

A CLIMATE OF INSECURITY

How Militarism Has Impoverished the African Continent, Placing it at the Epicentre of the Climate Crisis



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A climate of insecurity: How militarism has impoverished the African continent, placing it at the epicentre of the climate crisis

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Executive summary

This paper looks at the myriad ways in which conflict, militarism, and the climate crisis are intertwined on the African continent. While the continent is endowed with a lot of natural resources, the revenue from which should at least be used to fund recovery efforts for climate-related shocks, the presence of natural resources in Africa has proved to be a curse rather than a blessing for many African citizens. Most resource-rich African countries are experiencing resource-related conflicts and only a few elites are benefiting from the extraction of resources. Competition for resources has led to internal violent conflicts caused by groups fighting for control of and access to resources, forcing local people to migrate to safer areas or become otherwise displaced to pave way for foreign investors. In most parts of Africa, foreign investors are leaving a trail of environmental degradation. Resources from Africa are being fed into Global North industries, which in turn are causing a rise in greenhouse gas emissions. Hence the link between military industries, environmental degradation, conflicts, and the climate crisis must not be ignored. While huge sums of money are invested in militarism, less is being done in relation to climate adaptation. The climate crisis is contributing to bloody, violent conflicts in most African countries over access and control of the few available resources.

When it comes to conflict, evidence from Angola, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) shows that natural resources are used to fuel conflicts as their revenues are used to supply weapons and equipment to military and rebel groups. Competition over access and control over resources is fuelling conflicts because people rely on natural resources as their main source of livelihood, particularly in rural areas.

“Funds from [natural] resources have often fuelled corruption and conflict in Africa, the funds have distorted economies and propped up undemocratic leaders, with the complicity of outside actors and the private sector.”

Natural resources are feeding the militarised political economies of countries around the world, particularly in the Global North. Military power stems from economic interest: without wealth, which is acquired through control over natural resources, weapons cannot be produced or procured, and soldiers cannot be paid. In the case of Africa, resources are being looted in conflict zones in return for weapons and money. Natural resources from Africa are also being used for arms proliferation; for instance, uranium is being used to build up nuclear weapons.

Militaries are also significantly contributing to the climate crisis and environmental degradation through their status as the single largest institutional emitters of greenhouse gases. As well, nuclear tests have proved to have far reaching consequences on the environment and the health of people around the explosion area.

Resource-related conflict and the climate crisis are also fuelling growing poverty and income inequality in African countries. The 2013 report of the African Progress Panel indicates that people in Africa's most resource-rich countries, like Angola, Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, and DRC are often the poorest of the poor. Speaking at the World Economic Forum on 10 May 2013, the former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan noted that "funds from resources have often fuelled corruption and conflict in Africa, the funds have distorted economies and propped up undemocratic leaders, with the complicity of outside actors and the private sector."¹ According to the Africa Progress Panel report, Africa loses a total of \$38.4 billion each year through trade mispricing and \$25 billion through other illicit flows, which is more than what Africa receives through aid and foreign direct investment.² Wealth from oil and minerals has also increased the gap between the rich and the poor instead of narrowing it. These inequalities contribute greatly to social and political tensions across Africa, making it easy for armed groups to mobilise local supporters.

1 L. Louw-Vaudran, 'Clamping down on corruption in Africa's extractive industries' Institute for Security Studies, May 2013, available at <https://www.issafrica.org>, accessed 10 July 2022.

2 Africa Progress Panel, Africa Progress Report 2013.

Natural resources: Cause and fuel of conflict, poverty, and militarism in Africa



Valuable natural resources have contributed to conflicts in Africa through competition for territorial control, unequal distribution of wealth, looting, and corruption, in addition to the resources being used to sustain violence through financing. In **Mozambique**, the Cabo Delgado civil war has been caused by poverty, growing inequality, and the resource curse,³ which occurs when global mining and gas companies share the surplus from resource extraction with a small local elite only. Major ruby and offshore gas discoveries in 2009 and 2010 set the pattern for the dominance of the extractive industries, increasing poverty, corruption, and lack of trickle down benefits and leading to growing local discontent.⁴ The management of natural resources in Cabo Delgado has fanned the flames of the conflict. The extraction of gas is benefitting the elite with fewer benefits to the local people. Communities forced to relocate for the gas project are receiving insufficient compensation, and the residents are protesting the lack of access to job opportunities for their communities.⁵



