



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 (CGIAR). 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 brief presents the results for Kitui County.

Kitui's residents depend largely on smallholder farming, charcoal production, and livestock keeping, livelihoods that are highly sensitive to rainfall variability and land degradation. The county's population is predominantly Kamba, with minority groups engaged in trade and migration across county borders. Kitui experiences recurrent droughts, water scarcity, and soil erosion, challenges that undermine food security and strain natural resources, heightening the risks of competition and conflict over access to land, water, and forest resources.



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

- **Inclusive local decision-making:** WCCPTs and project committees apply democratic practices of representation, accountability, and grievance redress, fostering trust and peaceful conflict management.
- **Conflict risks integrated into adaptation:** Vulnerability assessments explicitly address resource competition, crime, and human–wildlife conflict, with some wards framing adaptation as a peace dividend.
- **Coordination across actors:** WCCPTs link with ward development committees and resource-user associations, though the absence of county-level peace structures underscores the role of national bodies like NCIC.
- **Conflict-avoidant project design:** Investments avoid contested areas, clarify access rules, and sometimes promote inter-ward cooperation, with grievance mechanisms reinforcing peaceful outcomes.
- **Addressing inequalities through participation:** Gender and intersectional lenses highlight unequal access to resources; women, youth, and persons with disabilities are represented, though structural issues persist.
- **Monitoring peace outcomes:** M&E tracks vulnerable groups but remains focused on process indicators; outcome-oriented metrics are needed to demonstrate peace dividends such as reduced disputes.

Recommendations to strengthen conflict sensitivity

- **Strengthen cross-boundary planning:** Move beyond ward-level approaches to more systematic collaboration across political and administrative boundaries.
- **Ensure funding consistency:** Avoid delays in mandated allocations and insulate CCCF funds from shifting political priorities to maintain trust.
- **Expand project sustainability:** Empower committees to develop cost-recovery, enterprises, or partnerships that sustain impacts and livelihoods beyond county cycles.
- **Improve M&E systems:** Incorporate peace and conflict outcomes to capture long-term social and political impacts and demonstrate dividends identified by communities.
- **Leverage peace insights:** Document and feed dispute-resolution experiences into broader governance systems to strengthen early warning and conflict prevention.
- **Reconcile procurement and local priorities:** Balance transparency and anti-corruption safeguards with communities' preference for local service providers to align fairness with economic participation.

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:

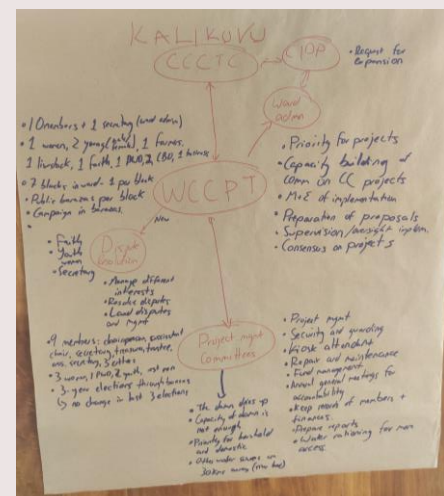
- **Multi-level governance** – Aligns adaptation policies with security considerations and local realities through coordination across sectors and governance levels.
- **Adaptive governance** – Builds institutional capacity to anticipate and respond to environmental and conflict-related change, informed 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: Reducing inter-communal conflict risk in Mutha Ward

Mutha ward, located in Kitui South and home to about 13,500 people, identified drought, human-wildlife conflict, and disease as key climate hazards. In response, the community prioritized water harvesting infrastructure to support crop resilience and improve livestock quality. Although human-human conflict was not ranked as a top climate risk, Mutha has experienced long-standing cross-border tensions with Somali pastoralists over pasture and water access.

The CCCF-supported Kalikuvu earth dam was selected following a contested site selection process, with various communities demanding equitable access. Resolution was achieved through community barazas mediated by the WCCPT and local leadership, ensuring consensus and transparency.

The dam has delivered significant adaptation benefits by increasing water availability, supporting drought planning, and improving economic resilience. It has also reduced conflict risk, as residents no longer need to access water from high-risk areas. This shift has eased tensions with neighbouring pastoralist groups, while a nearby market has fostered trade and interdependence, strengthening peacebuilding outcomes alongside climate resilience.



Governance of CCCF adaptation investments in Mutha ward

The County Climate Change Fund in Kitui County

The County Climate Change Fund (CCCF) is a multi-level adaptation mechanism designed to localize climate action in alignment with Kenya's 2010 Constitution and devolution framework. Operational in Kitui County since 2022, following legislative approval in 2018, the CCCF empowers communities to shape their own climate adaptation responses through structures rooted in the principles of Locally Led Adaptation (LLA).

