



Introduction

Governments, particularly those facing compounding climate vulnerability and conflict-related risks, must proactively address the potential unintended consequences of climate actions. Doing so requires strengthening existing adaptation instruments by mainstreaming conflict sensitive approaches, so that adaptation efforts are able to contribute to sustaining peace or, at the very least, do not 'do harm' by exacerbating existing conflict drivers. However, many governments face challenges. It's not easy to include conflict-sensitive thinking in climate adaptation. This is because climate problems often cut across many sectors (like water, land, and security) and can stretch across both space and time.

This policy brief shares key findings and recommendations from a joint study by the Adaptation Consortium (ADA) and the Alliance of Bioversity International – CIAT (the Alliance). The analysis focused on Kenya's County Climate Change Fund (CCCF) mechanism. It evaluated whether the CCCF is designed, implemented, and monitored in ways that: 1) prevent new conflicts; 2) support peaceful ways of solving disagreements; and 3) use climate actions as opportunities to build peace. This policy brief summarizes the results from the analysis, which included Wajir, Isiolo and Kitui counties as case studies. For the full report, [access here](#).

Isiolo and Wajir are predominantly pastoralist, with communities relying on herd mobility across arid rangelands, while Kitui's residents depend on smallholder farming, livestock, and forest-based livelihoods. The counties bring together Somali, Borana, Turkana, Kamba, and other groups whose identities and institutions shape governance and resource use. All face recurrent climate challenges—drought, water scarcity, erratic rainfall, and land degradation—that threaten livelihoods and intensify resource competition. Together, these cases show the need for climate actions that are both technically sound and sensitive to social dynamics and realities on the ground.



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Key messages

The County Climate Change Fund (CCCF) provides a promising model for conflict-sensitive climate governance by empowering ward-level planning committees and fostering inclusive, community-driven decision-making. Despite its successes, several opportunities for conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding integration remain.

Sources of conflict sensitivity in the CCCF

- **Inclusive local governance:** The CCCF promotes inclusive governance by empowering community-based committees like WCCPCs and project management bodies, which enhance ownership, accountability, and trust. These structures align adaptation efforts with local priorities and strengthen legitimacy and state-society relations.
- **Vertical and sectoral coordination:** The mechanism improves coordination across government levels and sectors through technical support and inter-ward collaboration. Participatory risk assessments help tailor adaptation strategies to specific local needs.
- **Corruption prevention and transparency:** CCCF operations incorporate strong anti-corruption safeguards aligned with national laws, including transparent procurement and public oversight. Community broadcasts, documented consultations, and formal complaints systems reinforce accountability and build public confidence.
- **Conflict prevention measures:** CCCF projects are designed to avoid conflict by using consensus-based planning and locating activities in non-disputed areas. These efforts improve inter-communal cooperation and reduce tension over shared resources.
- **Grievance mechanisms:** Structured feedback channels allow communities to raise concerns and seek redress, enhancing trust, accountability, and responsiveness within the CCCF framework.

Opportunities for conflict sensitivity in the CCCF

- **Increase and formalize coordination with security actors:** Peacebuilding institutions like the NCIC are not formally involved in CCCF planning, and conflict sensitivity is unevenly integrated into learning tools and assessments.
- **Establish protocols for policy continuity** and build capacity among committee members to mitigate disruptions caused by turnover.
- **Increase funding for administration and learning**, aligning with CCCF's design recommendation of a 10% allocation in support of coordination and capacity-building.
- **Improve trans-boundary and landscape planning:** CCCF projects often focus narrowly on local issues, overlooking opportunities for broader ecosystem-based approaches and sometimes exacerbating tensions over shared resources.
- **Increase budget transparency and guarantee consistent funding:** Inconsistent funding and unfulfilled government commitments erode community trust, while weak communication after assessments leads to frustration and undermines local engagement.
- **Implement conflict-sensitive M&E:** While participatory assessments highlight local conflict dynamics, these insights are not systematically documented or used, and the strong M&E framework from the pilot phase remains underutilized.
- **Systematize learning from implementation:** Experiences with peacebuilding outcomes should be documented to inform governance systems for conflict response.

