DCAF Geneva Centre
for Security Sector
Governance

Stocktaking of security sector roles in climate and environmental security

Report on Sierra Leone

May
2023

About DCAF

DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance is dedicated to improving the security of states and their people within a framework of democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and gender equality. Since its founding in 2000, DCAF has contributed to making peace and development more sustainable by assisting partner states, and international actors supporting these states, to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms. It creates innovative knowledge products, promotes norms and good practices, provides legal and policy advice and supports capacity-building of both state and non-state security sector stakeholders.

Federal Republic of Germany
Foreign Office

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

FBA

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

Executive Summary

Sierra Leone is facing a range of climate and environmental risks that directly affect human security. Human activities, including environmental crime, are further undermining protective ecosystem services and destroying carbon sinks, contributing to the cycle of degradation and accelerating the effects of climate change.

From rising sea levels and changing rainfall patterns, which cause both water scarcity and seasonal flooding, to widespread pollution and the destruction of natural resources such as coastal ecosystems and tropical rainforests, the combined effects of climate change and human pressures on the environment are threatening to undo the economic development and peacebuilding gains achieved since the end of the civil war.

While many of these risks require a response that extends well beyond the security sector, security institutions have an important and perhaps underappreciated role to play in this context. It is worth noting that government responses to these risks (or lack thereof) as well as failures to address corrupt practices that directly exacerbate an already critical context clearly affect the population's perceptions of the state. However, there are multiple, affordable opportunities for security institutions to play a role in addressing human security needs and in doing so to make a contribution to social cohesion.

As climate change increases the risk of flooding, mudslides and other disasters, the role of the Sierra Leonean security forces in disaster risk reduction (DRR) and in supporting efforts of the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) will be increasingly important and offers a valuable opportunity for institutions to work closely with communities and local government to better analyse and mitigate the risk of both sudden and slow-onset disasters. Likewise, the environmental crime police, in conjunction with specialised agencies operating under the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (MoE)[1], including the forest guards, has the potential to play a stronger role in preventing and prosecuting cases of environmental crimes and other forms of harm to the environment. There are important links between these two functions. Illegal logging and land-grabbing, leading to deforestation, significantly increase the risk of mudslides. Unregulated waste disposal and sand and mineral mining not only affect soil and water resources, but also have serious public health consequences and ultimately increase flood risks. This directly affects the health and resilience of available resources for farming and fishing, on which Sierra Leone's rapidly growing population relies.

Photo: DCAF

Overall, this stocktaking study has found significant potential for prevention and stabilisation programming to improve service delivery of security institutions with regard to mitigating the impact of climate and environmental risks on communities and the environment, as well as strengthening social cohesion and contributing to sustainable peace. While international partners in their prevention and stabilisation programming tend not to fully maximise potential in this area, findings place security sector roles in climate and environmental security at the heart of the triple nexus of humanitarian needs, development and security. Moreover, working at this nexus is relevant in the context of the sustaining peace and prevention agenda, commitments to mainstream DRR, as agreed under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Paris Agreement's Global Goal on Adaptation.

In addition to the more practical recommendations for international partners and the Government of Sierra Leone that are included in the report, several of the conclusions have broader relevance for security sector governance and reform (SSG/R), prevention and stabilisation programming across a range of regional, environmental and security contexts, and will be further explored in the other countries in the stocktaking study.

Findings

➤ Sierra Leone is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change. It faces a range of multidimensional risks at the intersection of environmental and human security, and across both the Prepare and Protect dimensions of this study. These risks interact in a way that continues to increase the vulnerability of Sierra Leoneans to the human security consequences of the changing climate.

➤ Environmental harm, such as pollution, illegal logging and mining, and violations of existing legislation are sometimes inextricably linked with community livelihoods. Even if law enforcement in this area is strengthened, harm to the environment is unlikely to cease without a focus on creating alternative, clean options for income generation. However, strengthening law enforcement is also crucial because of the strong links between harm to the environment and organised criminal activities, including transboundary activities.

➤ A variety of civilian and security sector agencies are involved in DRR and combating environmental crime, with mandates that are not always entirely clear or distinct. Moreover, when it comes to issuing environmental licences and permits (for mining, logging, construction, etc), it is not always clear which agency's licensing takes precedence over the other. In a context of many needs and limited resources, both gaps and overlapping mandates open pathways for corruption and undermine the ability of state institutions to deliver the security services that communities need most under the prepare and protect dimensions of this study.

