

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME



# Bridging Generations

PATHWAYS TO A YOUTH-INCLUSIVE  
CLIMATE, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA



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# Table of Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2. METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>3. THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE-RELATED SECURITY RISKS ON YOUNG PEOPLE</b> .....	<b>5</b>
3.1 Climate-induced forced migration and displacement can exacerbate vulnerability among young people and strain social cohesion in affected communities .....	<b>5</b>
3.2 Economic instability due to climate change can limit young people's employment opportunities and can contribute to social unrest in vulnerable regions .....	<b>5</b>
3.3 Climate-related challenges can drive young people involvement in crime and illicit activities while also rendering them susceptible to extremist recruitment, potentially perpetuating cycles of insecurity and conflict .....	<b>6</b>
3.4 Defending or vocalising issues surrounding climate change, peace and security might put young people at risk .....	<b>7</b>
3.5 Climate change can disproportionately impact young women and girls, increasing vulnerabilities to sexual and gender-based violence, trafficking and forced marriage .....	<b>7</b>
3.6 The dual weight of climate-related emotional stressors and conflict can burden young people in vulnerable settings, exacerbating social tensions .....	<b>8</b>
<b>4. STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF MEANINGFULLY ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN CLIMATE, PEACE AND SECURITY</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>5. EARLY FINDINGS - EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE TO ADDRESS CLIMATE-RELATED SECURITY RISKS</b> .....	<b>12</b>
5.1 Enhance access to Climate, Peace and Security information, education, resource sharing and skills development .....	<b>12</b>
5.2 Engage young people in Climate, Peace and Security Decision and Policymaking Processes .....	<b>12</b>
5.3 Foster inter-generational dialogue and collaboration for Climate, Peace and Security .....	<b>13</b>
5.4 Leverage innovation, communication and technologies for young people focused on Climate, Peace and Security .....	<b>14</b>
5.5 Increase targeted investments and cultivate youth-centric livelihood opportunities addressing climate-related security risks .....	<b>14</b>
5.6 Develop further research on Climate, Peace and Security and Youth .....	<b>15</b>
<b>6. RECOMMENDATIONS AS DERIVED FROM EARLY FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>7. CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>20</b>



# Executive Summary

This policy paper explores the intricate nexus of climate, peace and security (CPS), emphasising the critical need to address the multi-dimensional impacts of climate-related security risks that disproportionately affect young people worldwide. Young people are at the forefront of the adverse effects of climate change — ranging from forced migration and displacement driven by climate change to heightened economic instability and constrained employment opportunities to increased propensity for recruitment into illicit activities and armed groups as a means of survival. Furthermore, the emotional and psychological toll of living under the constant shadow of climate insecurity exacerbates social tensions, undermines mental health, and compounds the challenges of building cohesive, resilient communities.

The impacts on young people are not uniformly distributed, with young women facing additional layers of vulnerability, including increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence, trafficking, and forced marriage, all of which can be exacerbated by the destabilising effects of climate change. In addition to the challenges young people face in advocating for climate change and peace, defending or vocalising these issues may also put them at risk, particularly for environmental defenders, climate activists, and those who protect them.

Yet, amidst these challenges, young people demonstrate remarkable resilience and innovation. They are not only victims of climate-related security risks but also powerful agents of change. Their active, but limited, participation in climate action, and peacebuilding efforts, within policy and programming, underscores the untapped potential of young people as key partners in addressing these multifaceted challenges. The insights and experiences of young people, especially those living in the most climate-vulnerable, fragile and conflict-affected settings, are invaluable in ensuring effective responses to climate-related security risks.

The impacts of these risks vary across countries and regions, including in places like Jordan, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, the Pacific, and the Philippines. Addressing these challenges requires a tailored approach that considers the specific needs and vulnerabilities of young people in each geography. Policy and programmatic interventions must not only recognise the disproportionate impact of climate-related security risks on young people but also actively engage and empower young people as essential stakeholders in designing and implementing solutions. This involves enhancing access to CPS information, data, education, and resources; engaging in CPS decision and policymaking; targeting investments and prioritising youth-centric livelihood opportunities addressing CPS; promoting intergenerational dialogue that bridges experience across sectors; leveraging innovative communication strategies to amplify young people's voices in the CPS discourse; and developing further research, touching on key areas of interlinkages including climate activism in fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS) and connections with the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda.

This paper highlights UNDP's initial findings on the importance of meaningfully including, engaging and empowering young people in addressing climate-related security risks. It recognises the unique role that young people can play as agents of change in the CPS agenda.

# 1. Introduction

Climate change is one of the most pressing challenges of our time, posing significant risks to economic development, human security and social stability. Its repercussions are felt in many parts of the world, particularly in highly vulnerable, fragile and conflict-affected settings. Climate change not only intensifies these existing vulnerabilities, but also poses a significant barrier to sustainable development and peace efforts. Among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate-related security risks are young people,<sup>i</sup> who face a disproportionate burden of these risks.<sup>ii</sup> Over 698 million young people (between the ages of 15-34) live in fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS), amounting to approximately 67% of the total population in these contexts.<sup>iii</sup> The convergence of climate change with limited opportunities to adapt and build resilience amplifies these challenges, underscoring the urgent need for integrated climate, peace and security (CPS) policies and programmes that prioritise the meaningful inclusion, engagement and empowerment of young people.<sup>iv</sup>

Young people often simultaneously serve as both peacebuilders and climate activists, calling for ambitious action. For instance, in South Sudan, a country where 72% are less than 30 years old, young people have been steadfast in their vocalisation of local concerns and aspirations and are vital to addressing peacebuilding and climate change.<sup>v</sup> In 2015, young people in Oregon, USA, filed a lawsuit against the fossil fuel industry, stating that their government failed to address climate change, violating their right to life, liberty and property<sup>vi</sup>, and millions of young people around the world mobilised around the “Fridays for Future” movement in 2019 to demand action on climate change.<sup>vii</sup>

Despite being at the forefront of peace and security, and climate change solutions, young people remain excluded from decision-making processes in both sectors and might not be treated as equal partners or leaders. Nevertheless, their contribution to addressing climate-related security risks is critical. To maximise their impact, young people should be meaningfully included, engaged and empowered through policy and programmatic interventions and recognised as key actors.