Why conflict sensitivity matters for climate adaptation

Climate adaptation is vital for strengthening community resilience in the face of rising climate risks. Yet, when adaptation measures are designed without accounting for local social, political, and economic dynamics, they may inadvertently fuel tensions or exacerbate existing conflicts—particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

To mitigate these risks, a conflict-sensitive approach is essential. This approach ensures adaptation interventions are grounded in a robust understanding of the local context, including power dynamics, patterns of resource access, and existing grievances. Conflict-sensitive adaptation not only minimizes harm but can actively support peacebuilding by promoting inclusive governance, dialogue across divided communities, and trust in local institutions.

This study identifies three governance strategies that can embed conflict sensitivity in climate adaptation:

- **Multi-level governance** – Aligns adaptation policies with security considerations and local realities through coordination across sectors and governance levels.
- **Adaptive governance** – Builds institutional capacity to anticipate and respond to environmental and conflict-related change, informed by learning and feedback loops.
- **Representative governance** – Prioritizes the meaningful participation of conflict-affected and marginalized groups to address root causes of vulnerability and exclusion.

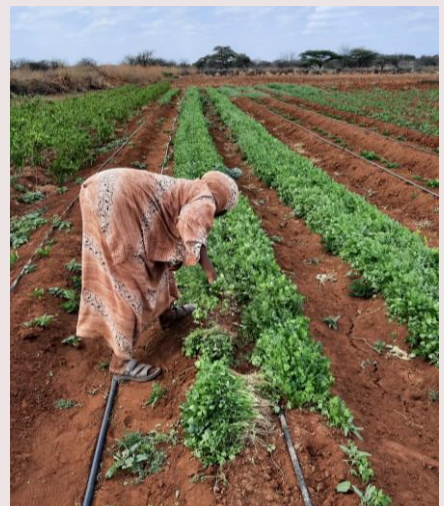
Case study. Enhancing water access and conflict management capacities in Buna Ward, Wajir

Buna, located north of Wajir Town, is a 3-hour drive on an unpaved road. While flash floods have caused damage—most recently in 2024—Buna primarily suffers from drought, which heightens health risks and undermines pastoralist livelihoods in the semi-arid landscape.

Two CCCF-funded climate adaptation projects in Buna focus on improving water access for agriculture, livestock, and domestic use. The Buna Water Supply, completed in 2023 in Shuriako Village, uses an elevated pan and tank to enhance household water access. The Bohol Borehole, implemented in 2024, supports drip-irrigated vegetable farming and provides water for homes and livestock.

Access to water in Buna is tightly linked to inter-clan relations, and water management decisions are made through a conflict-sensitive lens. Community barazas and planning meetings often debate project risks, sometimes leading to project rejection over peace concerns. Traditional bodies like the Borehole Committee, led by a bayregga (a culturally recognized water manager), guide implementation and resolve disputes.

While CCCF projects improve water access and support livelihoods, sustainability challenges persist. In 2024, a malfunctioning pump at the borehole and delays in county-level repairs led to shortages, heightening competition over water and undermining trust in the project's long-term viability.



Climate, peace and conflict linkages in Kenya

During adaptation planning processes, the CCCF should support the systematic integration of climate-security linkages into investment decisions. Recognizing how climate risks intersect with local conflict dynamics is essential to ensure the long-term effectiveness and resilience of CCCF-funded initiatives. Addressing these linkages can help mitigate potential threats to stability, while positioning CCCF investments as a catalyst for sustainable peace. The following are frequently observed relations between climate change and conflict in Kenya:

