

TO STEM THE TIDE:

Climate Change, UNMISS,
and the Protection of Civilians



RECOGNIZE. PREVENT. PROTECT. AMEND.

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T +1 202 558 6958

E comms@civiliansinconflict.org
civiliansinconflict.org

Cover:

Bentiu, South Sudan, 21 July 2023:

Climate change has brought severe rainfall and flooding to Unity State where UNMISS peacekeepers must reach some vulnerable communities, like this one in Tong, by boat.

Photo by Gregório Cunha/UNMISS

ABOUT CENTER FOR CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) is an international organization dedicated to promoting the protection of civilians in conflict. CIVIC envisions a world in which no civilian is harmed in conflict. Our mission is to support communities affected by conflict in their quest for protection and strengthen the resolve and capacity of armed actors to prevent and respond to civilian harm.

CIVIC was established in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a young humanitarian who advocated on behalf of civilians affected by the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Honoring Marla's legacy, CIVIC has kept an unflinching focus on the protection of civilians in conflict. Today, CIVIC has a presence in conflicts and capitals throughout the world, where it collaborates with civilians to bring their protection concerns directly to those in power, engages with armed actors to reduce the harm they cause to civilian populations, and advises governments, the United Nations and multinational bodies on how to make life-saving and lasting policy changes.

CIVIC's strength is its proven approach and record of improving protection outcomes for civilians by working directly with conflict-affected communities and armed actors and by drawing on research for evidence-based policy engagement and advocacy with decision makers, practitioners, and influential actors. At CIVIC, we believe civilians are not "collateral damage" and that civilian harm is not an unavoidable consequence of conflict—civilian harm can and must be prevented.

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ACRONYMS

CAD: Civil Affairs

CIVIC: Center for Civilians in Conflict

CRSV: Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

CSA: Climate Security Advisor

CSM: Climate Security Mechanism

CSO: Civil Society Organization

DDR: Demobilization, Desarmament,
Rehabilitation

DOP: Department of Peace Operations

DPPA: Department of Political and
Peacebuilding Affairs

DSRG: Deputy Special Representative of the
Secretary General

EP: Environmental Programme

EW: Early Warning

EW/RR: Early warning and Rapid Response

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization

FBA: Folke Bernadotte Academy

FIOC: Field Integrated Operations Centers

HRDDP: Human Rights Due Diligence Policy

IDP: Internally Displaced People

JOC: Joint Operations Center

JMAC: Joint Mission Analysis Center

MARA: Monitoring Analysis Reporting
Arrangements

MINUSMA: UN Stabilization Mission in Mali

MPb: Ministry of Peacebuilding

MEF: Ministry of Environment and Forestry

PDA: Peace and Development Advisors

PKO: Peacekeeping Operations

POC: Protection of civilians

RC/HC: Resident Coordinator Humanitarian Coordinator

SGBV: Sexual and Gender Based Violence

SIPRI: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

SRSG: Special Representative of the Secretary-General

SSR: Security Sector Reform

TOB: Temporary Operating Bases

TTT: Transhumance Tracking Tool

UN: United Nations

UNCT: United Nations Country Team

UNDP: UN Development Program

UNHCR: UN High Commissioner for Refugees

UNMISS: UN Mission in South Sudan

UNOCA: UN Office for Central Africa

UNOWAS: UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel

UNPOL: UN Police

UNSC: UN Security Council

WFP: World Food Programme

WPAU: Women's Protection Advisory Unit

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In South Sudan, climate impacts—most clearly in the form of flooding and drought—have contributed to mass displacement, exacerbated resource and food scarcity, and dramatically affected agricultural and grazing patterns. As in other contexts, these phenomena do not alone explain the persistent conflict and political violence that have seized South Sudan in the short time since its independence. Even so, dramatic changes in the natural environment can interact with underlying political and economic factors in ways that fuel armed violence or serve as its pretext. These phenomena can also fundamentally alter the vulnerability of civilians to the effects of conflict and complicate efforts to protect them. The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) - like former and current peace operations in Somalia, Sudan, Mali – are witnessing firsthand the impact of these shocks on civilian populations. As a Peacekeeping Mission mandated with protecting civilians from violence, it has become clear UNMISS needs to adapt how it protects civilians in this changed risk landscape. If peace operations do not evolve at the pace of climate change risks, they can jeopardize mission effectiveness, drive unintended consequences in a way that can reinforce vulnerabilities and deepen conflict dynamics.

A better understanding of the impacts of climate change on the vulnerability of civilians and the operating environment should help UNMISS improve how it prevents and responds to risks related to the protection of civilians. The UN Security Council resolution renewing UNMISS's mandate in 2023 (S/RES/2677) provided an opportunity to better understand these impacts by requiring the Mission to report on the “risks associated with climate change that may adversely impact peace and security in South Sudan, and implementation of the Mission’s mandate.”² The Council built on this mandate in 2024 (S/RES/2729) with elements focused on engagement with local communities, and use of comprehensive risk assessments and risk management strategies, as well as resources to strengthen South Sudan’s resilience.³

This brief aims to contribute to an early insight into how the Mission is interpreting and implementing the mandates’ new climate dimensions and whether its overall assessment of threats and vulnerabilities has improved as a result. As climate language appears more regularly in Security Council mandates, lessons from UNMISS’s early experience could be instructive to other missions and to more effective UN system-wide responses to protection risks exacerbated by climate change. The brief examines five distinct but related issues:

- How the inclusion of climate change in the mandate has been received and applied to date.
- Which core capacities support the application of the climate lens to the mandated protection of civilians (POC) work.
- How the Mission integrates climate-related data in its threat assessments and operations.
- How climate stressors have affected UNMISS POC capabilities.
- How climate adaptation relates to the Mission’s POC agenda.

Given that the research commenced soon after the mandate was renewed in 2023, and updated in 2024 to reflect progress, this brief offers a set of “key observations” rather than findings or recommendations in each area. The goal of the brief is to cultivate early insights that can inform other similarly mandated peace operations or UN presences, as well as work led by UN agencies, civil society organizations, and others in comparable contexts.

Key Observations

On climate in UN mandates:

- Inviting UN Peace Operations to consider the impacts of climate change on their mandated activities can improve protection outcomes with better assessment, analysis, planning, and operations.
- Mandates with specific climate risk assessment requirements, even those with modest mandated language, can enable mission leadership to drive coordination and focus and provide a basis for capacity allocation decisions.
- Conversely, overly prescriptive language may deprive mission sections of the latitude to make locally informed judgments on which interventions are best suited to a particular climate-related protection challenge. Mandate language should strike a balance between clarity and the flexibility needed for mission-based, and especially field-based, innovation.

On Mission core capacities, including the role of the Climate Security Advisor:

- In UNMISS, the Climate Security Advisor (CSA) focuses on integrating climate indicators with threat and conflict analysis as well as improving coordination within and outside of the Mission. The CSA's work may prove to be catalytic in facilitating joint efforts to improve the quality of decision-making and may ultimately improve the effectiveness of UNMISS in protecting civilians.
- Mission leadership support and access, paired with resource allocation, has been essential for the effectiveness of the role.
- Even so, the effect of the position on the Mission's priority work to improve the protection of civilians will be judged by whether improved analysis and coordination yields tangible results.
- As in MINUSMA, several UNMISS sections have been key to leveraging the mandate for improvements in POC-related operations, including JOC, JMAC, and Civil Affairs. This joined-up work could also help facilitate improved joint programming and community engagement between other UN entities, CSOs, and local partners.

On climate-related risk analysis

- Several Mission sections are collaboratively integrating climate-related data and indicators into the Mission's conflict analysis and threat assessments.
- Augmenting existing data analytics capacity and systems with climate data could increase the predictive strength of the Mission's threat analysis, which is used for threat detection and operational planning in early warning and rapid response systems. It has already extended time horizons for deployment planning.
- As with data-based early warning, the analytic rigor of integrating climate data will depend on uptake by the Mission's field offices, including both civilian and uniformed personnel, who should participate in how these analytical products are developed, tested, and used.

On the impact of climate change on the Mission's POC operations and activities:

- Natural hazards related to climate change create new vulnerabilities for civilians while also imposing resource, logistics, and capacity challenges on the Mission. Erratic weather such as extreme flooding has imposed severe limitations on the mobility needed for prevention and response.
- Even so, environmental hazards should not be invoked as the sole reason that UNMISS is unable to meet its protection mandate.
- The UN's notable role in abating the worst effects of severe flooding in South Sudan should not lead to the conflation between threats from natural disasters and threats to civilians from violence. Requested additional resources and personnel to manage environmental hazards should also have a demonstrable link to POC and other mandated activities.

On coordination and joint programming:

- Applying a climate lens to POC risk assessments and responses can reveal the links between environmental hazards, conflict drivers, and protection vulnerabilities, thereby creating opportunities for joint assessment, planning, and programming. The Mission's capacity to anticipate and respond to protection threats could benefit from early efforts—especially those supported by the CSA—to exchange climate data and expertise with humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding agencies and organizations.
- Mission analytic capabilities and products could, in turn, facilitate improved joint programming and community engagement between other UN entities, CSOs, and local partners, including by integrating a protection lens with climate adaptation programs.
- Ensuring that the Mission's support for climate adaptation is both locally grounded and sustainable, especially given the motivating concern for peace and security, depends on effective two-way cooperation with local civil society and local government.

