: relationship-building or leveraging skills and deep knowledge of the conflict and its stakeholders.

They might initially mediate a dispute directly and later involve a local elder to capitalise on the elder's influence. Alternatively, they may use their position as insider mediators to unite disputing parties and then step into a less visible role during formal negotiations; for example, in Syria, women have mediated ceasefires and negotiated with armed groups to ensure community safety and building coalitions for peace and community resilience such as the female teachers in Idlib collaborated with detainees' mothers to pressure faction leaders into releasing detainees. This informal coalition succeeded in securing their release through persistent advocacy.

In Iraq and Libya, women have mediated the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their communities and addressed sensitive post-conflict issues.[5] Moreover, Women who have directly experienced conflict or displacement have mediated issues affecting their communities, bringing unique perspectives, such as Yezidi women in Iraq who were recognised as survivors of violence, contributed to mediation efforts, representing victimised groups while challenging traditional gender roles. This success highlights the importance of actively including women in climate change adaptation and conflict resolution efforts at the community level.



Local women mediators discuss conflict resolution at a community event in Lebanon. Source: Emad Karim/UN Women 2019

Success Stories of Women Mediators in Climate Change Contexts in the MENA Region

MENA women mediators demonstrated their capacity to mediate climate change-related conflicts effectively. The following examples from Yemen and Sudan highlight the critical role of women mediators in addressing resource-based conflicts, highlighting women's mediation abilities when they take the initiative and promote peaceful resolution in the case of Yemen and when they gain the appropriate support enabling them to address climate challenges, improve resource governance, and build peace in the case of Sudan.

Yemen: Climate-induced challenges, such as water scarcity and food insecurity, have compounded Yemen's ongoing conflict. Women mediators in Taiz and Lahj have been at the forefront of resolving disputes over water access in war-affected areas. Through informal mediation networks, women have facilitated dialogue between conflicting parties, ensuring equitable distribution of limited water supplies. They have also organised community-led initiatives to rehabilitate wells and irrigation systems, addressing immediate needs and long-term resilience. For example, since 2015, Taiz Governorate has suffered from a siege that blocked roads and deprived residents of adequate water access, leaving women, girls, and boys to travel unsafe distances to collect water, risking sexual abuse and sniper attacks. In 2021, the situation worsened as nine water tanks fell under the control of armed forces who sold the water for administrative costs, prompting the Taiz Water Authority to cut the supply.

A female humanitarian worker and local NGO leader, Ola Al-Aghbari, initiated mediation by engaging local leaders and political figures. She organised a mediation committee with influential tribal leaders, legal experts, and community figures to design a joint negotiation strategy. The committee successfully negotiated with military commanders to restore civilian access to the water tanks. Agreements were signed to transfer six of the nine tanks to the local water authority, ensuring better access for residents. [9]

Sudan: In North Kordofan, Sudan, recurring droughts and desertification have intensified competition over scarce resources such as water and arable land, leading to conflicts between pastoralists and farmers. Women were historically excluded from conflict resolution despite their crucial role in agriculture. A UN Joint Programme from 2016 to 2018 aimed to address resource-related conflicts by integrating women into natural resource governance and mediation structures through training women in conflict mediation and sustainable resource management. It also challenged traditional gender norms through community sensitisation. The project resulted in women participating in 75% of local mediations and leading initiatives such as planting 6,000 seedlings for soil conservation and advocating for equitable water-sharing agreements and grazing rights. [10]



Yemeni Local Women Mediators. Source: UNDP Yemen, 2024

Barriers to Women's Mediation in Climate Change Contexts

The structural factors and inequalities that increase women's vulnerability to climate change often also marginalise them from participating in processes, platforms, and discussions on natural resource management and conflict mediation. Women mediators face significant barriers that limit their effectiveness and visibility despite their critical contributions to peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts. These obstacles include:

Patriarchal and Sociocultural Norms:

Deeply ingrained patriarchal structures and societal expectations often undermine women's authority and legitimacy in mediation roles. In many contexts, cultural norms view women as less capable or credible in leadership and decision-making positions, which hinders their ability to gain the trust and respect of stakeholders in mediation processes. These biases can lead to resistance from male-dominated groups or communities, forcing women mediators to constantly prove their competence and worth.

Lack of Resources :

Women mediators often struggle with limited access to financial, technical, and logistical resources. This lack of support restricts their ability to scale their initiatives, build sustainable networks, or invest in capacity-building opportunities. Funding for women-led mediation efforts is often insufficient, with most resources channelled toward larger, male-dominated organisations. Without adequate resources, women mediators face challenges in organising effective interventions, conducting outreach, and ensuring the sustainability of their efforts.

Policy Exclusion:

Institutional barriers deeply influenced by patriarchal and sociocultural norms further exacerbate the challenges faced by women mediators. In many contexts, these barriers exclude women from formal negotiations and high-level decision-making forums, including those addressing climate change, governance, and peace agreements. Such exclusion diminishes their influence on policy outcomes and restricts the integration of gender-sensitive perspectives in negotiations. The lack of representation in formal settings often marginalises women's voices, leaving critical insights and experiences unaddressed in final agreements [11]

Conclusion and Recommendations

The intersection of women's roles as mediators and the challenges posed by climate change has become increasingly relevant, particularly in regions where environmental stressors exacerbate existing social and political tensions. Women mediators bring unique perspectives to climate adaptation and conflict resolution, often serving as vital change agents in their communities. Scaling the role of women mediators is crucial through different recommended approaches, such as:

- Promoting gender-inclusive policies and addressing intersectional issues like race, class, and ethnicity. Indigenous women, for example, possess invaluable traditional knowledge about sustainable resource management.
- Capacity Building, Training programs on mediation, climate adaptation, and leadership and providing access to technologies such as digital platforms can amplify women's voices, enabling them to share knowledge and advocate for climate justice.
- Investments in gender-responsive climate finance can further support women-led projects, ensuring that resources reach those most affected by climate change.

Women's roles in addressing resource-based disputes and climate advocacy are multifaceted and impactful. Their inclusion leads to equitable resource management and fosters long-term climate resilience.

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II. Gendered Perspectives on the Food Security, Climate Change, and Conflict Nexus in Yemen

Dr Nadia Al-Sakkaf

Yemen is facing one of the most severe humanitarian crises of the century, driven by an intricate nexus of food insecurity, climate change, and violent conflict. These interconnected challenges have devastated the nation's socio-economic fabric, disproportionately affecting women and girls. Addressing this nexus through a gender-sensitive lens is critical for fostering resilience, ensuring equitable recovery, and paving the way for sustainable development.

There are three elements to the Food-security-Climate Change-Conflict Nexus: In terms of Food security, over 17 million Yemenis face high levels of food insecurity and will likely continue to face acute food insecurity in 2025,[1] with more than five million children suffering from acute malnutrition.[2] Yemen imports 90% of its food, and disruptions in global supply chains—such as those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and more recently the Houthis militia's attacks on the Red Sea —have significantly increased food prices. [3]

When it comes to Climate Change, Yemen is the third most climate-vulnerable country globally, facing recurrent droughts, flash floods, and erratic rainfall. [4] These phenomena disrupt agriculture and fisheries, forcing over 200,000 individuals to relocate in 2023 alone. [5] Climate Change is considered a threat multiplier with the convergence of disaster and conflict displacements sometimes forcing communities to be displaced repeatedly.