## What are climate-related security risks?

“Climate-related security risks” are understood as the adverse impacts of climate change on human security - the freedom from fear and want, but also as they relate to the security of the state, and the maintenance of international peace and security, under the United Nations Charter. For UNDP, tackling climate-related security risks represents a strategic focus on delivering innovative and cross-cutting approaches aimed at both promoting climate action and sustaining peace.

Adger, W.N. et al. (2014). 'Human security'. in: Climate change 2014: Impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability. Part A: Global and sectoral aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, pp. 755-791. Also see Busby, J. (2018b). 'Taking stock: the field of climate and security'. Current Climate Change Reports, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40641-018-0116-z>; Burke, M., Hsiang S. M., & Miguel, E., (2015). 'Climate and Conflict'. Annual Review of Economics 2015 7:1, 577-617, Vol. 7:577-617 (Volume publication date August 2015). First published online as a Review in Advance on May 13, 2015 <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-080614-115430>; Hendrix, C.S. (2018). 'Searching for climate-conflict links'. Nature Climate Change 8, 190-191 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0083-3>; Lee, H. F. (2020). 'Historical climate-war nexus in the eyes of geographers'. Asian Geographer, DOI: 10.1080/10225706.2020.1768571

Although the field of CPS is growing substantially,<sup>viii</sup> there remains limited recognition of the linkages with (i) meaningful inclusion, engagement and empowerment of young people, (ii) the youth climate movement, and (iii) the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) Agenda.<sup>ix</sup> Recognising and integrating these linkages is crucial for addressing climate-related security risks while directly including young people and being youth-sensitive. This paper, in line with the UN Youth Strategy,<sup>x</sup> tackles the first of these points, meaningful inclusion, engagement and empowerment of young people and explores initial lessons learned in how *Climate, Peace and Security policy and programming engage young people, foster development and promote youth empowerment, and aim to change harmful narratives on young people in CPS research and practice.*

It seeks to explore the strategies, approaches, and promising practices employed by UNDP in addressing the intersection of CPS and youth. It also examines potential gaps, challenges, and opportunities in current policy and programming efforts, offering recommendations for improving the intergenerational orientation of CPS. With UNDP initiatives as the starting point, this policy paper looks at:

- i. The impact of climate-related security risks on young people,
- ii. The strategic importance of engaging young people in the CPS agenda,
- iii. Early findings and recommendations as distilled from UNDP's CPS initiatives to ensure engagement and empowerment of young people into the CPS agenda,

This brief emphasises the importance of evaluating the current situation to ensure that efforts to reshape perceptions and attitudes regarding youth engagement in CPS initiatives are well-informed and practical. Ultimately, this is an intermediate step towards the larger goal of creating a more inclusive and responsive CPS framework.

“Young people’s empowerment, development and engagement is an end in itself, as well as a means to build a better world. The UN recognizes it cannot achieve its mission without partnering with young people and ensuring they are not only heard but understood, not only engaged but empowered, and not only supporting but leading global efforts and processes. Young people need to be full-fledged partners in the United Nations work to build a better world for all, as they are both beneficiaries and partners”.

United Nations (2018). 'Youth 2030: the United Nations Youth Strategy'. Available at : [https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080\\_UN-Youth-Strategy\\_Web.pdf](https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/18-00080_UN-Youth-Strategy_Web.pdf)



## 2. Methodology

The research explores the intersections of CPS and meaningful inclusion, engagement and empowerment of young people within the CPS policy and programming landscape. It aims to build on the early findings from UNDP CPS initiatives to inform future interventions.

The initial phase of the research involved conducting a short review and mapping of 80+ existing pieces of literature linking climate action, environment, peacebuilding, conflict prevention, social cohesion, youth and similar topics across scholarly databases, academic journals, research repositories, and organisational websites, including UNDP and other UN entities. The mapping of CPS literature focused on key themes, including the impacts of climate change on peace and security and further impacts on young people addressed through this literature, young people's perspectives and involvement across CPS, related policy frameworks and strategies, and best practices in engaging and empowering young people. The findings from the literature mapping functioned as a foundation for understanding the existing knowledge landscape and identifying gaps which would be further explored through interviews with UNDP practitioners.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 UNDP experts and practitioners engaged in CPS and youth-related work. Interviewees were selected to ensure a breadth of perspectives, experiences, and geographic coverage. The interview questions were designed to elicit insights into the experiences, perspectives, challenges, and opportunities related to young people's meaningful inclusion, engagement and empowerment in CPS efforts. Interview transcripts were carefully reviewed, and key themes, patterns, and insights were identified. The findings from the interviews were compared with the insights derived from the literature mapping to identify areas of similarity and differentiation. The common themes and significant findings were summarised and synthesised to inform the messages presented in this policy paper.

At the same time, data was drawn from UNDP's CPS portfolio, with funding sources from bilateral donors, the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), and the UN Climate Security Mechanism (CSM).<sup>xi</sup> While the CPS portfolio was the focus, the research also drew upon UNDP's YPS, Youth and Climate portfolios

and the Global Environmental Facility's Small Grants Programme (SGP), workshops held for and with young people on CPS, as well as the literature and examples that arose. Initial insights from programming and policy include more than ten countries across five regions: Africa, Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

As the CPS portfolio within UNDP is still maturing, discussions on CPS and youth are not yet well-captured in results matrices and similar frameworks. Although young people have been a part of UNDP's CPS initiatives, they have not necessarily been the primary focus of such work. This brief, therefore, considers young people through a broad lens, where they would be stakeholders, experts and/or target groups and aims to offer some indicative findings from these initiatives to help identify the next steps. In addition, as the portfolio is relatively new, the amount of evidence collected is more limited than that of more established portfolios. As this further develops, new insights will be gained from working with young people. This paper is shared as a contribution to this still-emerging field.



