

Legitimacy in Humanitarian Interventions: Exploring the Climate-Conflict Nexus and the EU's Policies in Sudan

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ABSTRACT

Examining the legitimacy of humanitarian interventions in the context of the climate-conflict nexus, focusing on the European Union's (EU) policies in Sudan. Climate change has intensified resource competition, displacement, and social tensions, contributing to Sudan's prolonged instability. The paper explores how the EU's interventions address climate-induced conflicts and whether these policies are perceived as legitimate by local communities and international stakeholders. From a constructivist position, and the concept of normative legitimacy, the study evaluates the legal, ethical, and practical dimensions of intervention in climate-affected conflict zones. The research aims to assess the legitimacy framework of EU interventions by analyzing how the climate-conflict nexus is incorporated into humanitarian policies. The study adopts a qualitative methodology, utilizing policy analysis, interviews with EU officials, and fieldwork in Sudan to gather insights into local narratives. The literature review covers the climate-security debate, theories of humanitarian intervention, and legitimacy in international relations, highlighting gaps in understanding the role of climate change in shaping intervention legitimacy. This paper offers policy recommendations for enhancing legitimate humanitarian action in climate-affected regions.

Keywords: Climate-Conflict Nexus, Sudan, Peace Building, Humanitarian Interventions, European Union.

INTRODUCTION

Of recent, there has been a rapid growth of connections between climate change and conflict which has actually reshaped the dynamics of global security especially in fragile regions and failed states like in the case of Sudan. Environmental degradation has had worsening impacts which eventually has led to crisis such as water scarcity, desertification, and food insecurity. This has fueled social tensions, violence and to a certain extent the displacement of persons. Through this, there has been the intervention of international actors like the European Union (EU), who have sought to engage through humanitarian actions, with aim of stabilizing conflict in the vulnerable areas. However, questions of legitimacy often arise, especially regarding the ethical, legal, and political grounds of such interventions.

The legitimacy of humanitarian actions centers on the balance between respecting state sovereignty and the addressing of urgent human needs of the beneficiary population. Sudan has been a victim with a long track record of environmental challenges, civil wars, political instability, hunger and displacement. According to the International Rescue Committee, both climate and political conflicts in Sudan has estimatedly killed about 15,500 people according to the 2023 count while long term political instability and economic pressures meant that 15.8 million people were in need of humanitarian aid. The conflict has only exacerbated these conditions leaving almost 25 million people which is more than half of Sudan's population in need. It delves into whether these interventions are genuinely driven by humanitarian concerns or whether they serve broader geopolitical interests, raising crucial questions about the future of international engagement in climate-stressed regions. This article aims to contribute to the broader discourse on legitimacy in humanitarian interventions, highlighting the urgent need for climate-responsive policies that prioritize human security and sustainable peace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Legitimacy in Humanitarian Interventions: Exploring the Climate-Conflict Nexus and the EU's Policies in Sudan

In every crisis, there is always a vulnerable segment of the population which would require humanitarian intervention for their protection. ¹The tardy response of the international community to atrocities in Darfur has been highly regarded as a backlash of the emerging norm in international society which attributes a responsibility to protect civilians targeted by genocidal activities, Piiparinen. T (2007:365). However, the legitimacy of these interventions still remains a subject of debate and concern in the domain of international relations taking into consideration the sovereignty of the state. By and large, looking at the case of Sudan, we would agree that the nature of its conflict is very complex by carrying a climate-conflict overtone which has even gone a long way to complicate the EU's intervention in providing humanitarian assistance. ²The EU is most attentive to human rights violations in non-European Union states, followed by countries in sub-Saharan Africa, while it has been least active in Asia and the Americas, Kreutz. J (2015).

Climate Conflict-Nexus in Sudan

Sudan has a long history of conflicts which predates the modern discourse of climate change. From the mouth of a Sudanese farmer interviewed;

"We used to plant during the rainy season, but now the rains come late or not at all. It causes tension between farmers and herders who are all trying to survive. Climate change has changed everything in our community."

Respondent X, 42, Farmer, North Darfur

Sudan is typical of other least developed countries in Africa in being highly vulnerable to climate change and environmental vulnerabilities. ³It is a victim of multiple stresses such as: widespread poverty, ecosystem degradation, complex disasters and conflicts, limited access to capital, markets, infrastructure and technology, have all weakened the people's ability to adapt to changes in climate, Zakieldean, S. A. (2009). Ethnic, religious, and political divisions have contributed to a series of civil wars, most notably the conflict in Darfur, which began in 2003. However, environmental factors have also played a significant role in shaping the conflict landscape.