As for Conflict, the ongoing violence has destroyed agricultural infrastructure, displaced 4.5 million people, and plunged millions into poverty. [6] Women and children constitute more than three quarters of those displaced and bear the brunt of the impacts. [7] Many of the displaced women live in camps where they are at heightened risk of violence, malnutrition, and poor healthcare. Cultural norms further limit their access to resources and decision-making opportunities.

While this nexus affects both men and women, the matter of fact is that women and girls in Yemen are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, climate change, and conflict. As caregivers, farmers, and water collectors, they face heightened vulnerabilities. Displacement exacerbates these challenges, as women encounter gender-based violence, limited mobility, and reduced access to resources. [8]

Furthermore, women form a significant portion of Yemen's agricultural labor force. Climate-induced disasters, such as floods and droughts, have reduced arable land by 38%, and agricultural production by 5% between 2019 and 2020, disproportionately impacting women. [9] Yemen is also facing an imminent water crisis, with the country's water resources depleting at an alarming rate. The economic decay and destruction of infrastructure from conflict and climate change-induced extreme weather events has driven Yemenis to rely on poor water management techniques, thus compounding issues related to water and agriculture.

Yemen is ranked the 12th most water-scarce country in the world. With a per capita renewable water share of only 80 cubic meters, compared to the global average of around 6,000 cubic meters, Yemen is the 12th most water-scarce country in the world with a baseline of water stress of over 80%.[10] In 2025 or shortly after, it is expected that groundwater reserves will be exhausted. (i) Women often trek long distances to fetch water, exposing them to additional risks while limiting their time for education or income-generating activities. [11]

Strategic Opportunities for Resilience

To mitigate these intersectional crises, Yemen must adopt gender-responsive strategies that empower women as agents of change.

To start with, women-led climate adaptation policies provide an opportunity for low cost-high impact solutions that are grounded in local wisdom. For example, promoting rainwater harvesting and spate irrigation systems can significantly enhance agricultural resilience. There is precedence of this in the past. For example, between 2021 and 2022, the Yemen Emergency Crisis Response Project supported the construction of over 1,000 public and 30,000 household rainwater harvesting reservoirs and cisterns in Ibb, Dhamar, and Al-Mahra, providing nearly 900,000 cubic meters of clean water. Small cisterns and reservoirs are part of an ancient tradition in Yemen, and there are several centuries-old historic landmarks that bear witness to the environmentally friendly and efficient technique.[1] These projects are especially effective at the decentralized local level, helping to resolve water disputes and promote sustainable agriculture. This type of water resource management, when combined with renewable energy solutions, will allow the country's agriculture to realize its full potential and contribute to food security.

Furthermore, Yemen's extensive coastline means that the fisheries industry possesses significant untapped potential for bolstering the national economy. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities, fisheries ranked as the nation's second-largest source of export revenue, trailing only behind the oil industry. In 2013, Yemen's fisheries sector was estimated to produce around 200,000 tons of seafood, with approximately 40-50 percent of this output earmarked for export. This contributed a substantial US\$289 million to the country's gross domestic product for that year.[12]

The fishing sector is predominantly composed of small-scale businesses, which presently sustain the livelihoods of approximately 83,400 small-scale fishers and their households, totalling around 667,000 individuals. Yemen was recognized as a significant regional contributor to the fishery industry, responsible for more than half of the fish production and exports in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden region. Training women in sustainable fishing and farming techniques, such as selective fishing methods, fish farming, community based marine resource management, cultivating drought-resistant crops and employing efficient irrigation systems, can bolster agricultural productivity.



Young Yemeni girls collect water. Source: Nabil Mohammed/ABT

That being said, with the increased effects of global warming and extreme weather phenomena, it is important to leverage renewable energy sources. Expanding the use of solar-powered irrigation and refrigeration systems in women-led agricultural activities can reduce reliance on costly fossil fuels.

Currently, solar energy supports 40% of Yemen's population and offers significant scalability.[13] While solar energy is an opportunity in its own right, reports show that it has been abused in a drilling wells in an ad hoc manner to irrigate qat farms which exacerbates the water scarcity problem. Well-water extraction also relies primarily on diesel-powered pumps, which pose an added threat to the environment. According to estimates, Yemen has more than 100,000 operating wells that primarily employ diesel-powered pumps to draw groundwater from degraded basins.[14][i]

Nevertheless, efforts are being made to incorporate solar energy into the water-extraction process. Satellite imagery from the Conflict and Environment Observatory reveals that the increased usage of solar panels in agriculture is primarily in qat-growing regions to prevent groundwater pumping from halting qat output during the fuel crisis.[15]

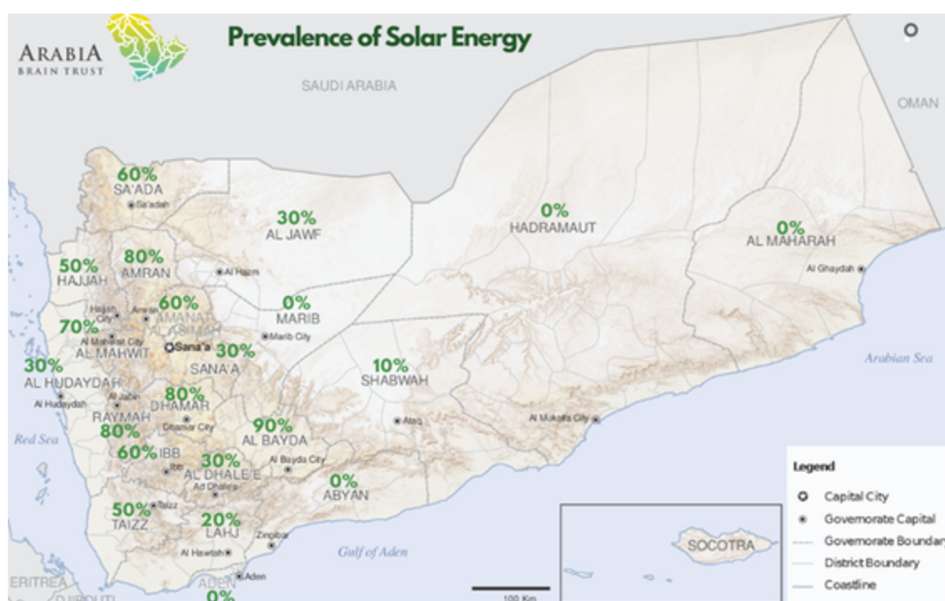
A study comparing water scarcity to the ad hoc utilization of solar energy water pumps to extract underground water showed that, although this technology is useful for the environment, its random use is creating more pressure on underground water,

leading to severe agricultural distress and food insecurity. [16] Therefore, developing community-level renewable energy projects to power essential infrastructure can further alleviate energy poverty.

Similarly, women have had to carry an increased financial burden due to the conflict. As men - the traditional primary breadwinners - lost their jobs because of rising poverty, or disappeared by being killed on the frontlines, becoming physically or mentally incapacitated, or abandoning their responsibilities, women were gradually forced to take on new income-generating roles. Providing tailored financial programs is essential to ensure women's access to agricultural inputs and markets.

