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Assessing the climate security sensitivity of the Gulf of Guinea Northern Regions Social Cohesion Project (SOCO) in Ghana

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Key messages

- **A climate security-sensitive approach in climate action is essential to address the root causes of conflict and insecurity.**
- **By connecting drivers of conflict and insecurity with climate-peace mechanisms, the CSST supports practitioners, decision makers, and multilateral institutes in avoiding maladaptation and its associated unintended consequences, avoiding conflict relapses, and contributing to peacebuilding.**
- **The CSST results point out that the SOCO project offers great peace co-benefits and potential for peacebuilding through the implementation of activities contributing to cooperation, social cohesion, and capacity and resilience building**
- **To increase the climate security sensitivity of the SOCO project, the programmatic approach should further incorporate activities to strengthen good environmental governance, to foster the adoption of sustainable use of resources and to promote nature conservation.**

It is widely established that under certain circumstances the climate crisis can exacerbate socioeconomic and political drivers of insecurity and conflict, such as increased competition over resources, livelihood loss, and volatility of local food prices and provision. Where climate-adaptation programs and

development initiatives neglect these associations, they risk intensifying such drivers which may lead to maladaptation and unintended consequences. These include fostering power asymmetries, grievances, groups marginalization and conflicts over natural resources, especially in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. These are commonly recognized drivers of conflict which must be considered while designing programs to avoid creating or exacerbating conflicts. At the same time, climate adaptation can exert positive impacts on peace and security, since shared environmental challenges can become opportunities for cooperation, integration, and peace through transforming natural resource management strategies. Acknowledging the interlinkages between climate action, natural resource use, and peace and security is fundamental for integrating climate- and conflict-sensitive programming interventions and preventing maladaptation.

To address this query and ensure that climate responses are sensitive to the implementation context, CGIAR Climate Security has developed a safeguard programming assessment tool for conflict-sensitive and peace-responsive climate action in agricultural settings. [The Climate Security Sensitivity Tool \(CSST\)](#) is used to evaluate, ex-ante, the extent to which a proposed climate adaptation intervention addresses local drivers of conflict and insecurity and recommends strategies to strengthen their suitability.

It seeks to prevent unintended consequences, avoid conflict relapses, and contribute to peacebuilding.

This Info Note reports on the CSST case study application for the [Gulf of Guinea Northern Regions Social Cohesion Project \(SOCO\)](#). It highlights the recommendations formulated by the CSST for the implementation of the SOCO Project in Ghana and the practitioners' feedback on these results.

The Climate Security Sensitivity Tool

A climate security-sensitive approach in climate action is essential to address the root causes of conflict and insecurity.

The CSST is employed on the premise that any fragile context is characterized by a unique set of risk factors for crises that can lead to insecurity and conflict. These drivers of conflict and insecurity comprise: natural hazards, human hazards, socioeconomic vulnerabilities, vulnerable groups, low institutional capacity to cope with shocks, and infrastructural coping capacity (Marin-Ferrer et al., 2017).

The tool draws on the growing body of research on environmental peacebuilding, which is the practice of using environmental challenges and resource-based disputes as opportunities to build cooperation, social integration, and peace through the transformation of natural resource management strategies (Krampe, Hegazi & VanDeveer, 2021). It employs environmental peacebuilding theories to express how climate adaptation can contribute to peacebuilding and conflict prevention through a climate-peace framework (Sarzana et al., 2023). This framework lays the theoretical groundwork for connecting climate adaptation elements to peace co-benefits. The framework introduces six climate-peace mechanisms: economic development, building institutions, building trust and cooperation, resource sustainability, enhancing knowledge and building capacity and resilience. These climate-peace mechanisms are the ways through which climate adaptation can unify conflicting communities against shared insecurities. They translate how different characteristics of climate action interventions can mitigate conflict drivers, such as by strengthening livelihoods, improving resource governance, and addressing inequality and environmental degradation.