# 3. The impacts of climate-related security risks on young people

Climate change has the potential to exacerbate existing conflicts and can contribute to emerging tensions such as land disputes, farmer-herder conflicts and transboundary tensions. As climate-related security risks affect the livelihoods and well-being of people worldwide, it is important to examine its impact on young people. While this intersection is less explored, initial findings from the literature on CPS and young people, UNDP programming and policy

suggest that climate change, climate-related disasters, resource insecurity and changing environmental conditions exacerbate vulnerabilities of young people with potential risks for peace and security. However, it is important to recognise that climate-related security risks are contextual and geographically diverse, meaning that the specific impacts identified in this section might not fit all countries, regions, and young people worldwide.

**Youth representative and researcher on environmental security Lindsay Getschel was invited to a UN Security Council meeting in 2019, where the concrete impacts of climate change on peace and security were discussed. Ms Getschel highlighted multiple issues, but when it came to youth, she asked the council to conduct an assessment of how climate change impacts local youth (e.g. through forced migration and displacement, unemployment, food insecurity and recruitment in armed groups).<sup>xii</sup>**

## **3.1 CLIMATE-INDUCED FORCED MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT CAN EXACERBATE VULNERABILITY AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE AND STRAIN SOCIAL COHESION IN AFFECTED COMMUNITIES**

Climate change is transforming familiar landscapes, particularly in regions already affected by conflict and fragility, where a significant portion of the population—including migrants and internally displaced persons (IDPs) – are young adults.<sup>xiii</sup> Climate change might lead to more movement of people (climate-induced mobility), potentially forcing young people to leave behind their homes and seek refuge elsewhere, posing challenges for integration and acceptance in host communities. For instance, despite being one of the world's driest countries, Jordan has become the home of over 643,000 UNHCR (Nov 2023) registered refugees from Syria. With 81% of the Syrian refugees in Jordan (and Lebanon) under the age of 35 and settling in urban areas, the pressure on both the host community and the young refugee population can significantly impact future prospects.<sup>xiv</sup> This can greatly affect access to limited resources, specifically water, and can disrupt social cohesion within the affected areas, even potentially leading to competition and conflicts.<sup>xv</sup> Furthermore, rising sea levels and coastal erosion in Kiribati can force young people and their families to migrate, leading to displacement and potential loss of cultural ties and livelihoods, putting pressure on urban centres, and impacting social cohesion.<sup>xvi</sup>

While migration can serve as an adaptation strategy offering new opportunities, it is key to address the associated challenges. This includes ensuring the protection and integration of young migrants, refugees or displaced persons in a manner that promotes social cohesion, peace and security, addressing potential climate and environmental impacts in both their origin and destination.<sup>xvii</sup>

## **3.2 ECONOMIC INSTABILITY DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE CAN LIMIT YOUNG PEOPLE'S EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND CAN CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIAL UNREST IN VULNERABLE REGIONS**

As resources might dwindle under the weight of climate change, job opportunities within specific sectors become scarce, especially for young people in vulnerable regions. In regions impacted, climate change and extreme weather events can damage businesses, transport routes, infrastructure and agriculture, further weakening economic opportunities.<sup>xviii</sup> This economic instability can lead to increased social unrest and conflicts as young people, often the largest groups of unemployed people in impacted regions, have fewer positive prospects for a promising future. This may push young people into negative alternative coping strategies as a means of survival and fuel frustration.<sup>xix</sup> In Nigeria, young people constitute 70% of the total population, and youth unemployment stands at 53.40% (2022).<sup>xx</sup> In a country where up to 70% of the total workforce is employed in

the agricultural sector, climate change impacts, including droughts, flooding, and associated pest and disease outbreaks, can result in agricultural losses, affecting young people who rely on agriculture for their livelihoods.<sup>xxi</sup> However, although not as many young people are pursuing agriculture and are becoming farmers, climate challenges will continue to impact those who remain dependent on agriculture.<sup>xxii</sup>

Furthermore, in Central America and the Caribbean, at-risk populations, including young people experiencing heat waves, are more likely to move to urban settings, putting pressure on urban centres in terms of employment opportunities.<sup>xxiii</sup> In Latin America and the Caribbean, high rates of youth unemployment have been identified as a contributing factor to the prevalence of crime and violence, particularly among young people.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Unemployment and underemployment, stemming from the economic impacts of the increased frequency of extreme weather events, along with pest and disease outbreaks and population pressures in urban centres can pose significant challenges, particularly for young people in vulnerable regions. These situations might not only restrict employment opportunities but can also

risk escalating social unrest within these communities. Tackling these challenges by supporting economic or livelihood initiatives for young people is pivotal within the CPS policy and programming framework.

### **3.3 CLIMATE-RELATED CHALLENGES CAN DRIVE YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVEMENT IN CRIME AND ILLICIT ACTIVITIES WHILE ALSO RENDERING THEM SUSCEPTIBLE TO EXTREMIST RECRUITMENT, POTENTIALLY PERPETUATING CYCLES OF INSECURITY AND CONFLICT**

Amidst the challenges posed by climate change, young people may face uncertain incomes and futures. In these environments, the combination of climate stressors and existing insecurity might make young people more vulnerable to illicit income and livelihood opportunities or the promises of radical ideologies that offer a sense of purpose and belonging, as noted in both Somalia and North-West Nigeria.<sup>xxv</sup> Such hardships can drive young people to engage in activities that can perpetuate cycles of insecurity and conflict, further exacerbating the challenges faced by their communities.

**H.E. Mamman Nuhu, Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission and Head of the Multinational Joint Task Force highlighted at the 8923rd meeting of the UN Security Council in 2021, “Security in the context of terrorism and climate change” that the Lake Chad Basin, a region that was a net exporter of agricultural products including sorghum and millet, practice livestock herding and fishing, is now significantly impacted by climate variability, putting pressure on the population, threatening food security and impacting overall security. The Executive Secretary further noted that young people represent 60% of the population in the basin, and many may have been pushed to take up criminal activities, including smuggling of various goods to provide for their families.** <sup>xxvi</sup>

A 2022 survey by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) revealed that 51% of recruits in Niger cited “climate change-related difficulties” as to have played a role in their recruitment.<sup>xxvii</sup> Young people engaged in such activities not only face personal risks but may also contribute to the erosion of social cohesion and peace, as communities might be torn apart by mistrust.<sup>xxviii</sup>