Climate Change Impacts in Sudan

Geography is a strong factor that has caused Sudan to be a victim of climate change and environmental degradation. ⁴Much of the territory of Sudan is arid or semi-arid. Below the northern Sahelian belt, fertile

¹Piiparinen, T. (2007). The Lessons of Darfur for the Future of Humanitarian Intervention. *Global Governance*, 13(3), 365–390. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27800667>

²Kreutz, J. (2015). Human Rights, Geostrategy, and EU Foreign Policy, 1989-2008. *International Organisation*, 69(1), 195–217. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43283295>

³Zakieldean, S. A. (2009). Adaptation to Climate Change: A Vulnerability Assessment for Sudan. *International Institute for Environment and Development*. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep01362>

⁴World Bank. (2021). Climate Change Knowledge Portal.

agricultural and grazing land is found in the Nile valleys and other southern regions.



Source: European Commission (https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/africa/sudan_en)

Socio-Ecological Vulnerabilities. According to the 2011 report, Sudan had growing economy after their separation from South Sudan. Ever since then, Sudan, has been battling with political instability, economic crisis, violent conflicts and reduced rainfall. ⁵This has undermined their livelihoods, increased poverty, food insecurity and forced displacement, with approximately 95 per cent of the population dependent on climate-sensitive livelihoods like traditional rain to sustain agriculture, crop farming, pastoralism and animal husbandry, Sudan is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, Tchie. An et al (2021).

Migration and Mobility. Migration and mobility is often the aftermath of climate change. ⁶In Sudan, over approximately 3 million people are internally displaced primarily by conflicts. 1 Million of the people have remained in protracted displacement since the 2004 conflict, although provisions in the 2020 JPA are intended to facilitate the return to their land and property – much of which was farmland.⁷ However, beyond the practical and legal complexities of the 18-year conflict, displacement, demographic increase and environmental degradation may further exacerbate the challenge of achieving durable solutions. “*There were always some disagreements over land, but now with the droughts, it’s become violent. Young men have no jobs, no crops, and no future. That’s when conflict starts.*”

Respondent X, 29, Youth Activist, South Kordofan

Livelihood Deterioration. A large segment of Sudan’s population suffers from the vulnerability of food insecurity which has been caused by protracted conflicts, environmental degradation and other forms of disasters such as droughts and floods.⁸Livelihoods are central to the relationship between climate change and

⁵Tchie, A. E. Y., Grand, A. O., & Tarif, K. (2021). *Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet: Sudan*. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep30678>

⁶IOM. (2021). Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Sudan.

⁷Day, A. (2020). *Climate Change and Security: Perspectives From the Field*. UN University Centre for Policy Research; Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan

⁸HEGAZI, F., & SEYUBA, K. (2024). *LEVERAGING LIVELIHOOD DIVERSIFICATION FOR PEACEBUILDING IN CLIMATE- AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep59472>

conflict. Changes in temperature and precipitation patterns negatively affect house hold income sources and food supply, particularly those of households reliant on subsistence farming (rain-fed agriculture or livestock raising). The lack of alternative livelihood options, coupled with political, social and economic strife, may lead people to resort to violence to safeguard their means of survival, Hegazi & Seyuba (2024). Since 2021, Sudan has been experiencing a serious humanitarian crisis and a complex development situation. Ever since the military coup that took place in 2021, the country has been through serious and increasing humanitarian crisis due to political fragility, economic deterioration, violence, floods and displacements.

The EU's Policies in Sudan

⁹To a certain extent, the international community has conspicuously failed to take the necessary steps to protect the people of Darfur, Grano. N, (2006). The EU has been very involved in Sudan through diplomatic, humanitarian and developmental actions. Again, the EU policy has been guided by the principles of promoting peace, stability, and human rights while addressing the root causes of conflict. The EU humanitarian aid provides Sudanese communities with health and nutritional care, cash, food assistance, water and sanitation, shelter and protection, education to the most vulnerable households, the internally displaced, refugees and host communities.



Source: European Commission (https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/africa/sudan_en).

