

Climate Action for the Epicenter of Crisis:

How COP28 Can Address the Injustices Facing
Conflict-Affected Communities



INTERNATIONAL
RESCUE
COMMITTEE



A family in Kabul, Afghanistan in front of their makeshift home made out of mud, plastic and fiber. They were given refuge on this land after being displaced from their home in Parwan.

INTRODUCTION

The three global challenges of climate change, extreme poverty and conflict are converging to form a new epicenter of crisis. But these communities at the epicenter of the climate crisis are being unjustly abandoned by global leaders. Climate-vulnerable, conflict-affected communities contribute the least to climate change, bear its worst impacts, and yet have been consistently left out of the business-as-usual approach to climate action focused on stable settings.

COP28 has the opportunity to address the climate injustices facing the most vulnerable communities worldwide—not just fragile states, but specifically climate-vulnerable, conflict-affected countries. Global leaders at the annual climate conference can shift power to the communities at the epicenter of the climate crisis and contribute to the achievement of climate justice by committing to:

- Improving risk mapping of conflict-affected communities to target action where it is most needed;
- Investing in innovative adaptation, resilience and anticipatory action designed for conflict settings;
- Adopting a “people-first” approach to delivery through meaningful non-governmental partnerships;
- Making climate finance more equitable and accessible to adequately resource action.

THE NEW EPICENTER OF CRISIS

While climate change is a global crisis, it does not impact all countries equally. The most damaging impacts occur when climate change acts as a “threat multiplier” that amplifies existing risks, cracks and inequalities in an already fragile or conflict-affected society. This vicious cycle was recently demonstrated by the catastrophic impact of a multi-year drought on **conflict-affected Somalia**, which drove the country to the brink of famine. In these communities, climate change drives displacement, destroys people’s economic livelihoods and disrupts access to food.

Far from being on the periphery of the fight against climate change, these climate-vulnerable, conflict-affected communities increasingly represent the epicenter of the climate crisis. And many of these countries are in regions that are experiencing more intense climate change than the global average. For instance, the Central Sahel region of Africa is warming at **50% faster than the global rate**.

Cover Image: Abuk holding her 4-year-old son, Nyirou, in front of their flooded home in Northern Bahr El Ghazal, South Sudan.

The three interlinked challenges of climate vulnerability, extreme poverty and armed conflict are becoming concentrated in a small handful of states, including Somalia, Sudan and Syria, that represent a new “epicenter of crisis.” International Rescue Committee (IRC) analysis identifies 16 countries¹ at the epicenter of crisis, which represent:

- 10% of the global population;
- 2.7% of global greenhouse gas emissions annually;
- 44% of all people affected by natural disasters over the last three years;
- 43% of all people living in extreme poverty;
- 60% of all people in humanitarian need.

This new epicenter of crisis highlights a deepening climate injustice being perpetuated against the most vulnerable communities on the planet. These communities have contributed the least to the climate crisis, yet are bearing the harshest impacts of the climate crisis. Worse yet, the business-as-usual approach to climate action excludes these communities, making them the least supported to fight the climate crisis. On average, conflict-affected communities receive just **one-third** of the adaptation funding that people in non-conflict settings receive on a per capita basis.

This lack of support means that injustices within these communities are also growing. Climate change exacerbates existing fractures and vulnerabilities within a society, such as economic exclusion on the basis of gender or ethnicity. Women and girls have less power over economic resources and household decision making, and when a climate shock hits, many families tend to feed women and girls last and pull them out of school first. This in turn creates a vicious cycle of increasing inequality, decreasing resilience and greater harm. Studies show poor women and children are up to **14 times more likely** to be killed by a climate-fueled disaster.

FIGURE 1: A Climate Injustice



These countries represent **44%** of all people affected by natural disasters over the last three years.



...But are only responsible for **2.7%** of global greenhouse gas emissions annually.



