# displacement across the Sahel

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## About this data story

In a 2009 TED Talk with over 35 million views, Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie speaks about the danger of a single story and the simplifications that they promote. Her observations are highly pertinent in the case of the Sahel. Persistent single stories in the media and the international policy sphere portray the Sahel region as an area of intractable conflict, drought, famine and displacement, but lack meaningful explanation.

**This data story examines how overly simplistic causal models which assume uncomplicated connections between climate change, conflict and displacement mask a much more complex story [1].**

We start with a high-level overview to better understand how climate change, conflict and displacement intersect with a range of other factors to affect people across the **Western, Central and Eastern Sahel** (inclusive of the Horn of Africa) – an area of some 363,000 km2 [2].

We explore changing definitions of displacement and the diverse causes of regional conflict, first drawing on the experiences of Mali and Burkina Faso, before examining the Saameynta Initiative in Somalia which seeks to put in place durable solutions for Internally

Displaced People (IDPs) who have been forced to settle in urban areas.

The data story concludes by reflecting on the important role that land governance can play as part of a broader intersectional approach to find and implement durable solutions in volatile settings across the Sahel - a region which remains highly vulnerable to conflict and catastrophic climate change.

# 1. Changing definitions of displacement

## UN REFUGEE CONVENTION

Article 1 of the 1951 Convention defines a refugee as someone who "owing to we fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership o particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themself] of the protection country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of [thei habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

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🔍 LEGALLY BINDING PROTOCOL

OUA CONVENTION

UN Refugee P...

The OAU Conv...

A variety of conventions and protocols have been developed to address displacement, both internationally and on the African continent [3]. These definitions impact both on how data is collected and shape how we understand an issue.

Definitions of displacement have remained strongly linked to conflict. They distinguish between **Internally Displaced People (IDPs)**, who are forced to move, but remain in their home countries, and **Refugees,** who cross borders to escape persecution. Refugees have rights recognised in international law while the legal position of IDPs remains weak.

In 2020 UNHCR declared the Sahel region to be the world's fastest growing protection and displacement crisis [4]. It has been forecast that drought driven migration "could triple this century if international efforts fail to address the growing climate crisis"[5].

This has strong land governance implications as displacement creates conflicting and overlapping rights in land. The Sahelian landscapes and the diverse peoples who inhabit them are unsettled by a complex and dynamic mix of political and climatological factors. These factors are amplified by poverty, inequality, economic collapse and governance failures which become fused as mutually reinforcing drivers of conflict and displacement.



In 2021 IOM and UNEP introduced the concept of **climate induced migration** and sought to expand the definition of displaced persons as those "forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, either across an international border or within a State"[7].

The IOM/UNEP increasingly regards climate-induced displacement "as irreversible, as the consequences of years of regular droughts and floods have progressively made a community uninhabitable" [8]. However, those who cross borders primarily displaced by slow onset climate change or climate change induced disaster cannot claim refugee status,

as the rights of climate migrants are not recognised in international law.

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Picture: Women fetching water, Sahel Region. Source: Flickr United Nations Chad

## 2. Climate change and disaster impacts in the Sahel
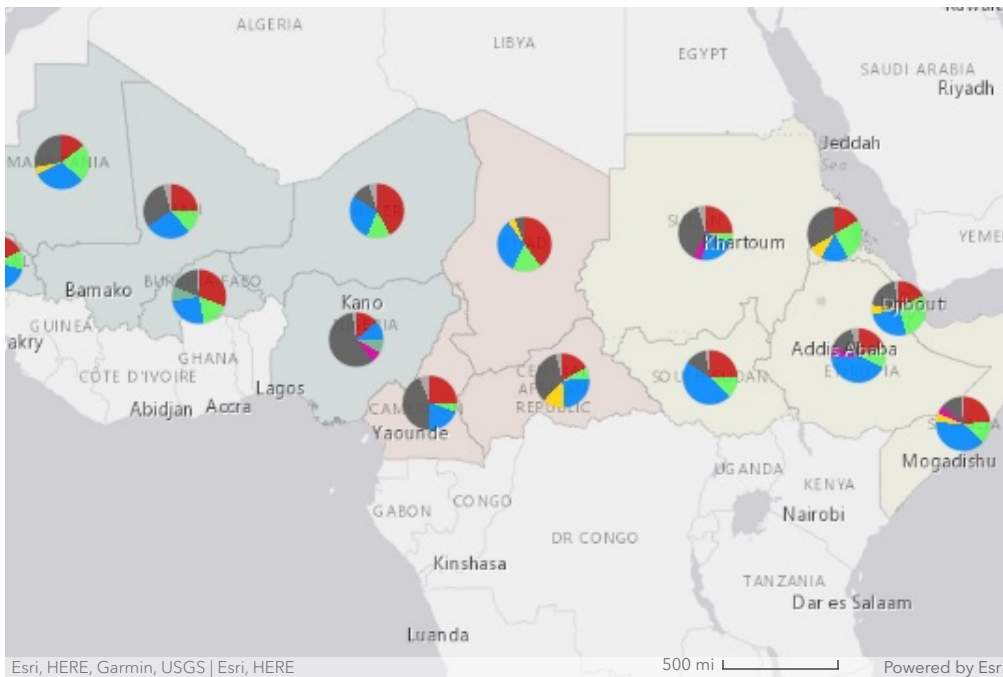


There are a range of push factors which contribute to displacement from both rapid onset events – storms, floods and the like and slower, more gradual changes. These often have a much greater impact on the movement of people, but receive less attention [9].

A recent comprehensive analysis drawing from the Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT) reviewed the incidence of biological, climatological, hydrological and meteorological disaster events in 16 Sahelian countries between 1960-2020. This research identified a total of 1000 disaster events stretching across the sixty-year study period. The analysis of EM-DAT data revealed that the Western Africa Sahel (WAS) region recorded the highest number of disasters, with 476 events, followed by the Eastern Africa Sahel (EAS) region with 369 events. During

this period some 300 million people in the Sahel were affected by a mix of hazards, with 59.17% in EAS, 36.48% in WAS, and 4.35% in CAS [10].

