

Climate induced conflicts: Sources of insecurity in Africa

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PSC Open Session on Climate Induced Conflicts: Sources of Insecurity in Africa

Tomorrow (21 May 2016), the Peace and Security Council (PSC) will have an open session on the theme 'Climate Induced Conflicts: Sources of Insecurity in Africa'. The AU Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA) and the Peace and Security Department (PSD) are scheduled to brief the PSC.

The meeting is taking place in the framework of the African Common Position on Climate Change and the Mitigation Factors adopted by subsequent AU Assembly decisions. The agenda demonstrate the increased recognition by the AU and the PSC of the strong link between climate change, global warming and violent conflicts in Africa. The African Common position notes that even though Africa is one of the least contributors to the global green gas emission, and has one of the lowest footprint for the global warming, it is paying dearly to the global change in climate. The meeting will also be informed by the 2015 Paris Agreement in international cooperation on climate change.

The agenda for tomorrow's session indicates that one of the objectives of tomorrow's meeting is to have a clear picture on the relationship between climate change and conflicts in Africa. This is one of the issues on which the briefing from DREA is expected to provide insights. The effect of climate change in conflict and climate-related environmental change isn't automatic and immediate. Yet, climate change creates the conditions for violent conflict through a long chain of

connected causal events. The UN led Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has shown strong links between the impacts of climate change in Africa with some of the most intractable conflict on the continent. These conflicts are caused and exacerbated by existing structural environmental, socio-economic, political and technological weaknesses including environmental pressure over scarce resources, unemployment and poverty. The poor capacity of institutions and the state of the physical infrastructure and social services also contribute to poor mitigation, response and adaptive capacities.

African economies and the livelihood of various communities on the continent are heavily reliant on natural resources. Environmental pressures affecting the foundation of local and regional livelihoods are increasingly precipitating inter-communal violence. Some of the manifestations of climate change on the continent in the past two decades include recurrent droughts, El Nino, irregular rainfall, floods and intensified desertification. These developments have resulted in disrupting livelihoods, instigating migration, food and water shortages and internal displacement. Numerous researches and the AU documents especially identified the pastoralist communities of the continent as the most vulnerable group for the climate change induced inter communal violence and conflict. The changing rainfall patterns and water scarcity and insecurity have become sites of national and regional tensions. These have ruined local economies, disrupted livelihoods producing recurring droughts as witnessed in the Horn of Africa. Declining and irregular rainfall and water scarcity have also affected the seasonal migration and movement patterns of the African pastoralist communities. These changes to the long existing patterns of movement for grazing land and water sources has significantly increased competition between different pastoralist groups and between pastoralists and farming communities. These tensions have resulted in recurrent conflicts in almost all regions of the continent from Ethiopia to Darfur and from Kenya to Nigeria.

Beyond the seasonal shift in pastoralist routs, environmental concerns and climate change is becoming a major source for internal displacement and cross border migration in Africa. The inability to sustain their economic and social needs because of climate change, coupled with other political and economic factors, are forcing people to move to areas with better availability of resources. The IPCC predict that environmental migration and displacement which is taken as a major adoptive strategy will be one of the biggest source of insecurity and sources of conflict in the coming years unless major mitigation and adoption initiatives are taken. These developments already lead to increased tensions and competition and led to localized and cross-border conflicts in some parts of Africa.

It is of major interest for tomorrow's PSC meeting to look into the inclusion of environment and the effects of climate change in the continent's peace and security architecture and the development and security agenda of AU member states. The Council in the past called for resilient approach in mitigating the impacts of climate change. These include building national capacity for proper conservation, utilization and management of natural resources. Other issues that may arise in the briefings include the inclusion in the report of the AU Commission Chairperson and in briefings on conflicts on the agenda of the PSC of assessment on the contribution or role of climate change to such conflicts. A good illustration of this was the inclusion of the climate change dimension of sources of insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin region in the April program of work of the PSC.

For PSC members, beyond the various forms of relationships between climate change and insecurity, there is a concern around the lack or weakness of shared institutions and mechanisms of conflict resolution and management among the different groups at national and regional levels. Rwanda as Chair of the PSC is expected to highlight the need for member

states to implement AU decisions including the building of the trans-African green wall and to encourage member states to sign and ratify the amendments to the Montreal Protocol on Climate Change (also known as the Kigali Amendments).

In terms of follow up of the theme, one useful avenue is the inclusion of climate change and environmental factors as important peace and security concerns in the AU early warning and conflict prevention efforts. In this regard, the role of the continental and regional early warning mechanisms in building national and local capacities on early warning on potential climate change-related conflicts will also be of interest for this session. This is an issue that the briefing from PSD may highlight.

At the regional level, there are various initiatives. It is worth noting in this regard that pastoralist related conflicts in the region has been a major focus of the early warning system of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), CEWARN. Most recently, the issue of climate induced inter-communal conflicts has received attention within the framework of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The recurring violence among herders and farming communities in ECOWAS states such as most notably Nigeria exemplify the destabilizing impact of climate change on the continent. Various reports have indicated that over 2000 people have lost their lives in 2016 in such conflicts in Nigeria's middle belt region.

At their 16 December 2017 summit, the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government identified the rise of conflicts related to transhumance in several states as constituting a new threat to regional security. Accordingly, they tasked ECOWAS Commission to work with UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) to conduct a comprehensive study and recommend an action plan to address the problem. Given that one of the objectives of this session is to help the AU devise strategies to find solutions to the security related impacts of climate change,

it is worth to follow this example from ECOWAS for conducting comprehensive assessment and developing action plan.

Although the outcome of this meeting was not clear, the PSC will at the very least adopt a statement. This is expected to state the need for paying increasing attention to the impacts of climate change on the security situation of various regions of the continent. It may in this regard task DREA and PSD to provide the PSC with detailed assessment of the theme and a mapping of parts of the continent most vulnerable to climate induced conflicts. The PSC is also expected to call for the introduction of a tree-planting scorecard for member states to share best practices and experiences on an annual basis. Another item that the outcome of this session may address is the inclusion of the security dimensions of climate change in the AU peace and security architecture.