

Climate, Conflict, & Civilian-Led Protection

Case studies of Unarmed Civilian Protection

In light of the intricate challenges posed by the combination of climate change with conflicts, this brief explores the application of Unarmed Civilian Protection as a strategic approach. The case studies presented below examine instances where community-led initiatives have effectively addressed vulnerabilities stemming from the interplay of climate and conflict dynamics, including bolstering community resilience. Recognizing climate change as a prominent driver of contemporary challenges, this brief underscores the need for adaptable strategies in the face of evolving threats. Strengthening our programmatic responses is a priority for Nonviolent Peaceforce, and we are learning and growing as this intersection of climate and conflict mutates and evolves. Our ultimate goal is to contribute to peaceful resolutions without inciting further violence.

Strengthening Community Resiliency (Tong, South Sudan)

NP's team in Bentiu, South Sudan supported the founding of a Women's Protection Team in Tong Boma in 2019. A short time later, in mid-2021, heavy flooding made it nearly impossible for NP to return to the community. Finally, in June 2022—following a 2-hour journey by canoe—the team was able to reach Tong. They were greeted by the women, who were eager to share news of their achievements in NP's absence.

Using the skills they strengthened with NP, the Women's Protection Team independently continued campaigns to raise awareness, provide direct protection, and advocate for change. Their work on creating “child safe spaces” and spreading information was crucial in preventing children from drowning and catching water-borne diseases amid increased risks as a result of the flooding. The Women's Protection Team also took action after noticing a rise in sexual and gender-based violence cases associated with the longer distances women had to travel to collect firewood and access waterlilies. After a nearby community became displaced, more people were looking for the same resources, exposing the women to sexual assault, harassment, and physical injuries. As a result of the Women's Protection Team's interventions, women will often travel in groups to collect firewood or waterlilies which reduces the risk of attacks and helps them feel safer and better supported when faced with challenges on route.



Civilian-led Protection Amidst Contracted Responses (Myanmar)

Myanmar faces several challenges associated with climate change, including rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and threats to agriculture and freshwater resources. When responses from duty-bearers or humanitarians are contracted—whether due to volatile political changes, violent conflict, or [natural disasters](#)—communities have no choice but to respond themselves.

Since Myanmar's transition from military rule in 2012, NP has supported the peace process through inclusive ceasefires. From 2013 to 2018, we trained over 700 community members from 8 states in ceasefire monitoring and Unarmed Civilian Protection, helping them establish their own networks. We also trained ethnic armed organizations in ceasefire monitoring and facilitated dialogue between ceasefire parties and civil society groups, emphasizing civilian protection. Recognizing the specific needs of women and youth, we have focused on strengthening their capacities since 2018—supporting emerging women and youth leaders to address community issues and connect with leaders from other regions. In areas with stagnant peace processes, we worked with civilian protection networks to enhance resilience. Even after the 2021 government overthrow, [we have continued supporting local partners in mitigating security threats and facilitating humanitarian assistance.](#)

These community-based protection frameworks allow communities to respond proactively and independently to the challenges posed by climate change and other threats, fostering civilian-led protection amidst contracted responses. By empowering local community members, promoting dialogue, and prioritizing the needs of women and youth, our efforts have contributed to building resilient networks capable of addressing community issues effectively. As Myanmar continues to navigate through complex political and environmental changes, civilian-led protection remains a crucial element in ensuring the safety and well-being of its people.

Protecting Land Protectors (Standing Rock, US)

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe opposed the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) because of concerns about oil leakage into Lake Oahe and the destruction of sacred burial grounds along the pipeline route. Protests began in 2016, and tensions escalated between water protectors and police, resulting in numerous arrests. From December 2016 to March 2017, [NP conducted a pilot project in response to the tension and violence surrounding the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline \(DAPL\) near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation in North Dakota.](#)

Originally focused on reducing violence between protesters and police at Standing Rock, NP pivoted its attention to Bismarck-Mandan as the context shifted: In December 2016, the US Army Corps of Engineers denied Energy Transfer Partners the easement to extend the pipeline under Lake Oahe (the DAPL legal situation remains subject to ongoing litigation and court decisions). With this change in context, instead of protective presence and direct violence reduction, the project aimed to equip a core group of people with tools and skills to face any subsequent violence related to the DAPL and build a network to address the divisiveness in the community over the DAPL. In addition, such a network could guide the community to consider a longer-term healing process between the Native and Euro-

American communities. NP worked alongside the Bismarck-Mandan community to establish working groups to continue the work in various aspects, including protective accompaniment, community dialogue facilitation, and clergy engagement.