- 1. Increasing resource scarcity emerges as a central concern within conflicts triggered by changing resource management norms and institutions:** Since Kenya's devolution in 2013, county governments have gained greater control over land and natural resources, supported by new legislation like the Community Land Act and Forest Management and Conservation Act (2016). This has encouraged more inclusive and sustainable management. However, areas with limited institutional capacity and competing interests face regulatory gaps and tenure conflicts, exacerbated by climate shocks. While many communities adapt local systems, institutional constraints hinder responses and fuel tensions with authorities.
- 2. Threats to resource-dependent livelihoods modify mobility patterns and exacerbate violence:** Unpredictable precipitation has led to reduced pasture productivity, increased livestock deaths, and forced migration in search of water and forage, exacerbating the risk of disease and predator attacks. These migrations often cross political and ecological boundaries, which increases the risk of violent conflicts over scarce resources. While historical cattle rustling was culturally accepted, it is now more deadly due to influxes of small arms weaponry and more frequently associated with territorial disputes, violence over resource access, and connections to organized criminal economies. Furthermore, the loss of livelihoods increases women's workloads and reduces their political participation, while men's feelings of ineptitude contribute to higher household violence.
- 3. Climate threats facilitate the political instigation of violence:** The impacts of climate change in Kenya's ASALs are intertwined with the region's historical and socio-political context. Colonial land management and contemporary political exploitation of ethnic divisions contribute to a volatile environment where climate change acts as a catalyst for violence. Political elites may manipulate land disputes for electoral gains, exacerbating inter-ethnic tensions. High levels of vulnerability among young populations makes them susceptible to recruitment for violence. Extractive activities like oil exploration further amplify climate vulnerabilities and conflict risks. These sociopolitical factors compound to existing historical grievances and contribute to threats of conflict.
- 4. Climate threats trigger both collaborative and conflictive community responses:** Local communities in Kenya have developed strong collective action capacities to address climate and environmental challenges, fostering alternative livelihoods like bee and butterfly keeping, tree nurseries, eco-tourism, and cultural initiatives. Inclusive civil society groups enhance resource management, deter illegal extraction, and promote inter-ethnic harmony. However, limited employment opportunities lead some to unsustainable and illegal resource extraction, causing conflicts over natural resources. Efforts to enforce resource-use bylaws are hampered by rent-seeking practices and impunity for well-connected individuals, hence increasing grievances and inequality.
- 5. Displacement from extreme events threatens safety and social cohesion:** Despite improved disaster risk systems, recurrent floods around the Lake Victoria Basin and the ASAL regions – especially after long periods of drought – can cause displacement, crop loss, and infrastructure damage. Stagnant water spreads disease, while camps increase security risks like crime and early marriage. Recovery is hindered by a lack of support, forcing many into unsafe living conditions or illegal activities.

Kenya's County Climate Change Fund

The County Climate Change Fund (CCCF) mechanism was launched in Kenya in 2012 as a pilot in Isiolo County, aiming to strengthen local adaptive planning in the country's arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs). Developed initially by the Ministry of State for Development of Northern Kenya and IIED, it later became part of the Adaptation Consortium (ADA), which now provides technical support to counties. The CCCF was designed to address key governance challenges—such as poor coordination, weak integration of climate information, and budget constraints—by devolving climate finance and planning authority to counties and wards. The pilot phase supported 39 projects focused on water access, pasture management, and livestock health, leading to the formal establishment of ADA as an NGO and the mechanism's expansion to four additional counties (Wajir, Garissa, Makueni, and Kitui)