EU and UNHCR at Sudan Chad Border. Around 40.000 people both Sudanese and Chadians have crossed the border since the outbreak of the conflict.

¹⁰Concerning the EU's humanitarian aids in Sudan, in 2013, they assisted with about 800 million Euros. In 2023, the EU aided Sudan with over 128 million Euros for humanitarian assistance. In 2024, it scaled to 148 million Euros according to the, EU Commission report (2024). The challenging question here is to find out if amidst these numerous interventions in providing humanitarian aids to Sudan by the EU, do they actually operate by promoting compliance with the international laws and respect of state legitimacy in Sudan? Because, in principle, the safety and security of aids workers must be respected, the fundamental human rights of the Sudanese must be respect vis-à-vis the state's sovereignty.

⁹Grono, N. (2006). Briefing: Darfur: The International Community's Failure to Protect. *African Affairs*, 105(421), 621–631. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3876768>

¹⁰https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/africa/sudan_en

It is worth noting that, the EU faces numerous challenges in applying legitimacy in its humanitarian policies in Sudan. And a critical look at this, we will discover that these numerous challenges are as a result of Sudan's complex economic, political and socio-cultural context.¹¹ In a similar sense, the security and humanitarian strategy of the EU is primarily a theoretical construction that is still waiting to stand the test of its practice, Kühnhardt, L. (2008).¹² As a humanitarian aid donor, the EU does not directly provide humanitarian assistance, but it supports partner organizations in implementing humanitarian assistance programmes, Tercovich, G. (2018). The EU has decided that development cooperation cannot be resumed before the Sudanese government shows some progress in its respect for human rights, the process of democratization and in its efforts to find a peaceful solution to the civil war. The decision to suspend Lomé cooperation in 1990 was taken before the legal basis (Article 366a, and now Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement) existed. Therefore, the European Commission is currently exploring the possibility of opening 'consultations' under Article 96 in order to 'legalise' the situation, to re-examine the suspension, and eventually to initiate the programming of the 9th EDF.

This decision by the EU to suspend the Lomé cooperation was not taken on the basis of fairness because they did not consult the Sudanese government. It is therefore imperative to review the situation in accordance with article 96, in order to find an appropriate legal basis. The EU can equally be accused of double standards because, they are aware of the fact that, political and human rights in Sudan is actually better than in some ACP countries that have not been sanctioned. This raises the question of double standards and the Sudanese government is asking the question as to why the EU is treating them very unfairly as compared to their cohorts.

Challenges to EU to Humanitarian Policies in Sudan

¹³Saffa Abdalla on behalf of the Sudan Household Health Survey 2010 National Management Team Correspondence to Dr Safa Abdalla, Sudanese Public Health Consultancy Group, 7 Appleby Grove, Solihull B90 4SG; opines that "**successful injury prevention requires identification and targeting of the vulnerable groups. Little is known about injury vulnerability patterns in Sudan**" This simply means that very little is known about the plights and perils of the Sudanese by the EU because they use other agencies to minister aids to them. Perception on neocolonialism. Based on past experiences of most Sudanese as it is in other African countries, an average Sudanese sees the EU humanitarian intervention as an extension of Western geopolitical interest. This perception is rooted in a history of colonial exploitation and post-colonial interference in African affairs. The implication of this has been a reduction of trust between the EU and Sudanese locals. Consequently, it has led to serious resistance and non-cooperation from both national and regional actors. These actors are in the likes of countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Turkey, Russia, China, South Sudan, Algeria and Libya.¹⁴ A case in point is Saudi Arabia who has initiated several unsuccessful peace talks between the two warring sides in the city of Jeddah. Though it has been alleged that Riyadh is had been supporting the Sudanese armed forces (SAF), while her counterpart the UAE supports the protagonist called the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), Mohammed. S (2024).

Misinterpretation of Humanitarian and Security Agenda. Note should be taken of the fact that, the EU humanitarian actions always overlap with her security-based policies in Africa as a whole and Sudan in

¹¹Kühnhardt, L. (2008). Defining Europe's Global Interests. In *European Union - The Second Founding: The Changing Rationale of European Integration* (1st ed., pp. 523–573). Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv941vm5.16>

¹²Tercovich, G. (2018). A Quest for Legitimacy: The Evolution of the EU in the Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Field. In C. Morsut & D. Irrera (Eds.), *Security Beyond the State: The EU in an Age of Transformation* (1st ed., pp. 75–92). Verlag Barbara Budrich. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvdf05p6.7>

¹³Abdalla, S. (2014). Patterns of vulnerability to non-fatal injuries in Sudan: initial evidence from a national cross-sectional survey. *Injury prevention*, 20(5), 310-316.