Early Warning, Early Response (Mindanao, Philippines)

Early Warning Early Response (EWER) plays a critical role in confronting the intertwined issues of climate change and conflict. In the Philippines, NP has recognized the importance of EWER in addressing the challenges posed by illegal logging and armed groups in forest areas, particularly in Lanao del Sur. By training forest rangers to identify indicators of illegal logging and armed presence, they can proactively respond to potential fire attacks against the military and prevent further forest destruction. Through EWER, the rangers were also equipped with Unarmed Civilian Protection strategies to engage with illegal loggers, lumber business owners, and quarry operators in a peaceful and nonviolent manner. This approach not only helps de-escalate tensions but also fosters dialogue and understanding, promoting a more sustainable and cooperative approach to managing natural resources and mitigating conflict.

In addition to forest-related challenges, EWER has been extended to address broader issues in Maguindanao, involving the local Disaster Risk Reduction committee. By integrating EWER with disaster preparedness and response efforts, the community becomes more resilient to both conflict and natural disasters. The collaboration between EWER and the Disaster Risk Reduction committee helps ensure a holistic approach that addresses the complex and interconnected nature of climate-related conflicts.

By incorporating EWER into these initiatives, NP Philippines demonstrates how early warning systems can be leveraged to identify potential environmental and security threats proactively. This proactive approach not only helps prevent conflicts but also allows for timely and effective responses, reducing the impact of both climate-related and conflict-induced disasters. Through such integration, EWER becomes a crucial tool in safeguarding the environment, fostering peaceful coexistence, and building resilience in vulnerable communities.



Conflict-Sensitive Approaches (Darfur, Sudan)

NP's team in Darfur has seen how drought, desertification, flooding, and torrential rain has negatively impacted the livelihoods and security of individuals in the region. Climate change has noticeably worsened the already precarious situation, which escalated dramatically with the outbreak of civil war in April 2023, with frequent and unpredictable migrations of pastoral communities and changes in migratory routes posing significant challenges to peace and security in the Darfur region.

As a humanitarian and a peacebuilding actor, NP has integrated the entire spectrum of conflict sensitivity in its operations and programme implementation in Sudan. Prior to the escalation in April, particularly in Darfur, humanitarian aid was almost exclusively directed toward IDPs, with nomadic communities sidelined from access. This is in part because nomadic communities are perceived as inaccessible or hostile to outside assistance, though with careful planning by humanitarian organizations, this need not be the case. This inequality in distribution of aid only increases existing tensions among nomadic and farming communities.

Using protective presence to show access to nomadic communities is possible,, NP conducted community protection orientations trainings with more than 300 civilians, including women and men in IDP and nomad communities of North Darfur from May to November 2022.

One participant from the nomadic community recounted how the community protection training positively impacted his daily life, and how he put into practice what he had learned to avoid violence that usually breaks out over land and resources. Just a few days after completing a community protection training with NP, he encountered a farmer from Kereneik. Despite the prevailing tensions between nomads and farmers in the area, the participant decided to take the initiative and approach the farmer. Their interaction began with a simple act of kindness, as the participant assisted the farmer in loading watermelons onto his truck. This small gesture opened the door for further communication and understanding between the two individuals. Recognizing the importance of cooperation to prevent potential conflicts, the participant exchanged phone numbers with the farmer. He asked the farmer to inform him if any nomadic animals trespassed onto his land, a common issue during certain agricultural seasons in Darfur. A few days later, the farmer called the participant seeking assistance, as 60 cattle from the nomadic community had invaded some of the Kereneik farmers' land. With the community protection training in mind, the participant responded with a nonviolent approach. Urging the farmers not to resort to violence, he worked to resolve the issue by engaging with the wider community. The participant attributed the success of this peaceful resolution to the valuable insights gained from the NP training on networking with diverse groups as a protection tool.

