

Conflict and fragility turn climate induced extreme weather events into catastrophe: The lesson from the tragedy in Derna Libya for COP28

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On a fateful night of 11 September, the city of Derna, in eastern Libya, was hit by the deadliest flooding. The heavy rain from Tropical Storm Daniel, combined with the collapse of the two dams in the city of Derna led to flooding that wiped out various parts of the city.

This catastrophic event led to an unprecedented death and destruction of the city of Derna.

In recent years, the world has witnessed the devastating impact of climate change-related disasters. From extreme weather conditions such as flooding, drought and heat waves to desertification and the rise of sea levels, these events have caused immense suffering and destruction.

But what happens when these disasters occur in countries already affected by conflict? The story of the tragedy in

Derna is emblematic of how conflicts, governance failures and fragilities turn extreme events into catastrophe.

The unprecedented heavy rainfall induced by tropical storm Daniel overwhelmed the two neglected dams in Derna, leading to their collapse and the release of an estimated 30 million cubic metres of water. The ensuing heavy flood resulted in loss of large number of lives and widespread damage to infrastructure, homes, and livelihoods.

The flooding has also caused the death of more than 5,000 people, with 8,500 reported missing, and has resulted in the displacement of more than 30,000 individuals.

The scale of this disaster is not merely a result of the climate change induced unprecedented levels of heavy rain. It is also significantly affected by the ongoing conflict in the country. [The conflict and associated governance failures](#) diverted attention and resources away from the maintenance of critical infrastructure and the provision of early warning to affected communities.

Conflict disrupts essential infrastructures and services, making communities more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Conflict also results in neglect of maintenance, leaving critical infrastructures vulnerable to be easily overwhelmed by climate induced extreme weather conditions. Additionally, conflict diverts resources and attention away from disaster preparedness and response efforts. This can hinder conflict-affected countries' effectiveness in addressing potential threats and providing timely assistance.

That is what happened in Derna. Like many parts of Libya, the conflict that unravelled in 2011 following the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi diverted resources and political attention away from services in the country including maintenance of critical infrastructure. This left essential systems ill-prepared to handle and respond to the sudden influx of

Tropical Storm Daniel.

The situation in Derna highlighted the significant impact of conflict in aggravating climate change-related disasters. However, this incident in Derna is not an isolated case. Other African countries facing prolonged conflicts are also at a high risk of climate change-related disasters.

While the famine in Madagascar was reported as the [first climate change induced famine](#), as an event that happens overtime, its occurrence would not have been possible without governance failure.

Similarly, the herder-farmer violence in parts of West Africa and the Sahel has become increasingly frequent and fatal due to governance failure and conflict. This is occasioned by climate change-induced conflict and the rising depletion of resources including pastureland.

The disaster that befallen Derna, along with other various cases, demonstrates how conflicts and governance failures can engender a lack of preparedness and effective response to climate change. This highlights that the climate-security nexus is not one-directional. Derna is a reminder that fragilities, governance failures and conflict are capable of transforming climate-induced extreme weather conditions into catastrophes.

These events highlight the imperative for inclusion in climate policy making the vulnerabilities that arise from conflict and fragility. According to a [report](#) by the United Nations Development Programme, none of the global climate change instruments, such as the Paris Agreement or the Kyoto Protocol of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, address the issues of conflict, fragility, or peace and security.

The 'Climate Response for Sustaining Peace' initiative, spearheaded by the COP Presidency of Egypt in 2022 marks the

first time that the issue of conflict and peace is brought to the discussion within the framework of COP.

One of the pillars of the 'Climate Response for Sustaining Peace' initiative is to enhance the connection between climate adaptation and peacebuilding. Not any less important and deserving of urgent attention is to address the fact that conflict-affected and fragile countries receive the least from global climate finance. While this is also linked to [loss and damage](#) (a major outcome of COP27 on which COP28 is expected to institute the fund), climate change as it relates to fragile and conflict-affected countries should not be subsumed under it. This thus underscores the need for close coordination in climate and peace and security policy making.

Over the past three years, African countries received only 16 billion US Dollars in climate finance, while the annual gap from 2020 to 2030 amounts to 1288 billion US Dollars. Fragile countries face even more challenges accessing climate finance compared to non-fragile contexts. Recent reports show that countries in fragile settings receive only 1/80th of per capita climate financing compared to non-fragile countries.

COP28 needs to take this agenda forward with a focus on fragile and conflict affected countries including on the question of how to ease access to climate funding. In the urgent battle against climate change, policy-makers must recognize that discussions like COP, devoid of conversations on peace and security, risk the exclusion of conflict-affected fragile regions, with unintended catastrophic consequences on the lives and livelihoods of people in those regions.

The content of this article does not represent the views of Amani Africa and reflect only the personal views of the authors who contribute to 'Ideas Indaba'