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CIVIL SOCIETY DIALOGUE NETWORK

Climate, Peace and Security: Entry points for EU engagement
Perspectives on the Great Lakes region

CSDN Meeting Report

European Peacebuilding Liaison Office

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European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO)

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Contents

BACKGROUND 1

EU POLICY CONTEXT 1

CLIMATE-SENSITIVE AND ENVIRONMENTAL APPROACHES AS AN ENTRY POINT FOR DIALOGUE, COOPERATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION 2

- FROM SHARED PRESSURES TO PRACTICAL COOPERATION 4
- RISKS OF INSTRUMENTALISING CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL AGENDAS 5

TRANSLATING LESSONS INTO EU ACTION, POLICY AND PROGRAMMING 6

CONCRETE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EU ENGAGEMENT: WHAT SHOULD CHANGE AT POLICY AND PROGRAMMING LEVEL? 8

OUTLOOK: FROM RECOGNISING THE NEXUS TO MAKING IT OPERATIONAL 9

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EU ENGAGEMENT 11

ANNEX I: LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS 12

Background

On 6 July 2026, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), in cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Commission's (EC) Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) and the EU Special Representative for the Great Lakes region, organised an online Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) Geographic Meeting on 'Climate, Peace and Security: Entry points for EU engagement Perspectives on the Great Lakes region'.

This CSDN meeting was convened in the context of the EU's efforts to strengthen the coherence between its climate adaptation, peace and security priorities as part of its external action and international partnerships. The overall aim was to unlock concrete recommendations that would lead the EU to more effectively use climate, peace, and security programming as a platform for engagement, as well as to inform the implementation of the Joint Communication (JC) on the Climate-Security Nexus.

The discussion drew on lessons learned from the Great Lakes region, with a focus on focus on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda to examine what has worked at the programming level, where gaps remain, and what the EU's political and institutional added value can be in supporting these approaches.

This CSDN event was the third of a series of online CSDN Geographic Meetings on addressing the climate-peace-security (CPS) nexus in different EU partnership contexts.

The CSDN meeting was held under the Chatham House Rule and gathered 18 participants from peacebuilding civil society organisations (CSOs), as well as representatives of the EU institutions. No attempt was made to reach consensus on the issues discussed. The report reflects the range of views shared during the exchange. The following sections gather key observations and recommendations from the discussions.

EU policy context

Over the past decade, the EU has built a substantial policy framework at the intersection of climate change, peace, and security. The EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy (2016), the Climate Change and Defence Roadmap (2020), the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change (2021) and the Concept for an Integrated Approach on Climate Change and Security (2021) collectively establish the importance of addressing climate-security dynamics as part of the EU's broader foreign policy commitments. In June 2023, the EEAS and the EC published a Joint Communication (JC) on the Climate-Security Nexus, which sets out an EU approach to addressing the growing impacts of climate change and environmental degradation in the fields of peace, security, and defence. Most recently, the Council Conclusions on 'EU Energy and Climate Diplomacy (2026) underline that climate finance 'tools need to remain climate, environment, and conflict sensitive' and set out that the EU will focus on climate vulnerable, fragile and

conflict-affected areas. The new Staff Working Document (SWD) on an Integrated Approach to Fragility (2026) recognises environmental consequences of fragility and climate-related challenges in root causes. In addition, water resilience has also gained greater prominence across EU external action: the European Water Resilience Strategy (2025) strengthens the water, peace and security nexus through attention to conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and greater cooperation.

For the African Great Lakes region specifically, the renewed EU Great Lakes strategy (2023) recognises climate change and environmental degradation as part of interlinked conflict drivers and risk multipliers, and sets out to continue to support the protection of natural resources and biodiversity, and mitigation and adaptation to the growing impact of climate change on local populations.

The EU Strategy for Civil Society and the Civil Society Roadmaps, in turn, recognise civil society as an essential actor in EU external action.

Climate-sensitive and environmental approaches as an entry point for dialogue, cooperation and engagement in the Great Lakes region

The discussion during the meeting highlighted the Great Lakes region (GLR) as a context where **climate change, environmental pressures and conflict dynamics are closely intertwined**, but where the climate, peace and security (CPS) agenda is still comparatively underdeveloped as an entry point for engagement. Participants stressed that climate change should not be understood as a direct or standalone cause of conflict. Rather, climate and environmental pressures interact with pre-existing fragilities, including weak governance and contested authority, competition over land and natural resources, livelihood insecurity, exclusion, and mobility. Droughts, floods and changing weather patterns can intensify these pressures, while conflict itself can deepen environmental degradation and undermine communities' capacity to adapt - urgently needed climate mitigation efforts in the region, and sustainable management of natural resources are also inhibited by ongoing violence and instability.

