

MEDIATING RESILIENCE: INCLUSIVE AND CLIMATE- INFORMED PATHWAYS TO PEACE

Evidence from Uganda and Kenya

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Executive Summary

Climate change is threatening livelihoods, intensifying competition over natural resources, and fueling conflict worldwide, particularly in agro-pastoralist societies in developing countries.¹ In response, governments, policymakers, and development practitioners are working to improve natural resource management (NRM), support conflict mediation, and strengthen climate resilience in affected communities. There is growing recognition that sustainable NRM and effective dispute resolution—especially around land, water, and other vital assets—require inclusive processes that reflect the distinct roles, responsibilities, and influence of men, women, and youth in natural resource use and community decision-making.

Women and girls are central users and stewards of natural resources. They often hold practical knowledge and play informal roles in local dispute resolution. Yet they are frequently excluded from formal NRM decision-making and conflict mediation processes. This exclusion weakens the legitimacy and durability of local agreements and limits communities' ability to adapt to climate shocks. Inclusive approaches that intentionally elevate **women's, girls', and youth** perspectives—while engaging men and addressing local power dynamics—can strengthen these interventions. Such approaches enhance governance, broaden benefits across populations, and ultimately build community resilience to both climate shocks and conflict.

This report examines how inclusive, gender-responsive natural resource management and conflict mediation can strengthen community resilience at the climate-conflict nexus. It draws on two complementary programs in the Karamoja sub-region spanning Northeast Uganda (Kotido and Kaabong) and Northwest Kenya (Turkana). **The Climate Change Leaders Advancing for Peace (CCLAP) program**, funded by the Austrian Development Agency, worked to reduce structural barriers preventing women, girls, and youth from participating in climate-smart NRM and conflict resolution. **Advancing Inclusive Mediation (AIM)** conducted training-of-trainers in inclusive and climate-informed interest-based mediation and negotiation (IBMN) for the CCLAP team.

¹ IPCC, 2022: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Geneva: IPCC.

Using data from both programs, we examine whether and how inclusive NRM and conflict mediation interventions improve natural resource governance, conflict resolution, and resilience to climate shocks. Specifically, we address three research questions:

1. To what extent, and how, did inclusive IBMN and NRM affect gender attitudes and the participation of women, girls, and youth in natural resource governance, conflict resolution, and community decision-making?
2. To what extent, and how, did changes in attitudes and participation affect climate adaptation, resilience to climate shocks, and exposure to conflict and violence?
3. What are the implications for designing and implementing more inclusive, climate-sensitive approaches to conflict mediation and natural resource management in climate-conflict settings?

These questions address critical policy and program concerns: how to include marginalized groups in climate governance, whether peacebuilding can reduce climate-related conflicts, and what approaches most effectively strengthen equitable access to natural resources and community resilience.

Key Findings

Inclusive NRM and conflict mediation improved gender attitudes, but only among women. Male respondents reported more gender-equitable attitudes than female respondents, but their views showed little change before and after the program – possibly reflecting social desirability bias rather than genuine attitude shifts. In contrast, women’s views changed significantly. Women in communities with the CCLAP program expressed considerably more support for gender equality than women in communities without the program. Moreover, we found that the more a woman participated in the program, the more her attitudes shifted, even after accounting for age and education.

Strengthening women’s roles in NRM increased their engagement in community decision-making.

Despite its relatively short duration (two years), the program effectively increased women’s involvement in natural resource management and conflict resolution. Multiple sources of evidence support this finding:

- Self-reported participation: More women reported participating in these initiatives more frequently.
- Community perceptions: There was a significant increase in the perceived participation and influence of women in community decision-making at the end of the program.
- Program dosage effects: Difference-in-difference analysis showed that more intensive CCLAP participation led to greater inclusive participation. These effects were robust and not explained by pre-existing differences in participation or general trends over time.
- Qualitative testimonies: In interviews and focus groups, respondents in program communities described a noticeable increase in women’s engagement and voice in community affairs – and consistently credited these changes to CCLAP.

Inclusive NRM and mediation approaches can strengthen community resilience to crises. The program enhanced community resilience to climate- and conflict-related shocks through two pathways. The first was *direct capacity building*: teaching people new skills, providing tools, and promoting climate adaptation measures (e.g., drought-resistant crops, reduced deforestation, kitchen gardens, improved migration strategy). The second pathway was *indirect empowerment*: increasing women’s participation and

influence in natural resource management, leveraging their knowledge, experiences, and roles as information hubs within communities. While all communities in the region experienced declining resilience during the program period, CCLAP participants fared significantly better – the program acted as a protective buffer against these shocks. This protective effect increased with program intensity: individuals with higher participation showed stronger resilience outcomes. Our analysis indicates that inclusive NRM and mediation approaches partly explain these resilience gains. By engaging women more fully in resource management and decision-making, the program facilitated knowledge transfer and adoption of climate-adaptive practices that spread throughout communities.