More research is needed to grasp climate change's connection to violent extremism, crime and banditry. However, despite these challenges, providing positive prospects through decent livelihoods and productive coping strategies can support pathways away from crime, extremism and banditry. Moreover, fostering dialogue, promoting social cohesion, and addressing root causes of mistrust within communities are essential steps towards building resilience against climate-related security risks.<sup>xxix</sup>

### **3.4 DEFENDING OR VOCALISING ISSUES SURROUNDING CLIMATE CHANGE, PEACE AND SECURITY MIGHT PUT YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK**

Defending or vocalising climate change, environment, peace, and security can put young people at risk, particularly environmental defenders, climate activists and people protecting them, who often face significant challenges and dangers in their advocacy efforts.<sup>xxx</sup>

Environmental defenders are crucial in addressing climate-related security risks because their advocacy and protection efforts are directly linked to preserving natural resources, land rights, and indigenous territories. By safeguarding these resources, they contribute to resilience against environmental degradation and resource scarcity. However, their activism often exposes them to violence and

intimidation, highlighting the genuine security threats associated with environmental degradation and climate change. In Latin America and the Caribbean, environmental defenders, including youth activists, have been targeted for their efforts to protect natural resources, land rights, and indigenous territories. At least 177 homicides of environmental activists were reported globally in 2022, with 88% occurring in Latin America and the Caribbean, with Colombia, followed by Brazil and Mexico most affected.<sup>xxxii</sup> Across Asia and the Pacific, young environmental defenders and climate change activists advocating against the destruction of forests, oceans and futures have faced intimidation, physical attacks, and even

criminalisation.<sup>xxxiii</sup> In the Philippines, 29 land rights and environmental advocates were reported to have been killed in 2020.<sup>xxxiii</sup> These risks deter many young people from speaking out on environmental issues and contribute to a climate of fear and silence.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Similarly, young people involved in activism, peacebuilding and conflict resolution initiatives may face risks to their safety and well-being, particularly in areas affected by violence and instability.<sup>xxxv</sup>

When it comes to environmental defenders, peace activists and similar groups at risk, it is essential to recognise and support their efforts, provide them with adequate protection and resources.

**The Escazú Agreement, the first international treaty in Latin America and the Caribbean focused on environmental matters, plays a crucial role in CPS by requiring full public access to environmental information, participation in environmental decision-making, and legal protection. Significantly, it includes specific provisions to safeguard environmental defenders. Before coming into force, and in recognition of young people's commitment, five youth "Champions of Escazu" were appointed to spread the message about the agreement's importance, encourage ratification and champion solutions. Since its ratification by 14 states, the agreement has been in force since April 2021, providing a robust framework for protecting those who champion environmental causes in the region.**<sup>xxxvi</sup>

### **3.5 CLIMATE CHANGE CAN DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACT YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS, INCREASING VULNERABILITIES TO SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, TRAFFICKING AND FORCED MARRIAGE**

While the above factors might be impacts that affect both young men and women, differentiated gender impacts need to be taken into consideration.

Sexual and gender-based violence and trafficking affect all members of society, yet young women and girls are often the primary targets and are increasingly at risk as climate change exacerbates these issues.<sup>xxxvii</sup> For instance, extreme weather events in coastal belt Bangladesh, particularly the 2004 floods, the 2013 Mahasen cyclone, and the 2014 floods<sup>xxxviii</sup> hit hard in the two districts, Sunamganj and Brahmanbaria. In response to immediate and potential future economic strain in these two districts, families resorted to forced and early marriages for their daughters to reduce the burden of household consumption needs. Additionally, unmarried daughters faced a higher risk of sexual and gender-based violence, which could harm them, damage the family's reputation, and negatively affect any potential dowry.<sup>xxxix</sup>

The situation is further complicated by traditional ideas of masculinity, which place pressure on young men to protect their family's cattle, often their most valuable

asset. This pressure, combined with the stress young men face from the changing environment and lack of familial support, can contribute to escalating conflict.<sup>xl</sup> However, in the Middle Belt region in Nigeria, inter-communal violence, primarily driven by farmer-pastoralist conflict and exacerbated by climate change, has led young men to more often migrate alone with their cattle, leaving their families behind to ensure their safety due to heightened stake of confrontations along the routes.<sup>xli</sup>

These gendered vulnerabilities, exacerbated by climate change, can undermine social cohesion and stability as they perpetuate cycles of violence and inequality. Addressing these risks requires targeted interventions that not only combat climate change but also address the root causes of gender-based violence and inequality, thereby contributing to broader efforts towards peace and security.

### **3.6 THE DUAL WEIGHT OF CLIMATE-RELATED EMOTIONAL STRESSORS AND CONFLICT CAN BURDEN YOUNG PEOPLE IN VULNERABLE SETTINGS, EXACERBATING SOCIAL TENSIONS**

Emotional stress, though not traditionally seen as a climate-related security risk, is a significant and often underestimated factor affecting the mental and emotional well-being of young people in vulnerable settings.<sup>xlii</sup> The emotional toll resulting from civil wars

and armed conflict is severe, leaving lasting scars on individuals and communities.<sup>xliii</sup> Concurrently, young people witnessing the degradation of their surroundings by extreme weather and climate change endure economic, social, and physical insecurities that compound their stress.<sup>xliiv</sup> Combined, climate-induced stress and the pressures of violence and insecurity can exacerbate tensions and drive despair in already vulnerable communities, especially in areas with large youth populations.<sup>xliiv</sup>

Children and young people are particularly susceptible to these mental health challenges, often experiencing higher rates of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and anxiety than the general population.<sup>xlivi</sup> According to WHO, one in five people in conflict-affected populations – many of whom are young - have developed symptoms such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and other disorders.<sup>xliivii</sup> Despite the prevalence of these issues, most young people lack access to essential

mental health services, leaving them to cope with chronic stress, anxiety, and depression on their own.<sup>xliiii</sup>