Competition over control of territories that are rich in oil or diamonds are the main factors contributing to violent conflicts in **South Sudan**, which has experienced battles where oil is the underlying issue. The trigger of the country's civil war was a dispute between President Salva Kiir and then-Vice President Riek Machar over control over state assets and natural resources. Abyei, an area on the border between Sudan and South Sudan, is responsible for about a quarter of Sudan's total crude oil output. Revenue from oil is used to fuel militias, a small clique that continues to get richer while the majority of South Sudanese suffer or flee their homeland. Numerous private companies have provided support to security forces in South Sudan in the form of supplying and transporting weapons, troops, and other goods, thus profiteering from the war.⁶

3 J. Hanlon, *Ignoring the roots of Mozambique's war in a push for a military victory*, ACCORD, August 24 2021, available at: <https://www.accord.org.za>, accessed 10 July 2022.

4 BBC News, *Mozambique's jihadists and the curse of gas and rubies*, 18 September 2020, available at: <https://www.bbc.com>, accessed 10 July 2022.

5 J. Stanyard, G. Arde, J. Rademeyer and A. Nelson, *Insurgency, illicit markets and corruption: The Cabo Delgado conflict and its regional implications*, Research Report, February 2002, p. 16.

6 The Sentry, *Fuelling atrocities: Oil and war in South Sudan*, March 2018, p. 4.



Participants in most civil wars in Africa are motivated by material gains that are realised in the grabbing of natural resources. **Sierra Leone** suffered a decade-long civil war between 1991 and 2002, during which diamonds were smuggled to finance one side in the war.⁷ Explanations for the civil war have mainly been centred on resource wealth and local grievances. Most scholars point out the prominent role of extraction and smuggling of (blood) diamonds in starting and sustaining the conflict. Keen argues that the control of diamond-rich areas was an important objective for the groups and battles were largely restricted to the areas with rich diamond deposits.⁸ Apart from diamonds, investments in land and extractive industries (iron ore, bauxite) have been implicated as a source of tension,⁹ because of inequality in access to the resources as well as the exclusion of the majority of the population.¹⁰ The war in Sierra Leone has ended, but it gives insight into the debates concerning conflict and resources. Sierra Leone remains an important case study in the discourse around the fight for control and access to resources, as well as the use of natural resources to fuel and sponsor civil wars.



Angola endured war for 40 years. From 1990 to 2002, the country endured a civil war in which the government army FAA (Forças Armadas Angolanas) and rebel group United Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) financed warfare against each other with income from natural resources. The government controlled offshore oil fields, while the rebel UNITA movement sustained itself for years through illegal diamond mining.¹¹ Hodges estimates UNITA's total diamond revenue between 1992 to 1998 at \$3.7 billion, which was used to sponsor war.¹² FAA was able to finance its weapons purchases from oil income; thus, without the presence of oil companies in the country, the government army would not be able to extract oil and earn revenue from it.¹³ The two actors were dependent upon international networks, hence Hegsvold argues that instead of classifying the conflict as a civil war, it could be defined as internationalised internal conflict.¹⁴ To this day, some of the richest countries are exporting arms to the most climate-vulnerable countries, fuelling conflict and war amid climate breakdown.¹⁵

7 P. Collier, A. Hoeffler and D. Rohner, *Beyond greed and grievance: Feasibility and civil war*, Oxford Economic Papers, vol. 61, 2009, p.13.

8 D. Keen, *Conflict and collusion in Sierra Leone*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2005, p.212.

9 P. Peters, *Conflicts over land and the threats of a customary tenure in Africa*, African Affairs, 2013, p. 112.

10 J. Baxter and E. Schafter, *Who is benefitting? The social and economic impacts of three large scale land investments in Sierra Leone: A cost benefit analysis*, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2013.