On guidance and training:

- Mission staff are requesting practical guidance from Mission Headquarters that centers all sections around a consistent interpretation and understanding of priorities but that also draws on their knowledge and allows for local adaptation. As with other topics, cross-mission and UN system-wide peer-to-peer exchange can be effective in capacity building for relevant personnel.
- Trainings with United Nations Country Team (UNCT) and UNMISS personnel are important vehicles for data and knowledge exchange, as they unify often-differing humanitarian and security understandings of climate, peace, and security. Such training includes those organized by the CSM, Climate Change Working Group, UN System Staff College, and others. These partners are also leading joint training with national/local actors including government and civil society to strengthen capacity and improve program sustainability.



December 2021: Floods create fresh catastrophe for South Sudan on its difficult journey from war to peace.

II. METHODOLOGY

This report is based on research conducted by CIVIC between June 2023 and June 2024 following rigorous research methodology standards. During this period, CIVIC carried out 178 semi-structured individual or group interviews in South Sudan, including with UNMISS officials from several Mission sections based in Juba, Bentiu, and Malakal. In most cases, interviews conducted by the research team in South Sudan served the dual purpose of informing this brief and another research project. CIVIC's research also included semi-structured interviews with subject matter experts on peace operations, humanitarian actors, civil society leaders, South Sudanese government officials, and civilians living in the displacement camp in Bentiu, the POC site in Malakal, or the capital, Juba. In each interview, CIVIC provided an explanation of the goals of the research and how the data would be protected and used, and researchers obtained consent from all participants. Citations are provided for all interviews that were directly consulted during the drafting of this paper. A draft was shared with key stakeholders for review before publication. Their feedback was incorporated into the final draft.

III. CONTEXT

Climate, Peace, and Security at the UN

So severe and prevalent are climate shocks in fragile and conflict-affected states, and so profound are their impacts on vulnerable people, that global governance systems are struggling to understand the full implications of these changes and determine how to adapt global governance structures and responses to be more effective in the face of rapid onset change. There is now growing pressure on the UN Security Council to take more concerted action, 16 years after climate first appeared on its agenda. Political paralysis has stymied much of this effort. For example, in 2021, a Nigerian/Irish thematic resolution recognizing the impact of climate change on security was vetoed in the UN Security Council. Even so, the 12 “yes” votes garnered by the resolution and a range of initiatives led both by Member States and UN agencies reflect growing concern at the UN over the impact of climate on peace and security evident in a growing number of its resolutions.⁴ Indeed, climate security language has become a regular feature in context-specific UN Security Council resolutions, even if attempts to pass a full-fledged thematic mandate have not yet been successful. For example, in S/RES/2692 (2023), the Council approved a new UN operation in Haiti acknowledging the climate security risks inherent in that country’s cyclical crises of violent crime and conflict following decades of environmental devastation, entrenched poverty, and failed governance.⁵

In an effort to keep the issue on the agenda, and despite shortcomings in garnering agreement for a more comprehensive resolution, elected Security Council members of the ever-expanding Group of Friends on Climate and Security have co-convened multiple Arria-formula meetings.⁶ Emphasizing that “climate change is the defining challenge of our time,” the coalition has prompted important discussions around what the UN peace and security architecture could achieve by integrating climate, peace, and security considerations to guide conflict prevention, peacebuilding, mediation, and peacekeeping efforts. The coalition has also focused on practical cooperation in leveraging the different strengths of the UN and its partners.⁷ Despite entrenched geopolitical divisions in the UN Security Council, several generations of its elected members have managed to effectively create political space for dialogue, particularly in drawing links to other priorities on the UNSC’s agenda.

These efforts have kept climate and security on the UNSC’s agenda while the mechanism’s Member States have unilaterally funded new climate security capacities in the UN’s security architecture.⁸ These capacities have, likewise, been integral to UN system-wide efforts to offer a strategic and joined-up approach to how intersecting issues are understood and prioritized across the UN system’s work. In 2018, the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP), and the UN Development Program (UNDP) created the Climate Security Mechanism (CSM) to develop a unified and systematic approach to guiding the UN’s work in the “climate security nexus,” including by facilitating interagency cooperation and strengthening capacities⁹. Since the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) joined in 2021, the initiative has provided technical support to UN peace operations, including through Climate Security Advisors, who have now been deployed to Special Political Missions, Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs), and regional offices.¹⁰ The UN, in partnership with external experts and academic institutions, has also developed its guidance and access to climate, peace and security training for staff of UN peace operations.¹¹

The negative impacts of worsening climate hazards and related environmental degradation, including on existing and new conflict dynamics, affect virtually all aspects of the UN's work.¹² Deployed in some of the world's most acute contexts where climate is driving and multiplying security risks, UN peacekeeping operations have long dealt with the effects of climate change on the ground. As Secretary-General António Guterres told the Security Council in 2020, "It is no coincidence that seven of the ten countries most vulnerable and least prepared to deal with climate change host a peacekeeping operation or special political mission."¹³ Rapid onset changes are observable in Somalia, for example, where droughts are destroying customary livelihoods and driving armed group recruitment. In the Sahel, climate change is accelerating desertification, changing transhumance routes, and, with these disruptions, sparking intercommunal conflict. In South Sudan, flooding destroys crops and forces people into areas of conflict. In the Central African Republic, extreme weather events drive internal displacement. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, climate impacts are exacerbating humanitarian crises and fraying the social fabric in areas already rife with armed group activity and persistent cycles of violence.¹⁴

The pace and severity of these shocks have direct implications for the UN's POC work. From field patrols to headquarters, peacekeepers in these contexts see firsthand the impact of climate change on the threats and vulnerabilities faced by civilians, as well as its impact on the capacities civilians have to respond.

The pace and severity of these shocks have direct implications for the UN's POC work. From field patrols to headquarters, peacekeepers in these contexts see firsthand the impact of climate change on the threats and vulnerabilities faced by civilians, as well as its impact on the capacities civilians have to respond.¹⁵ The climate- and security-related challenges faced by civilians are particularly acute in countries lacking the state institutions, governance, and resources needed to adapt to climate stressors.¹⁶ Ongoing conflict and state fragility degrades natural resources and the environment while undermining the ability of both communities and governments to build climate adaptive infrastructure.¹⁷ These effects have a disproportionate effect on women, youth, children, and other people in vulnerable situations.

Given the severity and scale of these challenges, which sit at the intersection of protection vulnerabilities in South Sudan, it is no surprise that UNMISS has the strongest language on climate security among all peacekeeping missions. Understanding of the climate security aspects of peacekeeping mandates in relation to the protection of civilians is still nascent; it is, therefore, the subject of this research. While missions navigate implementation with limited guidance, both the UN and Member States are taking steps to fill the gap. The UN Security Council, for example, directed an independent assessment of the implementation of the UNMISS POC mandate that acknowledged the impact of climate change on protection of civilians in the country.¹⁸ Then, in April 2024, at UNHQ, the Informal Experts Group on Climate and Security, co-chaired by Mozambique and Switzerland, proposed a meeting dedicated to the intersection of climate, security, and protection of civilians.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Though interconnected, climate change and environmental degradation are not synonymous.

Climate change: The UN defines climate change as “long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns ... primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas.”¹⁹ Practically, this means increases in the frequency, strength, and unpredictability of slow onset hazards (e.g., sea level rise, temperature rise, desertification) and sudden onset hazards (e.g., hurricanes, wildfires, floods) that are related to temperature and atmospheric changes.

Environmental degradation: The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction defines environmental degradation as “the reduction of the capacity of the environment to meet social and ecological objectives and needs.”²⁰ This term thus encompasses broader human impacts on the environment, including pollution, overconsumption, and damage from armed conflict.

It should be noted that these terms are distinct from both the study of the environmental effects of conflict and “greening the blue” efforts to reduce the UN’s environmental footprint in peace operations.

Climate Change and the Protection of Civilians in South Sudan

South Sudan, host to the world’s largest UN peacekeeping operation at the time of CIVIC’s research, is caught in a cycle of mutually reinforcing conflict, fragility, and climate stressors. Historic flooding of the Greater Upper Nile region in 2021 and 2022 left entire states underwater, displacing hundreds of thousands of people in an area with already significant levels of displacement from civil war.²¹ Drought, temperature rise, and desertification in other regions further threaten the lives and livelihoods of South Sudanese civilians whose resilience has been depleted by years of armed conflict, humanitarian crises, and economic downturn.²² In fact, South Sudan’s climate vulnerabilities and exposure to natural and human hazards—as well as its general vulnerability and lack of coping capacity—are so severe that it is ranked the world’s second most fragile country in a global risk index.²³

In the brief span since the country’s founding, violence against civilians in South Sudan persists through diverse and diffuse avenues of predation and impunity.²⁴ Following the signing of the revitalized peace agreement in September 2018, conflict has morphed into a generalized state of “subnational” violence that is simultaneously highly specific to local dynamics and manipulated by political and economic power brokers for personal gain.²⁵ These dynamics are particularly prevalent in Jonglei and Unity states, where conflict persists. A 2020 surge in violence between community-based militias in Dinka, Murle, and Nuer, for example, involved systematic raids distinctive in their militarized tactics and large scale. Their targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure resulted in high civilian casualties and reported abductions and sexual violence.²⁶ Unlike more typical cattle raids, this reflected structural violence: it was well financed, highly organized, and had ties to armed groups. Such violence is emblematic of a broader volatility in the “transition” years since the peace agreement, during which armed groups have been busy consolidating their positions and trying to drive rifts within and between rival groups.²⁷ The UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan explicitly noted climate-induced flooding among the challenges in implementing the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS).

In fact, South Sudan's climate vulnerabilities and exposure to natural and human hazards—as well as its general vulnerability and lack of coping capacity—are so severe that it is ranked the world's second most fragile country in a global risk index.