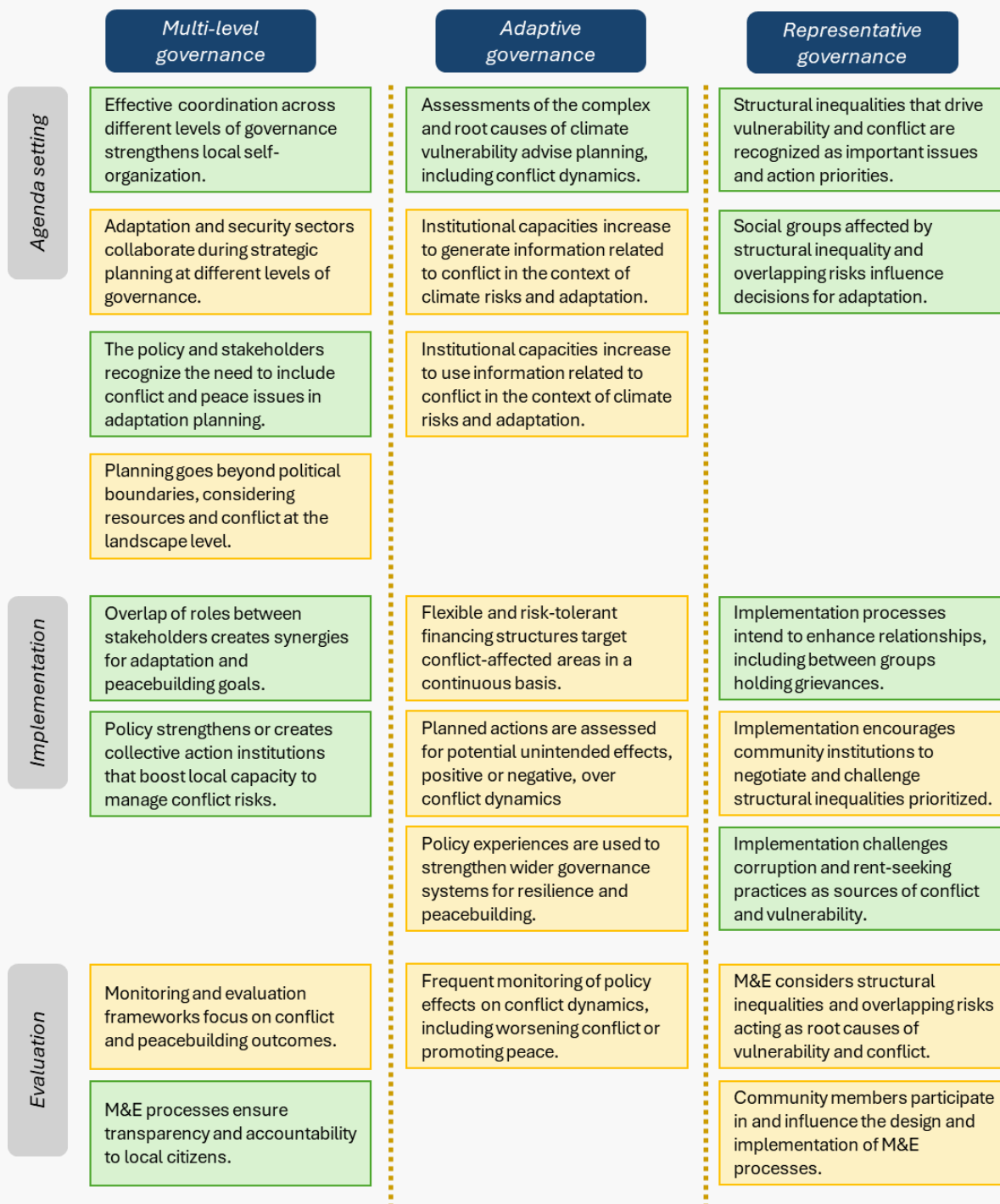
with DFID and SIDA support. The National Drought Management Authority eventually took over management following the dissolution of the original ministry. Central to the CCCF is its emphasis on Locally Led Adaptation (LLA), with Ward Climate Change Planning Committees (WCCPCs) identifying priority investments through participatory vetting. These are reviewed by County Climate Change Planning Committees (CCCPCs), which offer technical assistance, coordinate proposal development, and support oversight structures.

The CCCF is now being scaled nationwide, with support from the National Treasury, and forms a key component of Kenya's National Climate Change Action Plan. It aims to institutionalize inclusive, transparent, and responsive climate finance systems rooted in community priorities.



Sources and opportunities for conflict sensitivity in the CCCF

The findings of this analysis are structured in accordance with three main stages within the conventional policy development cycle: 1) agenda setting and policy formulation, 2) policy implementation, and 3) policy evaluation. For a more detailed analysis of the CCCF, see the full report¹. Traits marked in green below represent features and capacities that contribute to conflict sensitivity within the CCCF, whilst those marked in yellow represent entry points to further strengthen conflict sensitivity within the mechanism.