11 K. H. Anderson, *Resources and conflict in Angola: An economic conflict analysis*, Department of Economics, University of Oslo, 2003, p. 7.

12 T. Hodges, *Angola from Afro-Stalinism to Petrol-Diamond Capitalism*, Oxford and Indiana: FNI, IAI, Indiana and James Currey, Lysaker, 2001, p.153.

13 Ibid.

14 K. Hegsvold, *Resources and conflict in Angola*, Peace Research Institute, Oslo, 2003, p. 35.

15 M. Akkerman, D. Burkon, N. Buxton, H. Lin, M. Al-Kashef, *Climate collateral: How military spending accelerates climate breakdown*, 14 November 2022, Report, www.tni.org/en/public.



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The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is also experiencing civil wars and an analysis of the conflicts shows the greed and grievances dynamics. Mbuji-Mayi in central DRC is also known as the “diamond capital of the world” but the city is characterised by slums. The province of Kasai Oriental has high rates of illiteracy and infant mortality, with 60 per cent of children under five suffering from malnutrition,¹⁶ and it also lacks regular access to electricity – all while a few Congolese and foreign diamond merchants display unimaginable wealth.



In **Zimbabwe**, when diamonds were discovered in Marange, armed forces engaged in forced labour of children and adults, and villagers were tortured and beaten in the diamond fields. In 2008, when the military seized control of the diamond fields in Chiadzwa, more than 200 people were killed.¹⁷ Miners described colleagues being buried alive, while police officers indicated that they were ordered to shoot on sight miners found on the fields.¹⁸ Just like most African communities that do not benefit from their local natural resources, the diamond mining is taking



16 H.W. French, *Mbuji-Mayi Journal: In a diamond-studded land, poverty, not palaces*, The New York Times, 5 December 1997, p.4.

17 Human rights watch, *Diamonds in the rough: Human rights abuses in the Marange diamond fields of Zimbabwe*, 26 June 2009, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/06/26/diamonds-rough/human-rights-abuses-marange-diamond-fields-zimbabwe>, accessed 10 July 2022.

18 Ibid.

place in arguably one of the poorest communities in Zimbabwe and there is no evidence of the government investing a portion of the diamond wealth in the well-being of Marange and its people. In fact, the Auditor General Mildred Chiri revealed that the Zimbabwe Consolidated Diamond Company (ZCDC) has failed to account for the use of \$400 million, while also failing to properly account for 352,583.11 carats of stockpiled diamonds.

It is important to note that the discovery of diamonds in the Marange area led to the displacement of over 900 villagers to pave way for the government and the Chinese firm Anjin to invest in extractive operations in the area. In 2010 the Mugabe-led government pushed families into Transau farm, which is 140 kilometres away from the mining area where they once lived. Life on the farm isn't what was promised. The homes are substandard and already crumbling and water sources are not close by; residents must rely on rainwater or a well that is two kilometres away.¹⁹ When villagers were relocated, they were promised compensation of their homes that they have built and irrigation schemes, but of the \$5,000 USD promised they only received \$1,000 USD.²⁰ Children are out of school due to lack of money to pay school fees and lack of proper school structures. Food is scarce, and the families are currently trapped in a poverty cycle without jobs and land for subsistence farming which was promised.²¹ As a result of the discovery of diamonds in Zimbabwe the local communities were exposed to widespread violence, including forced displacements to pave the way for mining. Advocacy groups suggested that the diamonds be classified as conflict diamonds.

Against the backdrop of examples from diverse countries on the African continent, one can argue that local communities are not benefiting from their locally found natural resources. Rather, their lives have been negatively impacted by the discovery of diamonds in their homeland, including through displacement, human rights violations, increasing poverty and inequality, insecurity and conflict, and environmental destruction.

19 E. Chenjerai, *Zimbabwe: Over 900 families relocated during the Marange diamond rush yet to receive compensation despite court order*, Business and human rights resource centre, available at: <https://www.business-humanrights.org>, accessed 11 July 2022.

20 Ibid.

21 L. Moyo, *800 displaced Chiadzwa families fight for survival*, Voice of Africa, 9 May 2013, available at: <https://www.reliefweb.int>, accessed 11 July 2022.