During this period, elections, security sector reform (SSR), and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes became mere extensions of the conflict rather than exercises in peacebuilding and milestones of progress.²⁸ Not unlike in Sudan, its northern neighbor, zero-sum contests over political power and extractive industries coalesce around clan identities in South Sudan, spurring tit-for-tat violence that can escalate rapidly.²⁹ Official positions, economic rents, and humanitarian aid are weaponized, while the population is further plagued by widespread cattle raiding, child recruitment, and sex- and gender-based violence (SGBV).³⁰

Amid these volatile dynamics, social cohesion in South Sudan is also susceptible to changes in the natural environment due to a range of social, economic, and political factors. The country is largely rural, with a variety of resource-based livelihoods. Agriculture and pastoralism are particularly widespread, though logging, fishing, artisanal mining, and charcoal production are also prominent.³¹ This leaves the majority of South Sudan highly dependent on a predictable resource base, including seasonal changes, negotiated migration routes, clean water, and ample grazing and planting land.³² Exacerbated by climate impacts, traditional agreements between pastoralists and sedentary communities have eroded or been disrupted in recent decades, largely due to weapons proliferation, political manipulation, and economic exploitation and instability.³³ Recent variability in rainy seasons and intermittent floods and droughts has also disturbed long-established timetables and has relocated entire communities.³⁴ When communities displaced by floods suddenly settle next to hosts they've never previously had to coexist with, it can result in a breakdown of basic understanding related to language and customs (e.g., between Dinka herders and other Nilotic farmers) and can thus spur often-violent competition over power, land, and resources.³⁵ For example, in Jonglei/Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA), the loss of cattle and food insecurity due to drought contributed to cattle raiding and shifting migration patterns in 2020-21—a dynamic potentially fueling localized violence. In such circumstances, communities are meeting “strangers,” perhaps including clans they may have fought in the civil war. At the same time, communities are being displaced for longer periods, in part because climate-related disruptions are deteriorating the conditions conducive to return: flood waters soak into the ground year round, fresh water turns to marshland, droughts are becoming endemic, and desertification is parching once fertile land.³⁶

The impact of these linked phenomena on the vulnerabilities of communities is stark. The crisis in Sudan, which began in April 2023, has fueled Africa's largest refugee crisis and the largest internally displaced population in the world, reaching over 11 million people.³⁷ Displaced Sudanese refugees and South Sudanese returnees have fled to already vulnerable areas, compounding the humanitarian crisis in South Sudan: 2.2 million people have been internally displaced, and, in 2024, 6 million of the most vulnerable South Sudanese were targeted for humanitarian aid.³⁸ Corruption and economic mismanagement, paired with higher food and fuel prices from the war in Ukraine, have reduced most

urban and peri-urban work in South Sudan to poverty wages.³⁹ Most individuals, households, and communities thus have very little dependable income or savings to invest in protective capacities, which further undermines their resilience in the face of successive and accumulating shocks.⁴⁰ By all measures, South Sudan is in the throes of a severe protection crisis, with compounding vulnerabilities most acutely seen in women and children, who are experiencing conflict-related sexual violence, gender-based violence (GBV), and child protection forms of harm.⁴¹

UN Peacekeeping in South Sudan

UNMISS's work is affected by many of these challenges. Roughly 13,200 troops, 1,500 police, and 3,000 civilians implement a multifaceted mandate for the protection of civilians (POC), facilitation of humanitarian aid, support for the political transition, and documentation of human rights abuses.⁴²

Initially created to support the newly independent South Sudanese state in 2011, the Mission faced dramatic upheaval in subsequent years.⁴³ The outbreak of widespread political violence in 2013 quickly turned South Sudan into one of the most nonpermissive and dangerous environments for third parties attempting to deliver aid, document abuses, and protect civilians.⁴⁴ This situation necessitated a radical realignment of the Mission toward the protection of civilians, with hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese finding some level of security in five dedicated POC sites on and around UN bases (Juba, Bor, Wau, Bentiu, and Malakal).⁴⁵ As one interview respondent noted to CIVIC, POC became “the ethos of the Mission.”⁴⁶ But while South Sudanese civilians gradually identified UNMISS and POC with the Mission's physical sites, the Mission balked at the scale of camp management, the poor prospects of a drawdown, the lack of a timeline for return, and, at times, the difficult political position the sites put them in with the government.⁴⁷

Subsequently, in a process initiated in 2019 by the previous Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), UNMISS handed over four of the five POC sites to the government (the exception being Malakal, discussed in a later section).⁴⁸ The Mission has since emphasized a protection plan based on mobility, flexibility, and rapid response, meant to be supported by more robust and specialized analysis, training, and logistics.⁴⁹ But past CIVIC research has found that in a country with poor transportation infrastructure and pervasive access denials by armed actors, the Mission's limited air assets and time-consuming internal procedures, as well as military components' reluctance to deploy to high-risk or austere locations, poses significant hurdles to rapid or far-reaching protection.⁵⁰ Indeed, both civilians and humanitarians raised concerns before and during the POC sites' transition that politics and resource constraints were causing the premature handover of a vital source of safety and services.⁵¹

For a mission whose protection plan relies significantly on mobility, anticipating how climate change exacerbates violence is important, as is overcoming the barriers climate hazards pose to effective POC response. In this context, how Mission components respond to and collaborate on the nexus of climate and security will be an essential case study for the UN and beyond.



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21 July 2023, Bentiu, South Sudan: Remote communities surrounded by floodwaters grow increasingly vulnerable to a changing climate and insecurity.

IV. UNDERSTANDING CLIMATE AND PROTECTION OF CIVILIANS IN THE UNMISS MANDATE

Key Observations

Even minor changes to UN mission mandates can significantly influence a mission's work and resourcing decisions, particularly when they include a reporting requirement. Adding a new climate-related task in the UNMISS mandate could either distract the Mission from its POC focus or sharpen it, depending on how it is interpreted and applied. Language that includes a specific requirement, such as integrating climate in risk assessments, can provide mission leadership with the impetus for coordination and focus, as well as a basis for the allocation of resources to these efforts. Conversely, overly prescriptive language may deprive mission sections of the latitude to make locally informed judgements on which interventions are best suited to a particular climate-related protection challenge. Ultimately, the UNSC should strike a balance between clarity and the flexibility needed for mission-based, and especially field-based, innovation.

An evolving mandate for South Sudan

In recognition of surging climate-related security risks across the globe, over 70 resolutions and statements have emerged from the UN Security Council—although political divisions prevent the necessary consensus for its declaration as a strategic priority.⁵² In 2020, the Security Council introduced language in its South Sudan mandates acknowledging climate-related risks for the country's stability and their role in deepening the humanitarian crisis. In subsequent years, the UNSC formalized this recognition by adding specific requirements: first, for UNMISS to provide gender-sensitive risk assessments on the adverse effects of climate change in its operations (S/RES/2625, 2022), then for regular reporting on the “risks associated with climate change that may adversely impact peace and security in South Sudan, and implementation of the Mission's mandate” (S/RES/2677, 2023).⁵³ The Council strengthened this mandate in 2024 (S/RES/2729), noting it “further recognized the adverse effects of climate on the humanitarian situation and stability in South Sudan”, calling on the government to engage with local communities to address these challenges, while also emphasizing the “need for comprehensive risk assessments and risk management strategies by the GoSS and the United Nations to inform programs relating to these factors” as well as resources to strengthen South Sudan's resilience to address the effects of climate change.⁵⁴

While such tasks had recent precedent in other mandates, mixed views contributed to a lack of clarity on their implementation. Some experts believe that climate-related mandate language is a meaningful but pragmatic way to mainstream climate change into peace operations within the “contested” space of climate security at the UNSC.⁵⁵ However, in recent years, some UN officials and independent analysts have observed that ever-expanding “Christmas tree” mandates—those riddled with extensive lists of required tasks—can distract missions from fulfilling their highest priority roles, including POC.⁵⁶ From this perspective, some felt the new tasks could divert focus away from the Mission's POC work, an important concern considering it has been scrutinized for protection failures in the past, including notorious incidents of violence against civilians in Juba and Malakal in 2016.⁵⁷ Some observers also expressed concerns that a mission that struggles to fulfill basic protection functions cannot be expected to better address threats and vulnerabilities to civilians simply because they have added recognition of climate change. Still others misunderstood the new tasks, incorrectly thinking it asks staff to address South Sudan's climate crisis

in addition to improving peace and security in the country. Such a mandate would justifiably be seen as unreasonable, and as such, these misunderstandings stymie implementation. As several subjects pointed out, merely including climate language in the mandate does not translate into meaningful or adapted action without guidance.⁵⁸ Practical guidance was needed to guide staff on the ground, with particular emphasis on how the new tasks could contribute to mandate implementation in other areas.

