

CASE STUDY ON THEMATIC REVIEW OF CLIMATE SECURITY PROJECTS SUPPORTED BY THE UN PEACEBUILDING FUND

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Established in 2006, the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) is the UN's primary financial instrument designed to support and build peace in countries at risk of or affected by violent conflict. PBF support seeks to address the root causes of conflict through integrated responses involving national, cross-border and regional engagement. To examine past practices, identify lessons learned, and consider promising innovations, the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) commissions regular Thematic Reviews as part of its efforts to continuously learn and improve the effectiveness of peacebuilding.

The PBSO engaged the UN University to develop Climate-Security and Peacebuilding: Thematic Review. The review considered 74 climate-security and environmental peacebuilding projects that the PBF supported between 2016 and 2021. These totaled approximately \$162.7 million and were implemented in 33 countries. The Thematic Review placed the PBF-supported interventions in the broader global context, seeking to assess results, understand good practices, areas for improving programming, and ultimately to guide future investments and policies in climate security. Distinct from programmatic evaluation in its larger-scale analyses, approaches, and outputs, the Thematic Review produced policy and strategic investment inferences by conducting an overarching assessment of the entire PBF climate security project portfolio, analyzing global trends within it, and extracting findings across projects.

Methodology: The Thematic Review was conducted through three core research steps: (1) a global trends analysis; (2) an analysis of key project themes, cross-cutting issues, and intervention types; and (3) three geographic case studies. To conduct research, the Thematic Review drew upon a background literature review, expert interviews, desk research on PBF-funded projects, a few in-depth case studies, and global cross-referencing of indexes such as ND GAIN, Fragile States, IEP Global Peace, and Uppsala Conflict Database Program.

At the global scale, the Thematic Review assessed overall portfolio characteristics including funding by region, regional diversity, cross cutting and thematic issues, typologies, and responses. The Thematic Review's intermediate work analyzed 32 projects to explore theories of change and project design, which inevitably necessitated country context analysis. In analyzing the theories of change, the Thematic Review explored common trends, weaknesses and strengths, and compliance with PBF guidance, aiming to understand what projects identify as key change mechanisms and if they are effective.

AT A GLANCE EVALUATION

- Thematic Review

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The Thematic Review primarily used project documents to extract or intuit theories of change, using a combination of documentation with actual outcomes to assess theories of change in circumstances where they were not clearly delineated or absent. The Thematic Review analyzed three diverse climate security project case studies that enabled exploration of cross-cutting and regional-specific themes and practices in environments facing different security and environmental challenges, helping to contextualize the global analysis findings with contextually specific examples.

Several challenges emerged in conducting the Thematic Review. One of the first challenges was **definitional**: what constitutes climate-security risks and what is a climate-security project for purposes of the analysis? These questions were ultimately resolved, with the result that of the 74 projects initially identified, 43 were identified as having a climate-security focus.

The project team faced challenges to theory of **change validation and analysis**, as the project document-based nature of research restricted the project team's ability to validate theories of change in cases when there was a disconnect between project design and implementation or when a project was shaped by the implementation process over design. Theory of change validation was additionally challenged because ongoing projects constituted over half of the project sample.

The Thematic Review produced critical learning for both the United Nations and broader audiences. **Varying centrality of climate security dimensions** to projects posed the question regarding how climate security concerns may be better focused in PBF-funded projects. The Thematic Review additionally revealed **emerging dynamics and best practices** emphasizing the importance of greater environmental awareness in conflict awareness; greater efforts to have integrated approaches, cross-border engagement, and linkages between human security and climate change vulnerabilities; and enhancing climate change-related components in security-related activities.

Another finding related to **gender and climate security linkages**. The Thematic Review found that a significant proportion of projects were gender-focused projects with sometimes only superficial climate or environmental dimensions, rather than climate security projects with gender dimensions. This may reflect a broader "trend of not fully realizing synergies in the gender-climate-security sector" (Gaston and Brown 2023, 5). The Thematic Review observed that natural resource management and climate change projects are often used as an entry point for empowering women. It noted the importance of further learning from projects regarding the synergies between climate and environmental dimensions of a project and women's empowerment.

The Thematic Review noted that 9 of the 10 countries that received the most funding from the PBF were the most vulnerable to climate change and 6 of the 10 were among the most fragile states; this highlighted the **unique role that the PBF has in being willing to invest in situations that other donors may deem too risky**. As such, "effective PBF investments can offer 'proof of concept' that other climate funds and donors can consider scaling up." Moreover, the Thematic Review found that climate security projects were often quite effective at addressing other social issues, such as marginalization of women and youth, through the classic environmental diplomacy mechanism of bringing together communities over shared environmental challenges.

By emphasizing learning, the Thematic Review will help to inform United Nations policy trajectories and strategic investments while also highlighting emerging issues and important climate security themes more broadly. This case can be accessed at <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/thematic-review-climate-security-and-peacebuilding-2023>