¹Medina, L.; Schapendonk, F.; Jaskolski, M.; Osumba, J.; Jebiwott, A.; Singh, R.; Takaindisa, J.; Pacillo, G. (2025) Conflict-sensitive adaptation governance: Assessing Kenya's County Climate Change Fund. CGIAR FOCUS Climate Security. 60 p. <https://hdl.handle.net/10568/169314>

Sources of conflict sensitivity

The CCCF provides a promising model for conflict-sensitive climate governance by empowering ward-level planning committees and fostering inclusive, community-driven decision-making. Despite its successes, several opportunities for conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding integration remain. This summary outlines key findings.

Effective and inclusive coordination across levels of governance enables collective action.

The CCCF facilitates the creation of extensively autonomous local decision-making bodies, such as the WCCPCs. WCCPCs and project management committees promote broad community representation, fostering local ownership, accountability, and trust. These committees also strengthen state-society relations and build political legitimacy by aligning adaptation activities with local needs. The CCCF furthermore enhances coordination among governance actors through mechanisms like technical advisory support and inter-ward meetings.

Bringing together local actors strengthens coordination for conflict sensitivity. WCCPCs serve as a platform to harmonize different community structures, including peace committees, traditional rangeland management systems, water user committees, and sectors like education and health. Often this coordination takes place in formal policy planning mechanisms, such as the five-year Ward Development Plan.

Conflict risks are recognized and integrated into adaptation planning. Vulnerability assessments regularly identify conflict risks linked to climate impacts—such as competition over resources, domestic violence, crime, and human-wildlife conflict. Across counties, multiple wards reported that climate change worsens these risks in their vulnerability assessments. This information is furthermore documented in county-level reports.

Investments are designed to avoid triggering conflict. Local peacebuilders and traditional conflict-resolution actors are involved in CCCF planning to advance a “do-no-harm” approach in adaptation investments. Conflict-prevention measures like avoiding contested areas and ensuring clear access arrangements are common. Community consensus helps secure buy-in and fair access to resources.

Investments can support sustainable peacebuilding processes, although not usually done in a conscious manner. The CCCF instrument has proven effective in building trust and strengthening relationships within communities by enabling the development of locally relevant, climate adaptation projects. While this potential appears most evident within the immediate community benefiting from individual CCCF investments (see Kitui example below), the benefits for social cohesion under CCCF projects could be strengthened if consciously integrated as a goal across communities.

Investment planning and design fosters the representation of vulnerable groups. The process for composing the ward planning committees is designed to ensure both equitable representation and community-driven selection. Crucially, funding is consciously allocated, and guidelines and rules provided, to support the inclusion of populations affected by intersectional risks by integrating participatory governance structures that ensure representation of marginalized groups, including women, youth, people with disabilities, and the poor.

Participatory assessments and planning processes support the challenging of structural inequalities.

Vulnerability assessments as conducted through the CCCF mechanism incorporate a gender and intersectional lens as an important factor in shaping priorities, allowing for structural vulnerabilities and inequalities, such as power imbalances, to surface during the prioritization of adaptation investments. Despite this, proposed activities under CCCF projects, mainly related to water availability, do not always account for women's access to water or the safety risks they face.

Implementation processes recognize and prevent corruption and rent-seeking practices.

The CCCF mechanism has established robust frameworks to prevent corruption and rent-seeking, particularly in procurement processes, aligning with national and county-level regulations like the Procurement and Asset Disposals Act and Public Financial Management Act. Furthermore, a formal complaints procedure enables stakeholders to challenge unethical conduct. Hence, structured channels for community feedback enhance transparency and accountability across CCCF operations, building trust and enabling redress processes.