Focusing on implementation

According to CIVIC's interviews, personnel might share the view that climate change affects the Mission's work but differ in significant ways if asked how or why it matters. Describing how colleagues from humanitarian, development, or security sectors might see the impacts of climate change differently, a senior UNMISS official highlighted the importance of harmonizing internal understanding and prioritizing action through a coherent climate strategy.⁵⁹ Other stakeholders recognized the importance of clarity and consistent interpretation across the Mission while also recalling the benefits of leaving room for flexibility and innovation based on the Mission's local knowledge.⁶⁰ In this vein, one expert suggested that the approach to mandate language—at least for now—should “embrace the uncertainty and learn from it as we go.”⁶¹

For some, the benefit of the mandated requirement is not to alert staff to climate impacts, which they have already experienced firsthand and can clearly observe;⁶² rather, Mission personnel and experts stress that it can help ensure UNMISS's POC and humanitarian work are more systematically—and more accurately—informed by better analysis of climate stressors.⁶³ One official in Malakal said they actively supported including climate change in the mandate because they and others believe explicit recognition of the connections (for example between flooding and cattle raiding) would be useful in informing threat analysis and planning.⁶⁴ Several experts affirmed this view, noting that the hope behind the mandate change is to see how integrating climate in threat assessments can result in more accurate analysis of root causes and vulnerabilities, ultimately creating better solutions in severely climate-affected environments.⁶⁵ Although early, at least one senior UNMISS official stated that the language has already sharpened the Mission's understanding of climate impacts on conflict dynamics.⁶⁶

While a modicum of uncertainty may be unavoidable, guidance, peer learning, coordination, training, and collaboration within and outside the Mission are reliable strategies to empower the teams and units leading implementation. Resourcing requests to support mandated work among competing demands and diminishing budgets is a long-standing peacekeeping challenge, but the UN's Climate Security Mechanism is uniquely designed to deliver cross-organizational support expressly for this purpose. As in other mandated areas, such support ideally would empower field-led approaches and innovation while offering reliable capacity and advisory support, including from external sources. In this regard, field personnel in Malakal and Bentiu suggested that mandate language should be followed by practical guidance from Mission Headquarters. Such guidance, they suggest, should center all sections around a consistent interpretation and understanding of priorities while drawing on their knowledge and leaving room for local adaptation.⁶⁷ In addition, several respondents expressed to CIVIC their belief that the requirement would get lost without further staffing and technical expertise to maintain momentum.⁶⁸

Measuring the impacts of climate mandates by linking to tangible outcomes would need clear indicators, objectives, and a monitoring plan. But the recent mandate changes have already generated a series of activities that have increased UNMISS's understanding of the interplay between climate security risks and other mandated priorities. These areas of work, and the measures and capacities the UN has taken to support the realization of the mandate, are explored in the following section.

But the recent mandate changes have already generated a series of activities that have increased UNMISS's understanding of the interplay between climate security risks and other mandated priorities.



31 October 2023, Panyijar, South Sudan: In a remote part of the Greater Upper Nile region of South Sudan, UNMISS must conduct its patrols by air to reach civilians devastated by years of war.

V. MATCHING MANDATES WITH CORE CAPACITIES

Key Observations

As one of the most visible initiatives of the UN system to integrate climate security risk analysis into UN peace operations, Climate Security Advisors (CSAs) offer technical assistance and play advisory and/or coordination roles. In UNMISS, the CSA is tasked with “streamlining” climate indicators within the Mission’s threat and conflict analysis as well as improving coordination within and outside the Mission. Research findings, including Mission leadership and resource support for the role, suggest a commitment to its success. Even so, the effect of the position on the Mission’s POC efforts will be judged by whether improved analysis, understanding, and coordination yield tangible results for South Sudanese civilians.

The first deployments of Advisors to PKOs would have been to UNMISS and the UN Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), but MINUSMA’s withdrawal leaves UNMISS as the solitary case study for resourcing the climate security nexus in peacekeeping.

Introducing the climate and security advisory role

At the request of the UNSC and the CSM, a Senior Climate and Security Advisor (CSA) joined UNMISS in September 2022.⁶⁹ The position is funded by external donors, seconded by UNDP, and located in the deputy head of mission’s office with dual reporting lines to both the DSRSG (political) and UNDP.⁷⁰ A global network of advisors also includes the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), the Office of the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, and the UN’s regional offices in Central Africa (UNOCA) and West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).⁷¹ The first deployments of Advisors to PKOs would have been to UNMISS and the UN Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), but MINUSMA’s withdrawal leaves UNMISS as the solitary case study for resourcing the climate security nexus in peacekeeping.

The advisors’ roles differ according to the needs of each context; work streams vary from internal data and analysis to advising host states on climate adaptive pilot projects.⁷² While advisors’ portfolios must be tailored to each context, the varied and extra-budgetary nature of the roles indicates that the climate security agenda at the UN has been shaped by the initiatives and priorities of individual Member States.⁷³ Several interview respondents characterized this as an iterative process in which a community of practice is built, trainings are held, lessons are shared between advisors and partners, and the roles may eventually be formalized within the UN security architecture.⁷⁴

The CSA’s hiring in UNMISS added environmental expertise many felt Mission Headquarters needed, even as the new role was still being defined following the mandated climate-related reporting requirement.⁷⁵

While the immediate utility of such expertise may be debated given competing urgent operational priorities on the ground, some experts believe the value of CSAs is catalytic—beginning a trend that may strengthen, grow, and yield dividends years down the road, like the deployment of UN Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) did.

Several interview respondents noted that this helped formalize the advisory role within the Mission and helped the CSA's backers advocate for support for the position, as well as for an additional program manager and a data analyst in New York, within UNMISS's formal budget to safeguard the role and protect the progress it made possible.⁷⁶

The variety of CSA functions invites questions about the value of a CSA to protection work in a PKO like UNMISS, where the threats to civilians remain stark and POC is the Mission's mandated priority and supposed "ethos."⁷⁷ Supporting climate-sensitive peacebuilding, state capacity building, and mediation—all potentially important roles played by other advisors—might only go so far to address concerns in a mission criticized for its aversion to intervening between threats of violence and civilians.⁷⁸ While the immediate utility of such expertise may be debated given competing urgent operational priorities on the ground, some experts believe the value of CSAs is catalytic—beginning a trend that may strengthen, grow, and yield dividends years down the road, like the deployment of UN Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) did.⁷⁹

Integrating climate risk analysis across the mandate and the nexus

In the meantime, even modest mandated language allows missions like UNMISS to build up expertise and better link with UN agencies like UNHCR, UNEP, FAO, OCHA, IOM, and UNDP, which have years of existing practice and knowledge in areas like water scarcity, transhumance, migration, food security, and environmental peacebuilding from which missions can benefit.

Practically, the clearest connection between the UNMISS CSA and protection relates to the integration of climate-related data in the Mission's assessments and planning, as reflected in the five self-identified pillars of the CSA's work:

- Building Mission capacity to collect data on climate-related peace and security (CPS) indicators.
- Integrating this climate data into UNMISS's conflict analyses.
- Using this data and analysis to facilitate early warning and rapid response (EW/RR) interventions.
- Identifying areas for complementarity with the UN country team and triple nexus partners.
- Collaborating with the government and its development partners to build knowledge and capabilities related to climate adaptation.⁸⁰

Maintaining this momentum through day-to-day operational demands, across Mission strategies, and into longer-term planning will be important to realizing tangible operational outcomes.

However, the CSA's role as a dedicated thematic focal point also has the potential to introduce coherence among Mission sections' approaches to climate-related peace and security, including the implications of climate security risks for protection. According to several interview respondents, Heads of Mission components have actively engaged with the advisor to plan initiatives around each pillar of work.⁸¹ The CSA presented an initial theory of change at UNMISS's weekly meeting of section heads and has also attended meetings of the Protection Cluster and weekly meetings with senior management from the agencies, funds, and programs.⁸² Still, to help mainstream climate-related risks and analysis into the Mission's POC mandate implementation, the CSA's participation in in-mission POC coordination mechanisms like the POC Working Group would be advisable.⁸³

This advisory role has also extended to the UN Country Team through the existing Climate Change Working Group, which is co-led by UNDP and the Civil Affairs Division (CAD).⁸⁴ In partnership with the CSM, the UN System Staff College, SIPRI, the Swedish FBA, and UNMISS/CSA organized two rounds of training with UNCT and UNMISS personnel to reconcile their often differing humanitarian and security understandings of climate, peace, and security.⁸⁵

In these early stages, the role of the CSA has clearly revolved around building relationships within the Mission and among partners who could facilitate the CSA's own plan of work, while also increasing the knowledge and prioritization of climate-related security issues among Mission personnel. Their influence was observable over the period of CIVIC's research, particularly in the parts of the Mission doing joint analysis of threats of physical violence against civilians, such as Joint Operations Centers (JOCs) at Mission HQ and field (FJOCs), as well as in JMACs. Following a year of internal consultations, the inclusion of climate security risk indicators into the Mission's threat assessments is a significant step forward. At the time of research, however, it was too early to assess if shared analysis between the CSA, the Senior POC Advisor, and other Mission components was influencing decision-making regarding the protection of civilians.

Maintaining this momentum through day-to-day operational demands, across Mission strategies, and into longer-term planning and operational outcomes will be important. Regular sharing of data and analysis should eventually inform deployment strategies, resource allocation, and community engagement. Such efforts could augment those aimed at strengthening military peacekeeping intelligence, uniformed civilian data-sharing, knowledge management, and more systematic and robust early warning and rapid response systems—all of which mutually reinforce POC success strategies.



27 October 2023, Bentiu, South Sudan: The UN Panel of Experts on South Sudan recognized climate-induced flooding among the challenges in implementing the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan.

VI. DATA, ANALYSIS, AND EARLY WARNING

Key Observations

any Mission sections—including JMAC, JOC, and the Climate, Peace & Security Unit (CPSU) in the Civil Affairs Division (CAD)—are collaborating to integrate climate-related data and indicators into the Mission’s approach to conflict analysis and threat assessments. Over time, climate data could increase the predictive strength of the Mission’s threat analysis. Whereas early warning and rapid response cycles tend to rely on data about imminent threats, the inclusion of climate indicators could allow planners to note longer-term relationships and trends that could then factor into the Mission’s 6- and 12-month planning cycles. As with data-based early warning, the impact of even the most systematic and scientific approaches to integrating climate data will depend on uptake by the Mission’s field offices and its civilian and uniformed personnel.

