

Strengthening conflict sensitivity in Kenya's County Climate Change Fund: Isiolo county



Introduction

Governments facing a combination of climate vulnerability and conflict risks must proactively address the potential unintended consequences of their climate actions. It's crucial for them to integrate conflict-sensitive approaches into existing adaptation instruments. This ensures that adaptation efforts support peace or, at the very least, avoid exacerbating existing conflict drivers. However, many governments struggle to incorporate conflict-sensitive thinking into climate adaptation because climate issues often intersect with various sectors, such as water, land, and security, and can unfold across both time and space, making them complex to manage.

This policy brief shares the main outcomes and recommendations from a joint study conducted by the Adaptation Consortium (ADA) and the Alliance of Bioversity International – CIAT (CGIAR). The study analyzed Kenya's County Climate Change Fund (CCCF) mechanism to determine if its design, implementation, and monitoring effectively prevent new conflicts, support peaceful dispute resolution, and leverage climate actions as opportunities for peacebuilding.

This brief presents the results for Isiolo County. Isiolo is a predominantly pastoralist county, where herding of cattle, goats, sheep, and camels remains the backbone of livelihoods. Its population is ethnically diverse, comprising Somali, Borana, Turkana, Meru, and other communities whose seasonal movements and resource use often intersect. The county faces recurrent climate challenges including prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall, and resource scarcity, which heighten competition over water and grazing lands and exacerbate underlying tensions.



Key messages

The County Climate Change Fund (CCCF) in Kenya has demonstrated strong potential for conflict-sensitive climate adaptation. However, further steps can be taken to improve conflict sensitivity.

Sources of conflict sensitivity in the CCCF

- **Multi-level governance and legitimacy:** Isiolo's CCCF empowers WCCPCs as autonomous, community-led bodies that shape ward plans feeding directly into the County Integrated Development Plan, elevating grassroots voices into county politics and reinforcing accountability.
- **Integration of customary systems:** WCCPCs formally include peace committees and the Borana Dedha system, aligning CCCF projects with long-standing rangeland and grazing agreements that reduce inter-communal tensions.
- **Conflict as an explicit risk:** Vulnerability assessments systematically identify conflict risks—resource competition, crime, domestic violence, and human–wildlife encounters—embedding them into adaptation planning and county reports.
- **Inclusive representation:** Ward committees are designed to guarantee participation of women, youth, people with disabilities, and the poor, with dedicated rules and allocations to address intersectional risks.
- **Challenging inequalities:** Participatory assessments apply gender and intersectional lenses, surfacing structural vulnerabilities, though project design (e.g. water access) does not always reflect women's safety concerns.

Opportunities for conflict sensitivity in the CCCF

- **Systematic cross-boundary planning:** Ward-based approaches often exclude neighbouring communities reliant on shared grazing lands and water points; landscape-based, cross-ward collaboration is critical.
- **Institutionalizing peace roles:** Customary and peace actors contribute informally but lack defined roles or protocols. Documenting and formalizing their engagement would strengthen links between adaptation and peacebuilding.
- **Transparency of funding: Limited disclosure of CCCF budget allocations erodes trust, especially when county-level changes alter approved projects.**
- **Funding continuity:** Interruptions in mandated CCCF allocations due to political turnover undermine community confidence and leave projects unfinished.
- **Robust M&E on peace outcomes:** Though designed with socio-political indicators, Isiolo's M&E framework has not been systematically applied, weakening the ability to track or demonstrate peace dividends.

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

The Bibi water pan, located along a key livestock corridor near Kinna market, has long been vital for pastoralist communities. Established in the 1970s, its location complemented boreholes, which allow controlled access. In contrast, water pans provide open access, making them valuable yet potentially contentious during scarcity. As part of the CCCF pilot, the Kinna pan was expanded in 2014 with fencing, tanks, a pump, and a distribution system to channel livestock to designated drinking points. A management office was also built to oversee access and protect nearby pastures. These improvements aimed to regulate use while ensuring fairness for local pastoralists.

By 2020, however, the site had become a flashpoint between Somali and Borana communities. Somali herders from Garissa were denied access, as the Borana, who had set the rules, excluded them from decision-making. Combined with drought pressures and insufficient water, tensions escalated. The Somali viewed the restrictions as illegitimate, and both groups clashed repeatedly over access.

The violence displaced people and rendered the water pan unusable. In the absence of security, infrastructure was vandalized and looted. Ongoing tensions, partly driven by broader territorial disputes across county borders, have hindered recovery. Although once considered safe due to its peaceful history, increasing scarcity has transformed it into a conflict zone. This case underscores the need for conflict-sensitive adaptation: inclusive rule-making, conflict monitoring, and robust security are essential to safeguard infrastructure and community relations.