While the Sahel is most commonly associated with climatological hazards such as droughts, floods were found to be the most frequent hazard in the region [11]. This was mainly due to the increasing incidence of extreme weather events associated with climate change. In this regard it is important to note that the increased frequency of a recorded hazard is not necessarily an indicator of its overall severity. So, while droughts ranked third in frequency after floods and epidemics, available data show clearly how **droughts have the most significant impacts** in terms of loss of human life and economic damage[12].

It is important to record that being affected by a hazard does not necessarily mean that people are displaced by them. Indeed, farmers and pastoralists display extraordinary adaptive capacity and "dryland adaptation is deep seated among Sahelian people"[13].
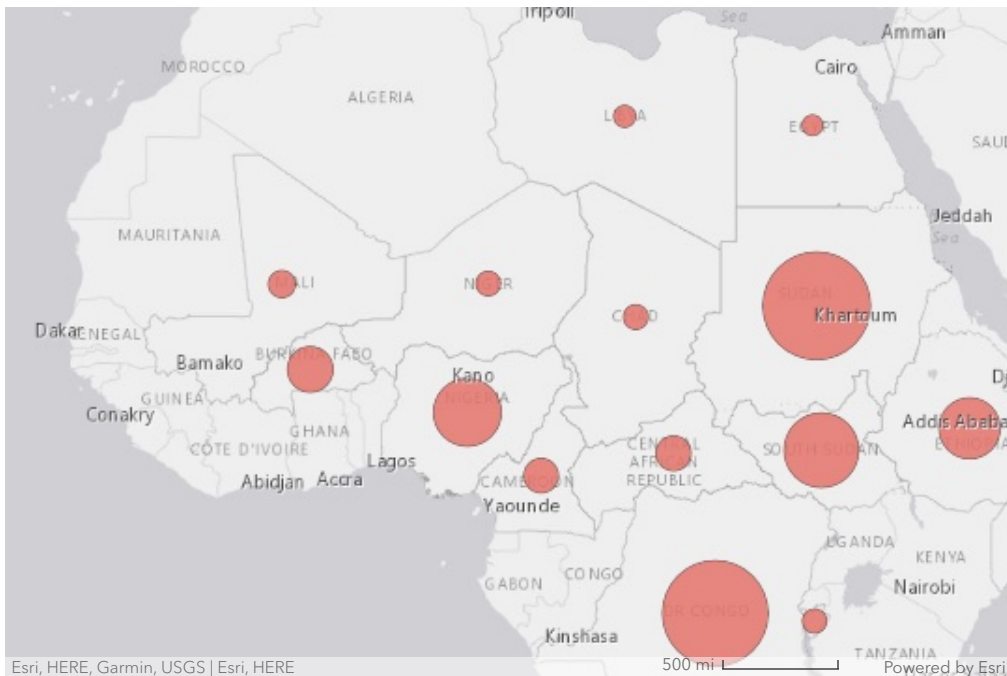


## A. Climate change-conflict intersections

The impacts of the wide array of climate linked hazards discussed above are exacerbated by widespread conflicts in the region. These include military interventions by rival elites, extremist attacks, clashes between neighbouring social groups,

pastoralist/farmer disputes, religious and racial intolerance. Such conflicts also reflect widespread state failures to provide the prerequisites for peace, security and livelihood opportunities[14].

The individual lifelines from Somalia below reveal how mounting climate vulnerabilities and localised conflicts overlap each other. Factors influencing displacement and conflict are dynamic and change over time. Understanding how these factors intersect and interact requires a transdisciplinary approach.
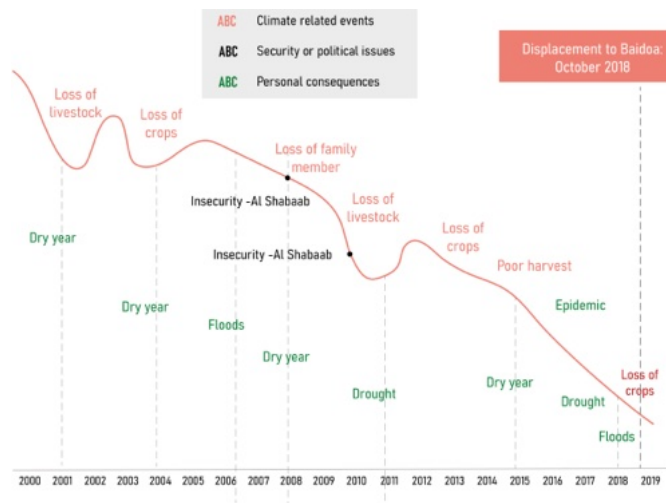


Climate and security events in Somalia

As of the 30th of June 2023, some 40.4 million people were estimated to have been displaced from African countries in conflict [15]. If we subtract those displaced by conflict in Libya, Egypt, the DRC and Mozambique, the remaining 30.355 million people, or **75.8% of those displaced are located in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa**.
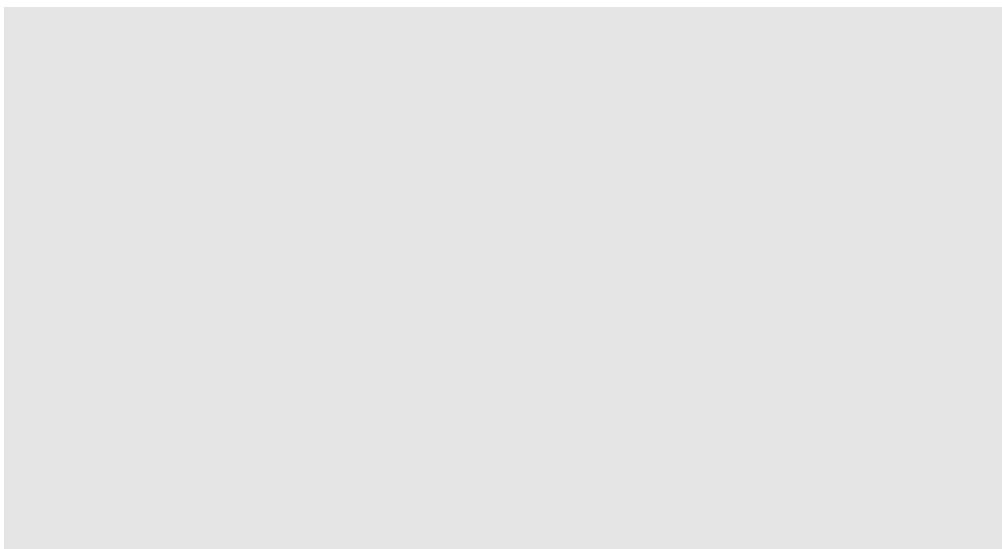
According to current data from the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, the Sahel continues to be the region experiencing the most violent events (2,912) and fatalities (9,818) [16]. 80% of these fatalities and violent events are happening in the Sahel and Somalia, which recently saw spikes in annual deaths linked to Islamist militants of 39 and 157%, respectively.

Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad and Sudan have all experienced military intervention to seize political power. Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia have no two-term limit for political leadership and have all been involved in protracted conflicts. This fragility limits the possibilities for transboundary co-operation essential to anticipate and mitigate the effects of climate change and find lasting solutions to conflict.



## B. Comparing causes of conflict

Generally, research points to the fragile socio-economic and political context as having much greater potential to trigger armed conflict than changing climatic conditions. This context reflects particular colonial and post-colonial histories, including the impacts of geopolitical contestations from both the Cold war and the contemporary era.

Four drivers are ranked as particularly influential in driving up conflict risk:

- low socioeconomic development,
- low state capability,
- intergroup inequality,
- recent history of violent conflict [17].

Evidence suggests that the social impacts of climate-related hazards are significantly shaped by the political and socio-economic system in which they occur. The deep rooted chronic political instability in the region makes it harder to deal with the accelerating impacts of climate change.

Overall, conflict risks in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa are amplified by a combination of an arid climate, scarce grazing and water resources, weak states, boundary disputes combined with a long history of underdevelopment [18].

## 3. Burkina Faso and Mali: How political fragility intersects with climate disaster
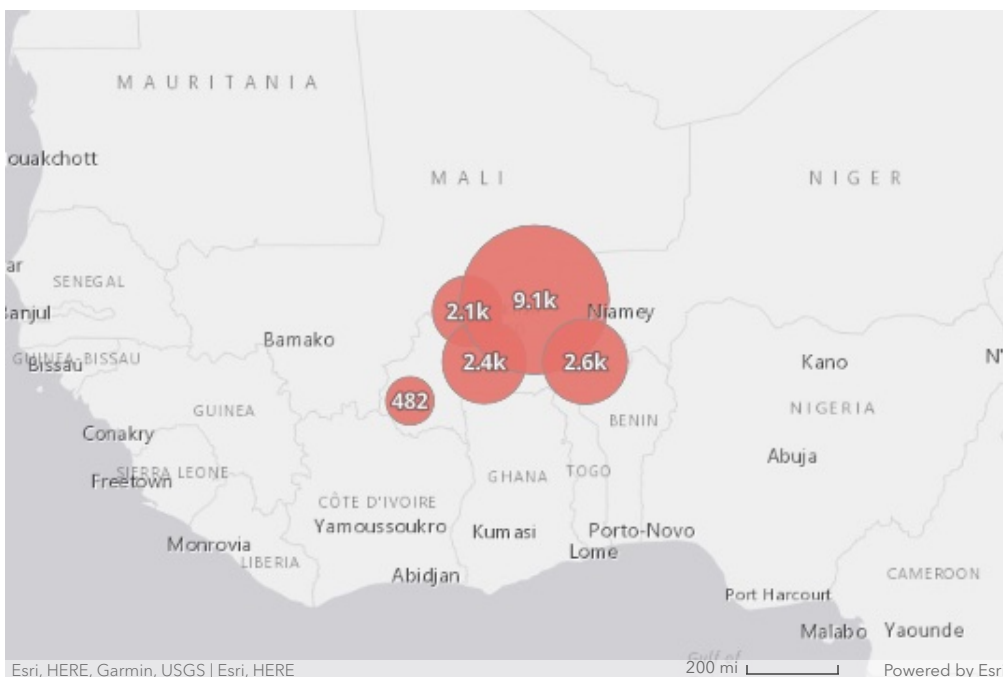


What started as a rebellion in Mali in 2012 by marginalised Tuaregs had a knock-on effect throughout the Sahel where numerous militias now

operate. This fed on deep-seated tensions among communities, enabling various armed groups linked to al-Qaeda and ISIL (ISIS) to aggravate this political instability, capture land and control economic activities [19].
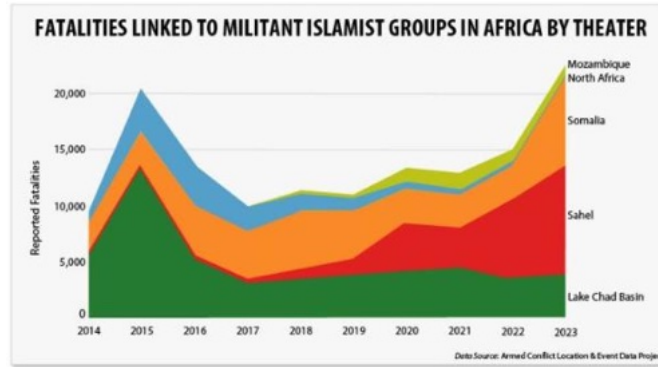


Fatalities linked to militant Islamist Groups in Africa by theater. Source: Africa Center for Strategic Studies.