Building on successful cooperative models can enable women to diversify livelihoods and strengthen local food production. Supporting women-led organizations in fisheries and agriculture can revitalize these industries, which have incurred losses exceeding \$6.9 billion since 2015.

As mentioned earlier, the majority of displaced persons are women and children. Establishing safe spaces for women in displacement camps is crucial to ensuring access to food, healthcare, and education. These programs should include psychosocial support for survivors of gender-based violence. Additionally, facilitating income-generating opportunities, such as small-scale farming and handicrafts, can enhance the economic independence of displaced women.



Prevalence of Solar Energy in Yemen, 2023. Source: Arabia Brain Trust

Policy Recommendations

There are several actionable recommendations which when applied, can significantly mitigate the Food Security, Climate Change, and Conflict Nexus in Yemen. Following are some recommendations to this end:

- **Gender-Responsive Climate Adaptation Strategies:**

Implementing early warning systems tailored to women's mobility constraints is imperative. Tools like mobile alerts and mosque announcements can effectively protect communities from climate-induced disasters. Facilitating women's participation in climate resilience planning and resource management ensures their voices are central to decision-making processes.

- **Strengthening Women's Role in Food Systems:**

Expanding agricultural extension services specifically for women farmers, with a focus on modern techniques such as crop rotation and organic farming, is vital. Advocating for legal reforms to guarantee women's rights to land ownership and inheritance is equally critical for long-term food security.

- **Enhanced Support for Displaced Women:**

Improving infrastructure in displacement camps can ensure safety and access to essential services, with a focus on secure water and sanitation facilities. Providing vocational training and mental health services for displaced women can enable their reintegration into the economy and society.

- **Building on Yemen's Assets:**

Despite its challenges, Yemen possesses untapped potential that can drive resilience. One-third of Yemen's land is classified as agricultural, yet only half of its arable land is cultivated. Investing in modern irrigation techniques and climate-resilient seeds could significantly boost food production. Yemen's 2,500-kilometer coastline is another critical asset. Revitalizing fisheries through sustainable practices could restore livelihoods for over 83,000 fishers and generate substantial economic growth. Additionally, with abundant solar and wind resources, Yemen can transition to clean energy solutions, reducing its \$1.1 billion annual fuel import dependency while supporting food systems and rural livelihoods.

- **Fostering International and Local Partnerships:**

Collaborating with women-led organizations to design and implement gender-sensitive food security programs is essential. International donors should prioritize funding initiatives that empower women. Mobilizing technical assistance can enhance local capacities in climate adaptation, renewable energy, and conflict resolution.

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III. Gender, Climate, and Conflict Nexus: Case Study on the Derna Flood Disaster, Libya, 2023

Ayat Mneina

I would be remiss not to start this piece by disclosing my personal connection to Libya and the city of Derna more specifically. While I have lived most of my life in the Libyan diaspora, my parents hail from Derna, and my family has called it home for generations. Today, after over a decade of conflict and more recently the flood, parts of my family have been displaced across Libya and beyond. However, my grandparents' homes and many relatives still reside there until today, all of whom were deeply impacted by the floods. We lost family members and have been forever changed by the events of those few hours. I last visited Derna a year before the floods would strike.

Introduction: A City Drowned in Grief

On September 11, 2023, the city of Derna in eastern Libya was struck by a catastrophic flood that claimed thousands of lives and left the city in ruins. This disaster, precipitated by Storm Daniel, underscored the interplay of natural forces and human failings, including governmental neglect, corruption, and the impacts of climate change. The aftermath has joined a long list of events the country has experienced highlighting the fragility of Libya's infrastructure and governance amid years of conflict and mismanagement. Those most impacted by such events are regular Libyan citizens who continue to exist at the mercy of the country's many powerbrokers. Even more vulnerable are its women and girls

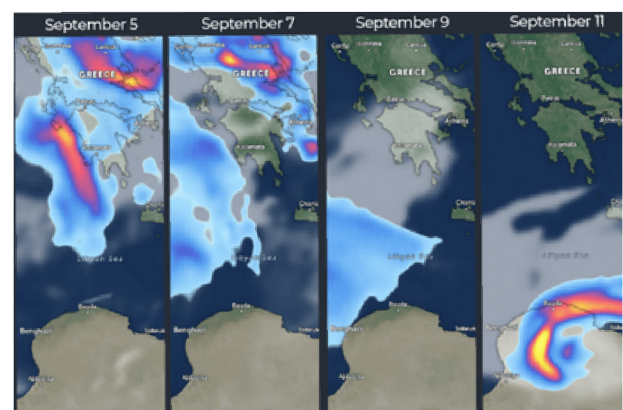
Storm Daniel

Storm Daniel, a Mediterranean cyclone, brought unprecedented rainfall to northeastern Libya. Within hours, Derna experienced torrential downpours equivalent to amounts seen in one year (400 mm) and overwhelmed the city's two aging dams. The Wadi Derna (valley) swelled uncontrollably, and when the dams collapsed, a wall (30 million cubic metres) of water was unleashed downstream into the city of Derna, then home to a population of approximately 100,000 people. One witness cried out, "Derna. [Derna] the culture, the science, the literature, the culture, the arts, the theatre. Where is Derna? Derna the city of jasmine, the city of pomegranates. Where is Derna?!". The floodwaters carved a path of destruction through the city's heart, leaving vast areas submerged and unrecognizable.

While initial reports estimated the death toll at over 5,000, today the number is believed to exceed 10,000.

Over 40,000 people were displaced, their homes destroyed and hearts broken. To put into words the scale of devastation and destruction that the city of Derna and Eastern Libya have seen is nearly impossible. My relatives described the events they lived through as apocalyptic: neighbours unable to help each other to safety, those that could huddle together on their roofs describe hearing the screams of those around them being swept away. Others along the coastal road would try to escape in vain, their entire building or street pushed into the sea.

Families of Derna, generations of them and their histories, erased. Thousands may never learn the fate of loved ones as hope of finding any survivors long gone, the recovery of bodies now buried in the sea impossible, and many hurriedly buried in mass graves before DNA sampling could take place. Derna was struck with a flood nearly seven decades ago, its impact recorded in the memory of those who lived through it and in poetry and local culture but nothing could prepare this city, this country or anyone's imagination for what Storm Daniel had in store [1].



The Path of Storm Daniel Source: Al Jazeera/Zoom.earth

Causes of the Disaster

The catastrophic impact of the flood was not solely due to natural forces. Years of governmental neglect and mismanagement exacerbated the disaster's severity. The dams that failed were constructed in the 1970s and had not undergone significant maintenance for decades. Nor were they used for their intended purpose to irrigate local agricultural projects and contribute to the region's economic development. They remained full and stagnant, turned into ticking time bombs by decades of neglect and decay.