The County Climate Change Fund in Isiolo County

The County Climate Change Fund (CCCF) is a multi-level adaptation mechanism rooted in Locally Led Adaptation (LLA). Launched in 2012 under the name of Isiolo County Adaptation Fund (ICAF), it enables Kenyan county governments to establish dedicated climate funds accessible to Ward Climate Change Planning Committees (WCCPCs), which are composed of community members who identify and oversee local adaptation projects.

The CCCF strengthens links between community planning and county governance by addressing challenges such as weak coordination, limited climate data use, and underfunded local efforts. It supports Kenya's devolution agenda by empowering counties and communities to lead climate resilience planning.

WCCPCs, selected through public vetting, identify local priorities and develop proposals, which are reviewed and supported by the County Climate Change Planning Committee (CCCPC). The also CCCPC develops the County Climate

Change Action Plan, based on participatory risk assessments, and provides technical support for proposal development. It also offers recommendations to the WCCPC and serves as the secretariat to the CCCF steering committee.

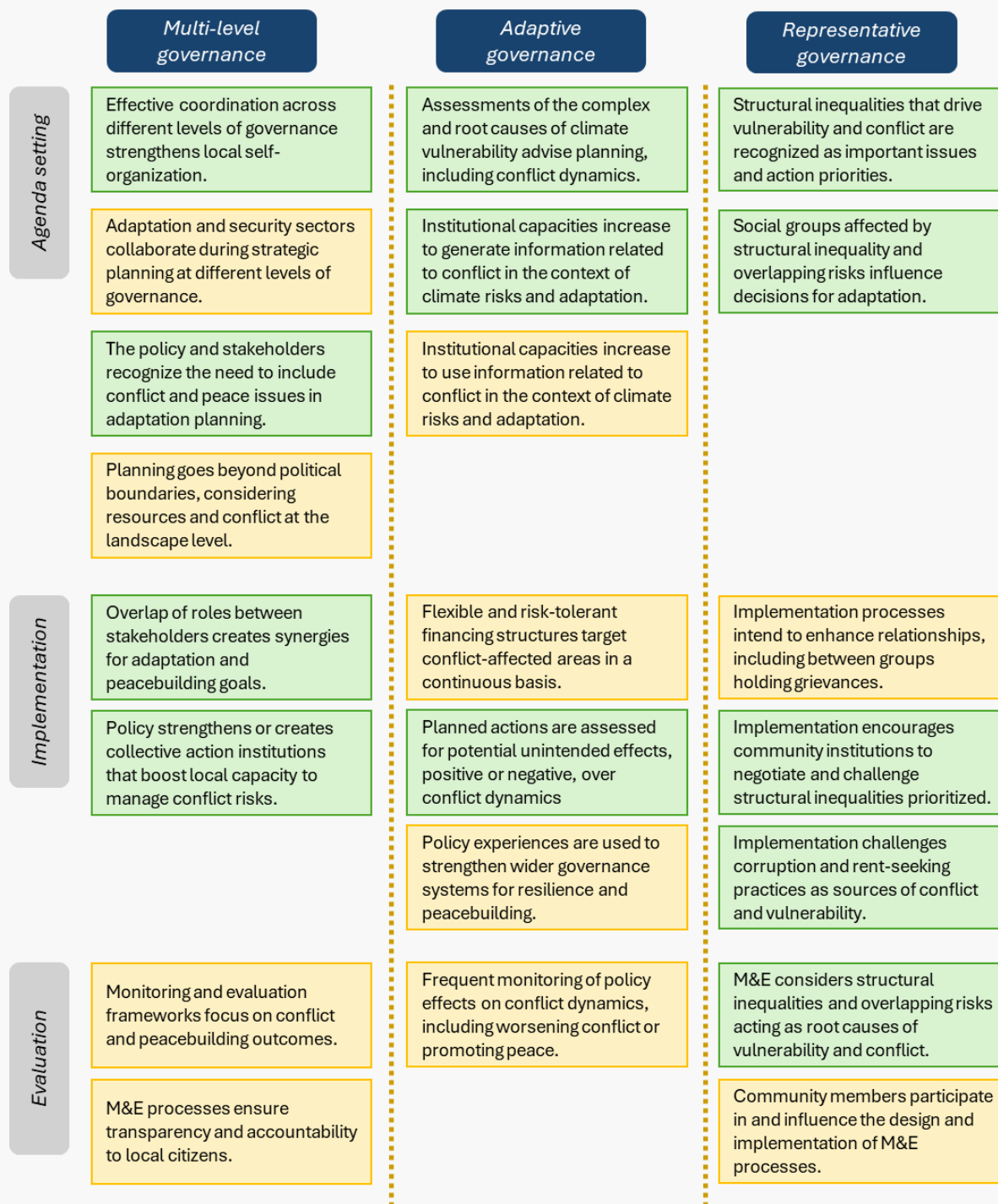
Isiolo County piloted the CCCF in 2011, establishing a fund to support public investments in resilience. Isiolo then formalized the CCCF through the County Climate Change Fund Act in 2018, creating a legal framework for fund management. Between 2013 and 2018, the model expanded to Garissa, Kitui, Makueni, and Wajir, replicating Isiolo's success in channelling climate finance to local levels.