By connecting the drivers of conflict and insecurity with the different climate-peace mechanisms, the CSST brings together a scoring tool to support practitioners, decision makers, and multilateral institutes developing climate adaptation initiatives in avoiding maladaptation and its associated unintended

consequences, avoiding conflict relapses, and contributing to peacebuilding. It provides stakeholders interested in diagnostic research for peace responsive climate action in agricultural settings with context specific recommendations to redefine and improve a proposed program design.

It is a two-step process. In the first step the context where the project is planned to be implemented is characterized: conflict drivers are defined and mapped to climate-peace mechanisms to identify which mechanisms should be addressed given the specific local risks. In the second step the user scores for each climate-peace mechanism and sub-mechanism the extent to which their planned intervention contributes to each of these mechanisms. The results are mapped through spider charts, illustrating the most crucial mechanisms that should be addressed, versus the ones that the project addresses. This gives insight into gaps and needs for improvements for specific environmental peacebuilding mechanisms.

The Gulf of Guinea Northern Regions Social Cohesion Project

The SOCO project is a 5-year program that has been developed to improve regional collaboration and the socioeconomic and climate resilience of border-zone communities in the target northern regions of the Gulf of Guinea countries exposed to conflict and climate risks. Its areas of investment include climate adaptation, natural resource management, WASH, connectivity, social infrastructures, and energy. These areas strive to strengthen regional stability and prosperity, which have been operationalized through the following project components:

- Investing in Community Resiliency and Inclusion
- Building Foundation and Capacity for Inclusive and Resilient Communities
- Regional Coordination Platform and Dialogue
- Project Management
- Contingent Emergency Response.

In Ghana, the project covers 48 districts across six regions in northern Ghana, amounting to approximately 80% of all districts in the North. The implementing agency is the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development (MLGRD) and it collaborates with the National Development Planning Commission, the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection.

This project started in 2022 but actual construction of related activities is scheduled for November 2023. Up until now, the focus has been placed on situational

analyses of the risks prevailing in the identified districts, including climate profiling through climate change toolkit guides and vulnerability assessments, stakeholder engagements, engagement of community facilitators, training activities, sub-projects site selections, procurement related activities among others.

Operating the CSST for the SOCO project in Northern Ghana

Before the implementation of the project, SOCO social and environmental safeguard specialists have shown interest in operating the CSST to assess the conflict sensitivity and peace-responsiveness of their intervention.

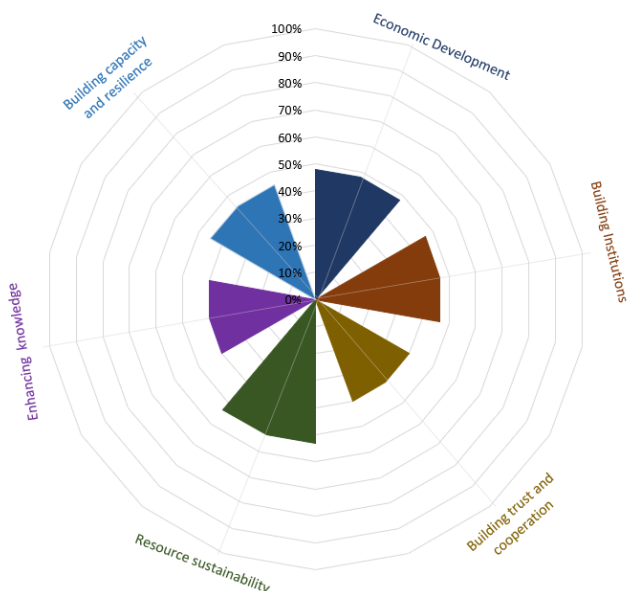
1. CSST results

The results of the CSST are expressed visually through displaying ideal climate-peace mechanisms scores for the selected context (left chart in figure 1) next to the climate-peace mechanisms scores of the proposed intervention on spider charts (right chart in figure 1). Based on the local drivers of conflict and insecurity in Ghana, it appears that all ideal climate-peace mechanisms score mid-high, with higher priority given to Resource Sustainability, followed by Economic Development and Building Institutions.