¹⁴ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/conflict-sudan-map-regional-and-international-actors>

particular. A good example is migration control for example in the Khartoum process. The execution of this dual agenda by the EU has created a room for conflicting priorities. From the EU- Horn of Africa migration routine Initiatives (2014) report, in 2012, the EU established a legal framework on smuggling of migrants in Sudan. This set a pace for the EU's action to fight criminal networks of smugglers which is a way of preventing the exploitation of migrants by criminals. The danger here is that most of these actions have been carried out in an atmosphere where the sovereignty of Sudan has been put at stake¹⁵. The impact on such policies is that, it has alienated local communities and some civil society organizations that prioritize human rights over security concerns.

Lack of Local Ownership. With the coming of the EU in Sudan, their policies have in most cases than not been criticized for imposing external solutions without adequately involving local stakeholders in the decision-making process. This action alone has made the humanitarian actions of the European Union to violate the internal sovereignty of Sudan. There is a strong need for the specific needs of the marginalized groups to be addressed otherwise it will exacerbate existing inequalities.

Climate-Conflict Nexus-Complexity. The EU's policy in Sudan actually lacks the flexibility to needed for these multidimensional issues. Oversimplified risk intervention stands the chance of ignoring the root causes of conflict such as historical grievances, over resource distribution. Talking to a primary school teacher about her opinion about the EU's intervention at Sudan in supplying humanitarian aids, she sees their action as being very biased. *"The Europeans send help, yes. But sometimes it feels like they help who they choose, not always those who need it the most. Still, without their aid, many people here would not survive."*

Respondent X, 35, School Teacher, El Fasher

Theoretical Framework

Environmental Security theory: This theory has laid a foundation in connecting the nexus between environmental degradation and violent conflicts in weak and fragile states. Sudan happens to fall under this category. Traditionally, security was seen from the perspective of just intra-etatic and infra-etatic conflicts involving the use of arms. However, the Environmental Security conflicts has brought into the lime light of challenging the statusquo that; non-traditional threats such as climate change, the collapse of ecology and equally resource scarcity are contemporary issues that generate conflicts in states.

Conceptually speaking, this theory has elucidated the fact that, environmental factors like those intensified by climate change has a great role to play in causing conflicts within states. It is imperative to note the different ways through which these climate induced conflicts manifest which are: scarcity of resources which results to environmental degradation patterns like droughts, desertification, and reduced agricultural productivity. This has gone a long way to trigger inter-community tensions in Sudan considering that it is purely an agrarian society. Secondly, this has equally caused forced migration and serious displacement which has obviously resulted to straining host communities and urban sprawl. To a larger extent exacerbated ethnic, political and social divisions.

Sudan as a country has over a long period of time now been a victim of environmental stressors such as desertification, irregular rainfall, and recurrent droughts especially in conflict-sensitive driven areas like in Darfur. Policy-wise, we can adhere to the fact that, understanding climate change as a security has helped to legitimize the European Union's intervention in Sudan. Hence, this theory is very useful to this work because, it has helped to provide a normative justification for the EU's intervention in Sudan where environmental degradation and humanitarian intervention are interwoven. In this light, taking action against climate change is a conflict prevention as opposed to the traditional ideology of just armed conflicts.

¹⁵ <https://www.iom.int/eu-horn-africa-migration-route-initiative-khartoum-process#:~:text=The%20Khartoum%20Process%2C%20primarily%20focused,destination%20on%20the%20migration%20routes>

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach which was aimed at verifying to understand the perceptions of legitimacy surrounding EU interventions, how climate-orchestrated factors are understood to influence the different conflict dynamics, and lastly how policies are framed, narrated, and justified institutionally. A qualitative approach was deployed in analyzing the discourses, policy documents, and the perspective of experts. Key EU documents, press releases related to humanitarian aids, climate actions and foreign policy in Sudan. Reports from international organizations like the UN, IPCC, NGO's regarding climate change in Sudan. Academic framework addressing issues on normative framework of interventions and climate security was equally analyzed.