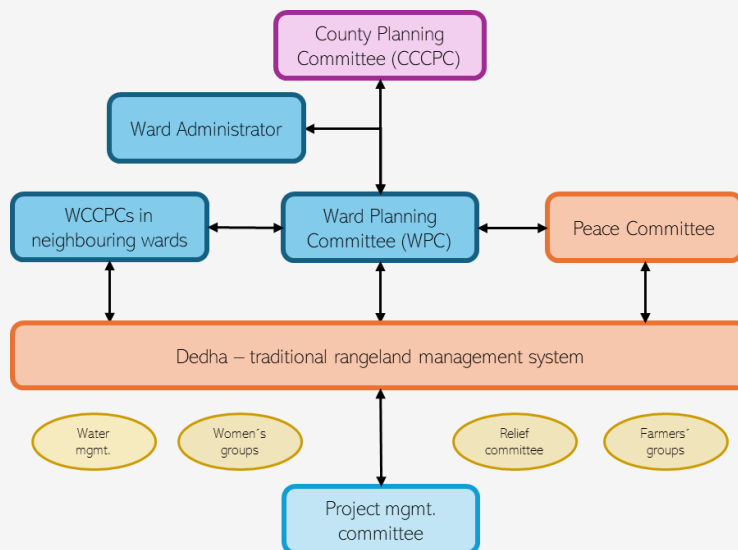


Ward Climate Change Planning Committees strengthen local peacebuilding capacities

Garba Tulla's WCCPC was formed through a participatory, community-led process. This began with a series of public engagement barazas, or meetings, in which community members from all local areas gathered. Initial meetings were held at the village level across various locations, with a larger baraza held centrally in Garba Tulla. During these gatherings, the purpose and importance of forming the WCCPC were explained, and community members reached a consensus on representatives for elders, youth, women, and people with disabilities.

Through these village-level barazas, 44 representatives—four from each of the 11 locations—were selected. To further refine this group, a centralized meeting with a stakeholder committee and community members takes place to review the 44 representatives based on specific criteria: each candidate needed to be from the local area, fluent in both the local language and English, and have a reputation of integrity and prior involvement in community initiatives. Ultimately, one representative from each of the 11 locations was chosen, ensuring that each area and group was equitably represented in the WCCPC.

Each member of the WCCPC serves as a representative not only of their specific community but also of the particular group to which they belong (such as women, youth, elders, or persons with disabilities). In addition to the main community representatives, other key committees, like the traditional rangeland management systems (Dedha) and the Peace Committee, also contribute to the WCCPC. While there is no formal requirement for these bodies to participate, their involvement was identified as valuable by the ward members themselves, underscoring the grassroots-driven nature of the WCCPC's composition.



Operation of the WCCPC in Garba Tulla ward, Isiolo county

Dedha: A customary Borana rangeland governance system that manages grazing, water, and resource use through communal decision-making.

WCCPC: A community body that identifies and designs climate adaptation projects, ensuring local priorities shape county climate planning.

Ward administrator: A local government official who helps draft CCCF proposals and serves as a link between WCCPCs and CCCPCs.

Peace Committee: A community forum for conflict resolution and mediation, consulted by WCCPCs to ensure projects do not heighten local tensions.

Project management committees: Community-run groups that implement and monitor projects, ensuring transparency and activating conflict response if needed.

Neighbouring WCCPCs: Committees coordinate across ward boundaries to ensure harmonized planning and prevent intercommunal disputes.

Opportunities for conflict sensitivity

Increase coordination with institutional security actors. CCCF structures across all assessed counties lack formal involvement of peace and conflict actors. For instance, peace and conflict stakeholders, such as the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), are not formally represented in CCCF planning. This may limit CCCF's capacity to embed conflict sensitivity and address local conflict dynamics within climate initiatives. The absence of formal roles for peace actors results in a lack of established protocols for incorporating peace considerations into proposal development, monitoring, or inter-ward coordination.

Leverage adaptation investments to address inter-group conflicts, especially across administrative borders. Customary institutions for conflict management are well integrated in CCCF investments. While effective, these are not always sufficient to prevent conflict escalation between communities. The CCCF planning process faces challenges when addressing projects near political or administrative boundaries, particularly in contested territories. While there are mechanisms for trans-boundary planning and coordination, ward-level approaches often limit projects to localized, small-scale solutions.

Increase documentation and use of previous experience on policy implementation towards supporting wider governance systems for peace. There is a de-facto interaction between local peace and security bodies and adaptation efforts under the CCCF. However, the outcomes and interactions of projects with conflict dynamics are not systematically documented or leveraged to improve governance systems for peace and conflict response. For instance,

or leveraged to inform governance or research frameworks. This lack of documentation undermines the potential of CCCF actors to learn and adapt to evolving conflict risks.