The mechanism is now being scaled nationwide, supported by the National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), as part of Kenya's National Climate Change Action Plan. It aims to institutionalize climate finance systems that are inclusive, accountable, and responsive to local needs.



Sources and opportunities for conflict sensitivity in Isiolo's 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

Coordination across governance levels enables collective action. Isiolo's CCCF has strengthened local governance by establishing WCCPCs as extensively autonomous bodies for diagnosing, planning, and implementing adaptation priorities. In Isiolo, WCCPCs not only guide CCCF-funded projects but have also played a decisive role in producing five-year Ward Development Plans that feed directly into the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP). This elevates ward-level voices into county politics, enhancing legitimacy and bottom-up accountability.

Considering customary practices strengthens conflict sensitivity. WCCPCs in Isiolo include representatives from peace committees, Dedha (the Borana customary rangeland governance system), water user committees, and service sectors like health and education. This coordination has formalized pathways for integrating traditional and state institutions, allowing local knowledge and customary conflict management practices to shape adaptation priorities. The Dedha's grazing agreements, for instance, inform water and pasture investments, linking CCCF projects with time-tested systems for reducing inter-communal tensions.

Conflict risks are recognized and integrated into adaptation planning. Vulnerability assessments² conducted across Isiolo consistently highlight conflict as a climate-related vulnerability. Wards reported that climate change aggravates livestock competition, domestic violence, crime, and human-wildlife conflict. These risks are not only discussed during consultations but are also systematically documented in county-level reports, providing a body of evidence that directly links climate impacts to security dynamics.

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.

"Each of these committees come from locations and represent the people from this location, and also some come from peace, some come from CBOs, so they represent the issues they work on in these functions"

Chairperson of WCCPC

² County Government of Isiolo (2023). Isiolo County Participatory Climate Risk Assessment Report. https://maarifa.cog.go.ke/sites/default/files/2024-06/REVIEWED-%20PCRA%20ISIOLO_1.pdf

Opportunities for conflict sensitivity

Account for inter-group dynamics, particularly across administrative boundaries, in a more systematic manner. Although some CCCF projects in Isiolo have improved inter-group relations, especially around shared resources, systematic approaches to cross-boundary planning remain underdeveloped. Ward-based planning often produces localized solutions that exclude neighbouring communities who depend on the same resources. Strengthening cross-ward coordination, particularly along county borders, would ensure that adaptation investments foster inclusion and prevent disputes linked to shared grazing lands and water points.

Promote more proactive inter-ward collaboration through landscape approaches to adaptation. CCCF projects rarely extend this collaboration into structured cross-ward planning. Adopting landscape-based and nature-based solutions would enable projects to span ecological zones and political boundaries. Inter-ward collaboration is particularly critical in Isiolo, where rangeland and water systems cut across administrative borders and regularly spark disputes.

Document experiences on policy implementation to support peacebuilding efforts. While informal engagement with peace committees and customary systems such as the Dedha has proven valuable, there are no defined roles or protocols for peace actors in CCCF processes. This gap reduces opportunities to integrate peace perspectives into proposal development, inter-ward coordination, and monitoring. Moreover, where CCCF projects have supported peace dividends—such as reducing disputes at grazing areas or water points—these experiences are not systematically captured or shared with wider governance systems. Documenting and institutionalizing such outcomes would allow CCCF actors to influence

county and national peacebuilding agendas, while also creating evidence for how adaptation can contribute to conflict prevention.

Enhance transparency of available budgets. There is a widespread perception in Isiolo that CCCF budget allocations are opaque. Communities are rarely informed about the amounts released annually for CCCF projects, and changes made at the county level often alter project scope without consultation. This lack of disclosure undermines trust in the CCCF.

Ensure continuity of mandated funds. Interruptions in CCCF funding caused by changes in county political leadership have undermined community trust and created frustration when approved projects were left unfinished. In Isiolo, the mandated allocation of funds under CCCF legislation has not always been consistently followed, creating a gap between community expectations and county delivery.

