BUILDING EVIDENCE FOR CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND PEACEBUILDING

Insights from Mali

RESEARCH OVERVIEW | APRIL 2025

The climate-conflict nexus has been a growing area of interest among civil society, policymakers, donors, and academics over the past few years. Mercy Corps has been at the helm of these efforts by implementing climate and conflict programming for over ten years and prioritizing the understanding of the complex intersection between climate and conflict in fragile contexts. Ben ni Baara was one program that worked at this intersection.

Ben ni Baara (BnB), which means "Work and Peace" in Bambara, was a human security program funded by Sida and implemented by Mercy Corps Mali in collaboration with International Alert and Humanity & Inclusion from 2020 to 2024. Through the BnB program, Mercy Corps conducted both a qualitative study examining the role of local peace committees (LPCs) on social cohesion as well as a mixed-methods study exploring how outcomes varied based on different *types* of program interventions. These studies resulted in two research reports: *Building Bonds of Trust: The Relationship Between Conflict Resolution Committees and Social Cohesion in Mali*, and *Weathering Change: Exploring Connections Between Climate Adaptation and Conflict Prevention in Mali*.

Together, these reports explore how locally led conflict resolution structures and climate adaptation efforts play a role in strengthening social cohesion and resilience within communities in central and southern Mali. Evidence from this research adds to our growing evidence base related to the climate-conflict nexus by further deepening our understanding of what helps communities cope, adapt, and thrive in response to shocks and stressors related to climate and conflict.

Key Findings: Local peace committees (LPCs) influence social cohesion

- In *Building Bonds of Trust*, study participants perceived that the BnB Conflict Resolutions Committees (CRCs), the program's LPCs, had a **positive influence on community social cohesion**, particularly by fostering trust (both between community members and the CRC members, and among community members) and by helping reduce the number of conflicts through conflict management and peacebuilding education.
- Study participants also perceived that **three core practices** contributed to the CRCs positively influencing social cohesion and peacebuilding, specifically: (1) collaboration with other peace and security actors in their communities, including other committee entities and social groups like youth; (2) focusing on the accessibility of their services to all community members since the CRCs are considered more approachable and affordable than other security actors like the police or courts; and (3) prioritizing the sustainability of the CRCs even after BnB ends, such as through local ownership of the committees.

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Key Findings: Certain *types* of program interventions can have a greater effect on the climate-conflict nexus

- In *Weathering Change*, participating in a combination of *both* climate and non-climate-based activities (compared to only participating in non-climate activities) may be especially effective at decreasing participants' levels of support for violence *and* decreasing the likelihood that participants view members of other livelihood groups as a threat.

- People who participated in *both* climate and non-climate activities were less inclined to support violence than those who only participated in non-climate activities.

- However, the findings also suggest that individuals who only participated in climate activities may be *more likely to support* violence under certain circumstances than those who only participated in non-climate activities.

Main Takeaways

- **Climate adaptation and peacebuilding efforts** – including those that foster social cohesion – must be **simultaneously embedded into programs** related to the climate-conflict nexus to address intertwined risks effectively, especially since resource scarcity is a main driver of local tensions that can develop into conflict.

- Strengthening and/or developing **local conflict resolution structures**, such as Local Peace Committees (LPCs), **can enhance trust between community members and empower communities** to mediate conflicts – including those arising from environmental and agricultural-related stresses.

- Sustainable peace and community resilience to shocks and stressors depend on **strong social cohesion and inclusive participation** – including with women and youth – in climate adaptation initiatives, peacebuilding efforts, and conflict resolution processes.

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