At the core of the mechanism are Ward Climate Change Planning Teams (WCCPTs), which identify priority investments, develop proposals, and supervise implementation through site management committees. These teams are systematically selected according to a set of rules and guidelines based on equity and inclusivity, with reserved positions for women, youth, and persons with disabilities. While the County Climate Change Planning Committee (CCCPC) provides technical support and aligns

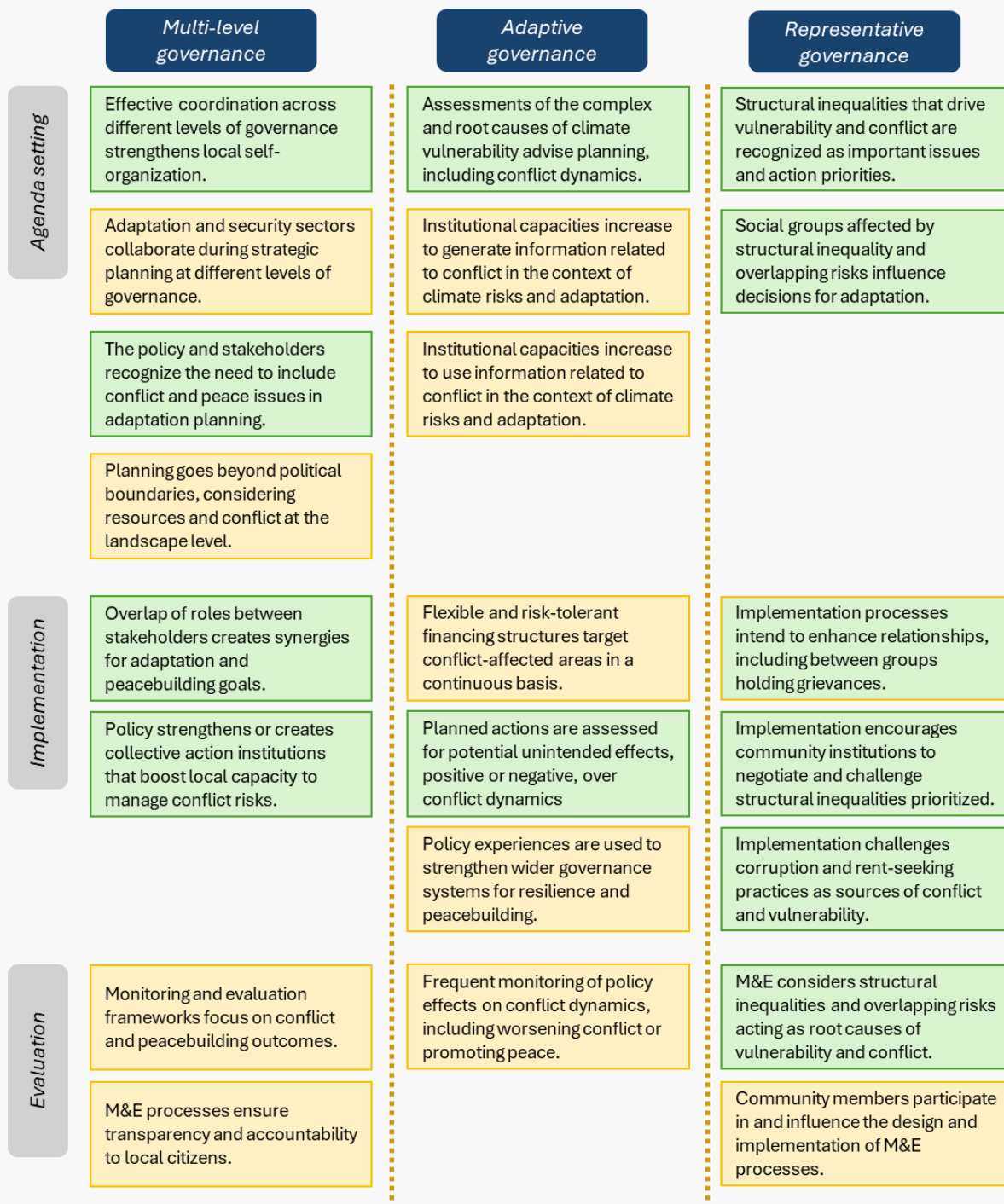
projects with county planning instruments.

A 2023 Participatory Climate Risk Assessment (PCRA) conducted across Kitui revealed that intensifying droughts, compounded by flash floods, environmental degradation, and rising temperatures, pose the most severe climate threat. These hazards are undermining food and water security, disrupting livelihoods, and contributing to broader socioeconomic challenges, including migration, household conflict, and insecurity. In some wards, especially those bordering Tana River County, climate pressures have escalated into inter-community tensions over access to water and pasture. Through the CCCF, Kitui County is building an adaptive governance system that links climate risk reduction to inclusive decision-making, offering a model for addressing the intertwined challenges of environmental stress and social vulnerability.



