

CASE  
STUDY

1



# Challenges linked to climate, environment and conflict in Burkina Faso

ANALYSIS OF THE PERCEPTION AND  
RESILIENCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN  
THE TOWN OF DORI IN THE SAHEL REGION

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# Contents

→	<b>Acronyms and abbreviations .....</b>	<b>3</b>
---	---	----------

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>4</b>
--------------------------------	----------

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
------------------------------	----------

<b>2. General Context of Burkina Faso .....</b>	<b>8</b>
---	----------

<b>3. Research Area and Methodology .....</b>	<b>10</b>
---	-----------

→	<b>3.1 Presentation and justification of the research area.....</b>	<b>10</b>
---	---	-----------

→	<b>3.2 Methodological approaches .....</b>	<b>12</b>
---	--	-----------

3.2.1 Data collected from young people aged 18 to 35 .....	12
--	----

3.2.2 Interviews with resource persons and structures .....	14
---	----

<b>4 Analysis of Research Results .....</b>	<b>15</b>
---	-----------

→	<b>4.1 Young people's perceptions of climate change, environmental degradation and conflict.....</b>	<b>15</b>
---	--	-----------

4.1.1 Perceptions of climate change and environmental degradation .....	15
---	----

4.1.2 Conflicts and tensions in the research area .....	19
---	----

→	<b>4.2 Influence of climate change and environmental degradation on conflicts .....</b>	<b>21</b>
---	---	-----------

→	<b>4.3 The combined impact of climate change, environmental degradation and conflict on young people .....</b>	<b>22</b>
---	--	-----------

→	<b>4.4 Solutions to the interconnected issues of climate change, environmental degradation and conflict .....</b>	<b>23</b>
---	---	-----------

<b>5. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>26</b>
----------------------------	-----------

<b>References.....</b>	<b>27</b>
------------------------	-----------

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CONAJEC</b>	National Youth Coordination for the Environment and Climate*
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>INSD</b>	National Institute of Statistics and Demography*
<b>IPCC</b>	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
<b>MEEVCC</b>	Ministry of the Environment, Green Economy and Climate Change*
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>RGPH</b>	General Population and Housing Census*
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Objectives
<b>SWAC</b>	Sahel and West Africa Club
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>SIPRI</b>	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

# Executive Summary

The research aims to explore how marginalized young people are affected by the intersecting effects of climate change, environmental degradation, and violent conflict. The analysis is based on documents and data from individual interviews and focus groups conducted in Dori, located in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso. The findings reveal that young people in the northern region of Burkina Faso are acutely aware of these challenges. In terms of climate change, they reported rising temperatures and declining rainfall. Regarding environmental degradation, deforestation, surface water pollution, and soil erosion were the most frequently observed issues. Conflicts related to terrorism, disputes between farmers and herders, and land tenure were the most commonly reported forms of violence.

The research also highlights that climate change and environmental degradation are significant potential sources of conflict in the region due to their adverse impacts on socio-economic and environmental conditions, particularly for young people. The deterioration of these conditions exacerbates competition for natural resources, such as those between livestock farmers and crop farmers, while also increasing the vulnerability of young people. This vulnerability makes them more susceptible to involvement in illicit activities, banditry, and recruitment into armed terrorist groups.

Additionally, the study reveals that the ongoing security crisis, lack of resources, socio-economic vulnerability, and exclusion from decision-making processes hinder young people's ability to contribute meaningfully to efforts combating climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict. In response to these challenges, young people have proposed a range of recommendations. These include raising awareness among all stakeholders, building the capacities of young people, and advocating for their greater involvement in decision-making processes.



# 1. Introduction



Climate change, environmental degradation and conflicts and their causes are at the heart of political and scientific debates at the international level. This is particularly reflected in the fact that these issues were given a high profile in the sustainable development agenda. Africa, and sub-Saharan Africa is one of the region's most vulnerable to climate change<sup>123</sup>, with extreme seasonal variability.<sup>45</sup> The region is also suffering from various forms of environmental degradation, for example pollution and soil impoverishment. In recent years, it has been plagued by terrorism and other forms of conflict such as land disputes, conflicts between herders and farmers, amongst others. Burkina Faso, a country located in the heart of sub-Saharan Africa, is particularly representative of this difficult climatic, environmental and security situation. In socio-demographic terms, the country has a predominantly young population. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Demography\*<sup>6</sup> 77.9 percent of Burkina Faso's population is under 35 years of age, including 32.1 percent aged between 15 and 34.