Through collaboratively scoring the SOCO project with practitioners and safeguards specialists involved with the program in Ghana across the different dimensions of the CSST, the programmatic climate security advantages and shortcomings of the program were assessed. By comparing the two charts in figure 1, the SOCO project positively outscored the most ideal mechanisms scores, including Economic Development, Building Trust and Cooperation, Building Capacity and Resilience, as well as Enhancing Knowledge.

- For the Economic Development mechanism, the SOCO project scored 100%, compared to ideal conditions of 48%. By identifying supply chains and opportunity for added value, practices, and technologies for climate information deployment to communities, and by restoring infrastructures, the project creates livelihoods and sustains existing ones. By establishing small earth dams and other water infrastructures such as boreholes, the project fosters the provision of public goods and services required to facilitate the economic activities.
- Regarding the Building Trust and Cooperation Mechanism, the project scored 100%, compared to ideal conditions of 40%. By using the Community Driven Development (CDD) approach with its participatory processes which are set to include marginalized vulnerable groups as well as engaging all relevant stakeholders, the project ensures social accountability. By setting up communal games and sports in the project and facilities to engage the youth, the project fosters shared identities. By making it mandatory to include women, the youth and other marginalized groups to participate in decision making processes, by undertaking a gender-based action plan, and by forming Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), the project enhances social cohesion and empowers vulnerable groups.
- For the Building Capacity and Resilience mechanism, the SOCO project scored 75%, with ideal conditions of 45%. Through Local Economic Development (LED) income diversification sources and by encouraging the use of climate shocks insurances the project leads to more climate coping capacities. Through LED formalization of producers and market groups and connecting

(a) Ideal Climate-Peace Mechanisms scores for the selected region



(b) Climate-Peace Mechanisms scores for the proposed climate action intervention: SOCO project

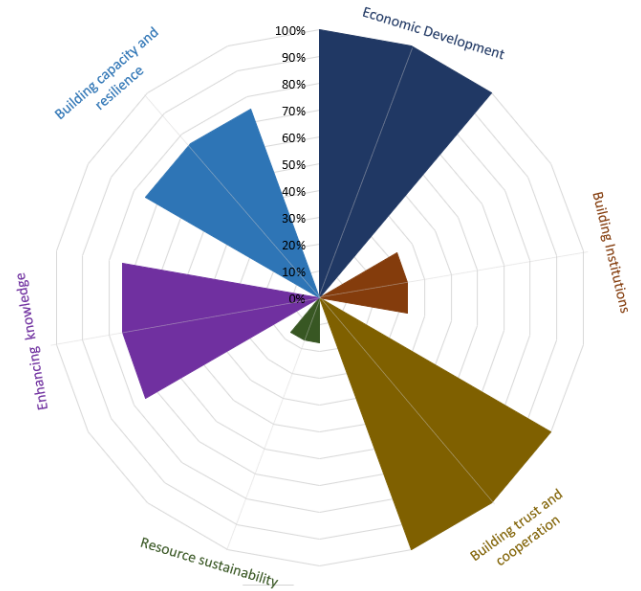


Figure 1 - CSST results for the SOCO project in Ghana. Ideal climate-peace mechanisms scores in Ghana (left) and climate-peace mechanism scores for the SOCO project (right)

farmer-based groups across districts, the project increases the adaptation capacity of social systems, while LED's provision of market infrastructures and processing facilities for village groups it increases the adaptation capacity of production systems.

- Concerning the Enhancing Knowledge mechanism, the project scored 75%, with ideal conditions of 40%. By providing training on climate adaptation, as well as information and tools to respond to climate risks through apps, the project contributes to raising public awareness and increasing learning opportunities. In addition, by providing nature-based solutions for climate adaptation and spurring project beneficiaries to define sub-projects based on their local knowledge, the project establishes the recognition of diverse ontologies in climate adaptation through grassroots approaches.