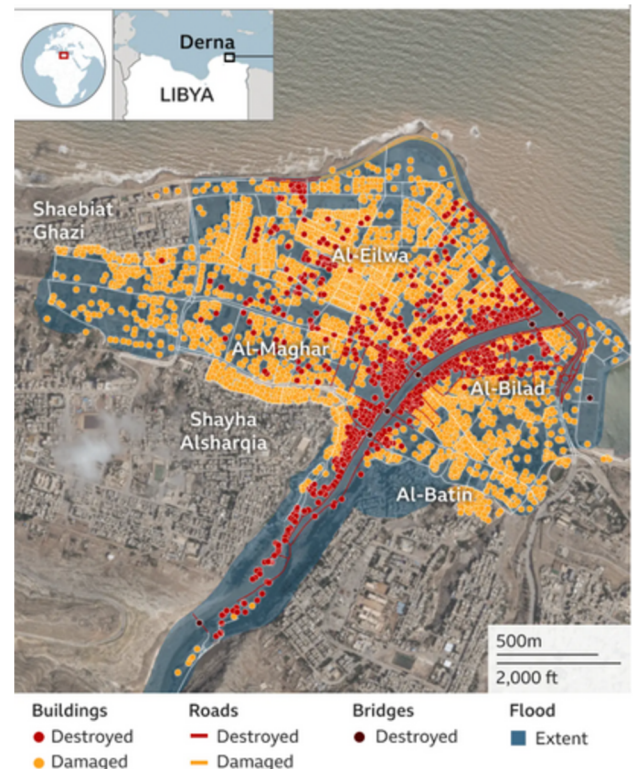
Experts had warned of their vulnerability for years, but these warnings went unheeded[1]. Political instability in Libya, divided between rival administrations in the east and west since 2014, further hindered coordinated disaster preparedness and infrastructure investment.



Damage after the floods. Source: BBC/Maxar Technologies

Corruption and kleptocracy—all too familiar themes in Libya—also played a role. Funds allocated for public works and dam maintenance were reportedly misused or siphoned off. This systemic corruption left Derna and other parts of Libya ill-equipped to handle extreme weather events. Additionally, years of conflict have degraded the country's infrastructure, making recovery efforts more challenging.

Climate change is another critical factor. The Mediterranean region has experienced increasing weather extremes, including more intense storms, due to rising global temperatures. Storm Daniel was a manifestation of this trend, its unprecedented rainfall overwhelming poorly maintained infrastructure.



Damage and Destruction in Derna. Source: BBC/Planet Labs

Psychological Wounds and Trauma

Beyond physical devastation, the flood has left deep psychological scars on survivors. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the trauma experienced by residents of Derna is immense and will take years to heal. Survivors—ranging from those who lost entire families, those orphaned, those widowed—grapple with the loss of loved ones, homes, and entire neighborhoods, leading to widespread emotional distress. Children, in particular, are vulnerable to long-term psychological impacts, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Mental health support services are crucial in the recovery process, yet these are often underfunded and inaccessible, further compounding the crisis [3].

Disproportionate Impacts on Women

We know that climate disasters often have a disproportionate impact on women, and the Derna flood was no exception. Women in Libya already face significant socio-economic challenges, including limited access to economic opportunities, healthcare, and political representation. These pre-existing inequalities exacerbate their vulnerability during disasters. In the immediate aftermath of the flood, women and girls faced heightened risks of exploitation, violence, and marginalization. Displacement often forces women into overcrowded shelters where their privacy and safety are compromised. The burden of caregiving, traditionally shouldered by women, became even heavier as families struggled to cope with the loss of homes and livelihoods and the uncertainty of what lies ahead. These pressures could lead to increased rates of domestic violence and early marriage [4].

Furthermore, the lack of gender-sensitive disaster response measures compounded these challenges. Reports indicated that aid distribution often overlooked the specific needs of women, such as access to sanitary products, maternal healthcare, and safe spaces.

Civil society organizations, national and international relief efforts attempted to address these gaps however their efficiency was majorly impacted by the lack of preparedness or coordination [5]. These oversights highlight the critical need for integrating gender considerations into disaster preparedness and response plans.

Women were rendered invisible in relief efforts due to systemic neglect, with their specific challenges overlooked in favor of generalized solutions. “The first thing they think about is food, clothes and medication, and after that if someone thinks about women’s needs it’s half hearted, or you can tell it’s from someone who doesn’t experience periods,” says Hajar Darwish, a Libyan women’s sexual health specialist [6]. This neglect not only exacerbates their vulnerability but also impedes community-wide recovery, as women are central to family and societal resilience.



A survivor looks over the destruction caused by Storm Derna. Source: AFP

Justice and Government Culpability

The flood in Derna also raises critical questions about justice and accountability. Survivors and human rights advocates have called for thorough investigations into the collapse of the dams, as well as the misuse of public funds that should have been allocated to infrastructure maintenance and disaster preparedness [7].

Families have demanded justice for the preventable loss of life and property, calling on both national and international bodies to hold those responsible accountable. Legal and institutional reforms are necessary to ensure that such failures are not repeated and that victims receive the justice and support they deserve.

Warning Systems & Disaster Preparedness

The lack of effective warning systems was a significant factor in the scale of the tragedy. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Libya lacks the advanced technological systems necessary to monitor and predict severe weather events accurately. In the case of Storm Daniel, no comprehensive early warning was issued to the population. In fact, unclear directives were issued in the hours leading up to the flood leading some residents to relocate away from the sea and into the heart of the valley, in harms way. [8] Effective warning systems, such as automated alerts and real-time communication networks, could have saved countless lives by enabling timely evacuations.

UNDP emphasizes the importance of integrating innovative technologies into Libya's disaster resilience strategies. These include advanced weather monitoring systems, community-based alert networks, and capacity-building programs to educate local populations on disaster preparedness. Establishing a coordinated approach between local authorities, national agencies, and international organizations is essential for building a robust disaster management framework. [9]

Lessons on Climate Preparedness & Recovery

A climate-sensitive recovery pathway is essential for Libya, as emphasized by recent studies. Climate disasters like the Derna flood demand holistic approaches that integrate environmental sustainability, community resilience, and governance reforms. Addressing the root causes of vulnerability, including socioeconomic disparities, inequality, and political fragmentation, is crucial. Developing climate-resilient infrastructure, such as flood-resistant housing and modernized dams, should be a priority.

Nationally, Libya must invest in climate adaptation and mitigation strategies that consider the impacts of prolonged conflict and institutional weaknesses. Recovery plans should include participatory approaches that engage local communities, particularly women, to ensure their needs and perspectives are central to decision-making processes. [10]

Applying a Gender Lens to Causes

Analyzing the Derna disaster through a gender lens reveals systemic issues that go beyond immediate impacts. Years of conflict and instability in Libya have marginalized women from decision-making processes, including those related to urban planning and disaster management. This exclusion has resulted in infrastructure and policies that fail to address the unique vulnerabilities of women.

The neglect of Derna's dams, for example, is emblematic of broader governance failures that disproportionately harm women. As the primary caregivers in many households, women bear the brunt of inadequate infrastructure and public services. The flood's destruction of healthcare facilities, schools, and water supplies had a cascading effect on their responsibilities and well-being.

Impact on Healthcare Systems

The floods inflicted significant damage on Libya's already fragile healthcare system. Many healthcare facilities in Derna were destroyed or rendered inoperable, leaving residents without access to essential medical services. The Lancet highlights that the inundation of hospitals and clinics disrupted the provision of emergency care, maternal health services, and treatment for chronic illnesses, many of those who sustained injuries were medevaced to Benghazi. Waterborne diseases, injuries, and mental health conditions surged in the aftermath, further straining the limited healthcare infrastructure.