Environmental impacts of mining

Apart from impoverishing the local people, the mining of diamonds is contributing to more conflicts due to the environmental impacts of the extraction process. The environmental destruction caused by diamond mining has been well documented by the 2012 Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association, which shows that diamond mining leads to widespread chemical and heavy metal pollution, causing water from local rivers – once used for drinking – to irritate skin on contact.²² Trees are being cut down, hazardous waste is being discharged into rivers, thereby endangering the lives of inhabitants and livestock, and trucks are moving around, increasing the levels of dust pollution.²³ There is loss of livestock due to contaminated water and women are suffering from high rates of miscarriages, which is said to be caused by chemicals from contaminated water.

The environmental impacts of mining are not just limited to diamonds. In **Cameroon**, civil society groups have raised the alarm over pollution of rivers in the eastern and northern parts of the country by Chinese gold mining companies, which are allowing significant amounts of mercury and cyanide to spill into watercourses.²⁴ Tests conducted in June 2022 in the Djiengou river, which runs through the village of Kambelle, showed traces of mercury in the surface of water flowing.²⁵ This exposes residents and wildlife to danger. The negative environmental impacts created by Chinese mining companies can also be found in **Ghana**, where abandoned pits left uncovered are becoming flooded, posing a danger to residents.²⁶ Rivers are also being negatively affected by alluvial mining activities.



22 C. Sunguro, *Benefit sharing: The way to improve livelihoods of Chiadzwa community*, Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association, available at: <https://www.zela.org>, accessed 11 July 2022.

23 E. Chenjerai, *Zimbabweans clash with diamond mining interests over pollution and other blight*, Global Press Journal, available at: <https://www.pressjournal.com>, accessed 11 July 2022.

24 Christophe Nyemeck, *Chinese companies criticized for mercury pollution in Cameroon*, 5 September 2022, available at: <https://news.mongabay.com/2022/09/chinese-companies-slated-for-mercury-pollution-in-cameroon/#:~:text=The%20Centre%20for%20Environment%20and,watercourses%20in%20the%20East%20Region>.

25 Ibid.

26 Gordon Crawford, *The impact of Chinese involvement in small scale mining in Ghana*, International Growth Centre, May 2016.

A vicious cycle of militarism and the climate crisis: Uranium mining fuelling nuclear proliferation and conflict

Uranium mining in Africa is the main resource base for nuclear weapons and power plants throughout the world, with 70 per cent of the Western world's uranium coming from African countries such as Namibia, South Africa, Niger, Congo, Gabon, and Madagascar. Uranium used in the nuclear bomb that caused 145,000 deaths when it was detonated on 6 August 1945 over Hiroshima, Japan, came from the Belgian Congo.

While feeding into the militarised political economies of Western countries, uranium mining has negative effects that are being felt in more than 30 African countries. Uriniferous waste threatens scarce water resources and the health of adjacent residents. The costs of rehabilitation of the mining areas are often many times higher than the total revenues derived during the mine's entire lifetime.²⁷ In South Africa, inadequate remediation of uranium mining in the Karoo Uranium Province led to a disused open pit and uranium ore in stockpiles and barrels, which led to livestock grazing among ore stockpiles and drinking from contaminated water supplies.²⁸ Yet despite these harmful impacts, multinational uranium mining companies are not being held accountable for environmental destruction in African countries and radioactive and toxic contamination of water, land, and air are often not effectively addressed. While uranium mining is contributing to these environmental challenges that are putting biodiversity, livestock, and humans at greater risk of infections and pollution, most of the uranium is being used for the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The testing of nuclear weapons on its own is a threat to peace and well-being. According to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2,053 nuclear tests were conducted worldwide between 1945 and 2006, 85 per cent of which were conducted by the US and USSR between 1945 and 1992.²⁹

27 SOMO/WISE Report, "Uranium mines threaten African people and nature", 12 July 2022, available at: <https://www.somo.nl/uranium-mines-threaten-african-people-and-nature/#:~:text=Uranium%20exploitation%20leads%20to%20large,term%20effects%20are%20insufficiently%20addressed>, accessed 11 July 2022.

