

STRATEGIC INSIGHTS: 5 Key Lessons from the Weathering Risk Peace Pillar

It is perhaps clearer than ever before that global crises are converging and influencing one another. From climate-fueled shocks to resource degradation to violent conflict, the need for integrated responses is increasingly urgent. The Weathering Risk Peace Pillar has responded to this challenge by testing whether integrated climate, environment, and peace interventions can function in some of the world's most fragile settings. Peace Pillar projects in the **Bay of Bengal, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, and Yemen** are demonstrating that integration is not only possible but also makes strategic sense. Together, these projects show how integration can generate greater value and impact in places where siloed approaches fall short. A cross-project analysis of recent evaluations distills key lessons and shows that what is emerging is not just promising but a demonstrated proof of concept.

1. SHARED ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS CAN BECOME DRIVERS OF COOPERATION

Climate and environmental security issues can present as common threats that transcend political and identity-based divisions. Shared natural resource challenges like water scarcity, degraded pastureland and collapsing fish stocks may be risks to stability but they can also offer opportunity and incentive to cooperate. Even in highly divisive contexts, these shared concerns can serve as entry points for collaboration.

In **Iraq**, climate pressures and mismanagement of a key canal were reframed as shared risks, opening space for dialogue between upstream and downstream communities. Inclusive agreements on more equitable water distribution and community led monitoring turned a source of conflict into a platform for cooperation across sectarian divides that had previously stymied progress. In the **Bay of Bengal**, discussing the depletion of fish stocks as a shared climate vulnerability created an entry point for cross-border technical cooperation, providing a rare space for dialogue among states who had limited regional engagement on this issue. In **Yemen**, community dialogues brought together civil society, local authorities and tribal leaders to address urgent issues like water scarcity and pollution. In Marib, Hadramawt and Al-Mahra, these exchanges produced informal agreements on priority environmental risks and opened space for cooperation at a time when national peace talks had faltered. In **Somalia**, joint flood response efforts bridged long-standing clan tensions while strengthening social networks and advancing local ownership of crisis response. These efforts showed how climate shocks, while destabilizing, can also mobilize communities around practical cooperation. These natural resource management issues are often so central to survival, of both people and states, that the urgency or benefit of solutions can motivate cooperation at new or different scales of decision-making even where formal political processes are stalled.

2. RESILIENCE IS A CAPACITY, NOT A DELIVERABLE

Across all five projects, what emerged clearly is that resilience is not a fixed outcome but rather a dynamic capacity to adapt, absorb shocks, and respond flexibly as conditions shift. At its most meaningful, project success in building resilience came from investing in systems and relationships that allow communities and institutions to navigate change peacefully. Examples include early warning systems, inclusive resource management committees, and adaptable conflict resolution mechanisms.

In **Somalia**, developing Climate Security Action Plans (CSAPs) with communities and coupling them with sustained dialogue processes connected climate risks to local conflict drivers and enabled communities to respond to evolving challenges collectively with appropriate mitigation strategies, like halting charcoal production or restoring degraded land. In **Nigeria's Middle Belt**, natural resource peace agreements integrating specific provisions on climate adaptation enabled collaborative governance of critical natural resources, reduced violence, improved intercommunal relations, and prompted locally led initiatives on land rehabilitation, afforestation and water conservation.. The local peace infrastructures reinforced under the agreements now mediate disputes, monitor compliance, and adapt rules as conditions shift. Early warning structures and mediation training have further equipped communities to detect tensions and defuse incidents before they escalate, which strengthens local capacities to adapt to shocks and to sustain peace. In the **Bay of Bengal**, regional coordination instruments such as the draft guiding principles for maritime law enforcement agencies for their conduct at sea, once adopted, and the already established collaborative marine science network (BIMReN) will strengthen institutional capacities to anticipate and respond to shared challenges such as unintended escalations at sea arising due to illegal cross-border fishing as well as the climate impacts on fisheries and coastal communities. As a result, these efforts are improving cooperative responses to climate-related challenges. Together, the evaluations suggest that effective resilience-building is not about delivering fixed solutions but instead it is about nurturing capacities for flexible, inclusive problem-solving in the face of change, that can be sustained in the long-term.

3. SOLUTIONS MUST BE GROUNDED IN LOCAL REALITIES—BY DESIGN, NOT BY CHANCE

The evaluations confirm a widely recognized but inconsistently applied insight: the most impactful interventions are those rooted in the realities, experiences, and priorities of the people and institutions most affected. This type of local grounding does not occur through one-off consultations or cursory outreach. Engagement should be intentional and sustained throughout the project cycle, and, where appropriate, inclusive of diverse actors and institutions across levels of governance and society. Without this grounding, programs risk misdiagnosing problems, offering solutions that don't resonate, or inadvertently reinforcing tensions.

Inclusion is also more than a matter of fairness; it is central to effective strategy. Marginalized groups often hold critical insights into environmental pressures, resource access, and social dynamics. Excluding them can limit legitimacy and lead to blind spots. The evaluations show this across contexts. In **Yemen**, more than 3,600 people across 13 governorates helped shape environmental peacebuilding priorities, with women making up 43 percent of participants — a remarkable level of representation in a context where they are systematically excluded from decision-making. Their contributions helped redefine environmental stressors as governance and peace concerns, giving the process credibility that top-down approaches often lack. In **Somalia**, traditional Shirarka assemblies created space for women, youth, and elders, groups often excluded from peace processes, to shape both problem definition and response. Their participation helped surface priorities such as curbing charcoal production and strengthening family ties across clans, ensuring that strategies reflected lived realities and carried local legitimacy. In

Iraq's Al-Zubair district, a locally driven social pact between displaced families and host communities set principles for fair access to resources and services, while institutionalizing conflict management with local authorities. Grounded in local customs and informed by the local experience of climate pressures, it eased tensions and filled governance gaps where formal institutions had previously struggled. Across all five projects, meaningful local grounding and inclusive engagement with a range of actors uncovered risks and opportunities that external actors might have missed. It helped tailor interventions to real-world dynamics, enhanced local ownership, and ultimately strengthened both peace and climate resilience.

