



WEATHERING CHANGE

Exploring Connections between Climate Adaptation and Conflict Prevention in Mali

JANUARY 2025

Executive Summary

The climate-conflict nexus has been a growing area of interest among civil society, policymakers, donors, and academics over the past few years. Mercy Corps has been at the helm of these efforts by implementing climate and conflict programming for over ten years already and prioritizing understanding the complex intersections between climate and conflict, instead of treating these as separate fields. However, there is still a need to better understand how certain *types* of program interventions affect the climate-conflict nexus, including climate and conflict outcomes within communities.

To better understand this relationship, Mercy Corps conducted an exploratory, mixed-methods research study focusing on the Ben ni Baara (“Work and Peace” in Bambara) program in Mali.¹ The data sources for the study are a survey conducted in January 2023 with 679 program participants in the Ségou and Mopti

¹ Note that this brief is part of a multi-study, larger research effort on the Ben ni Baara program. Additional research included a qualitative study examining the role of local peace committees (LPCs) on social cohesion. See [Radhakrishnan & Santara, 2024](#).

regions of Mali and 10 focus group discussions and 38 semi-structured interviews conducted in May 2023 in six communes in central Mali. The study focused on the relationship between conflict dynamics and program activities prioritizing adaptations to climate change. Mali's fragile conflict context and the dominant role of farming and agropastoralism in its economy made the Ben ni Baara program an ideal case study for this research.

Implemented in central Mali from 2020 to 2024, and funded by Sida, the Ben ni Baara program aimed to decrease conflict and violence in local communities using a cross-sectoral approach that addressed the underlying drivers of land and resource-based conflict.² The program design enabled this study to examine the connections between individuals' participation in a variety of program activities – including climate-resilient activities and non-climate focused activities³ – and how this participation may influence several different outcomes related to support for violence, conflict, and climate resilience.⁴

Key Findings

The findings from this exploratory study show that combining climate adaptation activities with conflict-sensitive interventions that strengthen social cohesion and climate resilience may be an effective way to decrease support for violence and negative perceptions of others. Specifically, these quantitative findings suggest that:

- Participation in a combination of *both* climate and non-climate-based activities (compared to respondents who participated in only climate activities or only non-climate activities) may be especially effective at decreasing participants' levels of support for using violence to defend one's community and/or one's livelihood(s).
 - Note, the findings also suggest that individuals who *only* participated in climate activities may be *more likely* to support violence than those who *only* participated in non-climate activities.
- Participation in a combination of *both* climate and non-climate-based activities (compared to respondents who participated in only climate activities or only non-climate activities) may also decrease the likelihood that participants view members of other livelihood groups as a threat.

These findings align with the wider literature that supports implementing climate adaptation interventions alongside other conflict management approaches to limit overall levels of conflict as well as the literature that supports implementing climate interventions in vulnerable regions.⁵ Moreover, since this study was conducted in relatively low-conflict areas in central Mali, these results contradict the claim that climate interventions and conflict mitigation efforts may be solely beneficial in areas with high levels of violence.⁶

The qualitative findings support the quantitative findings by providing insight from participants and community members who explained that:

² During its implementation period, the Ben ni Baara program reached a total of 132,448 beneficiaries (25,557 direct and 106,891 indirect).

³ "Climate activities" refer to climate adaptation activities that aim to address the more direct effects of climate change. "Non-climate activities" refer to traditional development and peacebuilding activities that aim to address the indirect effects of climate change. For more on these activities, see Program Context and Theory of Change.

⁴ Specifically, this study included items that measured: support for violence as well as perceptions related to interpersonal relationships, natural resource management, conflict resolution mechanisms, and household resilience.

⁵ van Schaik et al., 2019; Hegazi & Seyuba, 2022; von Soest, 2020; Sayne, 2011.

⁶ Adams et al., 2018

- Participation in Ben ni Baara activities strengthened social cohesion in their communities while also increasing agricultural outputs and household resilience against climate shocks and stressors – all of which participants believed to culminate in an overall decrease in violence and conflict.