Semi structured interviews were carried out to buffer up the strength of this research as we spoke to some Sudanese stakeholders like community elders, policy makers, humanitarian workers and scholars. The questions were very much focused on aspects related to legitimacy, decision making process, climate related risks and the role of the EU as a normative power. Due to limited access to Sudanese stakeholders who were willing to talk, we succeeded to lay hold on just eight (8) of them that were willing to talk to us of which they pleaded we keep their names very private for security reasons. This explains why we decided to label them as correspondent X as seen on the interview reference excerpts.

Thematic analysis has equally been used which was derived inductively from already existing data gotten via key EU documents and equally policy documents supporting humanitarian actions in Somalia. Deductively, these themes have been equally analyzed based on a strong theoretical framework. These themes included: legitimacy of intervention, normative power Europe, climate as threat multiplier and a whole lot on human security.

FINDINGS

From the qualitative analysis utilized in this research, the outcome yielded into several important insights:

Climate change is increasingly securitized. From the policy documents consulted and thematic analysis, the results reflected a growing trend in the EU's foreign and development policies to treat climate change as a security issue. This has given the EU a leverage to justify deeper involvement in fragile states like Sudan under the umbrella of preventive humanitarianism. Also, legitimacy is multi-dimensional because EU interventions in Sudan are generally perceived as legitimate when framed as responses to humanitarian crises, but legitimacy becomes contested when climate change is seen as a political or strategic entry point rather than a purely humanitarian concern. Most NGOs complain about the one-sided and elitist approaches deployed by the EU in administering humanitarian aids in the sense that these NGO's do not actually feel involved in the decision-making process whereas they are the real people on ground. *"We always appreciate help, but we want to be partners, not just receivers. Let us sit at the table too. That's when aid becomes fair and respectful."*

Respondent X, 26, Local NGO Worker, Khartoum

EU in a 'normative actor' is both internalized and projected, the EU frames itself and is seen by partners as a normative power promoting peace, climate justice, and human rights. However, this narrative is not always mirrored on the ground, especially in contexts where local actors are skeptical of Western involvement. The EU at some point uses humanitarian action as a yardstick to penetrate foreign systems and push through with their foreign policies. It may surprise us to note that most Sudanese indigenes look at the foreign interventions through aids with lots of reservations and mixed feelings. Speaking to a community elder, he asked a question of why would westerners cause climate change and claims to come and repair it in Africa. *"The world's big countries cause climate change, and we pay the price. If the EU wants to help, they must also listen to how we understand climate, land, and peace."*

Respondent X, 60, Tribal Elder, West Darfur

Integrated approaches enhance legitimacy: Policies and actions that combine climate adaptation, conflict sensitivity, and humanitarian aid are more likely to be seen as legitimate and sustainable, both by international observers and local actors.

This qualitative approach has been very instrumental in understanding the topic of legitimacy and humanitarian actions by the EU in Sudan. It enabled a rich, context-sensitive analysis of how climate-conflict dynamics are framed within EU policy and how these frames influence the perceived legitimacy of its engagement in Sudan. This method highlighted the importance of discourse, perception, and socio-political context elements that quantitative data alone could not adequately capture.

Table 1. The Twenty Worst-Ranking Countries in Democracy, Conflict, and Climate Indexes

Country	V-Dem (Democracy)	ACLED (Conflict)	INFORM (Climate)	Sum
Afghanistan	0.984	0.951	0.984	2.919
Yemen	0.95	0.976	0.989	2.915
Syria	0.922	0.996	0.952	2.87
Myanmar	0.967	1	0.9	2.867
South Sudan	0.939	0.876	0.994	2.809
Somalia	0.888	0.918	1	2.806
Sudan	0.894	0.938	0.921	2.753
Chad	0.916	0.81	0.978	2.704
Mali	0.776	0.942	0.947	2.665
Haiti	0.787	0.955	0.868	2.61
Democratic Republic of the Congo	0.663	0.967	0.968	2.598
Burkina Faso	0.692	0.951	0.921	2.564
Iraq	0.63	0.971	0.931	2.532
Bangladesh	0.748	0.913	0.868	2.529
Ethiopia	0.68	0.901	0.942	2.523

Source: “ACLEDConflict Index,” Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, 2023, [https://acleddata.com/Conflict Index /#overview](https://acleddata.com/Conflict%20Index/#overview); “INFORM Climate Change”, Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre /European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2022, <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-ClimateChange>; and Disaster Archive”.