Localized, data-driven approaches to climate, conflict, and protection

In addition to the Climate Security Advisor, there are three sections leading the implementation of UNMISS’s climate analysis and reporting mandate: the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC), Joint Operations Center (JOC), and Civil Affairs. Together, these core Mission capacities are adapting systems and introducing new data sources and processes in several ways. Their collaboration mirrors similar efforts made in MINUSMA prior to its withdrawal.⁸⁶ Staff are already integrating climate-related indicators from Mission and external data sources into the UN-wide Situational Awareness Geospatial Enterprise (SAGE) database to visualize “hotspots” and understand specific areas of vulnerability, including possible interventions for UNMISS. They are also factoring this analysis into the Mission’s conflict analysis and early warning and rapid response mechanisms, as well as climate-sensitive conflict analysis of displacement. Potential for stronger cross-mission and UNMISS/UNCT collaboration are beginning to emerge in regards to applying climate security analysis across other protection priorities, such as conflict-related sexual violence through the Monitoring Analysis Reporting Arrangements (MARA).

In line with UN Peacekeeping’s efforts to embrace “data-driven approaches to protection,” UNMISS has emphasized information-sharing between sections and timely early warning for informing troop deployments.⁸⁷ To do so, it relies on SAGE, a web-based application where personnel can log incidents and activities that feed into a dashboard visualizing hotspots.⁸⁸ Separately, when field personnel see indicators of increasing tensions or a developing threat in the course of their work, they can raise a flag in the dedicated EW section of their regular reporting to Juba.⁸⁹ These flags (alongside SAGE data) are collated, analyzed, and shared with relevant sections by the JMAC and can be discussed at regular or emergency meetings to determine the best way to prepare or deploy.⁹⁰ Additionally, the JOC has Field Integrated Operations Centers (FIOC) with field office coordinators who systematically collect information from field sections for regular operational updates that include EW indicators.⁹¹

In interviews with CIVIC, several Mission respondents emphasized the utility of data-oriented climate science to protection-related tasks.⁹² First, the scope and depth of data available to them has increased to cover meteorological, topographic, and hydrological datasets (which Member States, UN agencies, and private entities have already collected in abundance). Second, by defining the relationship between climate factors and their existing indicators, they are able to begin developing climate indicators to factor into their analysis (with the help of these newly legible datasets). Finally, these indicators can be integrated into SAGE, which is a disaggregated database that is searchable by event or by its constitutive elements (e.g., date, location, actor, etc.). This allows for the relatively straightforward addition of new elements, such as whether a natural hazard was involved in an event as well as related details. As a result, the database can enable the kind of

multidimensional analysis useful for informing operational decision-making, such as visualizing hotspots, anticipating alerts in the Early Warning system, or sending patrols to vulnerable areas.

Together with the CSA, JMAC's leadership presented an initial framework of indicators to Mission leadership in 2023.⁹³ Their initial categories include: i) the hazard itself; ii) the areas exposed; iii) intensity of exposure; and iv) the vulnerability of the areas. Notably, one of the subcategories in the vulnerability section will include possible interventions for UNMISS. There are plans to hire a data analyst to oversee this portfolio. They will first integrate the agreed-upon indicators, then back code climate indicators into older data to find trends, and finally collate and integrate broader UN and non-UN sources, including data from FAO on food security, UNEP on environmental trends, and UNDP on socioeconomic resilience and vulnerability.⁹⁴ Importantly, the FIOCs at each field office are expected to support this work. To prepare for this role, a training is planned for the FIOCs with their field colleagues in CAD on collecting data according to the new indicators.⁹⁵ While several interview respondents noted they were conscious of adding another cross-cutting issue to already overstretched field personnel, the utility of a "streamlining rather than mainstreaming" approach will be determined by the results.⁹⁶

Strengthening early warning and rapid response capabilities

Connecting the CSA with Civil Affairs offers clear advantages for benefitting from established access to communities. With an emphasis on strengthening community relationships in recent years, CAD acts as the first responder to reports of violence or displacement.⁹⁷ They deploy quickly to verify and collect information and have developed their own conflict and hotspot mapping, including of pastoral routes and related resources.⁹⁸ In this way, UNMISS is able to identify risk areas based on its localized conflict analysis, in some cases by factoring in climate change-related conflict risks between pastoralists, farmers, and communities. As the "face of UNMISS in communities," these Mission staff collect first-hand data on climate-related security risks, assess the impact(s), and use this information to inform existing mediation efforts and early-warning systems. To coordinate this work, CAD co-chairs with UNDP the joint UNMISS/UN Country Team Climate Change Working Group and is the focal point on climate change within the Mission.⁹⁹ Early on, these partners discussed systematically integrating climate change into CAD's conflict analysis, with both sides agreeing that there are "new needs" in reporting capabilities and indicators.¹⁰⁰ The CSA and CAD are now developing questions that CAD's field representatives can integrate into their dialogue with communities and feed into SAGE.¹⁰¹

Equally important to mapping hotspots is learning from "coldspots," in which two communities under strain did not come into conflict.¹⁰² The training CAD and the CSA are developing for field teams would thus include the critical question of where civilians fled, how they were received by host communities, and whether any tensions arose between displaced civilians and host communities. This climate-sensitive conflict analysis would pair with JMAC's quantitative reporting and trends analysis to help determine the likelihood of tension with their hosts and fellow displaced civilians.¹⁰³ But it is important to temper expectations, as predictive conflict analysis remains a difficult, resource-intensive, and ultimately imperfect task, as noted in past studies by CIVIC and others.¹⁰⁴ It will be essential for this initiative's planning, implementation, and subsequent evaluation to remain focused on the relatively favorable cost-benefit to UNMISS's existing and planned POC interventions.

Together, these units are planning three complementary efforts to build UNMISS capacities:

- Adding a more quantitative, spatial, environmental approach to the Mission's hotspot mapping and trends analysis.
- Training FIOCs and CAD field personnel to ask communities about the hazards they face and their movement plans.
- Strengthening CAD's ability to conduct a more climate-sensitive conflict analysis of displacement and whether/how it contributes to conflict.

If successful, the outcome of these efforts would be a seasonal, localized, hazard-specific early warning mechanism meant to provide actionable information to the Mission's uniformed and civilian rapid response personnel.

If successful, the outcome of these efforts would be a seasonal, localized, hazard-specific early warning mechanism meant to provide actionable information to the Mission's uniformed and civilian rapid response personnel. The recent development of climate indicators add further detail to internal databases that can strengthen the accuracy of early warning reporting and analysis, thus strengthening the Mission's response capacity and results, including by enabling it to plan its deployments and activities more effectively and over a longer time horizon.¹⁰⁵ Several interview respondents emphasized that integrating climate risks into Mission analysis will inherently stretch the UN's planning horizon from its once rather limited and immediate focus.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Mission leadership and agency partners have emphasized that they now plan on a 12-month schedule, up from the previous 6-month schedule.¹⁰⁷ Distinct from any of the initiative's direct impacts, this shift in planning timelines can be viewed as a positive externality with potential benefits across mandated areas of work.

While most of the climate/POC discussions appear to be centered at Mission Headquarters in Juba, coordination is extending to some of UNMISS's ten field offices.¹⁰⁸ Several field office staff indicated an openness to the capabilities and information access that Mission's Climate Security Plan of Work aims to build.¹⁰⁹ Despite this positive inclination, the immediacy of overlapping crises in certain field offices has largely prevented them from participating in these climate-informed processes.¹¹⁰ Interview respondents at one field office had limited awareness of current climate-related thinking in Juba or its potential implications for their work.¹¹¹ Several field respondents noted their intent to take a "wait and see" approach, indicating that they are focused on more immediate challenges of resourcing and delivering on their priority mandates. They assume the utility of this new workstream will come "down the road."¹¹²

As UNMISS plans these capabilities, it must continually assess whether and how efforts to incorporate climate factors into threat analysis and planning (as well as the resources allocated) will tangibly improve the day-to-day ability to protect civilians. While climate action and climate-responsive protection require long-term investment, today's protection challenges in South Sudan are stark. Any data or conflict analysis must remain tied to the POC prioritization that the Security Council has mandated. Several UN interview respondents emphasized that this would and should be the goal.¹¹³ But if climate-related data initiatives are (and should be) fundamentally intertwined with UNMISS's POC priority, their success becomes dependent on the broader question of the Mission's ability and willingness to conduct proactive and people-centered protection. This mitigating factor and ways to address it must be integrated into current planning and implementation of the above-mentioned climate initiatives.



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27 October 2023, Bentiu, South Sudan: Engineering tasks, including road maintenance, construction, and maintenance of dykes, and conservation of the airport runway, are conducted by the Pakistani engineers deployed to UNMISS in Bentiu. These essential works, often undertaken in challenging conditions, play a vital role in ensuring the safety and efficient movement of people and goods in the capital of Unity State, South Sudan.