Ensure continuous funding, even under changing political priorities, to avoid unmet constituent expectations. Interruptions in the operation of CCCF legislations due to changing county government priorities can lead to unmet expectations that increase local resentments and undermine legitimacy. While CCCF legislation mandates the allocation of at least 2% of county development funds for climate adaptation, non-compliance by county governments has disrupted investments. As a result, adaptation initiatives have become entangled in the broader political and electoral competition over development funds, undermining their effectiveness. The uncertainty allocation the mandated funds not only limits adaptation efforts but also undermines trust in the CCCF Committees.

Enhance transparency of available budgets. There is a lack of transparency about the yearly budget made available at county level for the implementation of CCCF projects in Isiolo. This limited disclosure of CCCF budgets undermines community trust and leads to tensions when county-level changes alter project scopes.

Increase efforts for Monitoring and Evaluation processes, while including conflict and peace outcomes. The CCCF developed a robust M&E framework designed to capture conflict dynamics and incorporate community-driven insights. However, evidence suggests that the framework has not been implemented beyond CCCF's pilot phases. Current M&E practices are limited to the early project stages, focusing on procurement quality, initial operational metrics, and financial accountability. Project management committees at the ward level document community users and financial flows, but there is no systematic tracking of the socio-economic, political, or environmental impacts of CCCF investments supervised by the County government.

Document experiences on policy implementation to support wider governance systems for peace. There is a de-facto interaction between local peace and security bodies and adaptation efforts under the CCCF. However, the outcomes and interactions of projects with conflict dynamics are not systematically documented or leveraged to improve governance systems for peace and conflict response. This lack of documentation undermines the potential of CCCF actors to learn and adapt to evolving conflict risks.



Two contrasting cases of CCCF investments for adaptation

Social cohesion arising from the Kalikuvu earth dam restoration in Mutha ward, Kitui county.

The restoration of the Kalikuvu earth dam in Mutha ward, Kitui County, originally built during the colonial era and revitalized under the CCCF pilot, has significantly improved local water access in a drought-prone region. Though its site selection initially raised concerns about equitable benefit distribution, inclusive consultations led by the Ward Climate Change Planning Team fostered community acceptance and ownership. The dam's presence has since reduced reliance on distant, conflict-prone water sources, lowering residents' exposure to cross-border tensions with pastoralists from Tana River County, especially during droughts. The dam has also brought a range of additional benefits. Children now attend school more regularly, and women participate more in farming and trade. Water rationing during dry spells, managed by a community site committee, ensures equitable access, while informal trade and agreements promote flexibility. The dam has also supported livelihood diversification through gardening and reforestation, boosted pasture and food security. These benefits have reportedly improved relations with conflictive pastoralist neighbours through and market interactions, ultimately fostering social cohesion.

Conflict around the Bibi water pan in Kinna ward, Isiolo county.

The Bibi water pan in Kinna ward, a critical water source for pastoralists since the 1970s, was expanded during the CCCF pilot phase in 2014 to improve access and sustainability. Infrastructure upgrades—including fencing, water tanks, a pump, and a livestock distribution system—aimed to regulate usage, protect surrounding pastures, and maintain fair access. Initially considered a low-conflict area, the site later became a flashpoint amid worsening drought and rising resource competition. By 2020, tensions escalated between the Borana and Somali communities over access to the pan. The Borana, who had overseen the project's management, restricted Somali pastoralists from Garissa, whose influx strained limited water resources. These access rules were contested by the Somali community, which perceived them as illegitimate, particularly during the extreme 2020 drought. The conflict led to displacement, halted use of the site, and left the pan vulnerable to vandalism and theft in the absence of security. This case reveals the fragility of shared resource governance under stress. It underscores the need for inclusive decision-making, conflict-sensitive planning, and robust security measures. Even historically peaceful sites can become conflict hotspots when adaptation interventions fail to anticipate evolving inter-community dynamics and the pressures of climate-induced scarcity.





Acknowledgments

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