However, the comparison between the two charts also highlights two gaps: Building Institutions and Resource Sustainability, which scored lower than the ideal mechanisms scores.

- Regarding the Building Institutions mechanism, the SOCO project scored 33%, compared to the ideal climate-peace mechanism score for Ghana of 46%. By installing a Community Implementation Committee to manage groups and ensure an equitable delivery of benefits and access to the infrastructures provided, such as small earth dams, the project fosters equitable distribution of resources and benefits. Although natural resource committees are present, SOCO partners believe that the project only indirectly contributes to enhancing institutional capacities for good environmental governance. Also, the project does not focus on facilitating legal pluralism and resource rights.
- Concerning the Resource Sustainability mechanism, the project scored 17% compared to the ideal score of 53%. Regarding this component, the project allows communities to opt for afforestation which contribute to community-based conservation of ecosystems and common-pool resources. However, the project lacks activities fostering the adoption of sustainable use of resources and the restoration of degraded ecosystems.

2. CSST recommendations

Based on the above results of the CSST, recommendations can be drawn by targeting the mechanisms that do not meet ideal ones.

Recommendations are formulated by advising the integration of the mechanisms' low-scoring components within the proposed adaptation intervention. For the case of the SOCO project, the recommendations target the two low-scoring mechanisms Building Institutions and Resource Sustainability.

By incorporating programmatic aspects to address the illicit use of resources, such as by fortifying sub-national and local institutions involved with nature conservation and linking them to the project, the program could better enhance institutional capacities for good environmental governance. Additionally, by mapping properties, addressing legal ambiguities on natural resource tenure and rights, and certifying resource rights, the SOCO project could better facilitate legal pluralism and resource rights, and therefore prevent conflicts over ambiguous resources.

By further addressing resource degradation and protecting common-pool resources, the SOCO project would have a greater prospect to avoid future conflicts over resources and address the needs of all resource users. Additionally, by increasing natural capital through regenerative agricultural practices, promoting more diversity in production systems and therefore foster the adoption of sustainable practices, the project could prevent resource-scarcity related to fast-onset climate shocks.

Nevertheless, the CSST results point out that the SOCO project offers great peace co-benefits and potential for peacebuilding through the implementation of activities contributing to cooperation, social cohesion, and capacity and resilience building. For instance, through the extensive integration of economic development components, such as through strengthening value chains, the project can increase livelihoods' economic capacities and create opportunities for groups to perceive mutual interests and identities, therefore contributing to stability and power symmetry amongst groups. Through largely focusing on the integration of vulnerable and underrepresented groups, the project provides vast opportunities for substantial integration and equity. Lastly, the project components striving to enhance knowledge and build resilience highly contribute to enhanced human capacities which is essential for peacebuilding. Capabilities are indeed a key element for human security since they represent options and instruments to face, mitigate and adapt to threats posed to human, environmental and social rights (Johnson et al., 2021; Barnett & Adger, 2007; Nussbaum, 2011; Peters et al., 2020).

Discussions on the CSST results

After collaboratively operationalizing the CSST, space was given for feedback and for sharing thoughts on

the results of this programmatic tool. SOCO partners pointed out that the low score defined for the Building Institutions mechanism was unexpected since one of the project's priorities is to strengthen institutional capacities at different levels. However, since the tool is framed through a climate-security lens, they acknowledged that environmental governance is not amongst the priorities at present. In addition, they reacted to the low-scoring Resource Sustainability mechanism by reminding that their work is more geared towards building social cohesion and resilience to climate change rather than sustaining ecological resilience, while recognizing that sustainable resource use and ecosystems protection are fundamental components for preventing conflicts and therefore ensuring social cohesion.

Overall, SOCO partners agreed with the CSST results and recommendations and were enthusiastic about incorporating them in the design of the project. These insights provided new perspectives and a positive way forward for the project.

Further reading

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