

# CLIMATE CHANGE, CONFLICT AND DEMOGRAPHY IN AFRICA CONFERENCE

14 SEPTEMBER 2021

## Summary of Co-Chairs' Conclusions

A PARTNERSHIP EVENT WITH **AFRICA CONFIDENTIAL**, **INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP** AND **THE ROYAL AFRICAN SOCIETY**

### AREAS OF DISCUSSION AND AGREEMENT

On 14 September 2021, Africa Confidential, the International Crisis Group and the Royal African Society co-hosted a high-level conference on Climate, Conflict and Demography in Africa. An audience of over 1,000 people from North America, Europe (including the UK) and Africa heard 25 speakers from all three continents. Representatives from Africa included the vice-president of Nigeria, Ghana's environment minister, the former prime minister of Ethiopia and the former president of the African Development Bank. Ministers, envoys, ambassadors, economists, academics and representatives from business, civil society and media from a wide range of countries also took part in the deliberations.

A lively debate at the conference and in three preparatory expert group meetings (which discussed the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and southern Africa) produced considerable common ground both in terms of analysis and in clear messages for African governments, the international community and participants in the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference (COP26).

Participants agreed that African countries are both among the most negatively affected by climate change, and the lowest contributors to the emission of green-

house gasses. It was also widely observed that African voices have been neglected in the climate debate, and it is crucial that they are heard more clearly if COP26 is to reach the decisions needed to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees.

The conference highlighted that Africa's resources are being put under increasing strain by both demographic and climatic change, the impact of which varies from region to region. While total precipitation on the continent has not necessarily diminished, the distribution and timing of rainfall has become more concentrated and erratic, leading to more frequent droughts, floods and cyclones. Additionally, more of Africa's arable land is being brought into cultivation, while forest zones are being cut back and biodiversity reduced by human expansion into previously wild areas.

At the same time, Africa's population is growing. Having doubled between 1900 to 1960, it quadrupled in the following 60 years to 1.3 billion in 2020, and may double again by 2050. This is reflected in the young median age of the continent's population (nineteen years old) and in rapid urbanisation (between 1950 and 2015, Africa's urban population rose from 27 million to 567 million people, a 2,000 per cent increase).





Levels of poverty remain high, at over 35 per cent, and have recently been exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conference discussions centred around the specific challenges African countries face. With many of the continent's citizens dependent on rain-fed agriculture or fishing, and others already suffering water scarcity, they are more vulnerable to the impact of climate change and will likely be disproportionately affected by it. Countries also lack the physical and administrative infrastructure to manage its impact. In particular, many Africans already suffer “energy starvation”, a severe lack of accessible and affordable power, while a large number of governments still rely on fossil fuel exports for revenue. Participants therefore appealed for investment in gas and its continued use as a “transition fuel”, to enable Africa to accelerate its development and reduce poverty without further destruction of woodlands for fuel. This was accompanied by calls for a dramatic increase in funding for renewable energy.

Participants explored the link between climate change and security. While climate change itself does not necessarily cause conflict, the increased competition for resources as a result of global warming can exacerbate political, economic and social factors that are drivers of violence and war. This is already apparent across parts of the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and southern Africa, and constitutes a danger to international as well as local communities. Conflict both exacerbates the problems and obstructs solutions that could create sustainable livelihoods for the growing continent's population and

enable constructive responses to climate change. Without more rapid action, the conference concluded that climate change is likely to contribute to greater poverty, greater inequality and intensifying local violence and wider conflicts, leading to displacement and migration.

Often, local mechanisms exist for managing access to increasingly scarce resources (land, woods and water) and preventing conflict, but are neglected or have broken down under the strain, as illustrated by the worsening tension between farmer and herder communities in several countries in Africa. National mechanisms either do not exist or do not work effectively, especially in the absence of accountable political institutions, and with national authorities that are often resistant to regional or international involvement.

The conference agreed that the speed of change in Africa and the implications for the whole world were being underestimated both inside and outside the continent. Participants agreed that more urgent action is needed by local communities, national authorities and external actors to reduce the impact of climate change in Africa and help people to adapt, so that economic growth and poverty reduction can be sustained. A failure to act at all three levels (local, national and international) will only increase the risk of conflict.

It was also agreed that it is essential to mobilise and articulate African opinion more effectively by developing and advocating a convincing narrative about the need to address climate change that draws on people's local perspectives and realities.

## CO-CHAIRS' AGREED MESSAGES

As co-chairs, we identified **five core messages** to be communicated to African people and governments, international actors and the COP26 negotiators.

First, **we need to measure and manage environmental and ecological change better**, if we are to help communities deal with the impact of climate and population changes. In particular we must improve both the prediction of climate events, so that people can be prepared, and the planning of resilience measures. We therefore urge action to:

- Measure the human impact on biodiversity across the continent through wider monitoring of national parks, reserves and conservation areas under threat.
- Put in place more effective natural disaster prediction mechanisms on a regional basis to reduce the damage from floods, droughts and locusts; and take action to improve the resilience of local communities to cope with such threats.
- Work to communicate the importance of climate policies to the African public and governments.

Secondly, **national governmental policies in Africa need to be more joined up to cope with the impacts of climate change.** Climate is not a matter for environment ministers alone, but for the whole of government as it impacts agriculture, trade, industry, finance and security throughout each country, in both urban and rural areas. It has to be a top political and cross-government priority.

Thirdly, **a failure to act faster on climate change will exacerbate conflict on the continent. Nor can we fight climate change if we are fighting each other.** We therefore urge action to:

- Make the security implications of climate change a more central part of the international debate, at COP27 next year if not at COP26 in November.
- Ensure African negotiators maintain unity and give priority to concrete steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, rather than just securing additional finance for mitigation measures. Action on emissions is even more urgent than money, because with it African governments are liable to pay an unacceptable price in social and political disorder.
- Address local resource issues in conflict resolution work, including through national authorities recognising its relevance and working more closely with local community leaders in designing solutions; and encourage international partners to make green investments a part of peace agreements to incentivise respect for them.

Fourthly, **Africa needs more support and financing to become more resilient and adapt more effectively to climate change.** The commitment by the world's richest nations to provide \$100 billion annually to developing

countries has yet to be met; of the money that is available, Africa is getting a disproportionately small share. We therefore urge donors to:

- Redirect a greater share of global climate finance to Africa (currently less than 3 per cent), and in so doing include additional incentives for conservation of forests and the wild environment, and encourage debt for social equity swaps.
- Provide more generous support, especially from the private sector, for a just and fair energy transition in Africa. Investments in the energy sector should prioritise renewables but not to the exclusion of other transition energy sources such as gas.

Fifthly, **a constructive response needs investment in a fair energy transition, education and upskilling, and sustaining the natural environment.** We therefore urge action to:

- Adopt green energy transition policies in African countries that will deliver increased power to communities, attract outside investment and minimise increases in greenhouse gas emissions.
- Encourage African green technology solutions.
- Develop educational capabilities in African universities to build the human capacity necessary to address the challenges of climate change, both technically and politically.
- Work with local communities for the sustainable development of natural resources, preservation of biodiversity and forest habitats.

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**Patrick Smith, Comfort Ero and Nicholas Westcott, respectively on behalf of Africa Confidential, the International Crisis Group and the Royal African Society**