1 WaterAid West Africa (2021). Climate change and water security in Burkina Faso and Niger.)

2 UNHCR. (2021). Climate Risk Profile - Sahel. UNHCR, Geneva. Retrieved from <https://www.unhcr.org/61a49df44.pdf>

3 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). (2023). Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland. doi:10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001

4 SWAC/OECD. (2010). Security implications of climate change in the Sahel: policy perspectives.

5 UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (n.d.). AMMA 2050 policy brief: Climate change and its impacts in Burkina Faso. Retrieved from <https://www.ceh.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-01/amma2050-Policy-Brief-Burkina-Faso-French.pdf>

6 National Institute of Statistics and Demography (INSD). (2022a). Fifth general population and housing census of Burkina Faso. Retrieved from <https://www.insd.bf/fr/file-download/download/public/2071>

While much thought has been given to the causes and consequences of these aforementioned issues, little attention seems to have been given to the potential relationships between them. The resulting attempts to reconcile these seem to indicate an indirect relationship between climatic and environmental challenges and conflicts.<sup>7891011</sup> Overall, they indicate that climate change and environmental degradation could be sources of conflict through increased food insecurity and the weakening of livelihoods. Some authors point out that climate change-related violence also depends on changes in institutions, conflict management practices and resources.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, existing analyses do not focus on young people's perceptions. This research therefore looks at young people's perceptions of the nexus between climate, environment and conflict. Specifically, it asks the following questions:

- What issues linked to climate change and environmental degradation are young people observing?
- What types of conflict do young people perceive?
- How are young people affected by the combined effects of climate change, environmental degradation and conflict?
- What are the solutions for making young people key players in the fight against climate change, environmental degradation and conflict?

To answer these questions, this case study was carried out in the town of Dori, capital of the Sahel administrative region of Burkina Faso. This region of Burkina Faso has some of the most difficult climatic and environmental characteristics in the country. It is also the epicentre of the security crisis that the country has been experiencing for almost a decade, marked mainly by terrorism. The study combines qualitative and quantitative analyses, based on a literature review, individual interviews and focus group discussions. Overall, 178 young people (84 women and 94 men) took part in the discussions. Of these young people, 125 (42% of whom were young women) took part in individual interviews in the town of Dori, 28 (64% of whom were young women) took part in two focus group discussions in Dori and 25 (52% of whom were young women) took part in a discussion workshop in Ouagadougou. The main results of the analyses varied.

Firstly, the analyses show that climate change, environmental degradation and the conflicts observed in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso are increasing the socio-economic vulnerability of populations, particularly young people. Secondly, climate change and environmental degradation are perceived as a likely source of conflict. This is all the more true given the influence that the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation can have on conflicts. Finally, it should be noted that stakeholders are mobilised at local and national level to tackle these scourges, even though they face important and cross-cutting difficulties. Young people in particular are faced with limited accreditations, inadequate funding for their activities, lack of access to

7 SWAC/OECD. (2010). Security implications of climate change in the Sahel: policy perspectives.

8 FAO. (2021). Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger - Analysis of conflicts related to natural resources in the three Liptako Gourma countries: Synthesis note. Rome. doi:<https://doi.org/10.4060/cb7446fr>

9 Ackern, P. V., & Detges, a. A. (2022). Climate change, vulnerability and security in the Sahel: Three scenarios for Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to 2050

10 Pacillo, G., Kangogo, D., Madurga-Lopez, I., Villa, V., Belli, A., & Läderach, P. (2022). Is climate exacerbating the root causes of conflict in Mali? A climate security analysis through a structural equation modeling approach. *Front. Clim.* 4(849757). doi:10.3389/fclim.2022.849757

11 Kheira, T. (2022). Climate Change and Violent Conflict in West Africa: Assessing the Evidence. Stockholm: SIPRI. Retrieved from <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2022/sipri-insights-peace-and-security/climate-change-and-violent-conflict-west-africa-assessing-evidence>

12 Ackern, P. V., & Detges, a. A. (2022). Climate change, vulnerability and security in the Sahel: Three scenarios for Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to 2050.



decision-making frameworks and processes, poverty and a lack of employment. Faced with these difficulties, young people and many other stakeholders have put forward proposals to enable them to play their full role as key players in this crisis.