80-year-old Hawo knew the impact of Somalia's three consecutive failed rain seasons all too well. It meant losing their only source of income: their animals. "If this severe drought persists, none of us will survive," Hawo said.

“Droughts are not new to me, but to my experience, this is the worst I have ever seen!”

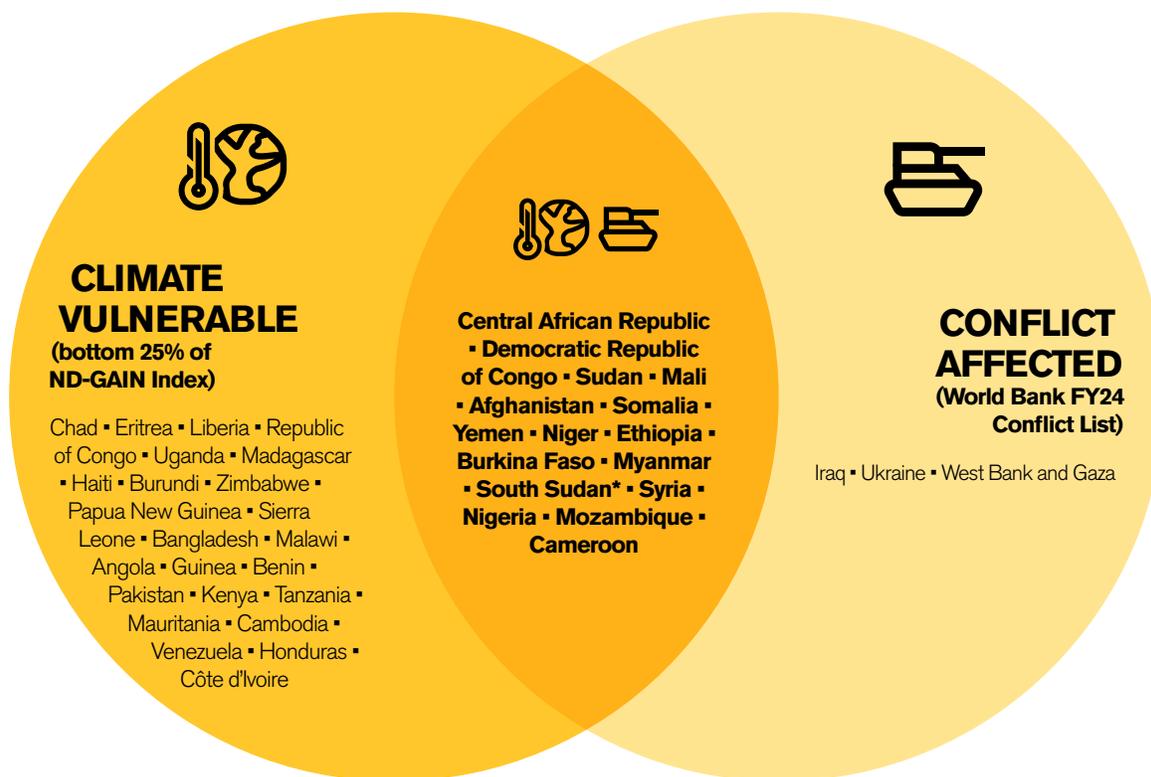
– 80-year-old Hawo Hashi Mohamud of Somalia during the unprecedented 2022 drought in East Africa

¹ Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Mali, Mozambique, Myanmar, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Climate-vulnerable counties are defined as being in the bottom 25% of the [ND-GAIN Index](#), which summarizes a country's vulnerability to climate change and its readiness to improve resilience. Conflict-affected countries are identified according to the World Bank's [FY24 List of Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations](#). Fourteen of these countries are on the U.N.'s list of [Least Developed Countries](#), while Nigeria and Syria are both home to some of the largest pockets of extreme poverty, despite not being classified as LDCs.

Correcting these gross injustices requires centering the most vulnerable and yet least supported people—listening to their perspective, including them in data and analysis, holding donors, governments and delivery partners accountable to them, and including them in project decision making, design and implementation.