In the absence of functional health facilities, international aid organizations and local CSOs stepped in to provide critical medical assistance. However, the long-term recovery of the healthcare system will require substantial investment in infrastructure and personnel, as well as measures to enhance resilience against future disasters. [11]

National Context and Civil Society's Role

At the national level, Libya's fragmented governance and prolonged conflict have continued to hamper efforts to advance gender inequality or empowering women. Climate change adds a layer to this nexus that will continue to prove challenging if it is not taken into consideration. Civil society organizations (CSOs), however, have played a vital role in advocating for women's rights and providing support to marginalized communities. In the aftermath of the Derna flood, CSOs mobilized to fill gaps in the official response, distributing aid and advocating for gender-sensitive policies. Reflective of the lack of preparedness for disaster relief, these efforts were all impromptu.

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The Libyan Scouts and Girl Guides Movement, an organization that has a deep history in the country for nearly 70 years and are well respected as a result, played a critical role in distributing and coordinating relief efforts [12].

Women-led groups also stepped up to focus on immediate gender-specific needs including hygiene kits for women and girls. One such effort was called Eve's Response and was born out of a volunteer network of women activists across the region who coordinated the collection and distribution of daily necessities for women and later shifted their focus to providing women with training to enter the labour market in the aftermath.

[13]

Libya's deeply entrenched power imbalances and fragmented political landscape hinder comprehensive disaster response. It also notes that women, as key agents of change in civil society, are often sidelined in national recovery and resilience efforts despite their critical roles in community mobilization and advocacy. [14]

A Vision for The Future

Over a year after the Derna flood, the city remains a stark reminder of the consequences of neglect and inequality. Rebuilding efforts must go beyond physical reconstruction to address the systemic issues that exacerbated the disaster's impacts. By integrating gender considerations into policies and programs, Libya can create a more equitable and resilient society.

The Derna disaster has highlighted the urgent need for a holistic approach to governance, one that prioritizes inclusivity, transparency, and sustainability. Addressing the root causes of vulnerability—from corruption and poor infrastructure to gender inequality—is essential for ensuring that future disasters do not result in similar devastation. As conflict and climate change continue to be challenges around the world moving forward, it is imperative that we realize that no one state exists in a vacuum. Climate change does not see borders, and conflicts have a way of forcing masses of people across border lines. Most recently, hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees have been displaced to Libya. Libya has an opportunity to build back better, not only by reconstructing its cities but also by fostering a culture of accountability, resilience, and inclusivity. By learning from the Derna tragedy and by other climate change events globally, Libya can lay the groundwork for transformative change and a more just and sustainable future for all.

Recommendations

Libya has ratified many international conventions, agreements and treaties committing to enshrining the rights of women and fighting against climate change. However, action on the ground is lacking. These high-level recommendations speak to the realities the country currently faces and are addressed to government officials, international partners and actors and civil society organizations

- **Integrate Gender Considerations into Climate Policies:**

Develop and implement national climate policies based on research-backed best practices that explicitly address the unique vulnerabilities of women. This includes ensuring access to resources, training, and participation in climate resilience programs. [15]

- **Strengthen Gender-Responsive Disaster Management:**

Establish protocols that prioritize the safety and well-being of women and girls in disaster responses. This includes providing gender-segregated shelters, addressing specific health needs, and ensuring equitable aid distribution.

- **Enhance Women's Political Representation:**

Increase women's participation in governance, particularly in sectors related to infrastructure, disaster management, and climate policy.

- **Combat Corruption and Invest in Resilient Infrastructure:**

Allocate resources transparently and prioritize the maintenance of critical infrastructure. Anti-corruption measures are essential to ensure that funds reach their intended purposes.

- **Support Civil Society Efforts:**

Strengthen the capacity of CSOs working on women's empowerment and disaster response. These organizations are often best positioned to address local needs and advocate for marginalized groups.

- **Promote Education and Awareness:**

The conversation surrounding climate change in the public discourse has been punctuated by the devastating floods in Derna. We must empower communities with knowledge by implementing educational programs in coordination with the media, government, civil society and the international community that emphasize the importance of gender equality and climate resilience.

- **Address Political Fragmentation:**

Encourage national reconciliation and more unified governance structures to enable coordinated disaster response and recovery. Political stability is a prerequisite for effective policy implementation.

- **Ensure Justice and Accountability:**

Establish independent investigations into the failures that exacerbated the Derna disaster, with a focus on preventing future negligence. Strengthen legal frameworks to ensure accountability for corruption and mismanagement.

- **Climate Change and Collective History Project:**

Establish a national repository for a climate change collective memory project where those impacted can share their stories, record their histories and commemorate those lost.

- **Support Long-Term Mental Health Impacts:**

Invest in and develop specific tools for health care providers and community-level interfaces to effectively support those impacted by climate and conflict events, particularly marginalized groups.

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IV. Understanding and Enhancing Local Conflict Resolution Mechanisms and The Role of Women on Environmental Issues - Case Studies from Iraq

Maha Yadallah

I. Contextual Background

A. Overview of Environmental Conflicts in Iraq and Their Significance in Local Communities

Environmental issues globally have emerged as both drivers and consequences of conflicts, aggravated by factors such as wars, industrialization, climate change, and population growth. The United Nations highlights that countries worldwide, particularly in vulnerable regions, face severe environmental challenges that threaten stability, societal cohesion, and livelihoods. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the wider situation mirrors many of the challenges that Iraq has faced, including conflict, political instability, and poor resource management exacerbating environmental degradation. Conflicts across the region have led to pollution, destruction of critical infrastructure, and resource contamination. The region also experiences some of the fastest rates of climate change, with rising temperatures, desertification, and diminishing water supplies becoming critical issues. Shared water resources like the Nile, Jordan, and Tigris-Euphrates systems are under strain, with disputes over water rights intensifying tensions. Additionally, oil production across the Middle East contributes to chronic air and water pollution, while rapid population growth further stresses limited and already strained resources. [1]

These interconnected challenges at the global and regional levels highlight the urgent need for sustainable policies and collective action to mitigate environmental and societal risks. According to the UN, Iraq has been ranked among the top five countries that are affected by climate change the most, facing severe environmental challenges that threaten its stability, cohesion, and the livelihoods of its citizens. [2]

Iraq's recent experience of conflicts like Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988), the Gulf War (1990-1991), and ISIS occupation (2014-2017) has led to significant environmental degradation.