## 2. General Context of Burkina Faso



Burkina Faso is a sub-Saharan African country in the heart of West Africa. It is a landlocked country with no access to the ocean. The country is bordered by Mali to the north and west, Niger to the east, and Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo to the south.

The country has three climatic zones: the Sudanian zone in the south, the Sudano-Sahelian zone in the centre and the Sahelian zone in the northern part of the country, which includes the Sahel administrative region.<sup>13</sup> Burkina Faso's climate is generally characterised by high temperatures and low rainfall. According to Burkina Faso's Ministry of the Environment, Green Economy and Climate Change (MEEVCC<sup>14</sup>), average annual temperatures vary between 30 and 33°C from the north to the south of the country. Average annual rainfall ranges from 300 to 1,200 mm, also from the north to the south of the country.<sup>15</sup>

13 Burkina Faso has 13 administrative regions: Cascades, Hauts-Bassins, Sud-Ouest, Boucle du Mouhoun, Centre-Ouest, Centre-Sud, Centre-Est, Est, Centre, Plateau Central, Nord, Centre-Nord and Sahel. These thirteen regions are grouped into three climatic zones, including the Sahel zone, which covers all or part of the North, Centre-North, East and Sahel regions.

14 From original French acronym (Ministère de l'environnement, de l'économie verte et du changement climatique)

15 Ministry of the Environment, Green Economy and Climate Change (MEEVCC). (2021). Communication on adaptation to climate change in Burkina Faso.

Similar to other global contexts, Burkina Faso's climate situation appears to be deteriorating as a result of climate change. According to the MEEVCC\* (2021), climate projections indicate that temperatures will rise by 2°C by 2030, 2.4°C by 2050 and 3°C by 2080. These temperature rises will lead to an increase in pockets of severe drought by 2050. These unfavourable climate projections pose a serious threat to the country's economy, which relies heavily on the primary sector. Agriculture and related activities, as well as livestock farming, account for the vast majority of employment for Burkina Faso's working population. The number of poor people, who will represent 43.2 percent of the population in 2021<sup>16</sup> is likely to increase in such a context.

From a demographic point of view, Burkina Faso has a high growth rate, with an estimated average annual rate of 2.93 percent between 2006 and 2019, according to the final results of the fifth RGPH<sup>17</sup>. The country's population mainly consists of young people and women. According to figures from the fifth RGPH, 64.2 percent of the population is under 24 and 77.9 percent is under 35. According to the same source, 51.7 percent of the population are women. The majority of Burkina Faso's population lives in rural areas, with only 26.1 percent of the total population living in urban areas.<sup>18</sup>

In terms of security, the country is experiencing the worst situation in its history for nearly a decade. This security crisis is mainly propelled by terrorism, which is the main cause behind the large loss of human life and the massive, forced displacement of populations. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2024, Burkina Faso recorded a 17 percent drop in terrorist attacks in 2023 but has become the country most affected by terrorist activity, with a 68 percent increase in the number of deaths totalling 1,907 in the previous year.<sup>19</sup> As of 31 March 2023, according to the UNHCR Burkina Faso (2024), the country had 2,062,534 internally displaced persons (IDPs), 52 percent of whom were from the Sahel region. The five major IDP host regions, in numerical order, are the Sahel, Centre-North, North, East and Boucle du Mouhoun. The country also hosts a large number of refugees, estimated at 39,483 as of 31 March 2024. The majority of these refugees (38,440, or nearly 97%) are from neighbouring Mali, and 70 percent are in the Sahel region.