Note: Higher Scores denote worst rankings. Blue fill means a country with the worst-off 20%. The red fill means graduation of the sum of the three index scores. From the table above Sudan is ranked as 7th out of the 20th worst countries in terms of low level of democracy, conflict and climate index.

DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research findings, it has been underscored that, climate change securitization has become a tool used by the EU to intervene legitimately in conflict prone regions. The EU does not undermine climate change vulnerabilities because they can go as far as disrupting the security and peace of a state. The EU has been able to justify her presence in Sudan through their giving of humanitarian aids making their presence legitimate. However, this has been received with a lot of mixed feelings by other school of thoughts. Critics argue that securitizing climate change risks overshadowing local socio-political realities and can lead to top-down, technocratic solutions that fail to address root causes of vulnerability. Most internally displaced persons in camps at Sudan believe that what the EU does in terms of aids donation is more of a misplaced priority in the sense that rather than just giving food and drinks in refugee camps, they should rather rehabilitate them in their respective communities by providing the basic social amenities for their day-to-day survival. *"We left our villages because the land was dry and the well had no water. Now in this camp, we depend on aid. But we want to go back if there's water and peace."*

Respondent X, 38, Displaced Woman, Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camp near Nyala

Barnett and Adger (2007) caution that climate-security narratives must be carefully deployed, or they risk instrumentalizing climate action for geopolitical or economic ends rather than true humanitarian goals.

One of the most promising findings relates to the concept of environmental Peace building and approach that integrates climate resilience, natural resource governance, and conflict transformation. EU interventions that adopt this integrated model appear to enjoy broader legitimacy, both internationally and locally. By addressing environmental stressors alongside social and political dynamics, such interventions are seen as more sustainable, holistic, and justifiable. They align with emerging global norms that view humanitarian intervention not just as crisis response, but as a form of climate justice and preventive diplomacy. As Homer-Dixon (1999) notes, long-term peace and legitimacy depend on a society's ability to manage resource scarcity and adapt to environmental change—functions that external actors can support but not impose. The bad governance in Sudan is a bigger problem. The EU is doing a phenomenal job by being honest more than the Sudanese government. This has landed the citizens to a point where they term to believe and put their trust on the EU than their local government. However, the reality sets to be how long will the EU stay in Sudan ? . A long-lasting solution will rather be the establishment of good governance as lamented by one of the civil servants of Sudan. *"Sometimes the EU does more than our own government. That's why people say they are more honest. But we also worry they are not from here. How long will they stay?"*

Respondent X, 45, Civil Servant, Gedaref State

This discussion has shown that the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention particularly in climate-affected conflict zones like Sudan cannot be fully understood through traditional legal or political lenses. Instead, legitimacy is contingent, dynamic, and deeply contextual, shaped by international norms, local perceptions, identity politics, and environmental realities.

The EU's efforts in Sudan illustrate both the potential and limitations of humanitarian action in the age of climate change. While its policies increasingly reflect a sophisticated understanding of the climate-conflict nexus, they must also remain attuned to local dynamics, ensure inclusive participation, and balance normative ideals with pragmatic realities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening Transparency and Accountability: For this to be done, the EU must set up a good mechanism for monitoring and evaluation. In this case, they have to establish clear benchmarks for measuring the impacts of interventions, such as climate resilience, reduced resource-based conflicts, or improved security. ¹⁶To Longa,

¹⁶Longar, S. A. (2021). *Transitional Justice in South Sudan: A Case for Sustainable Peace, Accountability, Reconciliation and Healing*. Sudd Institute. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep29136>

S.A. (2021), justice and peace are mutually exclusive. Hence, it will be imperative for the EU to ensure the publishing of shared progress reports as a tool to publicly demonstrate transparency and build trust and confidence amongst the different stakeholders.¹⁷ Collaboration and coordination present challenges due to the persistent fragmentation of humanitarian development and peace building (HDP), bodies or administrative units within donor institutions, as well as the lack of accountability of the Sudanese government which makes working with it highly problematic, Require, M et al (2023).