Sources and opportunities for conflict sensitivity in Kitui'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

Representation in local decision-making fosters collective action and conflict resolution. In Kitui, WCCPTs serve as inclusive, community-led bodies that drive climate risk assessments. Project management committees established to oversee implementation have evidenced highly democratic practices, with transparent selection of members, clear accountability to user associations, and open forums for addressing grievances. These practices have not only improved project performance but also provided peaceful mechanisms for conflict management, reinforcing trust in adaptation governance.

Conflict risks are recognised within vulnerability assessments and feature in adaptation planning processes. During vulnerability assessments², communities in Kitui identified conflict risks—including resource competition, crime, and human–wildlife conflict—as integral to climate adaptation. Importantly, some wards explicitly prioritized peace dividends, treating adaptation not only as a technical response to climate stress but as an opportunity to reduce human–human and human–wildlife tensions.

Bringing together local actors strengthens coordination for conflict sensitivity. WCCPTs coordinate with Ward Development Committees and integrate climate priorities into broader ward and county development plans. They also engage with resource-user associations, such as forest and water management committees, to ensure coherence in project planning. However, unlike Isiolo and Wajir, Kitui has fewer established peacebuilding structures at the county level. This makes the involvement of national peacebuilding institutions, such as the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), particularly relevant to sustain and institutionalize peace dividends generated by local adaptation efforts.

Investments designed to avoid conflict yield visible peace outcomes. CCCF projects in Kitui generally adopt a “do no harm” approach by avoiding contested areas and clarifying access rules. Beyond this, some projects have been deliberately located to foster inter-ward cooperation or reduce cross-county tensions, making peace a tangible dividend of climate adaptation. Mechanisms such as the Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) provide peaceful channels for resolving disputes, helping to consolidate these positive outcomes.

Participatory planning addresses inequalities, but with limits. Participatory planning processes apply a gender and intersectional lens, surfacing issues of inequality in access to water, land, and other resources. While many CCCF projects have focused on immediate needs, especially water access, these do not always reflect women’s safety concerns, such as risks associated with distant water points. Nonetheless, representation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in WCCPTs and management teams fosters the challenging of this structural issues.

Monitoring and evaluation processes account for the challenging of structural inequalities. Project monitoring and evaluation in Kitui often include indicators addressing vulnerable groups, but these tend to be process-oriented and easily quantifiable. While useful, they fall short of capturing the broader peace dividends that communities themselves recognize, such as reduced disputes at water points or improved inter-ward cooperation. Building stronger outcome-oriented indicators could help demonstrate how adaptation generates peace.

“Now we are able to co-exist. Before, we weren’t able to talk to one another. The dam definitely played a role in that.”

Ward Administrator

²County Government of Kitui (2023). Kitui County Participatory Risk Assessment Report.
<https://maarifa.cog.go.ke/sites/default/files/2024-06/Kitui%20County%20PCRA%20Report%20Reviewed.pdf>

Opportunities for conflict sensitivity

Adaptation planning should take into account inter-group dynamics – particularly across administrative boundaries – in a more systematic manner. While some CCCF projects in Kitui have improved inter-group dynamics across administrative boundaries, systematic trans-boundary planning remains underdeveloped. Ward-level approaches often lead to localized solutions that exclude affected neighbouring communities. Enhancing cross-ward collaboration, especially near political boundaries, would enable more inclusive and effective adaptation planning.

Ensure continuous funding, even under changing political priorities, to avoid unmet constituent expectations. Funding consistency is another key challenge. Delays in allocating the mandated 2% of development funds, due to shifting political priorities, have disrupted CCCF operations and risk generating unmet expectations among constituents. This can undermine trust in adaptation processes and entangle climate investments in electoral competition.

Foster the capacity of project management committees to secure and expand project impacts. Kitui's CCCF should also strengthen the role of project management teams to design alternative funding streams through commercial strategies. For example, developing cost-recovery mechanisms, community-based enterprises, or public-private partnerships. Such strategies could secure the sustainability of projects beyond county budget cycles while creating livelihood opportunities that reinforce peace dividends.

Build a more robust M&E system that captures peace dividends. Kitui's CCCF M&E framework includes conflict indicators, but in practice it has been applied narrowly to procurement and early project milestones. There is little systematic tracking of long-term social, political, and environmental impacts. Strengthening M&E to include conflict and peace outcomes is critical, not only to evaluate project success, but also to demonstrate the tangible peace dividends that communities themselves identify.