The bar for COP28 to be considered a success is whether it can demonstrate the global community’s commitment to a new chapter of climate action that prioritizes the most affected communities and supports them with tangible commitments on risk mapping, innovation in adaptation, service delivery and equitable financing.

FIGURE 2: The New Epicenter of Crisis



* Notes countries that are extremely climate vulnerable but are not ranked on index. Source: [UNEP](#)

THE IRC IN CLIMATE-VULNERABLE, CONFLICT-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

The communities at the epicenter of the climate crisis are the communities the IRC knows best—IRC works in 15 of the 16 countries that are both climate vulnerable and conflict affected. More than 90% of IRC country programs have identified climate change as a priority in their strategic plans, and IRC’s **five largest country programs are all climate-vulnerable, conflict-affected countries**. The IRC has been working in many of these contexts for decades, providing wraparound humanitarian services, whether responding to droughts, strengthening WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) programming or prioritizing protection and livelihoods—all while putting women and girls’ agency at the center of our work.

MAPPING RISKS: Targeting action to meet the needs of the most vulnerable

The first step to ensuring these communities are not left behind is to develop a comprehensive understanding of not just the sudden onset shocks and long-term climate trends these communities will face, but how these forces interact with local political economies, societal fractures and conflict dynamics, and how marginalized groups within a society may be impacted differently. For instance, a [recent IRC analysis](#) of climate trends in the Central Sahel found that economically and politically marginalized areas in the periphery of each country faced significantly greater harms from climatic change than capital cities, despite experiencing similar changes in temperature, rainfall and extreme weather events.

This effort requires building better tools for risk mapping not only at the national level, but also at the subnational and community levels to ensure financing and programs are directed to where they are needed the most, not just where they are easiest to deliver. The current approach to mapping climate risks often fails to properly account for the compounding impacts of conflict and fragility, underestimating the cascading impacts on individual lives. This leads to an inaccurate understanding of the climate response required by a diverse group of people with unequal access and power, and underestimates of the number of people in need.

The climate and humanitarian communities should collaborate on a new approach to risk mapping that more accurately incorporates the sudden and slow-onset effects of climate change, captures economic opportunity costs, and measures climate effects against conflict and economic dynamics. The U.N.-backed [Climate Security Mechanism](#) could play an important role in coordinating various risk-mapping tools. As the IRC continues to refine and pilot a people-first approach to risk mapping, our ambition is to collaborate with local communities in the identification of risks, mapping of climate impacts, and ensuring the final product is an effective tool for affected communities that informs our own resource allocation and program decision making.

DELIVERABLE AT COP28:

- » Commitment from climate finance contributors to work with local actors and civil society and national governments to **ensure community-level risk maps exist** in all 16 climate-vulnerable, conflict-affected countries by the end of 2025 to inform financing for conflict-sensitive climate adaptation.



Community elders in Pakistan share the needs of their community following the flood with the IRC staff in the Skahi Daru Khan village in Nushki.

INVESTING IN INNOVATION:

New approaches to adaptation, resilience and anticipatory action

With a clearer picture of climate risks and human needs, it becomes easier to develop, research and test innovative approaches to adaptation to prevent losses and damage to communities before a climate shock hits. But the global approach to climate investments is heavily skewed toward long-term mitigation and emissions reduction. While necessary, this is insufficient to meet the needs of conflict-affected communities, which face immediate threats that cannot be addressed through mitigation alone.

To more effectively insulate people in conflict settings against the devastating impacts of the climate crisis, the climate and humanitarian communities need to test and scale innovative adaptation and resilience solutions that work in conflict settings. One important area of focus is partnership with affected community members to improve resilience, particularly around food security. For example, in Syria, the IRC is **working directly with Syrian farmers** to test and identify seeds most suited to a changing climate, multiplying and scaling these higher-yielding and climate-resilient seeds, and enhancing women's participation in the agricultural sector in order to build a food system that is resilient to climate shocks.