28 N. Scholtz, O.F. Scholtz and G. P. Potgieter, *Potential environmental impact resulting from inadequate remediation of uranium mining in the Karoo Uranium Province, South Africa*, *Uranium in the Environment*, pp 789-799, available at: <https://www.springer.com>, accessed 11 July 2022.

29 V. Fedchenko and R. F. Hellgren, *Nuclear arms control and non-proliferation*, available at: <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2007/12/appendix12B>, accessed 12 July 2022.

These tests have been conducted in the atmosphere, underground, and underwater. For example, nuclear tests that were carried out in Algeria between 1966 and 1996 still taint relations between France and Algeria, while diseases related to radioactivity are passed on as an inheritance. Nuclear tests conducted in the second half of the twentieth century had a predominant geopolitical characteristic, as great powers used the tests to reassert their positions on the global geopolitical stage – shows of strength and power that have led to serious ecological and social consequences.

Nuclear testing has contributed to security threats and growing tensions among the world's nuclear-armed states. For example, in 2022, North Korea announced that it will carry out its seventh nuclear test. The US indicated that it will not take this test lightly since it is a complete violation of the United Nations Security Council resolution and it would destabilise world security.³⁰ In 2017, North Korea conducted a series of weapons tests that prompted then-President Donald Trump to assert that any more threats to the United States will be met with “fire and fury like the world has never seen.”³¹ A few hours later, North Korea threatened to fire four missiles into the Pacific Ocean near the American territory of Guam, to which Trump responded that military solutions are now fully in place.³²

Nuclear tests have also had major environmental impacts in most areas of the world where they have taken place. In terms of human exposure, nuclear testing can be linked with an increase in thyroid cancer in many areas of the globe.³³ The Trinity tests that were carried out on 16 July 1945 exposed civilians to two horrific explosions, leading to radioactive contamination that continues to impact people today.³⁴ A 2015 paper on the environmental impact of military actions found that nuclear blasts also represent an extreme threat to local biodiversity.³⁵ Humans and animals face life-threatening burns, lung damage, and haemorrhaging when exposed to nuclear blasts and radiation, while long-term environmental consequences of nuclear testing include the contamination of surface soil and underground water, and even the collapse of mountains as in the case of the North Korean testing site.³⁶

30 J. Lee and I. Marlow, *US warns North Korea of forceful response to a nuclear test*, 7 June 2022, available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com>, accessed 12 July 2022.

31 E. Osons, *The risk of nuclear war with North Korea*, 7 September 2017, *The New Yorker*, available at: <https://www.newyorker.com>, accessed 12 July 2022.

32 Ibid.

33 R. Pravalie, *Nuclear weapons tests and environmental consequences: A global perspective*, 24 June 2021, available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4165831/>, accessed 12 July 2022.

34 UN News, *Nuclear testing legacy is cruellest environmental injustice, warns rights expert*, 16 July 2020.

35 M. J. Lawrence and H. L. J. Stemberger, *The effects of modern war and military activities on biodiversity and the environment*, NRC Research Press, 2015.

36 DW, *How nuclear testing leaves lasting environmental scars*, 12 October 2022, www.dw.com.

Mechanisms linking climate change to violent conflicts at grassroots level

In addition to exacerbating resource-related conflict and the immediate and long-term impacts of nuclear weapons development, testing, and use on the environment and well-being of people around the world, militarism itself is a huge contributor to the climate crisis. Militaries are massive energy users, making a significant contribution to overall greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and ecological degradation. A report by Tipping North South estimated that the carbon footprint of global militaries and associated arms industries was around five per cent of the total global GHG emissions in 2017. By way of comparison, civil aviation accounts for two per cent of global GHG emissions.³⁷ Large quantities of toxic waste are produced by militaries, and there is high demand for resources to support military industries, with extraction and securing of resources contributing to conflict and creating a cycle of destruction. Military waste disposal has been poorly managed, with burn pits used at several US sites in the Middle East and Afghanistan. During most of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the military disposed of garbage and everything that they did not want to ship back to the US in open air burn pits; about 230 pits were discovered.³⁸ Next to these vast environmental impacts, military spending is diverting massive funding from the struggle against climate change. While the world is grappling with the climate crisis, between 2013 and 2021, the richest countries spent \$9.45 trillion on the military which is 56.3 per cent of total global military spending – representing an increase of 21.3 per cent in that time period.³⁹