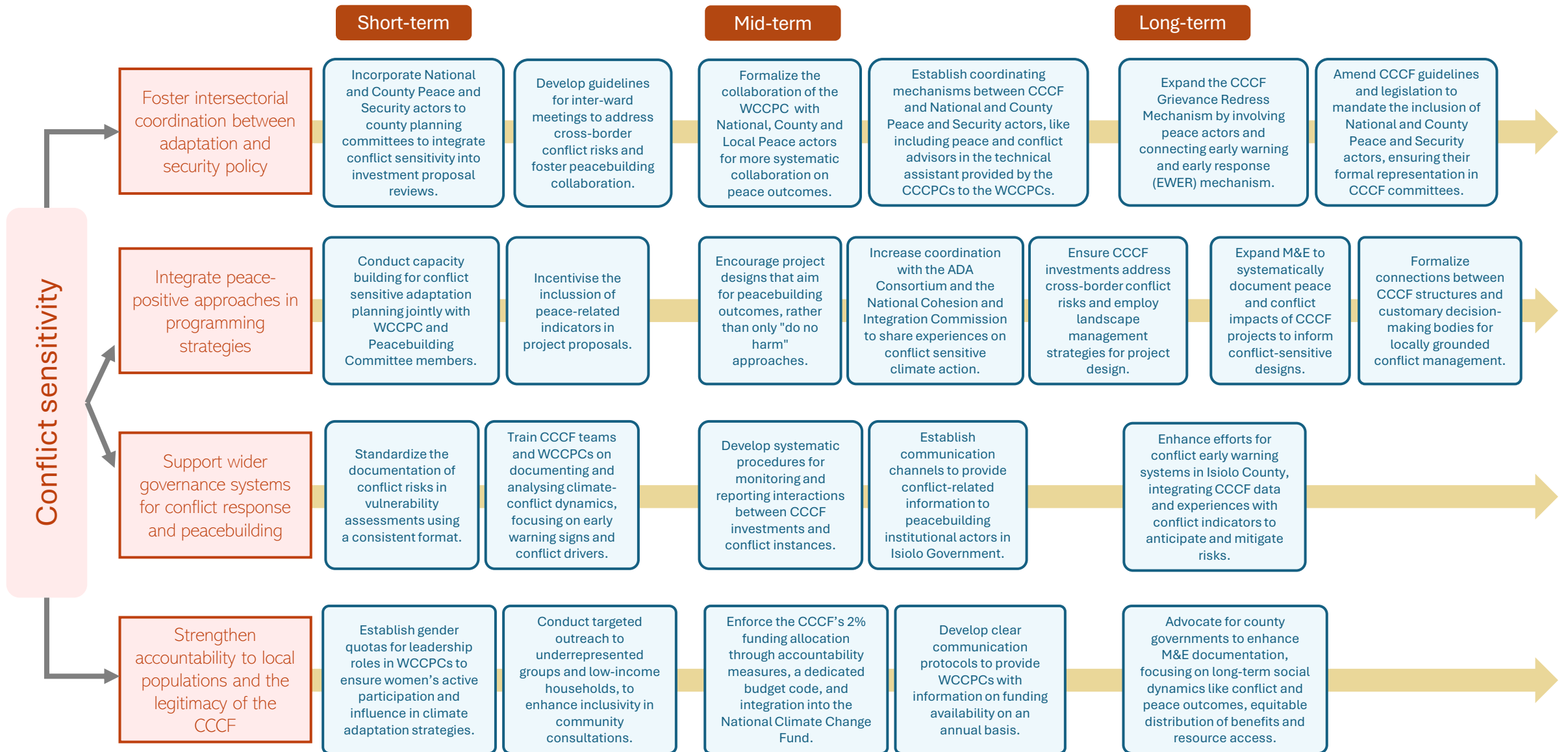
Increase efforts for M&E processes, while including conflict and peace outcomes. Isiolo's CCCF design included a robust M&E framework intended to track socio-political outcomes alongside climate and livelihood impacts. However, beyond the pilot phase, these tools have not been fully implemented. Without systematic tracking of peace and conflict outcomes, opportunities to refine project design and anticipate risks are lost.

“The information is not clearly reaching the ground, but in the forum there are some leaders who will clearly explain, but the county does not clearly explain things to the people...why did the county not invest in the plans, because they were changing priorities, they addressed conflict, they addressed covid, but we cannot talk on behalf of the counties, because we have not been told, these are all assumptions”

Member of a WCCPC

Integrating conflict sensitivity into Isiolo's CCCF

The following figure summarises the insights and recommendations that emerged from the analysis. Recommendations are grouped according to their feasibility of implementation in the short, medium, and long term. Together, they form an action plan towards conflict sensitivity in Isiolo's CCCF.





Acknowledgments

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