A second critical area of innovation is in anticipatory action programs and the scaling up of community-based disaster-risk reduction, such as early-warning systems. In Nigeria, the IRC is adding to the impact evidence of anticipatory action by working with government partners, including hydrological and meteorological (hydromet) agencies, and community leaders to create a flood-risk monitoring platform that incorporates indigenous knowledge, hydromet data and satellite information to better forecast impending droughts and trigger **anticipatory cash payments**. Results from this Google.org-supported project show how anticipatory action can help families reduce food insecurity, allow farmers to diversify crops, and prevent vulnerable households from relying on short-term fixes such as selling off livestock to pay for immediate needs. The promising results of this anticipatory cash program could reduce losses and damages sustained by communities at the epicenter of the climate crisis.



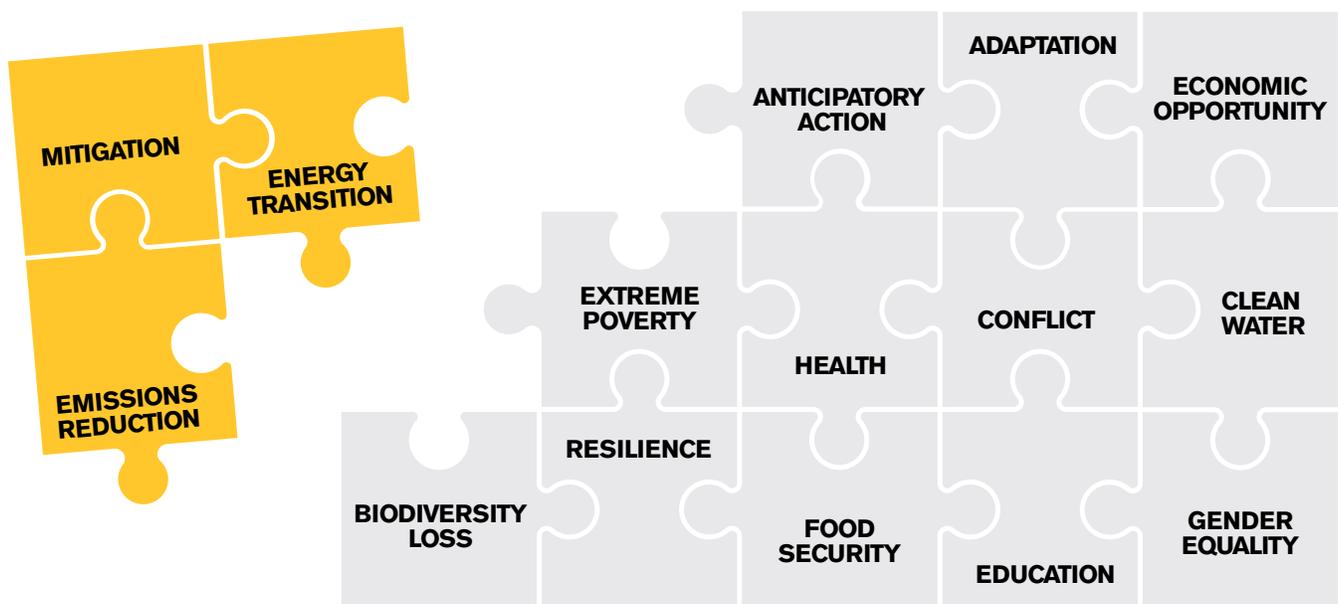
A Syrian worker holding wheat at the grain silos in Syria's northeastern city of Hasakeh. As climate change increases the likelihood of wildfires and drought worldwide, Hasakeh has been hit hard by low rainfall.

DELIVERABLE AT COP28:

- » Climate finance contributors should **commit and deliver 50% of all climate funding to adaptation** by 2025, with a particular focus on adaptation finance for small-scale agriculture in the 16 conflict- and climate-impacted countries.
- » Donors should commit to a **minimum of 5% of humanitarian budgets to anticipatory action**, delivered flexibly and in advance of crises, with a strategy for further expansion by 2030.