Inclusive mediation strengthened conflict resolution capacities, but its effect on violent incidents was less clear. The program achieved significant improvements in conflict management capacity and engagement, including:

- Increased knowledge of mediation and dispute resolution techniques
- Enhanced awareness of local conflict resolution structures
- Greater engagement in conflict resolution processes, especially among women
- Higher perceived decline in conflict among residents of CCLAP communities

However, external violence data² showed limited change during the evaluation period. While community members reported improved security and greater involvement in conflict resolution, we could not conclusively detect short-term reductions in violent incidents or fatalities. This may reflect both the limits of detecting short-term changes in violent events and the reality that shifts in local dispute resolution and governance often precede measurable reductions in violence. In contexts like Karamoja and Turkana, where violence is shaped by broader security dynamics and cross-border shocks, program effects may take longer to materialize, even when underlying conflict management systems are strengthened. Overall, the evidence suggests the program built critical foundations for longer-term violence prevention by strengthening community-level conflict resolution capacities and mechanisms, and **that its consistent and measurable improvements in participation, attitudes, and resilience within a compressed timeline suggest substantial potential for deeper impact with sustained engagement.**

Recommendations

Engage men intentionally and systematically in gender-inclusive NRM and mediation efforts.

Evidence from this study suggests that shifts in gender attitudes occur unevenly: women showed significant changes while men’s attitudes remained largely static. Moreover, men sometimes actively resisted women’s participation in certain domains, effectively acting as gatekeepers to NRM and conflict management spaces. Therefore, policymakers should require that gender-focused programs include specific, evidence-based strategies for engaging men and boys as a core component – not an afterthought. This may entail creating male-only dialogue groups facilitated by respected local leaders to discuss the concrete benefits of women’s participation (e.g., better resource management), and targeted messaging that addresses specific resistance points, such as the concern about women’s capacity to handle conflict or threats to traditional authority structures. These approaches create safer environments for men to examine and challenge restrictive

² We measured violence using data from the Armed Conflict Location and Events Dataset (ACLED), which captures political violence and organized conflict events (battles, violence against civilians, riots) but does not include interpersonal or criminal violence such as domestic abuse or assault.

gender norms, reducing the risk of backlash while building genuine buy-in for inclusive NRM and mediation practices.

Adopt an integrated, long-term model to build community resilience. CCLAP’s effectiveness stemmed from a dual approach: directly building climate adaptation capacity (skills, knowledge, tools), while simultaneously strengthening women’s participation and influence in natural resource governance. This integration created a reinforcing cycle where improved governance enhanced technical outcomes, and vice versa. Donors and practitioners should prioritize integrated program designs that link technical and environmental objectives with governance and gender equality goals. Siloed approaches—climate programs that ignore gender dynamics, or gender programs that neglect livelihood realities—are less likely to be effective. Practitioners should aim to replicate the CCLAP program’s model and ensure that climate interventions aim to strengthen the participation and influence of women in decision-making processes. Interventions should therefore be designed to build technical capacity, expand meaningful participation in decision-making, and strengthen community-level governance structures responsible for NRM and conflict management. At the same time, sustained engagement and longer implementation periods are crucial. Changing entrenched gender norms, shifting power dynamics, and achieving measurable reductions in violence takes time. Short-term interventions like CCLAP may build initial capacity and awareness but cannot consolidate governance changes or allow enough time for conflict outcomes to materialize.

Focus on meaningful *influence*, not just participation, to make community governance truly inclusive. While increasing women’s participation in NRM and conflict mediation is essential, our findings reveal a critical gap: presence does not equal power. Women may attend meetings without genuinely shaping decisions or influencing outcomes. Programs must therefore move beyond counting participants to deliberately building pathways for women, youth, and marginalized groups to exercise authority and decision-making power. This requires investing in facilitation approaches that elevate women’s voices in mixed-gender settings; creating structured roles (e.g., rotating leadership positions, co-chair models); strengthening women’s economic and technical authority; and monitoring not only who is present, but whose contributions meaningfully affect outcomes. By shifting from representation to influence, programs can amplify the mechanisms our research identified as central to improved resilience and conflict reduction.

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