In South Sudan, where 65% of the population is between the ages of 15 and 34,<sup>xlix</sup> years of civil war have deeply affected many individuals. Many are displaced and living in camps or neglected conditions, worsening their mental and emotional health.<sup>i</sup> Consequently, the combined impact of conflict and climate extremes, such as consecutive floods, is expected to lead to additional mental health and psychosocial problems stemming from the loss of homes, livelihoods, damage to infrastructure, properties, and lives.<sup>ii</sup> In the Philippines, as a part of a survey on climate anxiety, out of 1,000 young people surveyed, 769 felt that the impacts of climate change would threaten their family's security (economic, social or physical).<sup>iii</sup> Similarly, young people in Tuvalu experience emotional stress due to the existential threat posed by rising sea levels, leading to uncertainty about their future and the loss of their ancestral lands.<sup>iiii</sup>

**The 2024 Peoples' Climate Vote, conducted by UNDP and the University of Oxford, surveyed over 73,000 people across 77 countries over eight months. The findings reveal that nearly 66% of young people aged 18 to 35 are concerned about the impact of climate change on future generations, with 52% expressing greater concern compared to last year. Additionally, nearly 70% of young people reported that climate change influenced significant family decisions, such as where to live or work or what to buy.<sup>liv</sup>**

While there is a great amount of research on the intersection between climate change and mental health, as well as the intersection between war and mental health, research on the intersection of climate change, conflict and mental health is still in its early stages and needs to be better understood.<sup>lv</sup> Without adequate psychosocial support, these challenges risk further fracturing vulnerable communities. However, by integrating climate adaptation strategies with social and psychological support tailored to young people,

these initiatives can achieve co-benefits that extend beyond immediate mental health improvements. For young people, these efforts can strengthen their ability to cope with challenges by encouraging their active participation in addressing shared environmental challenges, promoting a sense of collective purpose, and enhancing trust—resulting in peace co-benefits—among different youth groups, across various geographies and between generations.



# 4. Strategic importance of meaningfully engaging young people in Climate, Peace and Security

Central to this policy paper are *principles* derived from a roundtable discussion organised by UNDP and UNFPA for young climate advocates and peacebuilders, development practitioners, partners and stakeholders to discuss climate, peace and security on International Peace Day 2022. The dialogue offered entry points for meaningful youth engagement and recommendations, highlighting that young people are not only victims of climate-related security risks but positive agents of change, equal partners in implementing the 2030 Agenda and leaders crafting solutions for peace and climate action. Their meaningful inclusion, engagement and empowerment, underscored by the key findings from the roundtable and following discussions, are not just beneficial but essential in formulating adept responses to the intertwined challenges of CPS. These principles, directly from the young climate activists and peacebuilders, are the foundation of this brief and our work:

**Young people's empowerment in CPS decision-making:** Young people are highly motivated to influence decision-making processes that impact their lives, communities, and the future state of the planet. Their passion and insistence on meaningful participation underscores their potential as key stakeholders in enhancing policies at all levels (local, national, regional and global).

**Youth-driven opportunities for climate action and peacebuilding:** Young people bring critical experiences and local know-how, particularly in identifying opportunities for implementation of climate action and peacebuilding within communities. They possess unique insights into the needs and dynamics of their respective regions, thereby ensuring initiatives enhance their effectiveness and longevity.

**Youth-informed localisation of peacebuilding and climate action:** Young people should be at the forefront of proactively localising peacebuilding and climate action efforts to ensure that interventions are contextually sensitive, inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs and perspectives of their communities. Their presence and meaningful participation would enhance the relevance and effectiveness of initiatives.

## What is meaningful youth participation in climate action?

This describes a broad array of mechanisms of participation to influence climate change governance where youth share power to steer the process and outcome of their participation. This entails their empowerment and involvement, individually or collectively, to express views, narratives and solutions in ways that are compatible with large-scale system transformations needed to achieve climate-neutral and resilient futures, overall contributing towards a sustainable society.

United Nations Development Programme (2022). 'Aiming Higher: Elevating Meaningful Youth Engagement for Climate Action'. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/publications/aiming-higher-elevating-meaningful-youth-engagement-climate-action>

**Young people as bridge builders in climate-vulnerable, fragile and conflict-affected settings:** In climate-vulnerable, fragile and conflict-affected settings, young people serve as bridge builders, bringing together diverse groups to pursue climate action jointly. Their ability to foster dialogue and collaboration is instrumental in overcoming divisions and creating a conducive environment for peace and sustainability.

**Youth-inclusive follow-up and monitoring of CPS initiatives:** Young people's engagement offers an avenue for strengthening the follow-up, and monitoring of commitments of the UN, governments, and other actors at various levels. Their meaningful participation can enhance accountability mechanisms, ensuring that promises made globally by relevant actors translate into concrete and inclusive actions on the ground.



# 5. Early findings - Empowering young people to Address Climate-related Security Risks

In our rapidly changing world, climate-related security risks have become a pressing concern, affecting communities and nations worldwide. While these challenges demand immediate attention and action, they also present a unique opportunity to empower the next generation of leaders and change-makers. This chapter builds on the preceding discussions to offer steps to empower young people in CPS efforts. Here, we explore the crucial role of young people in addressing climate-related security risks and offer emerging recommendations building on the experiences of UNDP's CPS policies and programmes.

## 5.1. ENHANCE ACCESS TO CLIMATE, PEACE AND SECURITY INFORMATION, EDUCATION, RESOURCE SHARING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Investments in education and skills development within CPS for young people should be prioritised, particularly in areas most affected by climate-related security risks. This would encompass training programmes, workshops, and educational resources tailored to equip young people,<sup>lxix</sup> including but not limited to skills building in advocacy, negotiation, communication, project management, law, environmental science knowledge and conflict analysis. This can help young people adapt to challenges while equipping them with the knowledge and skills to be effective agents of change.<sup>lxx</sup>

In the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), it was reported that environmental resources and management of land were significant factors along with economic inequality and historical, cultural and political grievances between clans, government administrations and armed groups in driving an armed conflict that ended in 2014.<sup>lxxi</sup> With the support of UNDP in the Philippines, young people are leading community-based adaptation projects. The success of these initiatives is largely attributed to educational programmes that equip young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to tackle complex climate challenges. By understanding the interconnectedness of environmental degradation, history and social unrest, young Filipinos spearhead projects that not only bolster climate resilience but also foster community cohesion and mitigate potential sources of conflict, such as resource scarcity and displacement.<sup>lxxii</sup>