FIGURE 3: An Incomplete Picture for Conflict-Affected Communities

The focus of past climate conferences on emissions reduction, while essential, is insufficient to address the climate needs of these communities.



KEY TERMS

- **MITIGATION:** Mitigation addresses the root source of climate change, including prevention and reduction of greenhouse gases. Mitigation can limit future changes to our climate but will not reverse existing changes.
- **ADAPTATION:** Adaptation reduces vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, and is the process of withstanding and adjusting to the existing and future impacts of climate change.
- **CLIMATE RESILIENCE:** The capacity of a system or a community to absorb, adapt and respond to climate trends or shocks while continuing to function effectively and maintain essential components in a sustainable way.
- **ANTICIPATORY ACTION:** A set of actions taken to prevent or limit dangerous effects before a shock occurs or before acute impacts are felt.



Fose Abdile fetches water at the water point in Kambe Kebele, Elele district, Somali region of Ethiopia.

A “PEOPLE-FIRST” APPROACH TO DELIVERY: Partnering with civil society to reach communities in need

A humanitarian or climate intervention is only valuable if all people in need can safely access it when they need it. Unfortunately, climate finance often flows where it is easiest to deliver—usually through national governments in stable countries—as opposed to where it is needed the most. This “government-first” approach is especially ineffective in conflict settings. While governments can access available climate financing, they often lack the control or capacity to deliver services. For example, Figure 4 shows the high percentage of people affected by record droughts who live in regions of Somalia governed by mixed, unclear or local control.

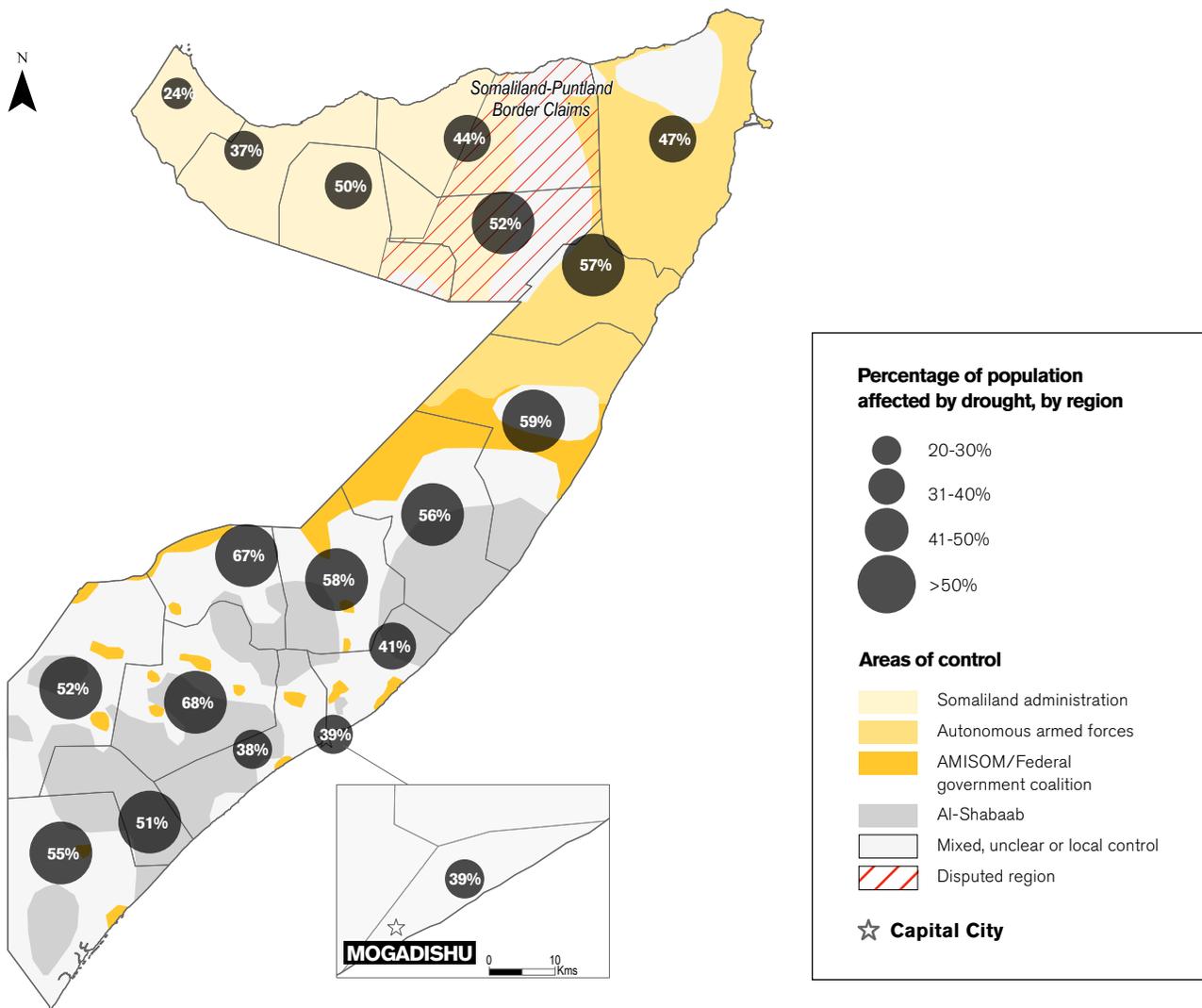
Meanwhile, the available climate finance is mostly inaccessible to local actors and civil society groups, especially those representing marginalized groups such as disability or women’s rights advocates, who often serve as service providers in conflict-affected regions. The combination of complex application and accreditation processes, inflexible and non-transparent procedures, as well as the risk-averse nature of climate finance, restrict access to funding for conflict-affected communities, particularly those beyond government control. In a country like Nigeria, the question is not whether climate action makes it to the capital in Abuja, but whether it makes it to the most marginalized communities in the northeast.