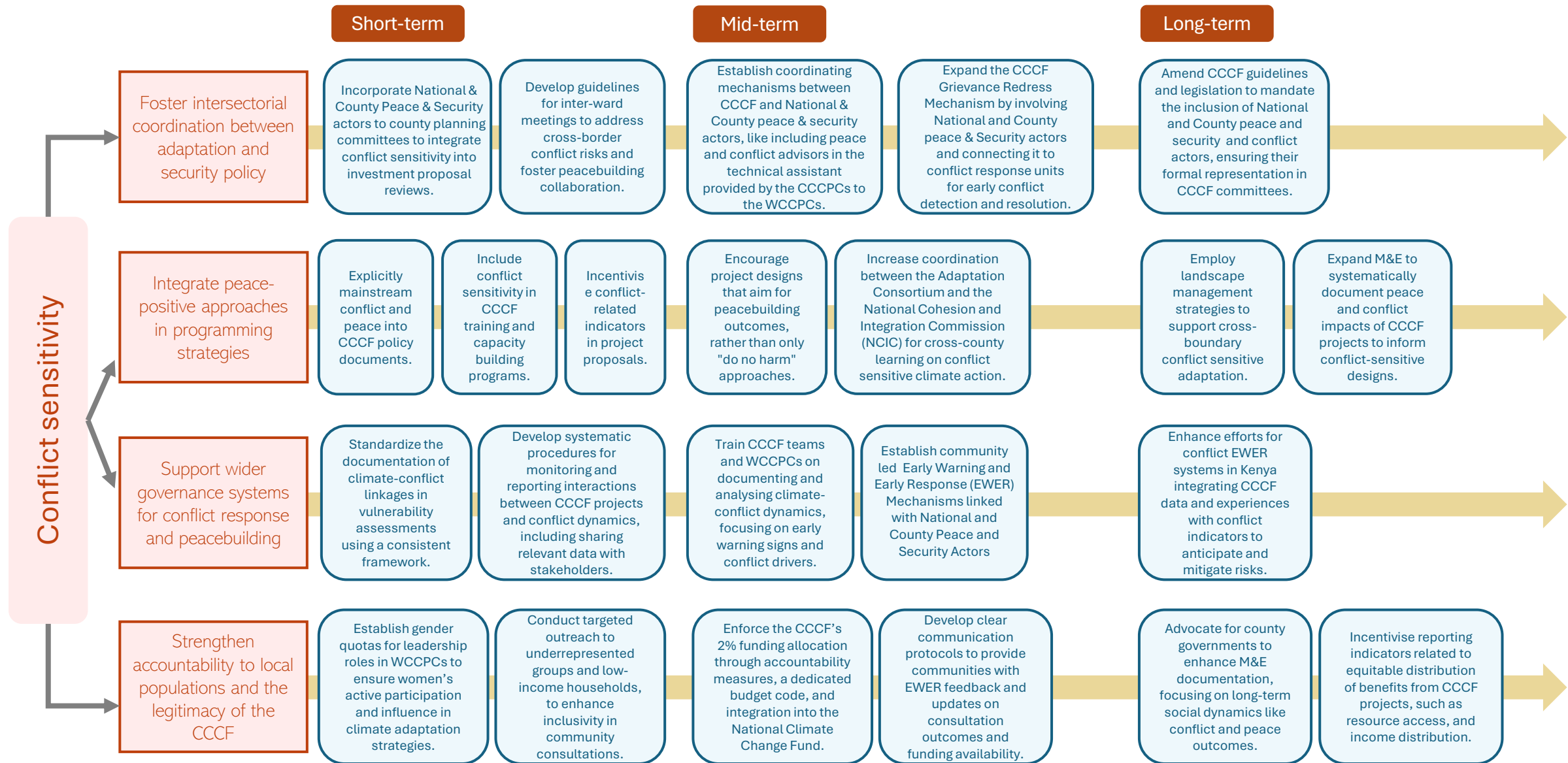
Information on peace and conflict generated during project implementation and operation should be better leveraged towards supporting wider governance systems. Although CCCF actors like WCCPTs and site committees have created informal mechanisms for managing disputes, peace-related outcomes and conflict interactions are rarely documented or used to inform broader governance systems.

Reconcile transparency frameworks with community expectations. Kitui's CCCF aligns with national frameworks on transparency and procurement, embedding strong anti-corruption measures into project implementation. However, at the county level, open tender procedures sometimes create tensions with WCCPTs and communities, who prefer the selection of local service providers to ensure benefits remain within the county. This gap highlights the need to reconcile formal procurement frameworks with community expectations of fairness and local economic participation.



Integrating conflict sensitivity into Kitui'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 Kitui's CCCF.





Acknowledgments

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