Recommendations

➤ **Recognising and reinforcing climate security roles:** from human and planetary security perspectives, the international community and national partners should recognise the security sector's role in mitigating climate and environmental risks as a top priority for engagement.

  ▪ This would represent a shift in responsibility and a broader definition of the security sector to include institutions working on civil protection, and further **empower national actors** in leading DRR efforts.

  ▪ In terms of environmental crime, it would mean strengthening **international and regional cooperation on fighting environmental crime**, addressing **domestic factors that enable environmental crime** and recognising the importance of preventing **non-criminalised forms of environmental harm**.

  ▪ Relevant functional areas in the security sector, such as DRR and fighting environmental crime, should be included conceptually in thematic strategies for SSG/R and could become a focus for support in **country or regional engagement strategies** and through **multilateral missions**.

  ▪ As this is an emerging area of focus for SSG/R, it will be important for future programmes to collect additional **data that can inform design and implementation** in areas such as the link between security sector roles, peacebuilding and social cohesion.

➤ **Corruption and accountability:** corruption is both an enabler and a driver of environmental crime. Increased commitment to accountability is required from national authorities and the international partners providing resources. Investment in capacities for tracking financial flows can increase transparency and at the same time enable better forward financial planning.

➤ **Environmental degradation through waste disposal and pollution:** waste disposal and pollution are **human security issues** that are likely to become more important in the coming years as pressures on ecosystems from climate change and demands for natural resources continue to increase. In addition to affecting public health, polluted land and water supplies diminish both food and water security. In a global context of tightening environmental regulations, security institutions in many regions may also need to strengthen their understanding of the transnational dimensions of illegal waste disposal.

➤ **Supporting capable communities:** working at the intersection of the environment and security – particularly in contexts of widespread challenges and limited security sector resources – also requires a realistic analysis of **what communities themselves can do as a first line of defence** and where security institutions must play a role.

➤ **Emphasising prevention:** a longer-term focus on **prevention** is critical for both DRR and environmental protection. **Risk-informed planning** of infrastructure and housing, for example, can make a significant contribution to mitigating future disaster risks but is not always well integrated with DRR functions. Similarly, security sector strategic and operational planning should include climate and environmental risks. In addition, widespread pollution, beyond being an environmental crime, is a **slow-onset disaster** with potentially catastrophic consequences for future food and water security. A preventive approach is essential in enforcing

environmental legislation, as communities can ill afford the **loss of productive agricultural land, reductions in supplies of clean drinking water** or other consequences of environmental degradation.

➤ **Coordination and integration:** tackling environmental crime and analysing disaster risks require specific technical skills (for example in the area of environmental sampling to detect crimes), and, because of the complexity, particularly **close coordination is required between security institutions and environmental and other government agencies** that may not traditionally work together. Furthermore, at the community level, **environmental harm is often linked with livelihoods** and thus solutions that focus solely on enforcement are unlikely to succeed. Therefore, integrated approaches are essential.

➤ **Comprehensive international partner approaches:** working effectively on DRR, environmental protection and more broadly on the triple nexus also requires partners to adopt a comprehensive approach. This means international partners developing innovative funding instruments that can cover several hitherto separate sectors and policy areas, and having the ability and willingness to engage with a wide range of national counterparts across sectors.

➤ **Sustaining peace:** the responses of security actors to climate and environmental risks, as well as the way in which they engage with communities and individual citizens on these risks, have great potential to foster social cohesion and peacebuilding.

Programming should take full advantage of this potential, and training in civil–military relations, dialogue and community engagement is needed. Fostering security actors' understanding of the connections between livelihoods and climate and environmental risks, together with specialised public order management training and preparation that emphasises de-escalation techniques, would mitigate the risks of conflict escalation.

Priorities for next steps

1. A **mapping of ongoing international partner engagement**: to conceptually define the scope, taxonomy and classification of between climate change and environment as well as the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. This mapping will also allow the identification of gaps, opportunities for collaboration and possible synergies.

2. Engagement with the Government of Sierra Leone on **performance-based management**: identification of a pilot agency, development of performance-based service delivery indicators and creation of financial incentives on an institutional and individual basis to deliver against them.

3. Investment in **local and community DRR efforts**: piloting support to the creation of an operational local DRR structures, including a local DRR committee and community DRR volunteer group.

SSG/R needs to mainstream climate and environmental risks so security sectors can help protect people, planet and peace