When the business-as-usual approach of relying on national governments as delivery partners is not working, donors must shift toward a **“people-first” approach** to climate finance. This requires funding and formalizing partnerships with non-governmental groups like civil society and local actors, especially those who represent marginalized groups, such as disability, youth and women’s rights groups. During this year’s Annual Meetings, the World Bank took a critical step in this direction by committing to work more closely in partnership with civil society as part of its **“Evolution Roadmap,”** and other multilateral development banks should build on this initiative.

DELIVERABLE AT COP28:

- » Multilateral development banks and vertical climate funds should **commit to mapping where civil society could deliver** effective climate adaptation and resilience programs and identify operational non-governmental partners who can fill the delivery gap, with a specific focus on local women-led organizations.
- » Multilateral development banks and vertical climate funds should **channel 20% of adaptation financing through non-governmental partners** in conflict-affected countries.

FIGURE 4: Climate Impacts in Regions Beyond Government Control in Somalia



Map represents areas of control as of May 2022 and climate impact data from OCHA Somalia as of September 2022

MAKING CLIMATE FINANCING MORE EQUITABLE: Ensuring adequate resources for climate action

While investing in better risk mapping, innovations in adaptation and a “people-first” approach to delivery are critical steps, none of these will have significant impact so long as climate financing remains so inequitable and inaccessible for climate-vulnerable, conflict-affected communities.