CASE STUDY: Gender, Climate, Peace, and Security

It is essential for protection actors to consider the gendered effects of climate change and incorporate this knowledge into their response efforts. In many societies, men have greater access to the services and social mobility that can help them adapt to natural hazards and resource scarcity.¹¹⁴ Women and girls are therefore more vulnerable to these hazards.¹¹⁵ This is especially true in South Sudan, where social norms, legal restrictions, and widespread sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV) fundamentally undermine women and girls' resilience to climate change.¹¹⁶

Traditionally tasked with collecting and managing natural resources, women and girls are often the first to recognize and respond to a change in the environment.¹¹⁷ The CSA and UNMISS's Women's Protection Advisory Unit (WPAU) "spoke the same language" on these issues and soon became close partners.¹¹⁸ Tasked with recording and responding to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), WPAU had already witnessed the compounding and differentiated threats women face.¹¹⁹ For example, UNMISS personnel and civil society respondents often highlighted to CIVIC the challenges around gathering vital household resources like food, fuel, and water.¹²⁰ In South Sudan, it is usually the role of women to collect these supplies for households.¹²¹ As resources become depleted near settlements, women have to travel farther away from protective networks and familiar surroundings to access increasingly scarce resources.¹²² This makes them more vulnerable to attacks and exploitation by South Sudan's many armed actors.¹²³ Women often mitigate this risk by traveling in groups, and UNMISS has stepped in with "firewood patrols" to increase security in the areas where they travel for firewood. However, these mechanisms (used extensively in Darfur) offer only limited protections for women.¹²⁴ The risk remains, as 95 percent of South Sudanese rely on charcoal, firewood, and grass for cooking.¹²⁵

The CSA and WPAU have been exploring methods to evaluate the relationship between CRSV and climate-related peace and security to complement the broader attempts at data-driven interventions and a shared knowledge base.¹²⁶ A quantitative study of gender, climate, and security indicators could be helpful in crafting specific interventions if indicators are disaggregated spatially, temporally (rainy or dry season), and by type of hazard and livelihood. Ultimately, the goal is for any trends, relationships, and predictive mapping to support proactive deployment of forces, pre-positioning of resources, and logistical planning for seasonal changes.

Climate has already become an added element to conflict-related sexual violence hotspot analysis. WPAU passes on information about specific risk areas to UNPOL, especially in places where WPAU and UNPOL are co-located, to advise UNPOL and Force on recommendations for patrols where and when risks may be higher. Much of this data collection comes from the Human Rights Division, which is also involved with and informed by deep local networks and extensive community engagement. Moving forward, UNMISS could complement other data sources by sharing analysis with UNCT and civil society partners through MARA and the Joint Consultation Forum on CRSV, which UNMISS co-chairs.¹²⁷

VII. ADAPTING PROTECTION ACTIVITIES TO CLIMATE IMPACTS IN SOUTH SUDAN

Key Observations

Natural hazards related to climate change create new vulnerabilities for civilians while also imposing resource and capacity challenges on protection actors, including the UN. Catastrophic flooding, for example, has imposed severe limitations on the mobility needed for prevention and response. Even so, environmental hazards should not be invoked as a reason that UNMISS is limited in its ability to meet its protection mandate without acknowledging the need to adapt mission protection strategies and operations to factor in climate-related risks posed to communities needing protection, access to those communities, and implications for peacekeeping operations relating to logistics, access, mobility, and capacities. Nor should protecting civilians from the impact of natural disasters be conflated with protecting them from threats of violence. Additional resources and personnel sought by UNMISS for environmental hazards should have a demonstrable link to POC and other mandated activities.

The increased intensity and unpredictability of natural hazards in South Sudan, including severe flooding and drought, has not only affected civilian vulnerabilities to violence, it has had a clear impact on the Mission's capacities to address them.

Several Mission components reported to CIVIC that climate-related access obstacles were inhibiting their mandated protection work, including severe flooding and extreme weather events.

Access limitations for civilian-led protection

Several Mission components reported to CIVIC that climate-related access obstacles were inhibiting their mandated protection work, including severe flooding and extreme weather events. As the focal point for much of the Mission's work at the intersection of climate change and protection, Civil Affairs, along with its triple nexus partners, has been mapping routes, pre-positioning protection assets and humanitarian aid, holding inter-clan peace conferences before and after migratory seasons, and establishing safe passageways for movement.¹²⁸ But growing variability in rainy seasons, watering holes, grazing land, and traversable herding routes is "weakening the tools" available to CAD, whether by radically changing the location and balance of resources for an agreement to be implemented or by physically denying access to and knowledge of a community's location.¹²⁹ The inability of UNMISS staff to travel by vehicle over flooded roads in Greater Upper Nile and Bahr el-Ghazal has also undermined their ability to convene mediation dialogues, women's networks, and peace clubs in schools.¹³⁰

Resolving conflict and building a protective environment become much more difficult when affected communities are unable to participate in civil dialogue.¹³¹ Moreover, increasingly unpredictable rainy seasons are inhibiting access for projects providing support to survivors of CRSV in Western Equatoria, thus causing programming delays.¹³² Notably, UNMISS staff in Bentiu and Malakal told CIVIC that the field offices had done much to adapt their operations to the flooding and to mainstream climate-related impacts into their programming and planning assumptions.¹³³

Natural hazards profoundly affect uniformed UN peacekeepers' ability to prevent and respond to protection threats.

Natural hazards affecting military and police mobility

Natural hazards profoundly affect uniformed UN peacekeepers' ability to prevent and respond to protection threats. First, displacement caused by flooding may place vulnerable civilians in different locations or at greater distances from pre-positioned UN assets.¹³⁴ Second, by washing away roads (which are often adjacent to the river), flooding has impaired the Mission's mobility. Such impairments inhibit needed patrols in vulnerable communities, compelling the Force to use expensive, resource-intensive, and sometimes riskier modes of transport like boats or aircraft or to conduct long-distance patrols.¹³⁵ Third, when air-facilitated patrols do occur, changes in weather patterns—including the frequency or timing of storms during the rainy season—frequently ground air operations, further limiting their mobility.¹³⁶ Fourth, roadway flooding has limited the number of routes the Force can use to transport personnel or equipment.¹³⁷ Finally, climate-related hazards can present obstacles close to field bases, as in the case of the UNMISS-managed Malakal POC site, where a UN official described how the mud from local flooding can swallow both boots and tires, thus complicating threat response within the camp.¹³⁸

Whether gradual or rapid, climate-related changes to the natural environment have inhibited mandate implementation. They complicate access to communities and require more intensive modes of transport, such as boats and aircraft, which have become essential for the Mission's own supply lines as well as its patrolling capabilities. However, even these more intensive modes of transport may not always be appropriate to meet emerging needs. For example, neither the UN boats cleared for transport on large river systems like the Nile nor the basic inflatable boats readily available to the UN are always suitable for safely navigating flooded areas covered in underwater brush and trees.¹³⁹ Additionally, the contingent-owned vehicles that many troops bring with them when they deploy to the Mission are ill-equipped to operate on South Sudan's roads when they become muddy.¹⁴⁰ To help address these problems, the World Food Programme (WFP) offered the Mission fifteen "sherps" (high-wheeled vehicles that can traverse muddy terrain), but several UNMISS interview respondents indicated they would require at least 45 more (six to ten vehicles for each of six battalions) to conduct adequate patrols, reach communities, and facilitate aid delivery and Force protection.¹⁴¹ Moreover, one UN official pointed out that as conditions have worsened, these and other capabilities have been in greater demand to support humanitarian and other UN agencies when their own vehicles get stuck in water or mud.¹⁴² Another official noted, "We are not waiting for New York to give us the toys that we want." They went on to note that the Mission has taken steps to adapt and optimize use of its existing

equipment by, for example, moving surplus aluminum boats from Malakal to Bentiu for Mission and local police to use for patrols.¹⁴³ Such resourceful problem-solving is an ever-increasing operational reality, as the gap between Mission capabilities and protection needs is almost certain to widen.

Such resourceful problem-solving is an ever-increasing operational reality, as the gap between Mission capabilities and protection needs is almost certain to widen.

Infrastructure, Logistics, and Personnel

In South Sudan, logistical hurdles have long been an operational reality. Maintaining a field presence capable of detecting threats and protecting civilians requires significant logistical infrastructure and reliable supply chains. Recurrent extreme weather events such as the flooding in Bentiu add additional, even novel, requirements. The threat of being cut off from other parts of South Sudan by rain or flooding requires stockpiling equipment, provisions, and fuel for generators and aircraft.¹⁴⁴ The basic challenge of maintaining the safety, health, morale, and welfare of UN staff assigned to field offices in isolated and austere conditions must also be factored in.

Some Mission personnel and external experts told CIVIC researchers that the cumulative effect of climate-related impacts have also negatively impacted the Mission's protection posture by diverting personnel to deal with them, such as patrolling dykes or filling sandbags.¹⁴⁵ In Bentiu, the Pakistani Engineering Corps quickly built and now sustains 88 kilometers of dykes—the sole barrier between the field office and 130,000 IDPs on one side and nearly two meters of floodwater on the other.¹⁴⁶ The local Mongolian and Ghanaian peacekeeper battalions are now left to patrol the dykes for breaches, which could rapidly inundate the camp (as personnel experienced in November 2022).¹⁴⁷ Environmental changes have thus not only created the need to account for the effect of climate impacts on posture and readiness, but also the need to ensure missions include personnel with the profiles, skills, and capabilities needed to respond to natural hazards—and the flexibility to deploy them as needed.¹⁴⁸ Severe climate-related impacts might justify, for example, the seasonal short-term deployment or assignment of personnel with relevant expertise.

Environmental changes have thus not only created the need to account for the effect of climate impacts on posture and readiness, but also the need to ensure missions include personnel with the profiles, skills, and capabilities needed to respond to natural hazards—and the flexibility to deploy them as needed.