In addition to the dire security situation, Burkina Faso has also had a particularly turbulent political history since independence. The country has experienced political instability marked by repeated coups d'état. Between 1966 and 2023, the country recorded eight military coups d'état, to which was added the constitutional coup d'état of 31 October 2014. In 2022 alone, the country experienced two military coups, the last of which brought to power the current President, Captain Ibrahim TRAORE, who enjoys widespread support among the population. Since then, a number of political measures have been taken, including the suspension of the activities of the political parties and the creation of the Alliance of Sahel States with Mali and Niger.

16 National Institute of Statistics and Demography (INSD). (2022b). Principaux résultats de l'étude sur la pauvreté et les conditions de vie des ménages en 2021.

17 Fifth General Population and Housing Census (RGPH) to be carried out in 2019. (INSD, 2022a).

18 National Institute of Statistics and Demography (INSD). (2022a). Fifth general population and housing census of Burkina Faso. Retrieved from <https://www.insd.bf/fr/file-download/download/public/2071>

19 Institute for Economics & Peace. (2024). Global Terrorism Index 2024: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism. Sydney. Retrieved from <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GPI-2024-web.pdf>.

### 3. Research Area and Methodology



This section presents the research area, and the approaches used. Firstly, it presents the study area, highlighting its socio-demographic, climatic, environmental and security characteristics. Secondly, it presents the methodological approaches used to conduct the study.

#### 3.1 PRESENTATION AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH AREA

The case study in Burkina Faso focused on the Sahel region, specifically on the town of Dori, the regional capital. This area was selected for research due to its distinct demographic, climatic, environmental, and security features. According to the latest general population census conducted in 2019,<sup>20</sup> the region has the second-highest fertility rate in the country, with an average of 6.6 children per woman. The total population of the Sahel region was estimated at 1,098,177 in 2019, with 49.29 percent being women. Additionally, 88.25 percent of the population resided in rural areas, 46.28 percent were under the age of 15, and 97.3 percent identified as Muslim. Dori, the town at the

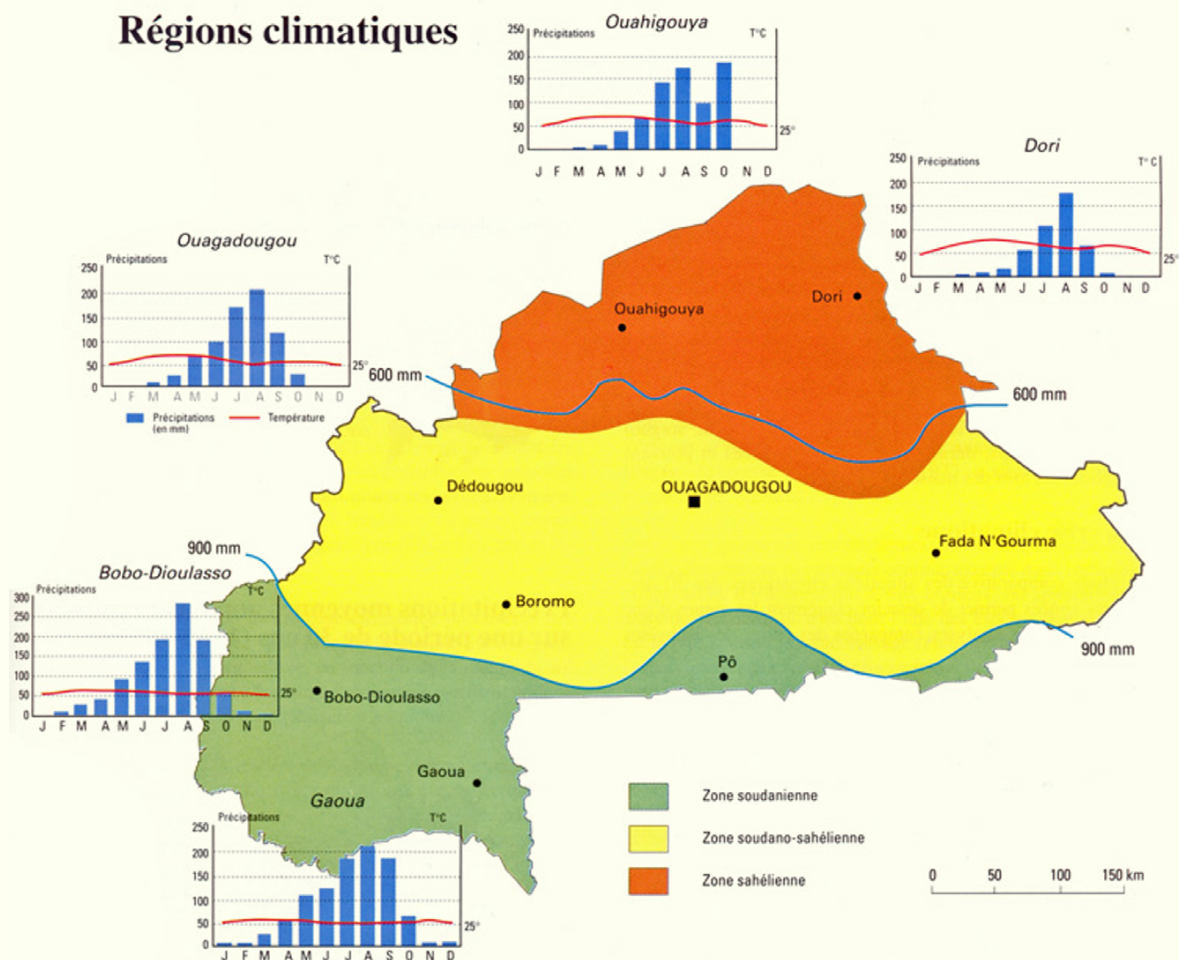
20 National Institute of Statistics and Demography (INSD). (2022a). Fifth general population and housing census of Burkina Faso. Retrieved from <https://www.insd.bf/fr/file-download/download/public/2071>