Reportedly, Burkina Faso has since replaced Mali as the epicentre of violence in the Sahel. Conflict has been accelerated by armed groups which seek control over the country's goldmines and trade routes linking land-locked West African countries to the coast [20].
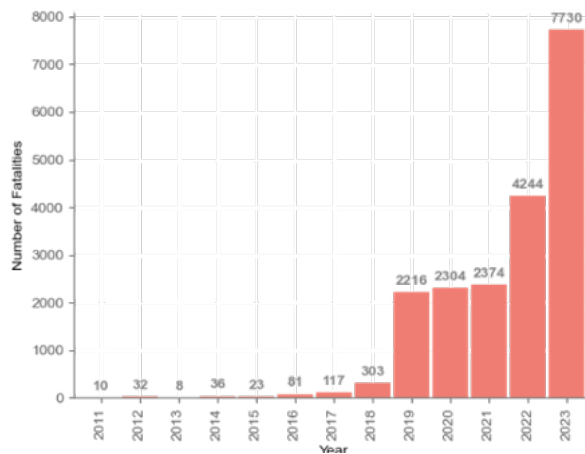


Number of fatalities by year in Burkina faso 2011-2023. Data from https://acleddata.com/

The map on the right shows conflict events in Burkina Faso and its associated number of fatalities. Between 2020 and October 2023, 7665 conflict events were registered. In the map, the

events are clustered, labeling the number of registered

fatalities. Data was retrieved from https://acleddata.com/.

### *Timelines*
**visualise key developments between 1960,**

**when both countries obtained**

**independence from France, and the present**

**day.**



Timbuktu-Moorish camps north of the city (French West Africa).
Source: WikiCommons

### *Audioguided journey*

*through the timeline of Mali*

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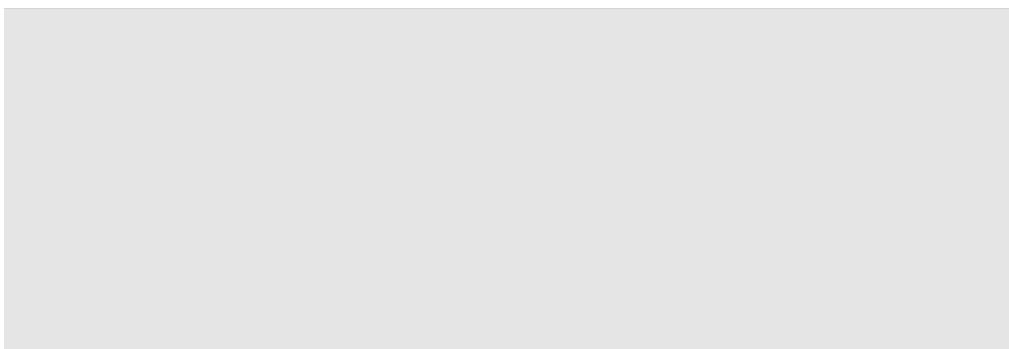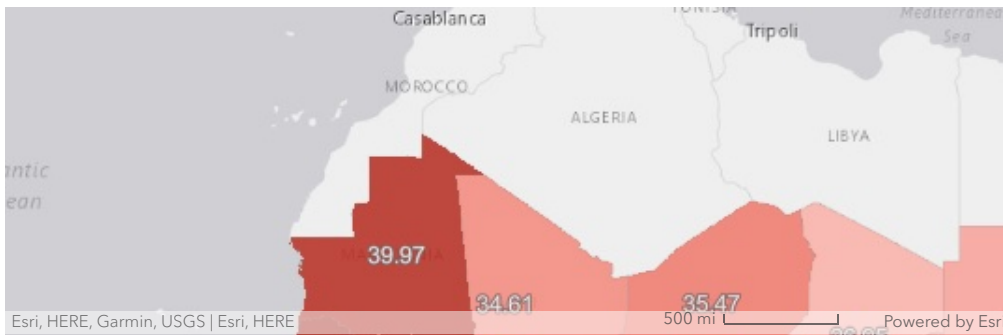


A gathering of young calves in Kisson, Burkina Faso, 1976, part of the Tropical Museum Collection (TMnr 20010720)

*Audioguided journey*

**through the timeline of Burkina Faso**

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The timelines reveal how deep political fragility and the impacts of climate change overlap.

Political fragility is evidenced by the frequency of coups, leaders who cling to power beyond their term limits, civil unrest, conflicts (both internal and cross border), insurgency and displacement.

Climate linked vulnerabilities insert themselves through rising temperatures, the increased frequency and force of extreme weather events resulting in flooding, patterns of debilitating and more frequent droughts, resultant food insecurity which can spiral into famine.

According to the Brookings Institute, Africa is the only continent in the 21st century that has experienced, and continues to experience, mass mortality due to food crises.

**"**

*"Evidence suggests most of the famines recently witnessed in Africa have been largely due to institutional failures resulting from the lack of broad-based accountable governance and much less to market or production failures."*

[21]

The precarity of state institutions in both Mali and Burkina Faso is also reflected in their extremely low levels of disaster preparedness. The ND-GAIN (Global Adaptation Index)[22] measures a country's vulnerability to climate change and its readiness to

adapt to the challenges this presents. Burkina Faso is ranked 161 out of 185 countries profiled on the ND-GAIN Index with a score of 37.6, while Mali is ranked even lower at 176, with a score of 34.6.

The IPCC points out that climate vulnerabilities necessarily extend beyond national borders. Overall, sustainable natural resource management  and disaster response increasingly depends on transboundary governance, regional integration and cooperation [23, 24]. In the case of Mali and Burkina Faso periodic conflict between the two states has rendered transboundary cooperation impossible.

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The map on the right presents the ND GAIN Index. ND-GAIN's framework breaks the measure of vulnerability into exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity, and the measure of readiness into economic, governance, and social components. The scores range from 0 to 100, with 100 being the best score: less vulnerable and more prepared countries to make effective use of investments for adaptation actions. Burkina Faso is ranked 161 out of 185 countries profiled on the ND-GAIN Index with a score of 37.6, while Mali is ranked even lower at 176, with a score of 34.6.

## 4. The dangers of oversimplifying 'climate conflict' risk

Climate change disrupts how people access key livelihood resources as a result of increasingly unpredictable extreme weather events. This can give rise to what the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) terms as "compound risks", resulting from interactions between different hazards. These may be combined within a single extreme event or rippled through multiple sequential events [25].