In eastern DRC, for example, the exploitation of natural resources can reinforce conflict dynamics, while insecurity, conflict-related displacement and environmental degradation increase exposure to flooding and landslides. Participants also noted that extreme weather events can trigger forced displacement which can add pressure to already contested land and resources. At the same time, participants emphasised that these same pressures and interdependencies can create shared interests around which cooperation, dialogue and peacebuilding can be built. Water, land, pasture, forests and livelihoods frequently cross administrative and national boundaries and create practical reasons for communities and authorities to cooperate. The potential of CPS therefore

lies not only in addressing the negative effects of climate and environmental pressures, but also in identifying areas where managing shared resources can create incentives for cooperation.

This was particularly evident in relation to **mobility and resource sharing**. In the Karamoja area of north-eastern Uganda and in Uganda's Turkana regions, drought and pressure on water and pasture can exacerbate tensions between pastoralist communities, such as the Toposa and Pokot, whose livelihoods depend on transhumance across the Uganda-Kenya border. Existing resource-sharing arrangements between communities, such as drought and cattle restoring approaches, provide a basis for cooperation, but participants stressed the importance of connecting such arrangements to broader peace initiatives and sustaining them beyond individual interventions. Similarly, cross-border fishing on shared lakes between Uganda and DRC has generated recurring tensions, including arrests when fishermen from DRC cross national Ugandan fishing boundaries that fishermen may not be aware of. Participants pointed to the need for clearer communication with fishing communities alongside political dialogue between the two states. The Lake Albert basin was similarly discussed as an area where shared natural resources can either exacerbate tensions or provide a basis for cross-border cooperation, depending on the quality of governance, accountability and local ownership.

Land emerged as another central intersection between environmental pressures and conflict. In Rwanda, Burundi and eastern DRC, pressure on land is linked not only to agricultural livelihoods and access to resources, but also to identity and belonging. Forced displacement and returns, for example through government-led relocation programmes, can intensify these pressures, particularly where land governance and law enforcement are weak or contested. Participants cautioned against presenting land conservation and community needs as a simple choice between environmental protection and human welfare. In contrary, participants considered those approaches sustainable that demonstrate tangible benefits for human security and affected communities while also recognising longer-term environmental protection.

The **management of protected areas illustrates these tensions**. In and around Virunga National Park, displaced populations have settled on land within or adjacent to the National Park, which has generated tensions between communities and park authorities and, in some cases, forced displacement. While negotiation processes have created some openings for dialogue, participants stressed that continued mediation and implementation of agreements remain necessary. The example illustrates that environmental governance cannot be separated from questions of displacement, land rights, livelihoods and local authority.

Participants also highlighted how **climate and environmental pressures also interact with the governance of borders and people's ability to sustain livelihoods**. In border areas of eastern DRC and Burundi, restrictions on cross-border movement can reduce opportunities for trade and other economic activities in support of livelihoods, leaving communities with fewer ways to respond to climate-related pressures. Participants stressed that climate adaptation therefore needs to be peace-responsive and inclusive

of groups affected by conflict: alongside technical and humanitarian adaptation measures, it should address the governance and economic conditions that shape people's access to livelihood means and mobility, while taking into account the interests and grievances of different groups, including women and youth. In eastern DRC, **renewable energy was discussed as a relatively underexplored entry point**: access to electricity can support households and small industries, reduce dependence on environmentally harmful charcoal supply chains and create employment, including for young people. Such approaches can contribute to local and regional economic opportunities and reduce some of the conditions that make mobilisation into armed groups more attractive. Participants also mentioned that the dual impact of climate change and the global green energy transition risks deepening divisions over resource management and fostering intercommunal conflict over resources such as land and water. Tackling those challenges through a joint lens and a thorough understanding of these interacting dynamics will be essential for engagements in the region moving forward to mitigate climate-related conflict risks and environmental degradation and pressures related to natural resource management exacerbated by conflict dynamics.

From climate pressures to shared interests and cooperation

Several **examples demonstrated that environmental and natural resource issues can provide practical entry points for dialogue across communities and sectors**. In northern Uganda, for instance, access to firewood for cooking was identified as a concern shared by refugee and host communities. Addressing this everyday resource pressure created an entry point for dialogue and social cohesion. In Uganda for example, community-led conservation initiatives, local committees managing tree use and cross-border women's, youth and local leaders' fora have provided spaces for communities to develop shared rules around natural resource management, manage resources jointly and exchange information. Such structures create spaces for dialogue and consensus-finding and can also contribute to early warning, early response and conflict prevention.