4. DIALOGUE AND ACTION MUST REINFORCE EACH OTHER

The peace and conflict field has long recognized that dialogue is essential but not sufficient on its own. The evaluations underscore a complementary insight which is that trust grows fastest when dialogue is paired with practical collaboration. Integrated climate–environment–peace efforts lend themselves to this outcome because environmental risks like drought, water scarcity, or extreme weather events often cut across social and political divisions, while also offering a specific entry point for groups to work together on issues that affect daily life and future stability.

In the **Bay of Bengal**, a regional dialogue platform brought key actors together for table-top exercises that allowed them to rehearse joint responses to cross-border incidents at sea. These practical exchanges fostered trust and fed into the development of draft guiding principles for law enforcement agencies on their conduct at sea, which will help minimise unintended escalations by creating predictability of interactions. In **Nigeria**, inclusive dialogues between farmers and herders produced peace agreements that not only led to the reopening of local markets and lifting of movement restrictions but also enabled establishing joint committees to sustainably manage grazing land and water access. This practical cooperation reinforced dialogue by showing visible benefits such as a reduction in violent clashes, improved livelihoods, and strengthened inter-ethnic cooperation. In **Iraq**, a multi-stakeholder agreement on water distribution reinforced by community-led monitoring curbed illegal canal diversions in Hawija, while joint assessment and planning in Kalar delivered new wells for nearly 100 families facing shortages. These improvements in water governance showed that climate-security dialogues could deliver tangible results, strengthening confidence in both the agreements and those implementing them. In **Yemen**, community dialogues on environmental risks promoted trust, with post-dialogue surveys showing that 91 percent of participants felt stronger connections with other groups. That confidence encouraged local leaders to pursue mediation on oil and sanitation disputes and prompted authorities to request further dialogues, showing how collaboration in dialogue created momentum for joint action.

These cases show that practical collaboration to address shared environmental challenges, especially where politics are sensitive or trust is low, can reinforce the value of dialogue and strengthen social cohesion. These types of pragmatic collaboration help translate the benefit of dialogue into trusting relationships that can foster long-term cooperation.

5. INTEGRATED PROGRAMMING MULTIPLIES VALUE BEYOND THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

These evaluations show that integrated climate–environment–peace programming is not just viable, it's more effective. What was once considered experimental is now a demonstrated approach that strengthens resilience and delivers more durable outcomes for peace and climate resilience. By addressing climate and environmental risks and conflict together, these projects generated co-benefits that siloed efforts often miss. Better resource governance supported dispute resolution. Peace programming created space for climate adaptation. Inclusion helped safeguard environmental agreements. The result was smarter resource management, stronger social cohesion, and more resilient communities in the face of change.

In **Somalia**, initiatives by the Insider Peacebuilders Network reinforced trust and environmental stewardship. These included youth football tournaments between rival clans and anti-deforestation campaigns, showing how peacebuilding, climate action, and social cohesion can advance together. In **Nigeria**, peace agreements combined dispute resolution with provisions on climate adaptation, enabling communities to manage grazing land and water cooperatively and adaptively while reducing violence. Communities have begun adopting climate-smart practices such as soil conservation, crop rotation, and afforestation. These local gains have reinforced one another and are now scaling into a statewide dialogue and laying the groundwork for a cross-border process. In **Yemen**, consultations across 13 governorates fed into Track 1.5 discussions and the Yemen Peace Roadmap, bringing local evidence on land, water and pollution into national forums. This bottom-up integration gave peace efforts broader legitimacy while also ensuring environmental risks were addressed as part of conflict resolution, producing gains that neither track could have achieved alone. In the **Bay of Bengal**, science diplomacy has advanced environmental cooperation while also building bridges across political and security divides. The Kochi Declaration on Marine Science Cooperation and the creation of a regional research network of more than 40 scientists have brought researchers, policymakers, and maritime security actors into one process. This has generated co-benefits for fisheries governance, regional cooperation and trust-building. In **Iraq**, communities and authorities collectively used new analytical tools and mediation skills to negotiate climate-sensitive water-sharing rules that reduced disputes and improved access—building capacity to cope with drought and other forms of climate stress. National roundtables then carried these experiences upward, connecting community resilience with district, governorate and ministry actors while also informing international partners and programming.

These cases show that when climate and environmental risks are treated as part of the conflict context rather than separate challenges, responses often become more adaptive, legitimate, and impactful. Integrated programming draws more from each investment by generating interconnected benefits that reinforce one another. This systems-based approach strengthens both peace and climate resilience, delivering outcomes that are greater than the sum of their parts in contexts where risks are dynamic and interdependent.

Conclusion: From Evidence to Action

These five projects demonstrate that integrating climate and environmental considerations into peacebuilding programming is a pragmatic investment in sustainable peace that delivers more than synergy. It generates new capabilities that siloed programming can't replicate. The learning from these efforts is not theoretical, it is already operational. It offers practical guidance on how to design smarter interventions that respond to today's interconnected crises. The imperative now is to scale what we've learned, deepen what's working, and embed integrated approaches into peacebuilding and climate strategies going forward. Promising but a demonstrated proof of concept.

AUTHORS

This publication was prepared by Cynthia Brady (adelphi research). The policy brief synthesises lessons from the five project (Bay of Bengal, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen) outcome evaluations carried out by the Weathering Risk Peace Pillar consortium partners: Berghof Foundation, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, and the European Institute of Peace.

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