18 October 2023, Wau, South Sudan: UNMISS peacekeepers meet with community members while on patrol protecting civilians in the village of Kay-go, 60 kilometers from Wau, the capital of Western Bahr el Ghazal State in northwestern South Sudan.

Notably, however, one analyst warned that climate stressors could become an excuse for both the Mission and national actors to lag in their responsibility to protect civilians.¹⁴⁹ Logistical hurdles posed by extreme weather events like flooding, in addition to risks to peacekeeper safety and security, are among the reasons cited for the lack of Temporary Operating Bases (TOBs) despite clear POC risks in the Jonglei-Pibor conflict.¹⁵⁰ Multiple recent offensives in Jonglei State have resulted in civilian casualties and requests for Force protection by communities and WFP convoys. Mission reluctance to establish TOBs there despite these concerns may thus be indicative. To temper this risk, UNMISS should assess the limitations that climate-related shocks present to implementing its protection strategy, including mobility, logistics, access, and capacities. It should also ensure that it can distinguish between the impact of climate stressors and other factors impeding its protection activities such that it can clarify the difference internally and in its external reporting. Climate should not become a scapegoat when protection challenges may stem more from political blockages, peacekeeper inaction, risk-averse decision-making, or other shortcomings.

CASE STUDY: UN UNITY FIELD OFFICE, BENTIU, UNITY STATE

In 2021, flooding in Bentiu in Unity State, South Sudan, destroyed infrastructure, decimated cattle herds, displaced tens of thousands of people, and complicated efforts for their return.¹⁵¹ With its own operations significantly affected by the region's worst flooding in sixty years, UNMISS's Pakistani Engineer Corps built an estimated 88 kilometers of dykes around the Bentiu IDP camp and the UN field office. A range of UN agencies and humanitarian organizations contributed to other flood mitigation efforts.¹⁵² Between 2021 and 2023, water levels from flooding reached 90 to 190 centimeters deep in the immediate vicinity.¹⁵³ The shocking effects of the flooding on the local landscape are clearly visible from the air, where passengers can see the outline of submerged roads, dwellings, and even vehicles as they approach what has become an island protected from the waters only by a system of dykes.

In 2022, the Mission and its partners only had two weeks when the roads in Bentiu town were dry, during which they organized 140 convoys to deliver essential aid into the camp.¹⁵⁴ This short timetable strained UNMISS's Force protection capacity while prompting the Mission to develop a joint contingency plan with humanitarian partners in case they were unable to deliver enough aid for the year (a circumstance they ended up avoiding).¹⁵⁵

The extent and impact of the flooding directly affected the staff and operations of the UN's Unity Field Office in Bentiu. The portable containers in which they live and work were said to have even set afloat at one point.¹⁵⁶ Staff emphasized that the crisis demanded stronger cohesion and resourcefulness, not only internally but also in their relationships with humanitarian organizations and local officials.¹⁵⁷ Shortly after the flooding, the Mission convened a joint response task force of the various Mission sections.¹⁵⁸ "The flooding brought us together," recounted one staff member.¹⁵⁹

Field personnel similarly described how the flooding impacted the threats and vulnerabilities of civilians, particularly women, as well as how it resulted in new and sometimes unexpected community response efforts.¹⁶⁰ Some described unexpected benefits—for example, temporary cooperation between rival armed groups in combating the effects of a new "common enemy."¹⁶¹ Others noted that floods had created an effective physical barrier between some armed groups and civilians while also making it easier to keep track of communities who had congregated in central places as a result of the flooding.¹⁶²

The Human Rights and Civil Affairs Divisions incorporated environmental impacts from climate change into their planning assumptions. For example, planning assumptions now include conducting programs around the extended rainy season and pre-positioning materials before flooding.¹⁶³ One UN official stated that the crisis had compelled them to look past the immediate causes of conflict toward the role of environmental and resource-based stressors.¹⁶⁴ More Mission and Country Team programs, they said, are now intentionally designed to mitigate social and political competition over resources like water and grazing land.¹⁶⁵

When discussing their relationship with Juba, staff in Bentiu spoke to the potential for climate-informed risk analysis to sharpen the timing and location of their protection-focused programs and activities, including their early warning and rapid response capabilities.¹⁶⁶ But they also highlighted the importance of two-way information sharing, noting that requests for information from Mission Headquarters become a distraction unless the information led to tangible outcomes.¹⁶⁷

VIII. CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND POC

Key Observations

The links between environmental hazards, conflict drivers, and protection vulnerabilities in South Sudan make local and national climate adaptation important for the protection of civilians. The Mission's capacity to anticipate and respond to protection threats could benefit from early efforts to exchange climate data and expertise with humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding organizations. The Mission should work in mutual cooperation with local civil society and local authorities to ensure its efforts to mitigate the impact of climate on civilian vulnerabilities and protection are effective and sustainable.

Triple nexus climate adaptation programming and POC

While environmental factors are neither new nor solely responsible for multidimensional conflict in South Sudan, UNMISS staff agreed they are contributing to both its causes and effects. Mission staff revealed broad acceptance that climate shocks act as a conflict risk multiplier and that climate-adaptive approaches and programming can help alleviate conflict's root causes and mitigate the vulnerabilities caused by it. For example, conflict related to pastoralism has long existed in the region but is being exacerbated as climate change causes disruptions to traditional migration routes. Opportunistic actors such as those on the South Sudanese–Ugandan border area are in turn exploiting these disruptions by driving Ugandan cattle across the border to agricultural areas, where land-grabbing has turned violent amid growing farmer-herder conflicts.¹⁶⁸ In addition to mission-led and tested approaches to POC in these types of transhumance-related conflicts—including route mapping, mediation, inter-tribe peace conferences, and safe corridors—UNMISS personnel who spoke with CIVIC recognized the value of complementary cross-cutting programs aimed at underlying issues like food insecurity, loss of livelihoods, and changes to cattle grazing that can exacerbate local conflict dynamics and, by extension, the vulnerability of civilians to violence.¹⁶⁹

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Given the potential for protection and climate-focused interventions to address overlapping vulnerabilities, there are clear benefits to coordinating on climate security with UN Country Team agencies and external organizations that work at the “triple nexus” of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding approaches.¹⁷⁰ In South Sudan, the immediate needs served by climate-responsive or climate-adaptive humanitarian and development programming often correspond with patterns of

vulnerability to violence. For example, a World Food Program initiative in Bentiu that addresses flood-induced food insecurity through alternative livelihoods programming for women may also mitigate the vulnerability of women to threats of conflict-related sexual violence.¹⁷¹

The nascent Climate Security Working Group (jointly led by UNMISS Civil Affairs Division and UNDP) is

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comprised of UN Country Team members (e.g., FAO and UNHCR) and UNMISS. It was conceptualized to coordinate efforts, facilitate knowledge exchange, and encourage joint programming on issues such as flooding and transhumance.¹⁷² However, it was unclear to CIVIC researchers whether the POC Advisor was an active part of this group. Their role would be crucial to maintaining a POC lens in identifying and analyzing climate-related risks and their impact on the protection of civilians. UNMISS field office staff also coordinate relevant programs with other agencies. For example, at regional cattle migration conferences, UNMISS CAD provides training in seasonal conflict management alongside counterparts from FAO.¹⁷³ Meanwhile, joint analysis with UNMISS enabled UNHCR and FAO to better plan for displacement patterns and cattle migration disruptions in the Uganda–South Sudan corridor.¹⁷⁴ As UNHCR-led multiyear planning factors in the impact of climate on displacement, contingency planning for humanitarian relief operations and IDP crisis response regularly revisits these plans to make adaptations where needed in relation to climate shocks and/or changes in conflict dynamics.¹⁷⁵ Such collaborations offer clear benefits and can lead to better protection outcomes for affected communities.

Joint data sharing and analysis make such collaboration possible and is the cornerstone of complementary approaches at the intersection of human security, climate risks, and conflict drivers in vulnerable areas. As such, UNMISS has begun to focus more on the potential relevance of climate adaptation programs and datasets managed by other organizations for conflict prevention and the protection of civilians.¹⁷⁶ Such data is invaluable for informed joint analysis and, from it, joint approaches to planning and programming. Climate change is informing UNHCR-led multiyear planning for protection, which includes, for example, identifying factors related to the climate impacts of displacement, leading contingency planning for humanitarian relief operations and IDP crisis responses, and regularly revisiting plans to adapt where needed to climate shocks and/or changes in conflict dynamics.¹⁷⁷ Other joint risk-tracking and data-sharing initiatives, such as INFORM, offer the UN and partners insights into risk trends using multi-hazard information from diverse sources to inform scenario-based and foresight planning with longer time horizons and multidimensionality.¹⁷⁸ Applied jointly, this kind of data (for example, on how climate change is impacting agriculture, water, and displacement) can inform humanitarian and development programs with necessary analysis of potential conflict “hot spots” for prevention and early warning.¹⁷⁹

These early warning tools are among the most important in both Mission and non-Mission contexts

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for protecting civilians and preventing conflict. One tool used to facilitate “triple nexus” responses to climate-related human security risks is the Transhumance Tracking Tool (TTT) used in the Central African Republic to track herder migrations. IOM and FAO implement conflict mediation and community-based protection programs along these routes, while FAO intervenes with alternative livelihood options.¹⁸⁰ Given the predominance of transhumance related climate–conflict linkages, UNMISS and IOM are collaborating on a similar approach in South Sudan. Similarly, UNEP’s Strata tool converges web-based geospatial data to track where environmental, climate, and security stressors converge with socioeconomic vulnerabilities and instability. Such tools are multi-purpose, enabling conflict-sensitive climate and environmental programming as well as climate-sensitive conflict prevention and peacebuilding approaches.¹⁸¹ The next step is to consolidate these initiatives into a shared evidence base complemented by local community engagement.