Collaboration with Regional and International Actors: Given that Sudan does not just operate in a vacuum because there are umbrella organizations in Africa like the African Union (AU), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the EU should be able to align efforts in a bid to promote regional priorities.¹⁸ As demonstrated by Schmitter (2007), the experience of Europe since the early 1950s with integrating-peacefully and voluntarily-previously sovereign national states, it is by far the most significant and far-reaching among all such efforts. In line with the EU's Green Deal, they can equally align their energy transition policy with that of the AU's Great Green Wall Project which addresses desertification and climate change issues in Africa in general and Sudan in particular.¹⁹ As demonstrated by Chevallier and Benkenstein (2020), the project sought to primarily amplify African perspectives on the green transition and energy access.

Capacity Building for Local Institutions: The goal of every humanitarian action is to be able to build capacities in the beneficiaries for future independence. Hence, the EU should strengthen the Sudanese governance system and rule of law by providing technical assistance in areas like conflict resolution, natural resources governance, and climate adaptation planning.²⁰ To Tardy, T. (2016), from 2007, in the Joint Africa EU strategy, one of their objective was to take this partnership into another level by enhancing the donor-recipient nature of relationship, and promote more equitable partnership which the African Union (AU) and other regional actors would emerge as true partners of the EU and not merely receivers. The EU should engage in the training of local community Sudanese leaders and officials in enhancing their ability to manage conflicts over natural resources affectively. Help communities in Sudan to establish early warning systems for climate-related disasters such as drought, floods, or to reduce displacement and conflict.

Communication and Awareness: This should be done in the form of promoting cultural appropriate messaging. Sudan has local languages such as; bema, fur, Nubian, masalit, zaghawa, and so on. This will go a long way to build trust and reduce skepticism. Engaging into public diplomacy is equally a good way to foster communication with locals. Through community outreaches, to elucidate the EU's objectives and intentions in Sudan by addressing concerns related to neocolonialism and politics bias in a bid to reduce suspicion and build a certain level of trust. Facilitate dialogue between the EU and Sudanese local communities and governments to maintain open channels of communication.

TSCHUNKERT, K., DELGADO, C., MURUGANI, V., & RIQUIER, M. (2023). *FINANCING FOOD SECURITY: PROMISES AND PITFALLS OF THE HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-PEACE NEXUS IN SOUTH SUDAN*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep47284>

¹⁷OYERANMI, O. (2015). EU-AU Relations in a Globalized World: The Implications for Integration and Development of Africa. *Journal of African Union Studies*, 4(1), 97–131. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26893846>

¹⁹BENKENSTEIN, A., & CHEVALLIER, R. (2020). *Partnership for a Green Transition and Energy Access: Strategic priorities for Africa and Europe*. South African Institute of International Affairs. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep28399>

²⁰Tardy, T. (2016). *The EU and Africa: a changing security partnership*. European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06808>

CONCLUSION

From the findings, we have seen that, the EU like many other donors and humanitarian actors in Sudan are obliged to work within the legal framework and respect acute legitimacy as designed by the principles and norms of the international law. The nexus between climate change, conflict, and migration in Sudan underscores the profound and complex challenges facing global humanitarian interventions. As climate-induced resource scarcity exacerbates inter-communal tensions and fuels displacement, the need for effective and legitimate responses becomes increasingly urgent. This study highlights the critical role of the European Union's policies in addressing these challenges, reflecting both the opportunities and limitations of external intervention in fragile states like Sudan.

Legitimacy in humanitarian interventions hinges on striking a delicate balance between respecting national sovereignty, addressing local needs, and adhering to international norms. The EU's policies in Sudan demonstrate attempts to navigate this terrain, emphasizing conflict prevention, resilience-building, and sustainable development. However, the persistent gaps in coherence, local engagement, and long-term sustainability raises important questions about the efficacy of these efforts. Without a genuine focus on local inclusion and adaptive strategies that respond to the evolving climate-conflict dynamics, interventions risk perpetuating cycles of dependency and marginalization.

Ultimately, the legitimacy of humanitarian interventions in the climate-conflict nexus is not just a matter of policy but of practice. By aligning international ambitions with the lived realities of affected populations, the EU and other global actors can chart a path toward more effective and equitable solutions in Sudan and beyond. Addressing the intertwined challenges of climate change and conflict requires not only resources and political will but also a commitment to justice, inclusivity, and long-term resilience. In this way, the lessons learned in Sudan may inform broader strategies for navigating the humanitarian challenges of a warming and increasingly interconnected world.

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