Participants similarly called for **environmental risks to be incorporated into protection, early warning and early response systems**. In eastern DRC, for example, natural resource exploitation can contribute to environmental degradation while conflict itself increases risks of flooding and landslides, with consequences for civilian protection and displacement. Participants also mentioned that displacement linked to environmental shocks like a typhoon or contamination also increases vulnerability to land mines. Internally displaced persons are at a very high risk to be exposed to land mines since they often move to land that has not been cleared of land mines. Environmental preparedness should therefore be considered before shocks occur, including through community awareness, preparedness and early warning mechanisms.

The Ruzizi River is another example of the **importance of cross-border cooperation**. Crossing Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC, the river is simultaneously an environmental,

livelihood and cross-border governance issue. Flooding has affected communities and infrastructure, while insecurity and border closures have disrupted cross-border trade on which communities depend. Participants argued that the shared environmental and livelihood pressures linked to this should be treated as opportunities for cooperation rather than solely as technical or humanitarian concerns.

Participants repeatedly stressed that **the effectiveness of these approaches depends on whether they are responding to local realities**. The language used by policymakers to describe "climate change" as a broader phenomenon does not necessarily correspond to how communities experience environmental change. For many communities, the immediate concern is declining access to land, water and energy access, flooding and resulting destruction of homes and infrastructure, pasture or forests rather than climate change as a more abstract concept. This does not diminish the relevance of the impacts of climate change, but points to the importance of starting from lived experience and existing local knowledge, rather than imposing external terminology or frameworks.

This also has implications for how environmental agendas are connected to peacebuilding. Participants cautioned against treating climate as an additional thematic component that can simply be added to existing peace processes or diplomatic agendas. The value of CPS programming does not necessarily lie in introducing climate issues into settings where they are not already relevant. Rather, it can help identify existing environmental, livelihood and resource-management concerns around which different actors already have a shared interest. This requires approaching climate and environmental pressures through the lived realities of communities, rather than treating climate change as an abstract or primarily technical agenda. The **CPS approach is most useful when it identifies genuine intersections between environmental pressures, livelihoods, governance and security and creates space to address them through existing relationships, interests and structures**.

Risks of instrumentalising climate and environmental agendas

The discussion highlighted a clear **risk that climate and environmental agendas can be instrumentalised for political or diplomatic purposes without adequately reflecting local priorities**. One example concerned population relocation of displaced residents in disaster-prone Bududa, a border district in Eastern Uganda, where government-defined territorial and security priorities conflicted with local preferences and generated resistance. It was also mentioned that communities' identities in that area are strongly intertwined with their natural surroundings, rendering relocation efforts difficult and often ineffective. Participants also noted that donors supporting affected communities can inadvertently reinforce these dynamics when they adopt government or international priorities without sufficiently understanding local needs.

More broadly, participants worryingly expressed that while **climate and environmental issues are prominently discussed in international for a, their presence is still very limited in ongoing peace negotiations in the Great Lakes region**. Despite communities experiencing climate-related pressures as part of their everyday security and livelihoods, these realities remain absent from the ongoing political processes. Participants therefore emphasised that local communities should not merely be consulted during the implementation of projects or agreements. They should have meaningful influence over the decisions that affect land, resources, livelihoods and displacement from the outset.

Therefore, the EU should not seek to "add climate" to every peace or diplomatic process. Rather, it should identify where environmental pressures already intersect with political, economic and security concerns, and use these intersections to create opportunities for dialogue and cooperation. Whether these opportunities contribute to peacebuilding also depends on conflict-sensitive governance, local ownership, if there are tangible benefits for the local population, and attention to the wider political and economic dynamics that shape resource access.

Translating lessons into EU action, policy and programming

Participants mentioned that there exists already a vast amount of analysis and data about how climate change, environmental degradation and conflict interact in the Great Lakes region. The principal **challenge is translating this knowledge into institutional practice, political engagement and programming**. Climate adaptation and environmental programmes are not always sufficiently informed by conflict analysis, while humanitarian, development, peacebuilding, governance, climate and security actors continue to operate through separate institutional and funding structures.

A first priority is therefore to **make conflict sensitivity an operational requirement across EU climate, environmental and investment programming**. Participants highlighted an example from eastern DRC where an environmental initiative operating in an area affected by armed groups incorporated a conflict-awareness component, which enabled stakeholders to adapt implementation to the changing security environment. Similar approaches should be applied more systematically to climate adaptation, natural resource management and larger infrastructure investments, including under Global Gateway. The Global Gateway flagship Team Europe initiative on Transboundary Water Management in Africa was identified as a concrete opportunity to strengthen water governance of Lake Albert, if this investment is anchored in local realities, community accountability and conflict sensitivity.