*Picture: Landscape of the Sahel. Source: Flickr CIFOR*
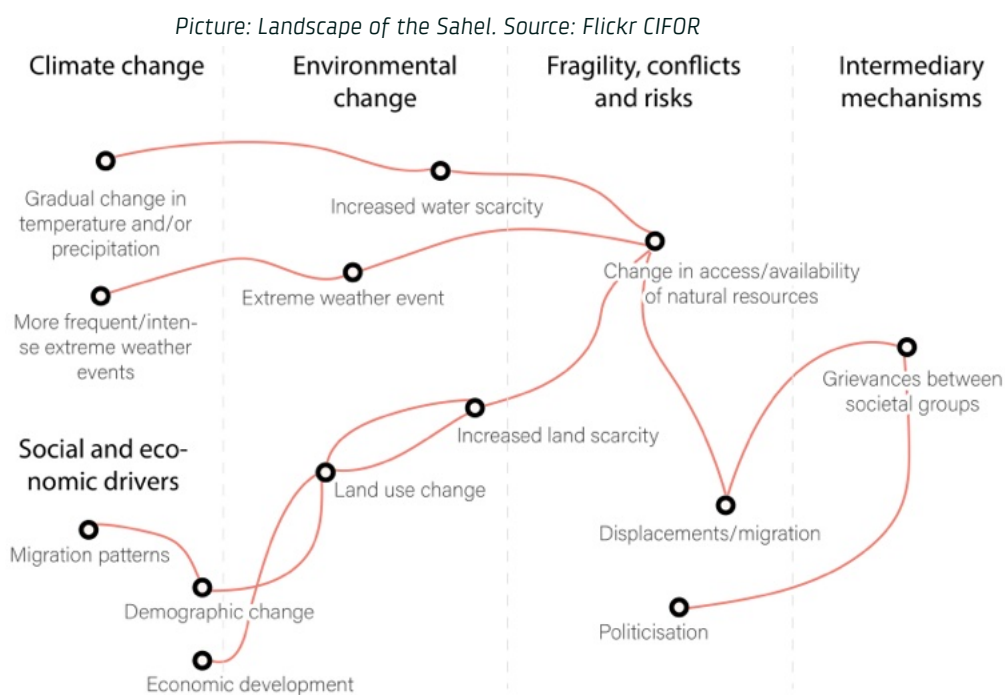


At first glance the connection between climate change and escalating conflict risk seems obvious. However, we need to be cautious about drawing hasty conclusions in this regard. In 2009 researchers sought to establish a direct correlation between regional and temporal variations in drought incidence and severity with outbreaks of conflict [26]. They argued that historical data pointed to a strong relationship between warming and civil war on the African continent, with warmer years leading to increased likelihood of conflict.

From this data it was inferred that a rise in temperature of 1 degree Celsius increased the incidence of internal armed conflict in African countries south of the Sahara (SSA) by 4.5% in the

same year and 0.9% in the next year. When researchers combined these estimates with climate model projections of future temperature trends, they predicted a 54% increase in armed conflict incidence by 2030 [27].

Subsequently, however, there has been significant criticism of such projections on the grounds that one dimensional linear regression model fails to account for other political, economic, social and historical variables which either drive up, or alternatively may diminish conflict risk.

*With many political, social, economic and environmental factors playing either a preventing or a stimulating role, applying quantitative analysis to conflict and predicting the chance of future conflicts is problematic [28].*

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*Pircture: Interconnected factors driving up conflict risk. Source: Modified from climate diplomac*



## Resource scarcity or poor land governance?

It is also commonly assumed that resource scarcity, exacerbated by climate change, is a primary driver of conflict. However, empirical evidence does not always reveal direct causal links between scarcity and conflict. For example, media reports frequently described the civil war waged in Darfur, Sudan, between 2003 and 2005 as a classic 'climate conflict' [29]. However, the civil war took place against a backdrop of "fundamental imbalances in Sudan's political economy, the profoundly destabilising effect of Arab-African racial tensions and the erosion of customary land management institutions"[30].

It was this complex mix of social, economic and ecological factors, exacerbated by an earlier deterioration in the environmental conditions, following drought and famine in the 1980's, which contributed to the later conflict. The severe drought and famine a decade earlier had led to distress migration. This had far-reaching social consequences as migration had reconfigured local power structures.

Many of those who remained behind or migrated in from other areas, had not played a role in the negotiation of historical resource sharing agreements between herders and farmers. It is significant that both immediately prior to and during the conflict years, the area had received above average rainfall. In this analysis it was weakened land management institutions and the abandonment of longstanding resource sharing agreements[31], rather than drought itself, that contributed significantly to the spread of conflict.

These examples reveal the dangers of reducing the relationship between climate change and conflict to assumed neat patterns of cause and effect. Conflict risk analysis has to take into account multiple factors, rather than focusing exclusively on the impacts of climate change.

Let's take a look at some of these factors.

## Factor 1: Inequalities of power and resource access

In 2020 the Catholic Relief Services highlighted in a report the urgent need to reduce inequality in the Sahel [32]:

> **"**
>
> *Insufficient and inequitable access to wealth, livelihoods, and natural resources is the driving force behind the deterioration of the social fabric and uptick in violent conflict, especially for youth from traditional pastoralist backgrounds. Individuals emigrate, join violent groups, or perpetrate violence as an escape from poverty and injustice.*
>
> Catholic Relief Services, 2020

Elsewhere in the Sahel unequal access to land – sometimes as a consequence of colonial policies and dispossession is a potent source of conflict. In Sudan, which has faced ongoing civil strife, British

colonial policies entrenched "highly uneven land relations" [33], leaving some groupings dependent on access to land and water held by others – itself a recipe for conflict, with or without the added aggravation of climate change. Post-colonial land disputes have created new waves of dispossession across the Sahel.