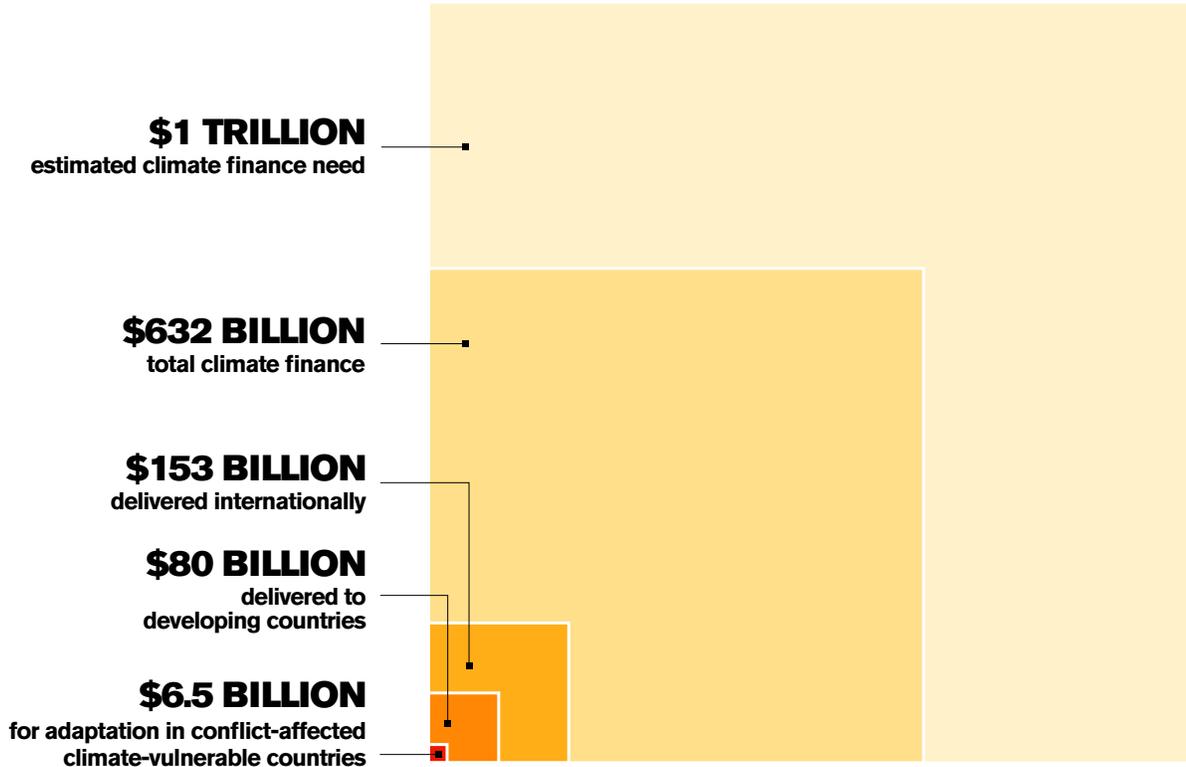
Ninety percent of climate financing is focused in middle-income, high emission-producing countries. For what’s left over, the more fragile a country is, the less climate finance it will receive, according to **UNDP**. The International Crisis Group estimates that conflict-affected communities receive just **one-third** of the adaptation funding that people in non-conflict settings receive on a per capita basis. There is even less that is accessible to national and community-based women’s rights and women-led organizations working toward gender-just climate solutions.

This inequality in climate finance means that communities in conflict-affected states are not only the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate shocks, but also the least prepared to withstand them. In order to adequately support these communities, donors must scale up international climate finance and properly invest in action. Based on IRC analysis, meeting the adaptation needs in the 16 conflict-affected and climate-vulnerable countries will require increasing annual adaptation finance to these countries by four- to eight-fold, or roughly \$25-50 billion annually, in concessional or grant based finance.² Sufficient and strategic climate finance will contribute to the goal of achieving climate justice.

DELIVERABLE AT COP28:

- » **Fulfill the \$100 billion-per-year climate pledge** with “new and additional” financing, and increase ambition for the new goal being set from 2025 that will start from a floor of \$100 billion.
- » The UK-backed **Centre for Access to Climate Finance**, due to be launched at COP28, should prioritize at least five of the 16 climate-vulnerable, conflict-affected countries, and specifically pilot approaches to overcoming risk aversion, bureaucratic delays and accreditation challenges for INGOs and local CSOs, particularly women-led organizations, which are in a position to lead adaptation efforts in the absence of governments.