The **HDP dimensions of EU responses were seen as inseparable in practice.** Mine action was provided as an example: Climate shocks and conflict dynamics can cause people to move into unfamiliar areas where they may be exposed to explosive contamination, while environmental events can also shift contaminated material. Clearing land can

subsequently enable climate-smart agriculture, reforestation and other forms of recovery. Participants therefore argued **that mine action and other protection considerations should be incorporated into approaches to land and environmental management** rather than treated as separate sectors.

The EU could also strengthen the HDP nexus by connecting local initiatives and peacebuilding mechanisms with national and regional processes. **Cross-border programming was seen as particularly relevant where security, mobility, natural resources and climate pressures are intrinsically connected**. At the same time, coordination needs to improve between different EU institutions and between local, national, regional and international levels to improve such programme, or render it possible in the first place. Participants noted that regional initiatives can struggle when capacities and resources at regional or sub-national levels are weak.

Gender equality and youth inclusion dimensions should be integrated into this approach rather than treated as separate components. Participants emphasised that women often experience climate and environmental insecurity in specific and often challenging ways through experiences relating to access to water, livelihoods, land and human security concerns. Still, their participation in formal security processes remains limited. Positive examples from DRC included women-led tree planting and other environmental initiatives that generated both environmental and livelihood benefits. However, one such initiative was destroyed by armed groups only months after implementation, illustrating the **importance of conflict sensitivity and investing in longer-term sustainability when supporting similar initiatives**. Women's peace fora and cross-border initiatives were also identified as mechanisms through which women can contribute to dialogue and reconciliation.

Participants similarly highlighted that when young people have limited access to employment, income-generating opportunities and other viable economic prospects, this increases the risk to be recruited by armed groups. Environmental activities, reconstruction and peacebuilding can provide alternative opportunities for engagement for young adults. **EU support to youth organisations and youth peace structures** could therefore connect the EU's commitment to the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda with climate and environmental programming in practical ways.

Local ownership was identified as a particularly important condition for effective CPS programming. Participants distinguished between localisation as local implementation and meaningful local ownership over setting priorities and being part of decision-making processes. Existing community structures, local knowledge and locally developed solutions should be treated as assets rather than bypassed by externally designed interventions. This requires consultation before decisions are made, not only delivering a predetermined intervention once a project has already been designed. Participants stressed that this problematic also applies to large infrastructure and investment initiatives with consequences for land, jobs, compensation, security and resource access as these can substantially alter local conflict dynamics. Communities are often consulted only once major political or investment decisions have already been made, with

participation also often limited to the implementation of smaller projects. Local CSOs should therefore be involved in defining priorities and decisions around how EU external action, including larger investments as well as smaller projects, impacts their lives.

Funding modalities were seen as a major constraint. Many local initiatives operate with limited resources despite maintaining long-standing relationships with communities. Participants called for simpler application procedures, more flexible and longer-term funding, smaller grants and greater direct access for local CSOs. It was also discussed that INGOs should examine in which cases their intermediary role may help or hinder resources reaching local actors.

Finally, **participants stressed the value of better data and analysis**, particularly data disaggregated by gender, age and other relevant characteristics, to understand how climate change and conflict pressures affect different groups. However, the discussion consistently placed such analysis alongside local knowledge rather than treating data as a substitute for it. The EU's added value could therefore lie in connecting different forms of knowledge and ensuring that conflict- and climate-analysis informs programming choices across portfolios.

Concrete recommendations for EU engagement: what should change at policy and programming level?

In the final part of the dialogue meeting, the discussion moved from programming lessons towards the EU's broader political and strategic engagement in the region. Participants stressed that **the EU should build on existing national and regional policy processes rather than create parallel frameworks through its engagement**. In Uganda, for example, existing policies on climate change, disaster preparedness, land, oil and gas and public finance provide potential entry points for connecting environmental governance with peace and security efforts. Supporting implementation and strengthening the links between these policy areas could be more valuable than developing new standalone processes.

Participants also called for **greater geographical specificity.** Certain challenges require sustained attention to particular cross-border areas, such as Lake Albert, the Rwenzori-North Kivu area, protected areas and areas facing strong resource exploitation. Targeted, transnational funding could enable the EU to pilot approaches adapted to these specific political and environmental realities while connecting neighbouring countries.