Recommendations for Future Programs and Research

From these findings, recommendations for future climate programs that aim to influence violence and conflict include:

- Rigorously assess the key drivers of conflicts in the implementation area, using tools like the Mercy Corps' Assessment for Adaptation to Conflict and Climate Trends (AACCT)⁷
- Develop program activities that aim to target the identified conflict drivers.
- Routinely consider combining climate adaptation activities with conflict-awareness activities and/or Income Generating Activities (IGAs) in order to have a greater impact on conflict reduction and climate resilience.
- Include activities that help beneficiaries develop skills for livelihood activities that are not land-dependent and, therefore, are less vulnerable to climate change as a means of strengthening climate resilience and deterring potential climate-based conflicts.
- Build on the local capacities developed by the program to reach other localities/participants and increase impact.

Areas for future research could build upon this study's exploratory findings by further examining outcomes across individuals' participation in climate, non-climate, or both types of activities, such as:

- Assessing if a combination of climate and non-climate activities is more effective at reducing potential conflict and improving climate resilience than standalone interventions.
- Exploring participants' perceptions of natural resource management as a means of assessing ways to improve conflict resolution outcomes, especially in contexts of resource scarcity.
- Examining the relationship between conflict management mechanisms and climate adaptation efforts.
- Measuring the impact of participation in different types of program activities on household-level resilience to agricultural-related shocks and stresses.

⁷ [Bartolozzi, J. \(2024\).](#)

References

Adams, C., Ide, T., Barnett, J., & Detges, A. (2018). Sampling bias in climate–conflict research. *Nature Climate Change*, 8(3), 200–203. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0068-2>

Bartolozzi, J. (2024). A guide to conducting an Assessment for Adaptation to Conflict and Climate Trends (AACCT). Washington, DC: The Resilience Evaluation, Analysis and Learning (REAL) Associate Award. <https://fsnnetwork.org/resource/adaptation-climate-conflict-assessment-guide>

Hegazi, F., & Seyuba, K. (2022). *The social side of climate change adaptation: Reducing conflict risk*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. <https://doi.org/10.55163/SEYZ9437>

Radhakrishnan, B., & Santara, M. (2024). *Building bonds of trust: The relationship between Conflict Resolution Committees and social cohesion in Mali*. Mercy Corps.

Sayne, A. (2011). *Climate change adaptation and conflict in Nigeria*. United States Institute of Peace.

van Schaik, L., Born, C., Sellwood, E., & de Bruin, S. (2019). *Making peace with climate adaptation*. Global Commission on Adaptation.

von Soest, C. (2020). *A heated debate: Climate change and conflict in Africa*. German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24787>

CONTACT

KATHRYN M. LANCE

Senior Researcher – Peace and Conflict | Research and Learning

klance@mercycorps.org

MARIAM SANTARA

Research Officer | Mali

msantara@mercycorps.org

About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



45 SW Ankeny Street
Portland, Oregon 97204
888.842.0842
mercycorps.org

Suggested Citation

Lance, K., Bezares Calderon, A., Radhakrishnan, B., Sheely, R., Santara, M., Smith, E. 2024. Weathering Change: Exploring Connections Between Climate Adaptation and Conflict Prevention in Mali. Washington, DC: Mercy Corps.

Acknowledgements and Disclaimers

The authors would like to thank Blaise Muhire, Assaleh Ag Ousmane, Seydou Diakite, Simon Mercer, Ifeoluwa Olawole, Charlie Christian, Laura Strawmyer, Miranda Hurst, Anna Renfew, Thom Lee, and Wise Nzikie Ngasa for their feedback and collaboration on this study. We also thank the efforts and contributions of all of the members of the Ben ni Baara program team as well as all of the data collectors and research participants — without whom this report would not be possible. This is version 3.0 of this report, which is publicly available on Mercy Corps' Digital Library as of January 2025. Version 1.0 was produced in March 2024 for Ben ni Baara's end-of-program learning events and version 2.0 was produced for a soft launch in October 2024. Revisions, edits, and refinements may be made in the future, in which case the version number and date will continue to be updated.