The impacts of the climate crisis have been found to exacerbate conflict and insecurity on the African continent. In **Somalia**, for example, where the region is characterised by high temperatures and erratic rainfall, there are battles over access to and control of land and water between herders and farmers. Pastoral communities in Somalia are sometimes resorting to illicit trade and the use of small arms and light weapons. The climate crisis is threatening their livelihoods to the extreme, and those affected believe they have less to lose from joining armed groups to survive.⁴⁰



37 M. Akkerman, D. Burkon, N. Buxton, H. Lin, M. Al-Kashef, *Climate collateral: How military spending accelerates climate breakdown*, 14 November 2022, Report, www.tni.org/en/public.

38 D. Sagalyn, *Photo essay: The burn pits of Iraq and Afghanistan*, 17 November 2014, available at: <https://www.pbs.org>, accessed 15 July 2022.

39 Climate Collateral: How military spending accelerates climate breakdown.

40 A. Yaw Tchie, *How climate insecurity could trigger more conflict in Somalia*, Prevention Web, 12 April 2021, available at <https://www.preventionweb.net>, accessed 10 July 2022.



Climate-related issues can worsen existing vulnerabilities and tensions and may disrupt fragile peace processes.

In **Zimbabwe**, the climate crisis has contributed to the failure of rain-fed agriculture.



This has led many to migrate to the Midlands province and other areas where gold is available so that they can use artisanal mining as an alternative source of livelihood. However, the shift from agriculture has led to environmental degradation and conflict between farmers, miners, and pastoralists. Farmers are aggrieved that miners are polluting the water in streams with their mining chemicals such as mercury and cyanide, making water unsafe for livestock and humans to drink, and rivers

they once used for gardening are drying up as a result of siltation being caused by alluvial mining activities. While farmers and miners are fighting, artisanal miners are also fighting for access to mineral rich sites. Bloody machete wars are common whenever there is a gold rush across the country, with the wars being fought on tribal and political grounds. These tensions contribute to the militarisation of the artisanal mining sector, and it cannot be regarded as a safe source of livelihood. Therefore, the climate crisis is creating a chain of problems for communities, leading to a cycle of environmental degradation, natural resource scarcity, food insecurity, and violent conflicts.

A call for justice from the epicentre of the climate crisis

The compounding impacts of the climate crisis and militarism are a threat to the environment and the survival of humans and biodiversity. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change obliges signatories to publish annual GHG emissions data, but military emissions reporting is voluntary and often not included. At the same time, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs' military expenditure reporting forms do not include fuel costs and the International Energy Agency statistics also exclude military energy use. There is an urgent need to strengthen current guidelines on militaries' reporting of climate-related information to make reporting on GHG emissions binding to ensure greater transparency. Most importantly however, countries must disarm and demilitarise; "greening" the military won't be enough to mitigate the climate crisis.

As long as militarism – a violent, extractive, and oppressive system – exists, there will be conflicts and ecological disasters.

It is also important that vast natural resources and funds currently being channelled towards conflict parties and growing the wealth of a few elites be instead invested into climate mitigation and adaptation as well as loss and damage. The climate crisis is no longer just an environmental issue but a human rights matter, and a catastrophe for the future of the planet.

Despite accounting for less than four per cent of GHG emissions, Africa is at the epicentre of the global climate crisis. The continent's poverty, evidenced by food insecurity, housing insecurity, and migration related to conflict and environmental destruction as a result of resource looting and corruption, makes it particularly vulnerable to climate impacts. Yet Africa has all the assets it needs to be at the centre of a global green economy. Countries of the Global North must stop applying double standards by portraying themselves to be climate champions while their activities in Global South countries prove otherwise. The global agenda must accommodate Africa's development challenges to ensure the continent becomes part of climate crisis solutions and effective resource use and management.

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