*Picture: Driving cattle across the river, Africa. Source: Flickr CIFOR*
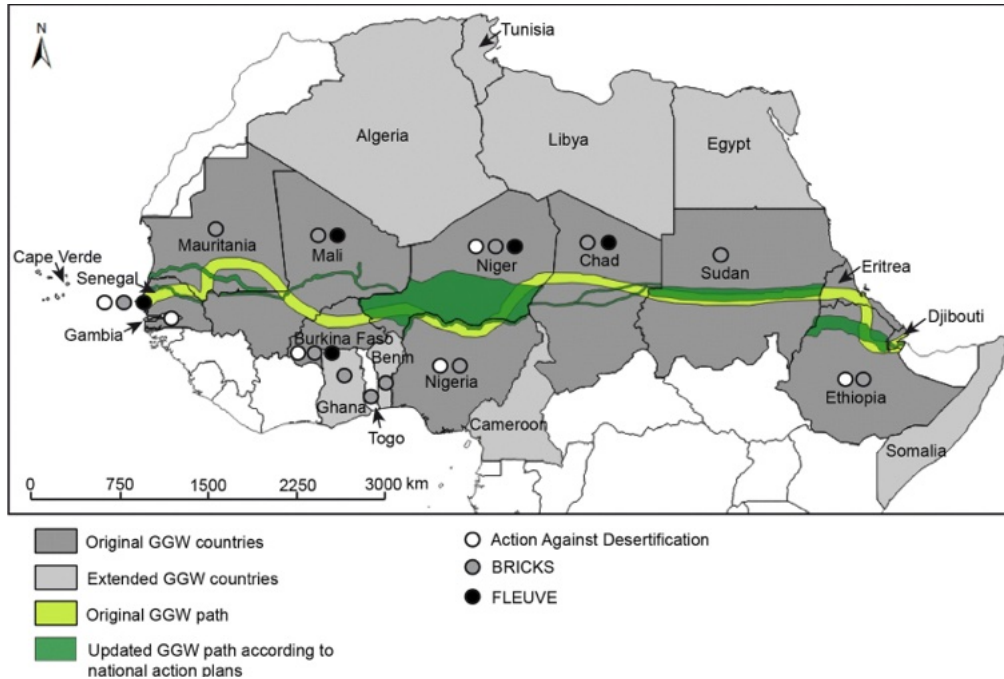


## Factor 2: Exclusionary land governance

Recent estimates indicated that there were 34.5 million people who were food insecure across the Sahel and 45,000 people on the brink of famine. In this context even the most degraded land has value for agro-pastoralists and nomadic populations. Attempts to reverse land degradation such as investment in the Great Green Wall – a large belt of planted trees across twelve states of the Sahel - has excluded people with historical use rights from the enclosed land which has made them more vulnerable.

The map on the right presents the spatial evolution of the Great Green Wall path. The "Green Wall" expanded to include 21 countries across the African continent. Source Goffner, D., Sinare, H. & Gordon,

L.J. The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative as an opportunity to enhance resilience in Sahelian landscapes and livelihoods. *Reg Environ Change* **19**, 1417–1428 (2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-019-01481-z
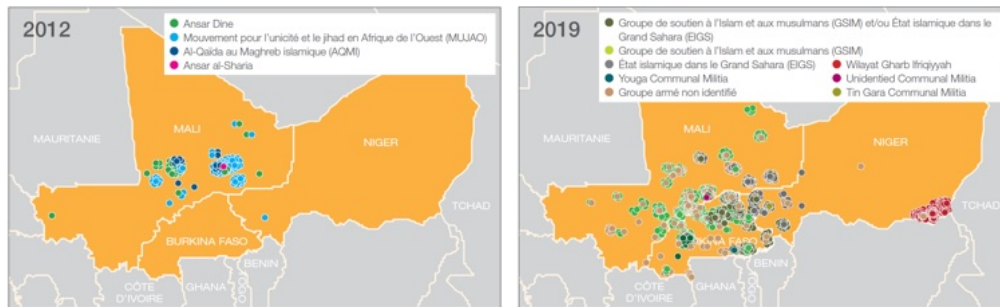
## Factor 3: Persistent transboundary conflicts

The Liptako–Gourma tri-border area, which straddles Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger has experienced severe conflict driven by multiple, overlapping factors. Among these are competition for the control of lucrative illicit trans-Saharan trade routes and conflicts over control and access to natural resources [35].

*Maps: Evolution of the terrorist threat from 2012 to 2019. Source: Assanvo, W., Dakono, B., Théroux-Bénoni, L. A., & Maïga, I. (2019). Extrémisme violent, criminalité organisée et conflits locaux dans le Liptako-Gourma. Rapport pour l'Afrique de l'Ouest, 26, 10. Data from: https://acleddata.com/*

## Factor 4: Elite concentration of livestock ownership

One of the commonly cited conflict flashpoints is between pastoral herders and local crop farmers over access to water and grazing. However, it seems that the nature of pastoralism is changing, reflecting the mounting social and economic inequalities in the region. Today, across the Sahel one of the big questions is who owns the livestock that is frequently at the centre of the conflict between pastoralist herders and sedentary farmers? There is increasing evidence of far-reaching changes in livestock ownership and herding models.

Writing in the New Security Beat blog Luizza has noted that in the emerging Western Sahelian pastoral system, "urban elites, including military and civil administration officials in cities such as N'Djamena (Chad), Khartoum (Sudan), Bangui (CAR), and Abuja (Nigeria) are concentrating their wealth in large herds of cattle and other livestock"[36].

This has given rise to a 'neo pastoralist' model based on elite accumulation of livestock. These powerful absentee stock owners employ armed livestock drovers to manage and secure their herds. Mounting concentration in livestock ownership has served to militarise and distort long standing transhumance patterns and collapse the social contracts which

underpinned them. Armed militia protecting elite interests ignore long standing agreements between pastoralists and farmers over access to grazing and water[37], triggering local conflicts in the process.