Military operations and socio-political-economic impacts of conflict have caused extensive pollution, destruction of infrastructure, and contamination of land and water resources. I. For example, the looting of the Tuwaitha Nuclear Research Center during the 2003 invasion of Iraq released radioactive materials into the environment, posing long-term health risks to the population. [3]

Nevertheless, Iraq is facing the fastest rate of climate change globally, with the temperatures rising seven times quicker than the global average. [4] This prompt change resulted in droughts, increased desertification, and reduced water supplies from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Scholars indicate that precipitation levels are projected to decrease by 25% from pre-2000 levels by the end of the century, leading to significant agricultural losses. [5] According to the National Resilience Center, 60% of the farmers in Iraq have reduced their cultivated land due to those conditions. [6]



A dried up river bed south of Baghdad. Source: Bloomberg/Asaad Niazi/AFP

Oil extraction plays a vital role in environmental degradation. Water sources have been contaminated by oil spills and waste disposal, whereas gas flaring associated with oil production has led to chronic air pollution. Many of the oil extraction companies are built in the middle of residential neighborhoods, and long-term exposure to pollutants has led to severe illnesses like cancer. [7] Yet, people around this area lack awareness about the risks of these environmental issues and continue to have large families, which further strain the available limited resources. As environmental conditions worsen, many families migrate from their agricultural areas of origin (AoO) to the cities searching for better living conditions resulting in changing cultures and norms in the cities. This displacement often increases the tension between host communities and newcomers. Competition over water and land resources often results in conflicts and violent extremism. Approximately 20,000 people were reported displaced due to water scarcity alone by the end of 2021.[8]

B. Importance of Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Managing These Issues

Conflict resolution mechanisms in Iraq are important for managing the environmental issues. These mechanisms promote dialogue among different stakeholders, including tribal leaders, civil society organizations, local communities, and government authorities and are vital for tackling issues related to resource scarcity and environmental degradation. By encouraging proactive interaction, these mechanisms assist in developing trust and understanding, thereby fostering cohesiveness in societies. Because they enable communities to take responsibility for their environmental problems and produce more sustainable solutions, community-based approaches that include local actors in decision-making processes have been shown to be the most successful. Promoting dialogue and collaboration among the key stakeholders in environmental management will effectively tackle the root causes of many conflicts. This strategy will allow the key stakeholders to understand each other's perspectives. Also, identifying the shared interests and collaborative management of natural resources can be achieved if the marginalized communities are heard. These strategies can help create resilient communities against climate change.



Gas flaring close to grazing lands. Source: Shafaq



Sadr City, Baghdad. Source: Spiegel Foto



Women participate in a conflict management program. Source: UNDP

Case Study 1:

The consequences of population growth on the environment and the role of women

Over 1.2 million births in 2020 alone were reported by the Iraqi ministry of planning, with estimations that Iraq's population will reach 80 million by 2050. Population growth further strains and exacerbates environmental issues, including agricultural decline and desertification. Iraq loses over 100 square kilometers of cropland yearly because of climate change and urbanization due to population growth.

Population growth has contributed to Iraq's environmental conflicts, especially in deprived areas such as Sadr City, where almost three million people live in an area less than 30 square kilometers. This extreme population density strains limited infrastructure, resulting in chronic water scarcity and inadequate sanitation systems. The impact of overpopulation remains dire. Iraq's increasing dependence of food imports heightens its vulnerability to food insecurity as farmlands becomes less productive because of raising temperatures and water scarcity. Cities like Mosul face acute housing shortages, forcing urban development into previously productive agricultural lands and threatening the capacity to produce food. This cycle of overpopulation and environmental degradation not only threatens Iraq's capacity to support its population but also poses risks to internal stability and security, potentially leading to resource-based conflicts. Sadr City's high rates of polygamy and early marriage, which are reported at 20% and 10% respectively, significantly contribute to its rapid population growth. To address this issue, prioritizing women's education and access to reproductive health services will empower women to make informed decisions about family size and promote sustainable practices. Such practices are essential for balancing population growth with environmental sustainability. Actively involving women in resource management initiatives and decision-making processes leverages their unique perspectives to develop practical strategies for mitigating the environmental impacts of overpopulation.

Case Study 2:

The consequences of climate-induced migration on the environment and the role of women

A critical case study that shows the impact of climate induced migration is the Kazzino Lebanon area. Many families have migrated the rural areas in Missan and Thi-Qar because of the water scarcity and desertification to Basra where they built informal houses in an area called Kazzino Lebanon. As Iraq struggles with these environmental pressures, rural populations are forced to seek better opportunities in the cities like Basra, causing a significant pressure on the city's infrastructure. This migration has resulted in high number of informal settlements like Kazzino Lebanon. These settlements often lack the fundamental necessities and fuel environmental conflicts.

Local ecosystems are further degraded by the fast urbanization brought by population growth, which makes existing issues like waste management and air quality worse. Inhabitants of these informal settlements with inadequate infrastructure intensify the competition over limited resources, which lead to conflicts over water and land access. Moreover, this migration negatively impacts the cultural and social norms within the city. Basra's host community reported that tribal practices like blood money and tribal intimidation, where armed groups from one tribe threaten rivals through gunfire near their homes, became more common with the new commers. Such traditions hinder the rule of law and complicate community dynamics by contributing to a culture of fear and instability.

The local government response to this informal settlement included the eviction of the area to use the land to build a park on it. Many people refused to leave their houses and shops and initiated big protests against the government. The government then offered residents financial compensation and free lands in other areas in the city for relocation, which created tension between the host community and the migrants that led to hatred between all residents of the city.

Women's role is crucial in addressing such challenges as they are often responsible of maintaining household stability in the face of bad living conditions. They fight for the rights of their families and manage the socioeconomic effects of their displacement. However, their actual contribution is ignored in public debate and policymaking.

II. The Role of Women

Women have long been essential to the management of natural resources in Iraq, especially in rural and marshes areas. The production and sale of dairy products and fish and the trade in the cities have been always done by women. Not only have they contributed to the economic activities, but also served as the custodians of the traditional knowledge of protecting the environment. In the marshes in southern of Iraq, women have played a crucial role in eco-tourism. They have also been responsible for managing water resources for domestic use and agriculture. Their deep understanding of water cycle, soil conditions, and biodiversity enabled them to mediate disputes over resource allocations. For example, the reliance of the city of Nasiriyah on the Euphrates River often leads to issues, sometimes with the government and sometimes between tribes. The city is divided into two main sections, each inhabited by a different tribe. Coincidentally, the district mayor of the Al-Jabaysh area, which contains marshes, belongs to one of these tribes. When water levels rise, it can cause a backflow from a certain point into the river, bringing dirt and toxins into the area and contaminating the water. In such cases, the district mayor builds a dam to prevent water pollution, which results in cutting off water supply to a specific part of the city. This action prompts residents from that area, who belong to a particular tribe, to attack the mayor, accusing him of favoring his own tribe by providing them with water. However, women play a significant role in calming these disputes because they are fully aware of the pollution issues due to their experiences as farmers and understand the potential impact on both the river and the community. However, women in these communities are the most vulnerable group that is severely affected by climate change and environmental issues. They face challenges such as loss of livelihoods, domestic violence, and social and psychological trauma. When they lose their jobs due to climate change, it affects the well being of the entire family, which in most cases lead to domestic violence because the male member start blaming the woman of not providing for the family. In other cases where the husbands migrate to the city searching for a job, they leave the wives and children to cope alone in a community that is ruled by the tribal traditions that dictates that women and children should not be left alone but rather protected by their husbands.

Rural areas are typically ruled by tribal leaders who have the highest authority over decisions, limiting women's public voices. Women may express their opinions inside their houses but never in public due to societal norms.

III. Local Conflict Resolution Mechanisms That Advance Women, Peace, and Security

Local conflict resolution mechanisms in Iraq are crucial for addressing the socio-political issues created by decades of conflict, especially following the rise and fall of ISIS. These mechanisms include a range of strategies, like community dialogue, mediation, and local peace agreements that involve different stakeholders such as community leaders, local authorities, and civil society organizations. These mechanisms aim to address conflicts related to resource scarcity and environmental degradation, restore trust among divided groups, thus fostering social cohesion.