Integrating climate and peacebuilding into formal and informal learning environments, such as awareness-raising sessions, can demystify complex concepts, making them accessible to a broader youth demographic.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Tailoring educational content to resonate with young people, with local contexts, languages, and cultures, as done by UNDP Nigeria's Climate Peace Hubs, enhances the relevance and uptake of CPS knowledge, empowering young people to take meaningful action in their communities.<sup>lxxiv</sup>

Fostering closer collaboration between academic institutions, youth-led organisations, and youth groups working on various thematic areas can facilitate the integration of CPS topics into formal and informal education, training, and grassroots activism, provide input and support in policy, and strengthen global platforms. The Ghana Youth Environmental Movement (GYEM) recently launched a Climate Action and Peace Education Project to empower young people with knowledge and tools to address the interconnection.<sup>lxxv</sup>

Efforts should be made to enhance the quality and accessibility of youth-friendly information on climate change and sustainable peace. Programmes and resources should empower young people with special needs, ensuring they have equal access to knowledge, skills, and leadership roles. This accessibility ensures that climate negotiations and peace processes are inclusive of different groups, including Indigenous youth.

## 5.2. ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE IN CLIMATE, PEACE AND SECURITY DECISION AND POLICYMAKING PROCESSES

One of the cornerstones of successfully integrating youth young people's perspectives into CPS initiatives lies in granting young people a meaningful seat at the decision-making table, inspiring transformative change and bridging generational gaps in understanding these issues. Their participation, not merely as passive observers but as active partners, serves to infuse the policymaking process with youth informed, driven and inclusive insights and ideas. Despite this potential, more often than not, young people remain excluded and underrepresented in decision-making positions.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

**UNDP identifies that a staggering 77.9% of young people surveyed as a part of the development of a checklist on youth inclusion in National Determined Contributions (NDCs) have never participated in the formulation and implementation of their country's NDC.<sup>lxvii</sup> Furthermore, UNDP (2020) finds that 40 of the first round NDCs reference climate security,<sup>lxviii</sup> and only 50% of these incorporate youth considerations.**

In Somalia, UNDP's and the CSM's climate security pilot supported eight youth delegates' participation at COP27 and COP28, ensuring Somali youth and FCAS representation in the global climate discussions.<sup>lxix</sup> The young representatives were able to take part in various discussions but also be present as the COP for the first time launched initiatives related to CPS, such as the COP27 Presidency's "Climate Responses for Sustaining Peace", the COP28 Presidency's Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace Day, the first-ever thematic day dedicated to the topic.<sup>lxx</sup> Furthermore, as the COP28 Presidency institutionalised the role of the "Youth Climate Champion", and by doing so, delivered a lasting legacy for young people with the Youth Climate Delegates Programme, it remains important to ensure the continued focus of young people from FCAS' meaningful participation, in line with the continued focus of CPS at future COPs and similar platforms.

Engagement often takes place through dedicated fora, both formal, as through COP27 and COP28, and informal, that provide open dialogue between young people and other decision-makers. These platforms empower young voices, enabling them to share ideas and co-create solutions. In West Africa, Youth Councils operating across multiple countries offer valuable avenues for collaboration on capacity building, where young people from various sectors already work together.<sup>lxxi</sup> Similarly, in South Sudan, youth committees have been formed to address specific issues, tackling water, business and peace education.<sup>lxxii</sup> These existing structures could effectively address CPS by facilitating collaboration between groups, allowing those focused on climate and those working on peace to exchange knowledge and experiences. By collaborating across different thematic areas, these platforms could stand stronger in providing unified advisory support to decision-makers.

When it comes to global and regional engagement, the UN Youth Advisory Councils appointed to work on specific areas—such as peace, climate, ecosystem restoration, and other key issues—could explore joint platforms or discussions, addressing the interconnectedness of the climate change and peace

agendas. By combining their expertise and efforts, these councils would provide a powerful, unified platform for youth voices, offering strategic guidance to decision-makers.

### **5.3. FOSTER INTER-GENERATIONAL DIALOGUE AND COLLABORATION FOR CLIMATE, PEACE AND SECURITY**

Policymakers and practitioners should promote intergenerational dialogue and collaboration to ensure that young people's perspectives and needs are considered in decision-making processes. This can also help foster collaboration and mutual learning between different age groups and ensure that young people are included in efforts to build resilience and address climate-related security risks in safeguarding durable peace. Intergenerational coordination goes beyond one-time activities, embedding ongoing dialogue and collaboration into the fabric of climate, peace, and security initiatives.

In the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Philippines region, with the support of UNDP, young people engaging in intergenerational dialogues have been able to glean wisdom from elders while also introducing youth-informed perspectives on climate adaptation, resilience and social cohesion.<sup>lxxiii</sup> While in Sudan, with the support of UNDP and the CSM, awareness-raising sessions and consultations with adults and elders have helped ensure that previous sensitivities related to the inclusion of young women have been addressed, and young women have gradually been given decision-making roles.<sup>lxxiv</sup>

In Kenya, the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) collaborates with 43 community conservancies along the coast to improve livelihoods, foster peace, and protect the environment. NRT's initiatives, highlighted in a 2023 UNDP and Life & Peace Institute report, include the successful deployment of youth and women as peace ambassadors, scouts, and conflict response teams, contributing significantly to the effectiveness of local peace and conservation efforts.<sup>lxxv</sup>

UNDP established the Climate, Peace & Security Experts Academy in 2022, aimed to introduce a core set of knowledge and tools to policymakers and government representatives in the field of climate policy and finance for peace. Following the two first iterations, women's representation was lower than men's, outlining the need for a dedicated women's academy. Furthermore, as the same was identified for young people, a dedicated academy takes place October 2024.. By the end of 2024, projections show that more than 230 participants have taken part across seven academies, both global and regional iterations, including 130 women policymakers. The representatives have come from over 70 countries, with 66 institutions, including regional entities from the Global South, being engaged.

Furthermore, facilitating programmes and networks that connect young individuals with experienced professionals in climate change, peace, and security is crucial for capacity building. These relationships offer guidance, knowledge transfer, and opportunities for collaboration, enhancing the capacity of young people while also allowing seasoned professionals to gain fresh insights from younger generations. Programmes like the Climate, Peace & Security Experts Academy can strengthen young individuals' skills and understanding and create a sense of belonging and continuity within the climate change and peace and security communities, ensuring the continuity of CPS strategies across generations.