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*Picture: Cattle herds in the Sahel. Source: Flickr EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid.*



## Factor 5: Resource abundance as a source of conflict

'Resource abundance', sometimes known as the 'resource curse' can fuel local and regional struggles to capture part of the revenue streams from the exploitation of minerals, high value arable land, forest resources and illicit trade routes[38].

Both Mali and Burkina Faso have developed relationships with the controversial Wagner group which provides military assistance to combat jihadist insurgents, while taking a significant share of revenues from gold mining. The Africa Center for Strategic Studies records that in December 2021, the Malian military junta struck a $10.9 million/month deal to secure 1,000 Russian Wagner paramilitary forces, while providing Wagner access to Malian gold mines. In 2022 Wagner was accused of six alleged civilian massacres including the extrajudicial killings of 300 people in Moura village in Mali.

Conflicts created by relative scarcity or control of abundance need to be seen in their context of social and economic inequality. It has been asserted that "all resource related conflicts revolve around the relations between scarcity and abundance and are never about the one or the other of these variables in isolation"[39].

Understanding the relationship between these different factors can help us better understand the dynamics of change, identify potential winners and losers and determine the impacts on marginal groupings across different societies [40].

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*Picture: Ferry crossing on a river in Chadd. Source: Flickr United Nations Chad*

## 5. Learning from Somalia

Let's turn now to the case of Somalia, where hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced from conflict-ridden rural areas and forced to move to towns and cities.

### A. Conflict and governance

Somalia has a population of about 16 million, of which roughly 60% are nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists who live in rural areas. 75% of the population is estimated to be under the age of 30 [42]. Somalia has had a long history of systemic conflict and extreme political fragility. The timeline sequences key moments from this history.

The ways in which Somali territories were carved up by Imperial powers – Britain, France and Italy in the late 19th century created some of the fault lines for contemporary conflicts. Somalia has also been impacted by successive geopolitical rivalries from World War 2, the Cold War and the subsequent US led 'war on terror' which accelerated post 9/11.

The reckless politics of divide and rule employed by Siad Barre who took power in a coup to rule Somalia between 1978 and 1991, would guarantee the emergence of a host of contesting clan and Islamic militias and the collapse of the state [43]. A Somali state has taken decades to be reconstituted, albeit in a fragile form [44, 45, 46, 47].

### *Audioguided journey*
#### *through the timeline of Somalia*

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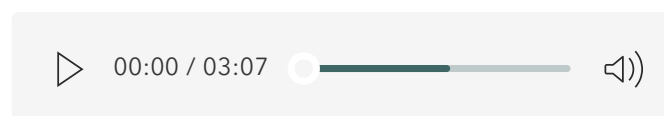
## B. Climate induced migration

The impacts of climate change in the form of rising temperatures, the frequency of droughts interspersed with extreme weather events which can trigger massive flooding, feature across the Sahel region.

**The timeline illustrates the frequency of droughts, food insecurity, famine and flooding in Somalia**. IOM and UNEP have argued that this has created a category of climate induced IDPs "whose displacement was mainly triggered by slow onset environmental degradation"[48].

## C. The intersection of conflict and climate disaster

The big picture comes into focus when the two chronologies above are merged. This reveals how the **vulnerabilities associated with violent conflict and governance failures intersect with those of climate change.**

**The two vulnerabilities amplify one another to create deeply complex and interconnected crises.** Social instability can profoundly exacerbate climate disasters. The impacts of drought and famine become catastrophic in a context of state collapse and warring militias. Climate change may profoundly alter environments undermining the possibilities that those displaced can feasibly return.

Baidoa Relocation:
One Year Later

In October of 2018, IOM collaborated with Danwadaag Durable Solutions Consortium, humanitarian allies, and the government to initiate the transformation of public land. The objective was to deliver essential life-saving services like water, sanitation, healthcare, and shelters to households. As of now, more than 2,000 displaced families, previously at risk of eviction, have been successfully moved to the new location, where they now benefit from improved access to these vital services.

### D. Conflict and climate induced urbanisation

The combination of conflict, drought and flood related disaster has contributed to Somalia's rapid urbanisation rate, currently at 4.3% per annum[49].

According to the 2017-2018 Somalia High Frequency Survey, close to 50% of the population reside in urban areas, while rural nomadic pastoralists and agro-pastoralist communities make up the balance[50].

The majority of internally displaced people (IDP's) originate in rural areas, and many have had no option but to relocate to towns and cities. Approximately 2.7 million people in 2,300 sites in the country are IDPs, with close to 80% of them living in urban or peri-urban informal settlements[51]. These are described as "disconnected pockets outside the city limits"[52].
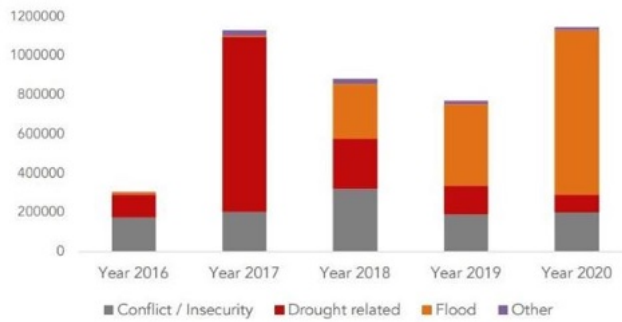
Displacement monitored by UNHCR-Somalia (PRMN) 2016-2020.

A further 1 million Somalis have sought refuge in neighbouring countries which brings the population of displaced people to almost 20% of the total population of the country[53]. In 2016 Mogadishu was estimated to accommodate some 400,000 IDP's, of which more than half (55%) had settled in two peri urban settlements on the fringes of the city.

The ability of IDP's to obtain a secure land right and derive a sustainable livelihood, depends largely on where IDP's are able to live, amongst whom and under whose local jurisdiction[54]. IEED et al present evidence that many people displaced into cities or peri urban areas decide to stay there, even after it becomes safe to return home[55].

Rapid and unplanned urbanisation creates new sets of conflicting and overlapping rights in land. It threatens to overwhelm urban planning and land governance systems and state capacity to provide infrastructure. It also makes displaced people highly vulnerable to exploitative relationships as they try to access land.