The National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and conflict resolution mechanisms interact, highlighting the essential participation of women in addressing social and environmental issues that are worsened by conflicts. In order to integrate gender perspectives into peacebuilding initiatives while acknowledging the difficulties women encounter in conflict situations, the NAP is structured around six pillars, **participation, protection and prevention, promotion, social and economic empowerment, legislation and law enforcement, and resource mobilization**. [10]

Local peace agreements are a key tool for promoting the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda because they provide a forum for communications among conflict-affected groups. Environmental factors can be included in these agreements especially in areas that witness tension due to water and agricultural land scarcity. To promote a more comprehensive approach to peacebuilding, programs that train community leaders on conflict resolution and gender-based violence (GBV), for example, can also include environmental degradation issues.

In order to guarantee women's voices are included in decision-making processes related to resource management, the NAP asserts capacity building within local governance structures. In areas northern Iraq like Makhmur, Tel Afar, and Al-Rifai, where competition for limited resources has increased due to climate change, potentially resulting in conflicts, this inclusion is necessary. Women can be essential in building resilience against climate related challenges by including environmental concerns into the NAP's goals, such as encouraging sustainable agricultural methods and safeguarding natural resources. [11]

In spite of these frameworks, there are still obstacles in successfully implementing the NAP. Addressing gender inequality and environmental challenges is hampered by lack of political will and insufficient funding. Additionally, the NAP lacks concrete initiatives aimed at addressing environmental variables that contribute to conflict dynamics, even when it outlines broad objectives for women's empowerment and protection. Empowering local women's organizations and ensuring their active involvement in peacebuilding and environmental management can strengthen the effectiveness of these mechanisms.

IV. Women as Key Stakeholders

A. Historical Contributions

In pivotal moment of Iraq's history like the 1920 Revolution against the British occupation, women have played significant roles. Women at that time have showed how important they are in the resistance through different contributions. They supported resistance fighters collecting money and food and treating the wounded. They also acted as messengers, delivering messages between revolutionaries and tribes, and using their movements to plan military operations covertly. They mobilized the public and encouraged the communities to join the revolution through songs, speeches, and poetry that urged resistance against injustice. While it was uncommon for women to participate in combat, some did participate in skirmishes or offer crucial ground support. Other women promoted tribal alliances against the occupying forces. For Iraqi women, this participation was a turning point that showed their importance to the country's independence and paved the way for further liberation movements.

In recent history, Iraqi women played a pivotal role in the Tishreen Protests in October 2019 that demanded political reforms, an end to corruption, and improved public services. Women of all ages contributed differently to these protests, raising slogans and providing food and medications for protesters. Many worked as doctors and nurses within the protest areas. Their activism on social media exposed human rights abuse and brought international attention to the violence the protesters were subjected to. Many women stood on the frontline to for a shield that protected the protesters. In order to challenge conventional standards and show their crucial role in promoting change, women also used art to communicate their demands.

B. Current Challenges

Iraqi women face numerous challenges that hinder their participation as key stakeholders in addressing the current crises. Women's participation in decision making is limited and shaped by traditional cultural and social norms, which also marginalize their voices in discussions about community needs and urban planning.

Female activists have been targeted and killed since the Tishreen Protests for political reasons, creating an unsafe environment for those advocating for justice. Due to their prominent involvement in these protests, politicians view them as a threat fearing their influence on community dynamics. Tribal intimidation and blood money practices not only endanger the public safeguarding, but also feed violence cycles that disproportionately affect women and children.

Moreover, gender-based violence (GBV) continues to be one of the biggest challenges women in Iraq face. Even though entities like UN Women work to assist displaced women, women's right are compromised by the uneven application of protective laws brought on by cultural views.

Even though Iraq has developed the NAP, women active participation in peacebuilding is limited by systemic challenges such as socioeconomic dependance, lack of education, and cultural standards. Iraqi women are at risk of harassment and violence when they stand up for what they believe in.

IV. Women as Key Stakeholders

A. Empowerment Initiatives (Local Civil Society Organizations Role)

Local civil society organizations (CSOs) significantly implement empowerment initiatives to strengthen women's participation in peacebuilding processes through providing capacity building in leadership, advocacy, and conflict resolution. These local CSOs enhance collective actions and facilitate the sharing of resources and strategies aimed at promoting gender equality.

Community engagement is another key strategy employed by local CSOs to raise awareness about the importance of women's involvement in peace and security matters. Through outreach campaigns, these organizations educate communities on gender issues and the benefits of including women in decision-making processes. Additionally, CSOs advocate for legal and policy changes that support women's rights, working to ensure the implementation of frameworks like the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security.

Addressing gender-based violence (GBV) is also integral to these empowerment initiatives. Local organizations provide support services for survivors while advocating for stronger legal protections to create a safe environment for women's participation. By linking local efforts with international frameworks such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325, these initiatives align grassroots actions with global standards for gender equality.

Initiatives like the Wasl Civil Society Fund, established by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Iraq, aim to partner with local civil society organizations, many of which are women-led, to implement projects on various topics, including climate security and resilience. These initiatives ensure that women are actively involved in decision-making processes. The projects target women beneficiaries across Iraq, focusing on areas such as capacity building, entrepreneurship, and livelihoods. Such efforts empower women, granting them ownership over resources and ensuring their voices are heard. Also, Women for Green Iraq platform, established by the UNDP in collaboration with the Government of Iraq, aim to promote gender integration in environmental policies and disaster risk reduction.

This platform empowers women by providing training on gender-sensitive policies, enabling them to actively participate in decision-making processes related to environmental management. As emphasized by UNDP officials, women are more likely than men to engage in communal actions that enhance development and reduce risks associated with environmental hazards, making their involvement essential for effective governance.

IV. Conclusion

Summary of Key Findings

This research highlights the critical intersection between environmental challenges and women's roles in peacebuilding within Iraq. Environmental degradation, exacerbated by climate change, overpopulation, and historical conflicts, poses significant threats to stability and livelihoods in the region. Women have historically contributed to resource management and conflict resolution in their communities but remain marginalized in decision-making processes. The findings emphasize that integrating gender perspectives into environmental policies and conflict resolution mechanisms is essential for fostering sustainable solutions. Local civil society organizations play a vital role in empowering women, yet systemic barriers such as socio-economic dependency, cultural norms, and gender-based violence continue to hinder their participation in peacebuilding efforts.

Future Direction

Moving forward, it is crucial to develop comprehensive strategies that not only empower women but also address the underlying environmental issues contributing to conflict in Iraq. Policymakers should prioritize inclusive participation by ensuring women's voices are central to peace negotiations and resource management discussions. Strengthening local civil society organizations and promoting community awareness campaigns will enhance women's capacity to engage effectively in these processes. Additionally, fostering collaboration between governmental bodies and international organizations can facilitate the implementation of gender-sensitive policies that address both social and environmental challenges. By prioritizing the integration of women's perspectives in environmental management and conflict resolution, Iraq can pave the way for a more equitable and sustainable future that benefits all its citizens.

Recommendations

- **Integrate Gender Perspectives in Environmental Policies:**

Ensure that all environmental management strategies explicitly incorporate gender perspectives, recognizing the unique roles and knowledge women bring to resource management and climate adaptation.