One of the main challenges in South Sudan is joining up respective early warning approaches between the Mission, UN agencies, and their partners. UNMISS has taken important steps to overcome the sometimes thematically siloed focus of respective sections to reach a whole-of-Mission understanding of early warning mapping and hotspots. They have done so to facilitate integrated rapid response.¹⁸² Regionally, UNMISS has joined a Horn of Africa climate, peace, and security hub linked with IGAD’s Conflict early warning and response mechanism, thus leveraging regional expertise and capacities with a cross-border analysis of available data.¹⁸³ An independent assessment of UNMISS’s implementation of its protection of civilians mandate encourages South Sudan to leverage regional and subregional platforms and be part of integrated solutions in addressing protection concerns exacerbated by climate change.¹⁸⁴ Notably, seasonal forecasting tools have also become part of the Mission’s toolbox.¹⁸⁵ The UN’s Department of Peacebuilding and Political Affairs (DPPA) is piloting a geospatial dashboard for climate assessment and early warning in West and Central Africa known as Geoguard, though it does not yet include South Sudan.¹⁸⁶ At the time of this writing, the UN’s Climate Security Mechanism team was taking stock on such tools.¹⁸⁷

As the UN Climate Security Working Group fosters the kind of shared data and analysis that can offer improved early warning and response results across the nexus, they may take inspiration from Somalia’s climate security team. The first of its kind, it comprises UN, government, and civil society jointly organizing work outlined in the UN’s Cooperation Framework to promote a climate-sensitive “triple nexus” approach. It links climate to peacebuilding by using climate-sensitive conflict analysis, developing a research and evidence basis for the links across the nexus, and building national capacity via technical advice and support.¹⁸⁸ Together, these and other interventions designed to protect civilians in vulnerable climate/conflict hotspots can offer models for UNMISS and other missions with shared objectives and changing mandates.

National and local government adaptation

The South Sudanese government's national efforts on climate-related peace and security was a common theme raised in CIVIC's research process.¹⁸⁹ Several interview respondents indicated that the Mission could train officials and share its climate-informed conflict analyses to build relevant ministries' internal abilities to understand and potentially mediate in arising concerns (for example, communal disputes over resources).¹⁹⁰ Respondents mentioned several natural partners on these issues, including the Ministries of Peacebuilding (MPb), Environment and Forestry (MEF), and Livestock and Fisheries (MLF).¹⁹¹ While UNDP has representatives in the MEF (with whom it co-authored South Sudan's 2021 National Adaptation Plan for Climate Change) and the MPb, UNMISS's engagement with these entities on climate, peace, and security issues has remained ad hoc.¹⁹² The Mission still lacks regularly scheduled meetings or points of contact.¹⁹³

One of the most effective UN connections with local stakeholders has come through technical cooperation with FAO's livestock conferences. For example, when UNMISS participated in September 2022, the Advisor met with both Ministers (MEF and MLF).¹⁹⁴ Indeed, a government official interviewed for this brief indicated that despite a lack of regular contact with UNMISS, several relevant ministries were enthusiastic about stepping up engagement on the climate and civilian security nexus and improving coordination between them. They outlined several priorities to abate the growing set of risks, including community engagement, dialogue and social cohesion between displaced and host communities, and livelihood resilience strategies.¹⁹⁵

Strengthening national government capacity on security issues is essential and must be pursued with a "Do No Harm" approach to mitigate the risk that such capacities undermine the protection of civilians.¹⁹⁶ While working toward national ownership, the UNMISS POC strategy must be embedded in the UN's Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) to mitigate such risks. Mission respondents highlighted that they apply the HRDDP before working with specific units and officials, but action on climate-related peace and security often concerns more fundamental socio-economic questions than whether a particular actor has committed human rights abuses.¹⁹⁷ Signatories to the peace process remain largely uncommitted to integrating their police and military forces, heavily involved in environmentally destructive and often violent extractive industries, and plagued by the embezzlement and misallocation of international donor funds. They also continue to encourage and instrumentalize ethnic and economic tensions for political gain.¹⁹⁸ National government actors with a stake in such activities may perpetuate the narrative of a country riven by climate change and "local-level" violence in order to deflect from their own involvement in activities related to local conflicts while also legitimizing government intervention in communities' security- and resource-related arrangements. Furthermore, elite capture of contested land formerly belonging to communities, driven by mass displacement linked to cyclical violence and climate extremes, undermines the legal system for settlement of land disputes, while also eroding public trust in the state.¹⁹⁹

Several interview respondents highlighted that there are still a variety of technical elements in national and local government that offer less problematic opportunities for collaboration.²⁰⁰ Tangible steps at the technical level could include, for example, setting up regular roundtable check-ins with representatives from relevant and interested ministries, like the MPb, MEF, MLF, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, and the Ministry of Animal Resources and Fisheries. Representatives from other Ministries could attend on an ad hoc basis.

Local civil society

Despite challenges, including severe restrictions on civic space, many local civil society organizations in South Sudan continue to work on issues that are highly relevant to the climate security nexus, including climate adaptation, environmental conservation, human rights, and conflict management and resolution. Local organizations have views on the implications of climate-related displacement and resource competition on local conflict, as well as how environmental hazards more broadly affect the vulnerability of civilians. They also offer insight into how these matters change depending on geography and local politics, as well as how certain groups are affected differently, such as women, youth, and children.²⁰¹ Various initiatives seem to reflect the Mission's belief in the value of involving and supporting a range of local civil society organizations within its efforts to understand climate risks. These initiatives were nascent in 2023 when the research began, with plans to share climate analysis with local civil society organizations to strengthen their own climate-related programs. In early 2024, progress was evident.²⁰²

In April 2024, in response to demand from local civil society and government partners, DPO (as part of the CSM) co-delivered a training in South Sudan on climate, peace and security (CPS) for 35 local government and civil society members aimed at strengthening local actors' capacity and partnerships with the UN System.²⁰³ The training was delivered jointly with UNSSC and the UNMISS CPS Team and built on a prior training delivered to UNMISS and UNCT in February 2023.²⁰⁴



13 September 2023, Malakal, Upper Nile, South Sudan: Displaced families in Malakal IDP camp where UNMISS peacekeepers lead patrols amid an influx of displaced people have fled insecurity in neighboring Sudan and border areas, where climate-related shocks have fueled conflict and increased vulnerabilities for civilians.

IX. CONCLUSION

Widely observable across South Sudan, climate-driven extreme weather events and unpredictable, shifting seasonal patterns are not future scenarios. These disruptions are already contributing to conflict-related protection risks in dramatic and dangerous ways, and they will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Ranked as second most vulnerable to natural hazards globally, South Sudan's climate emergency is deepening and multiplying risks for civilians, as observed in the UN's 2023 independent assessment report. For UNMISS, the cumulative effect of climate-related impacts has negatively impacted the Mission's protection posture by diverting personnel to deal with climate impacts while also inhibiting access to conduct mandated protection work. Erratic seasonal changes and extreme flooding creates limitations on the mobility needed for prevention and response, as well as for important protection programming and community outreach such as supporting migration conferences, CRSV survivors, and local mediation efforts related to disrupted cattle migrations and intercommunal conflicts.

Some question the continued viability of the UN to achieve even modest protection outcomes in South Sudan as vulnerabilities deepen at the convergence of multiple and increasing threats—climate change among them—to civilians themselves and to the UN presence mandated to protect them. For how long will a base in Bentiu be possible? Is supporting traditional livelihoods like pastoralism consistent with peacebuilding strategies if, in a new climate reality, its continuance may be expected to contribute to ongoing conflict? Is a system-wide review of UN operations in South Sudan needed to consider such questions? At the very least, a UN system-wide shift to more anticipatory planning and action may be needed to help protect vulnerable groups in South Sudan against future risks.

In this fragile moment, UNMISS is leveraging its mandate to seize a unique opportunity to integrate climate risk implications into the Mission's conflict analysis and threat assessments, as well as the operational planning from which improved protection outcomes can reasonably be expected. Important innovations in data analytics and early warning and rapid response systems are emerging—a dynamic made possible by Mission leadership support and core capacities such as the CSA. These shifts have enabled measured improvements in collaboration and knowledge-sharing across the Mission, with the UNCT, and with UN partners. Indeed, this joined-up work could also help facilitate improved joint programming and community engagement between other UN entities, CSOs, and local partners.

Such efforts may prove to be catalytic, as several workstreams are emerging from an initial theory of change extensively consulted among UN offices and rooted in a POC orientation. Ultimately, results will depend on uptake by the Mission's field offices and civilian and uniformed personnel, as well as continued political support in the Security Council and modest investments in a handful of core capacities, ideally by the UN itself. However, longstanding challenges to UN integration, including joint analysis and planning, civil–military coordination, and robust, mobile operational patrolling, will not disappear overnight. UNMISS must find a delicate balance: ensuring these efforts remain POC focused while linking them to the triple nexus and using its comparatively sizeable influence and resources to bring both climate and protection analysis and work into a joined up, broader response. The work ahead is significant, but this research reveals an encouraging picture of a peace operation putting its best foot forward as it adapts to a rapidly changing and supremely difficult context.

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21 July 2023, Bentiu, South Sudan: Historic flooding of the Greater Upper Nile region in 2021-22 left entire states underwater, displacing hundreds of thousands of people and animals in an area already made vulnerable by the civil war.

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