This is particularly relevant to major EU investments and connectivity initiatives. Participants argued that **conflict prevention and peacebuilding should be integrated into major investments such as the Green Corridor and Lobito Corridor from the outset**. Large-scale investments can create economic opportunities for sustainable agriculture

and energy access, and strengthen regional economic integration, but can also intensify competition and grievances over land, employment, compensation, access to resources and the role of security actors, or deepen perceptions of exclusion, if conflict dynamics are not considered from the outset of these investments. This is only intensified if local governance and accountability are weak. Integrating conflict sensitivity and social cohesion approaches from the design stage can therefore both reduce conflict risks and improve the sustainability of such investments.

Participants further highlighted the potential of energy diplomacy**. Renewable energy access can contribute simultaneously to household incomes and local economic activity**, for example by enabling small businesses, agricultural processing and other productive uses of energy, while also reducing pressure on forests and charcoal supply chains. Yet the relationship between energy access and peacebuilding remains insufficiently articulated in policy and programming. The EU could explore how energy investments can be designed and assessed not only in terms of economic or environmental outcomes, but also their contribution to cooperation and peace.

Finally, participants saw **potential for CPS approaches to broaden the understanding of security that often underpins peace processes in the region**. Rather than focusing primarily on hard security concerns, peace negotiations and diplomatic engagement should account better for human security, livelihood support, land and natural resource governance, and the differentiated impacts of conflict and climate-related pressures. At the same time, participants cautioned that it may be premature to prescribe precisely how climate considerations should be integrated into ongoing peace processes. A more immediate priority is to strengthen the evidence, community perspectives and political entry points that can inform such processes.

Outlook: from recognising the nexus to making it operational

Across the three sessions during the meeting, participants converged on the view that the Great Lakes region does not primarily lack awareness of the links between climate, environmental pressures and conflict. The more significant challenge is making these interconnections operational in political engagement, investment decisions, financing and programme design.

The region offers **numerous practical entry points**, from shared water resources and pastoralist mobility to land governance, renewable energy, environmental protection and community-level adaptation. Yet these entry points only contribute to peacebuilding when they are rooted in local realities and accompanied by attention to governance, inclusion and conflict dynamics.

For the EU, this points **towards a more coherent approach that connects its diplomatic, development, humanitarian, climate, environmental and investment engagement**. It also

requires recognising the comparative value of investing in CSOs and local communities, which often maintain the relationships and contextual knowledge needed to identify emerging tensions and viable avenues for cooperation.

Ultimately, a stronger CPS approach in the Great Lakes should not mean adding another layer of programming. It should mean **using the EU's existing breadth of engagement more strategically:** identifying where climate and environmental pressures intersect with conflict risks, ensuring investments do not reinforce those risks, and supporting locally led efforts that can turn shared environmental challenges into opportunities for cooperation.

Recommendations for EU engagement

1. **Make conflict sensitivity standard across climate, environmental and investment action**
    - Integrate conflict analysis and peacebuilding considerations from the design stage of climate, environmental, energy and connectivity investments.
    - Use CPS approaches to identify and mitigate risks around land, resources, livelihoods, displacement, exclusion and exposure to land mines.

2. **Put meaningful local ownership at the centre of CPS engagement**
    - Involve local communities and CSOs in priority-setting and decision-making, not only in project implementation.
    - Build on existing local governance, mediation, women's and youth structures and locally developed solutions.

3. **Strengthen cross-border and geographically targeted approaches**
    - Support initiatives addressing shared resources and challenges across borders, including water, pastoralist mobility, protected areas and natural resource governance.
    - Consider flexible transnational funding for geographically specific challenges where national approaches are insufficient.

4. **Adapt EU funding and partnerships to locally led, long-term approaches**
    - Simplify access to EU funding and expand flexible, smaller-scale and longer-term financing for local CSOs, including women's and youth organisations.

5. **Connect CPS with broader political engagement and peace processes**
    - Use climate, environmental and livelihood concerns to broaden security discussions towards human security where this reflects locally identified priorities.
    - Strengthen links between CPS, WPS and YPS and support existing national and regional policy processes that connect environmental governance with peace and security.

Annex I: List of abbreviations

CPS	Climate, Peace and Security
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSDN	Civil Society Dialogue Network
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EC	European Commission
EEAS	European External Action Service
EPLO	European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
EU	European Union
FPI	Service for Foreign Policy Instruments
GLR	Great Lakes region (in Africa)
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
JC	Joint Communication
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SWD	Staff Working Document
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WRO	Women's Rights Organisation
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security