- **Empower Local Civil Society Organizations:**

Support local civil society organizations, particularly those led by women, to implement empowerment initiatives that focus on capacity building, education, and training related to environmental management and peacebuilding.

- **Promote Sustainable Resource Management:**

Develop programs that promote sustainable agricultural practices and responsible resource management, engaging women as key stakeholders in decision-making processes. This can help address issues of water scarcity and land degradation exacerbated by climate change.

- **Establish Legal Frameworks for Gender Equality:**

Advocate for the enforcement of laws that protect women's rights and promote gender equality in environmental governance. This includes ensuring women's representation in local governance structures related to resource management.

- **Address Gender-Based Violence (GBV):**

Implement comprehensive strategies to combat GBV, particularly in the context of environmental degradation and displacement. Establish support services for survivors and create safe spaces for women to participate in community dialogues.

- **Community Awareness Campaigns:**

Launch awareness campaigns focused on the importance of women's roles in environmental stewardship and peacebuilding. These campaigns should challenge cultural norms that limit women's participation and highlight their contributions to sustainable practices.

- **Facilitate Dialogue Among Stakeholders:**

Encourage dialogue among community members, tribal leaders, government representatives, and civil society organizations to foster collaboration on environmental issues. This can help build trust and promote joint solutions to resource conflicts.

- **Support Climate Resilience Initiatives:**

Invest in initiatives aimed at enhancing community resilience to climate change impacts, with a specific focus on empowering women as leaders in these efforts. This includes training programs on climate adaptation strategies tailored for women.

Chapter IV References

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Key Recommendations & Conclusions

Policy Integration & Governance

- Integrate gender into climate and environmental policies.
- Enforce legal frameworks for gender equality.
- Promote intersectional, gender-inclusive policies.

Disaster Management & Resilience

- Ensure gender-responsive disaster management.
- Support women's leadership in climate resilience.
- Address mental health impacts of climate and conflict.

Women's Empowerment & Representation

- Increase women's political participation.
- Strengthen women-led civil society organizations.
- Expand capacity building and training.

Resource Management & Food Security

- Engage women in sustainable resource management.
- Support women's roles in food systems.
- Invest in climate-smart agriculture.

Justice, Accountability & Anti-Corruption

- Combat corruption and ensure transparent resource allocation that is gender sensitive.
- Strengthen justice and accountability for disaster response.

Social Protection & Support

- Address gender-based violence.
- Improve support for displaced women.

Education, Awareness & Community Engagement

- Promote gender and climate education.
- Run community awareness campaigns.
- Facilitate inclusive stakeholder dialogue.

Partnerships & Finance

- Foster partnerships with women-led organizations.
- Invest in gender-responsive climate finance.

Collective Memory & History

- Create platforms to share and commemorate climate-affected experiences.

There is a growing body of research and practical case studies that demonstrate the complex interconnectedness between climate change, conflict, and gender. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is only the first step. It is through sustained commitment, concrete action, and genuine partnership with women in all their diversity that we can ensure their meaningful participation. When women are included as experts and leaders, climate and security responses become more effective, equitable, and sustainable for everyone. Recognizing diversity in experiences with climate change, conflict, environment, and security is essential for designing effective, equitable policies and interventions. Inclusive approaches must ensure that the voices and needs of all women—especially those most often excluded—are meaningfully represented and addressed in climate, environment, conflict, and security decision-making.

However, meaningful progress also requires a fundamental shift in how resources and opportunities are distributed. Increased, flexible, and, direct funding for women-led organizations—especially in climate- and conflict-affected settings—is essential to support their leadership and innovation. At the same time, a mentality shift is needed at every level: moving beyond tokenistic inclusion to truly valuing women's knowledge, experiences, agency, and rights. By aligning funding, policy reforms, and social change efforts, we can create enabling environments where women's diverse voices are not only heard but drive transformative solutions for a more resilient and just future.

MEDRC's Transboundary Waters Practitioner Briefing series has been developed for industry practitioners and government officials at the request of MEDRC's member countries. The briefings are meant to be informative and practical, providing an overview of the subject matter material, while remaining accessible to various backgrounds and disciplines. The briefings serve to develop shared knowledge and serve as a basis for further discussions between partners. If you would like to learn more about these subjects, please see the section 'Sources for Further Learning'.

Sources for Further Learning

UN ESCWA - Conflict, climate change and their mutually reinforcing impact on gender imbalances in the Arab region <http://www.unescwa.org/publications/conflict-climate-change-and-their-mutually-reinforcing-impact-gender-imbalances-arab>

UNDP - Overview of linkages between gender and climate change (Policy Brief 1)
<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP%20Linkages%20Gender%20and%20CC%20Policy%20Brief%201-WEB.pdf>

UN Women - Gender, climate and security: Sustaining inclusive peace on the frontlines of climate change
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/gender-climate-and-security>

GIWPS - The Climate-Gender-Conflict Nexus <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/the-climate-gender-conflict-nexus/>

UN Women - Explainer: How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/02/explainer-how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected>

Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) - Towards Localisation of Gender, Climate and Security: Moving Beyond Commitments and Towards Action https://www.gppac.net/files/2022-07/Gender_Climate_Security_GPPAC.pdf

LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security - Defending the Future: Gender, Conflict and Environmental Peace <https://www.lse.ac.uk/women-peace-security/publications/Defending-the-Future-Gender-Conflict-and-Environmental-Peace>

Conciliation Resources - How do climate change, conflict and gender and social inequality connect?
<https://www.c-r.org/news-and-insight/how-do-climate-change-conflict-and-gender-and-social-inequality-connect>
Women for Women International - Climate, Conflict and Gender Inequality
<https://www.womenforwomen.org/blogs/climate-conflict-and-gender-inequality>

Climate Security Mechanism (CSM) - <https://www.unep.org/topics/fresh-water/disasters-and-climate-change/climate-security-mechanism-csm>

Briefs in the Series

Developed for water industry practitioners and government officials at the request of MEDRC's member countries, MEDRC's Practitioner Briefing series serve as a guide to trends in transboundary environmental cooperation. The initiative is intended to bridge the academic-practitioner gap in the sector by providing short, accessible and practical overviews, focusing on a different theme.

- Issue 1 - Water Accounting+
- Issue 2 - Wastewater
- Issue 3 - Climate Finance
- Issue 4 - The Water-Energy-Food Nexus
- Issue 5 - Water Cyber Security
- Issue 6 - Transboundary Dams
- Issue 7 - International Water Law
- Issue 8 - Gender and Transboundary Water
- Issue 9 - Transboundary Water Technology
- Issue 10 - Water and Urban Development
- Issue 11 - Private Sector Support for Transboundary Water
- Issue 12 - Groundwater
- Issue 13 - Water Finance
- Issue 14 - Peace Parks & IWRM
- Issue 15 - Transboundary Carbon Cooperation
- Issue 16 - Transboundary Carbon Technology
- Issue 17 - Transboundary Carbon Valuation
- Issue 18 - Water Security & Migration
- Issue 19- Legal Perspectives and Considerations in Climate Action
- Issue 20 - Climate Finance for Net Zero
- Issue 21 - Climate-Conflict Nexus

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