"The current urbanization, driven by drought, insecurity, and displacement due to poverty, has led to an unprecedented demand for land in urban and peri-urban areas. However, much of the desired land is still owned by absentee landlords, lying unused and artificially exacerbating land scarcity"[56].

This can aggravate existing social instability which may already be precarious, provoke forced evictions and trigger localised conflict.

## 6. The Saameynta initiative: In search of 'durable solutions'

The Saameynta Initiative is a collaborative effort involving the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UN Habitat and UNDP, working closely with the Government of Puntland and the Federal Government of Somalia. The initiative was launched in March 2022 and will run for four years. It should benefit more than 75,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and vulnerable host communities in the cities of Baidoa, Beletweyne and Bossaso [41].

From an urban planning perspective, the Somali government is concerned that if "protracted urban displacement is not addressed as an urgent matter, IDP settlements in cities may well consolidate as slums, marked by exacerbated poverty, protection violations, dire health, and low hygiene conditions". [58]

The Initiative seeks to deepen the technical and institutional capacities of local authorities to address urban displacement, while strengthening the inclusion of IDPs to contribute to local urban development planning. It seeks to enable sustainable land governance, increase housing tenure security, improve access to basic services, provide livelihood

and employment opportunities, and develop an environment conducive for social cohesion.[58]

In a bid to counter rapid, unplanned, and unregulated urbanization, Saameynta has relocated IDPs from unplanned sites within cities to nearby sites in peri-urban locations where they have stronger rights in land[59]. Overall the initiative seeks to strengthen systems of climate-resilient land governance.



## A. Challenges to implementing this strategy

The Saameynta project document lists numerous challenges including:

- The complexity and dynamics of the displacement situation.
- The limited resources and capacity of the regional government, humanitarian and development actors to address the multiple needs of displacement affected communities.
- The lack of coordination and harmonization among different actors and stakeholders[60].

Other studies describe the urban governance context as a "political marketplace – a system in which political office, loyalty and services are tradeable commodities" and where transactional politics dominate over institutions[61]. This enables the

emergence of a shadow state in which decision making does not follow the policy and legislative scripts. In such settings the existence of law provides little guarantee that it will be enforced, either fairly, or at all.

A policy vacuum and the absence of tenancy laws has made IDPs vulnerable to recurrent forced evictions. In 2020, a displacement overview for Somalia recorded more than 250,000 incidents of forced eviction by private landowners. IDPs testified that they had been forcibly evicted several times:

> **"**
>
> *When we first settled in this place and rented some land, there was no documentation, everything was verbal and the agreement was made by someone who was representing the landlord. Then after a while the owner himself came and gave us 3 days notice to move out and it was really challenging.*
>
> *(Interview, a female camp leader)* [62].

Forced evictions affect livelihoods, decrease access to healthcare, disrupt social support networks, and lead evictees to experience mental and physical ill-health. Women's health was particularly affected, as forced evictions exposed them to sexual and physical violence[63].

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*Picture: Displaced communities before their relocation in Baidoa, Somalia. Source: IOM/Foresight Films 2019*

## B. Emerging lessons for urban land governance

Saameynta has sought to formalise urban land management through the enactment of the SWS Urban Land Management Law in 2022. This law establishes State Urban Planning Committees and procedures for urban planning and land management at the municipal level, creating departments empowered to issue land title deeds. The law also envisages a system of land-based taxation to raise revenue for infrastructure provision and maintenance.

However, in the process Saameynta has come to recognise that there are different and overlapping legal frameworks governing land rights and land dispute resolution. Currently formal State law, customary Xeer law and Shari'a law all coexist and regulate the same matters[64]. Recent research has confirmed the continued relevance of traditional and religious frameworks while noting that these create both challenges and opportunities for land management[65].

From a statist perspective this may be seen as a constraint, creating legal uncertainty over who has the right of ownership or use of land. However, from a land governance view such overlaps present an

opportunity to explore the interconnections and core values underpinning these systems.

Where knowledge systems and institutions can be harmonised, a socially accepted hybrid system can emerge. Perhaps it is here where the greatest potential exists to identify and craft durable solutions which promote social justice and equity, and which are truly fit for purpose.

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*Picture: Panoramic sight of Barwago 2, one year after the relocation. Source: IOM/Forest Films 2020*

## 7. Lessons for the Sahel and beyond



The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants notes that:

**"**

*"Since earliest times, humanity has been on the move. Some people move in search of new economic opportunities and horizons. Others move to escape armed conflict, poverty, food insecurity, persecution, terrorism,*

*or human rights violations and abuses. Still others do so in response to the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters (some of which may be linked to climate change), or other environmental factors. Many move, indeed, for a combination of these reasons."*

Adichie has highlighted the importance of enabling many stories to be told - ones that speak of past and present and trace issues back to their roots. As she observes: "Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story".

This is also highly relevant for how we understand climate change and where responsibility lies to address its impacts. Somalia's Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions are estimated at less than 0.03% of total global emissions and yet its future remains under threat from a phenomenon for which it has little, if any responsibility.

In the case of the Saameynta Initiative, the data story has explored ways to strengthen land governance in response to conflict and climate induced urbanisation. Human rights and environmental activist Kumi Naidoo has recently sounded a caution which is particularly relevant for those whose focus is on land governance. He argues that:

**"**

*"We need to broaden our focus from property centred law... [to take] a far more intersectional approach, insisting that the struggle to avert catastrophic climate change and environmental collapse, and the struggle to address*

*human rights, poverty and equity must be seen as two sides to the same coin."*

[66]

The immense multi-faceted challenges facing the people of the Sahel suggest that bold, inclusive and context specific intersectional approaches create possibilities for durable solutions to emerge. The challenge remains as to how to scale these up to take into account the 3.3 to 3.6 billion people living in contexts that are highly vulnerable to climate change, where 70% of the most climate-vulnerable countries are also ranked among the most politically and socially fragile.

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Picture: People portrait in West Sahel. Source: Flickr CIFOR

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