FIGURE 5: The Inequality of Climate Finance



Data based on IRC analysis from Climate Policy Institute "[Global Landscape of Climate Finance](#)" report, London School of Economics "[Finance for climate action](#)" report, and OECD DAC [data](#).

² This calculation is an estimate based on Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) where available, which the [Global Center on Adaptation](#) notes are likely underestimated by as much as 100%, and 2021 [OECD DAC data](#).

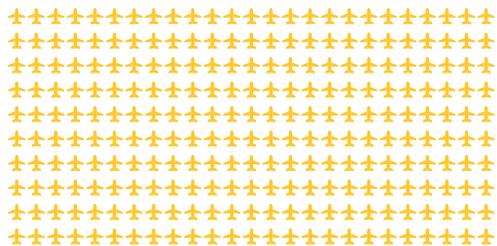
FAILING TO ACT IS NOT AN OPTION

The 16 countries that form the new epicenter of crisis are some of the most complex and challenging environments to work in. Failing to support them is not an option. Devastating flooding in Pakistan and Libya, drought and the resulting impact on food security in Somalia and Afghanistan all highlight the present danger of inaction.

Without immediate support, these threats are all projected to worsen. The World Bank **estimates** that an additional 68 to 135 million people could be pushed into poverty by 2030 because of climate change. Without sufficient investments in climate resilience, **1.5 billion people** could be displaced by 2050 as a result of climate shocks, and food insecurity and overall humanitarian needs will continue to rise in the absence of urgent and ambitious international action on climate change in these fragile settings.

But in a sea of dire statistics and injustices, there are clear solutions and a clear opportunity presented by COP28. By delivering tangible commitments to better map conflict and climate risks, invest in innovative approaches to adaptation, adopt a “people-first” approach to reaching communities and make climate financing more equitable, we can stave off the worst consequences of climate change for the most vulnerable.

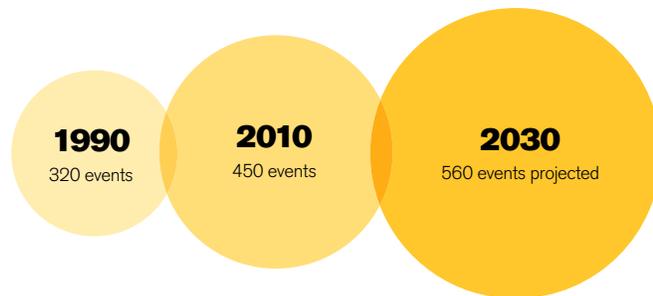
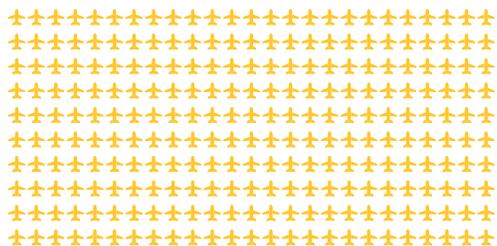
FIGURE 6: The Consequences of Inaction



250,000 additional deaths

per year, approximately, **are expected** to be caused by climate change between 2030-2050 due to malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea and heat stress.

That's the **equivalent of 500 Boeing 747s crashing** every year during that same period.



560 climate disaster events

globally, are **projected to occur** each year by 2030. **That's roughly 1.5 events per day.** Over the last two decades the world has seen 360-500 natural disasters per year.

68–135 million

additional people could be **pushed into poverty** by 2030 because of climate change, as estimated by **World Bank.**



20 years

of progress toward gender equity **could be reversed** if the impact of climate change on women goes unaddressed. **In other words, gender equity in 2030 will be back to where it was in 2010.**