#### **5.4. LEVERAGE INNOVATION, COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE FOCUSED ON CLIMATE, PEACE AND SECURITY**

Policymakers and organisations should prioritise using innovative communication strategies such as community radio shows, podcasts, social media, virtual reality, artificial intelligence and beyond to engage young people in awareness and action.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Furthermore, embracing digital solutions and innovative technologies can be valuable when addressing climate peace and security, as they can provide scalable, accessible, and effective means to mitigate climate risks and foster resilience.

In the Pacific, under the Climate Security in the Pacific Project, implemented by UNDP and IOM, supported by the PBF, virtual reality and podcasts to communicate climate risks and solutions highlight the innovative ways technology can engage a young audience. These tools facilitate a deeper understanding of climate-related security risks in the context of the Pacific and inspire young people to explore creative solutions that bridge traditional knowledge with modern technology.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

A UNDP supported pilot in Jordan has engaged 63% young people in using technology and innovation to explore how digital solutions can enhance water security, a critical aspect of climate resilience and peace. Young innovators in Jordan are developing sustainable agricultural practices and water conservation technologies that address climate change and reduce competition over scarce resources, a common flashpoint for conflicts.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Furthermore, in UNDP Philippines, initiatives like the Ideation Impact Challenge empower young people to identify CPS challenges and develop innovative solutions while emphasising capacity building and mentorship to strengthen young people's empowerment in CPS efforts.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

#### **5.5. INCREASE TARGETED INVESTMENTS AND CULTIVATE YOUTH-CENTRIC LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES ADDRESSING CLIMATE-RELATED SECURITY RISKS**

**Developing youth-centric livelihood opportunities is intrinsically linked to the need for scaling up targeted investments. Effective livelihood strategies require financial backing to ensure they are sustainable and impactful.**

UNDP and the CSM (2021) highlight that climate finance needs to reach the last mile of the population, as only USD 2.1 per person is provided by the vertical funds to extremely fragile states, compared to USD 10.8 per person in fragile states.<sup>lxxx</sup> This raises a pressing concern regarding the minuscule fraction of this already insufficient funding that reaches young individuals. The International Institute for Peace's (2021) report, "Youth Participation in Global Governance for Sustaining Peace and Climate Action", highlights that youth organisations and activists remain underfunded, and funding largely remains ad-hoc.<sup>lxxxii</sup> In pursuing increased financial resources, a deliberate focus should be on reaching the most at-risk youth populations, often disproportionately affected by climate-related security risks.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

**The SGP, a corporate programme of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) implemented by UNDP, has young people among the target groups, and about 40% of projects have active youth participation. In addition, 73% of SGP national steering committees have youth focal points, and each year, 350 to 500 projects are implemented, ensuring youth participation or leadership.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>**

To address climate-related security risks effectively, it is essential for policymakers and practitioners to focus on developing livelihood opportunities that are directly linked to enhancing resilience and creating income opportunities, especially targeting marginalised young people.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> This approach involves nurturing livelihoods that mitigate and adapt to climate impacts and strengthen social cohesion. Examples can be sustainable agriculture, renewable energy projects, and eco-friendly enterprises. When it comes to differentiated gendered impacts, targeted interventions should not only focus on combatting climate change but also address the root causes of gender-based violence and inequality, thereby contributing to broader efforts towards peace and security.<sup>lxxxv</sup> Furthermore, when integrating climate considerations into PVE strategies, it's crucial to prioritise addressing the livelihood opportunities and inclusion needs of large youth cohorts. This approach aims to empower young people positively while avoiding the negative portrayal of young people as drivers of violence or instability.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

In Sudan,<sup>lxxxvii</sup> young women have been more vocal and active in advocacy events. Here, young women have been actively participating in technical training to establish and maintain solar power installations, which provide a reliable source of energy, contribute to economic stability and can play a role in contributing to a peace-positive environment. In Jordan, the climate security pilot supporting youth entrepreneurship has

been important, as it provides access to start-up capital, business development training, and connecting young entrepreneurs with broader networks and - markets.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Such support empowers young people to launch and scale up businesses that contribute to economic development and CPS efforts. Furthermore, success stories from UNDP Nigeria's Climate Peace Hubs, where young peoples are engaged in climate-smart agriculture and natural resource management, underscore the potential for scaling climate solutions that also serve as peacebuilding measures. By addressing the root causes of farmer-herder conflicts through sustainable livelihoods, these initiatives combat climate change, diffuse tensions, and foster cooperation among diverse community groups.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

## **5.6. DEVELOP FURTHER RESEARCH ON CLIMATE, PEACE AND SECURITY AND YOUTH**

The pressing need for expanded research at the intersection of CPS, meaningful youth inclusion, engagement and empowerment, and their connections to YPS stems from recognising the current gap in scholarly exploration. There is a body of research on CPS and YPS, mental health/emotional stress, climate activism, forced migration and displacement as separate agendas, but there is a noticeable scarcity of studies that effectively bridge these areas. This gap into the need for a deeper the understanding of the dynamics of young people's involvement, engagement and empowerment in the CPS space.<sup>xc</sup>

**In 2023, the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) published an independent Thematic Review on Climate Security and Peacebuilding that was commissioned in partnership with the CSM, FAO, UNICEF and the UK, which highlighted that more than half of the projects examined aimed to increase women's and youth participation and inclusion in local natural resource management and other CPS initiatives. Although eight out of 43 specific climate security projects with a primary focus on youth were identified, project data was insufficient to allow for deeper exploration. The Review highlighted that better understanding of youth motivations and limitations on their participation or source of grievances and vulnerability may be necessary to improve their contributions to climate-security dynamics.<sup>xc1</sup> Diving further into this, the PBF is currently undertaking a Thematic Review on Youth, Peace and Security, looking into how the PBF has contributed to realising the agenda over the last five years, including a dedicated section on youth engagement in environmental peacebuilding and CPS.<sup>xc2</sup>**

Although there is extensive literature on the positive contributions of young people to climate activism, there is a notable research gap in contributions from FCAS. This gap limits understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities for young people in these contexts, hindering the development of effective strategies.<sup>xciiii</sup>

Regional studies on how climate-related security risks impact young people and whether these impacts vary based on geographic contexts are needed. Understanding these regional variations is crucial for developing tailored strategies that address the unique needs of young people in different settings. There is also an unfortunate stigma that young people are perpetrators of violent conflicts, abductions, cattle raids, and rapes.<sup>xciiv</sup> This perception does not reflect the reality for the majority of young people. Their role in climate-related security risk dynamics needs to be discussed, especially in the context of sub-national conflicts, such as cattle raiding, revenge attacks and the auto-defence of their communities.<sup>xciv</sup> Additionally, a potential study with a stronger emphasis on mediation and peacebuilding as entry points, rather than a

significant focus on climate action, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of young people in sustaining peace amidst climate challenges.

Moreover, the connection between the YPS agenda, marked by pivotal resolution 2250<sup>xcivi</sup> and Climate, Peace, and Security (CPS) agendas is actively being explored. The Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), UNDP and Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) have embarked on a research journey to further identify the interlinkages between these agendas. The guidance note contributes to an emerging understanding of how young people from different backgrounds and identities are affected by climate-related security risks, and how they perceive and address these interlinked risks. It outlines the interlinkages between the YPS and CPS agendas. It provides real-world examples of how young persons, youth-led organisations, and initiatives perceive, engage and lead CPS-related efforts, distinguished from the UN/DP initiatives outlined in this policy paper. The guidance note also aims to inspire actors to reflect, explore and realise the nexus of youth, climate, peace and security (YCPS).





# 6. Recommendations as derived from early findings

## Enhance access to CPS information, education, resource sharing, and skills development

- Prioritize support to education and skills development within CPS for young people, particularly through training programmes, workshops, and educational resources.
- Tailor educational content to resonate with young people by incorporating local contexts, languages, and cultures, as exemplified by UNDP in Nigeria

## Foster inter-generational dialogue and collaboration for CPS

- Ensure that the perspectives and needs of young people are fostered through mutual learning between different age groups, as demonstrated in the Philippines, Sudan and Kenya
- Develop programmes connecting young individuals with experienced climate, peace, and security professionals for mutual learning and capacity building, as showcased through the Climate, Peace & Security Experts Academy.

## Engage young people in CPS decision and policymaking processes

- Actively include, ensure meaningful participation of young people from FCAS in global climate, energy, peacebuilding and similar discussions and decision-making platforms, such as Conferences of Parties, as demonstrated by UNDP Somalia as well as the COP28 Presidency support to the youth delegates from FCAS.
- Synergise efforts with existing councils, such as UN youth councils or advisory groups, existing community councils, youth advisory boards of organisations or others across thematic areas to provide guidance on CPS policies and practices, ensuring young people's perspectives genuinely influence initiatives

## Leverage innovation, communication, and technologies for young people focused on CPS

- Prioritize using communication strategies such as community radio shows, podcasts, and virtual reality to engage young people in CPS awareness and action, as shown by the Climate Security in the Pacific Project.
- Embrace digital solutions and innovative technologies to address climate risks and foster resilience, as seen in Jordan's use of technology in agriculture and water to reduce competition over scarce resources and mitigate conflict.

## Increase targeted investments and cultivate youth-centric livelihood opportunities addressing climate-related security risks

- Prioritise access to finance for youth-centric livelihood opportunities that address climate adaptation, mitigation, peacebuilding and conflict prevention, ensuring that financial resources reach the most at-risk youth populations.
- Foster livelihood opportunities linked to enhancing resilience and social cohesion, such as sustainable agriculture, renewable energy projects, and eco-friendly enterprises, ensuring these opportunities are accessible to young people. This approach helps combat climate change and contributes to peacebuilding and conflict prevention, as seen in initiatives in Sudan and Nigeria.

## Develop further research on CPS and Youth

- Leverage and build upon current research efforts, including this policy paper, the UN PBF Thematic Reviews on CPS (2023) and forthcoming on YPS, and the guidance note by Folke Bernadotte Academy, UNDP, and SIPRI. Utilise findings from these studies to identify gaps.
- Explore 1) regional variations in how climate-related security risks impact young people to develop tailored strategies and enhance understanding of young people's impact roles in different geographical settings, 2) youth climate action specifically within FCAS, as has limited research, and 3) how peacebuilding and mediation as entry points (rather than climate action), including environmental peacebuilding, can offer effective solutions to address climate-related security risks and actively engage young people.

## 7. Conclusion

The convergence of climate change, conflict and insecurity is a significant challenge, and young people are central to its risks and solutions. This paper reflecting the initial findings from UNDP, emphasises that engaging young people in the CPS agenda is an essential component for effective and inclusive responses. Their involvement helps ensure that interventions are informed by their communities' diverse needs and perspectives.

It is crucial to recognise young people's potential as leaders in addressing climate-related security risks. The effectiveness of climate, prevention, and peacebuilding efforts increasingly depends on the meaningful inclusion of young people at all levels, from local initiatives to broader policy discussions.

To build on these initial findings, it is important to focus on education, skills, and opportunities that empower

young people, particularly in regions most impacted by climate-related security risks. Equally, leveraging existing platforms on CPS and ensuring youth voices are integrated into these spaces is vital while also synergising efforts of existing youth platforms and councils across various thematic areas. This paper highlights the need for targeted support to ensure that youth-led initiatives are encouraged, actively supported, and scaled within established frameworks.

In conclusion, this policy paper emphasises the importance of meaningfully including, engaging, and empowering young people in efforts to address climate-related security risks and recognises the unique role that young people can play as agents of change. These initial insights will inform future strategies and underscore the critical need for ongoing focus and investment in young people within this evolving agenda.

**Sarra Messaoudi, Regional Lead of the Middle East and North Africa Coalition on Youth, Peace and Security, highlighted climate-sensitive security risks at the 9606th Meeting of the Security Council: “The struggle lies in saving what’s left of agricultural land”. To address this, young peacebuilders in Palestine are working to reconnect Palestinian farmers with their land by “organising alternative tours and employing non-violent resistance techniques”.<sup>xvii</sup>**



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