center of the study, stands out with the largest urban population in the region, accounting for just over 36 percent.

The region also had the highest infant mortality rate in 2019 (72.7%), particularly among women (77.5%). The literacy rate for people aged 15 and over in the region is by far the lowest in the country (only 12.5%), especially among women (only 9.21%). What's more, 76.5 percent of children aged between 6 and 16 in the region have never attended school by far the highest rate in the country. The employment situation in the region is also of note, with the lowest rate (22.8%) in the country in terms of the employed workforce and the highest rate of unemployment as defined by the ILO (17.1% and 21.3% for women). The combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force is also the highest in the country (60.9%), especially among women (69.1%). These initial findings are indicative of the enormous socio-economic and demographic challenges that contribute significantly to the vulnerability of the region's population.

The town of Dori is located in one of the hottest and driest regions of Burkina Faso, characterized by the lowest annual rainfall in the country and a very short rainy season. It also has the least vegetation and green cover, which is further strained by the demands of the region's population. According to INSD (2022a), in 2019, 85.4 percent of households in the region relied on wood as their primary source of energy for cooking, ranking the region third among Burkina Faso's thirteen regions in terms of wood usage. Access to water is another significant challenge in Dori, with 19.5 percent of the population still dependent on unimproved water sources, such as wells, dams, and rivers, further compounding the area's environmental and resource constraints.



The Sahel region, particularly the town of Dori, has been at the epicenter of Burkina Faso's security crisis, which has persisted for nearly a decade and is marked by widespread terrorism. Because of its geographical location, this area has been the hardest hit by terrorist activities and served as the initial entry point for their spread throughout the country.

The Sahel region, located in the tri-border area of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, has been a hotspot for armed terrorist groups since the early 2010s. According to the UNHCR, it recorded the highest number of internally displaced people in the country, with 501,961 as of March 31, 2023, and the largest number of refugees, 27,752, as of March 31, 2024. Due to the ongoing security crisis, access to the town of Dori by land has become nearly impossible, severely restricting the movement of people and goods. To mitigate this, transportation is reliant on military convoys organized by the country's authorities, as armed terrorist groups continue to dominate the region.

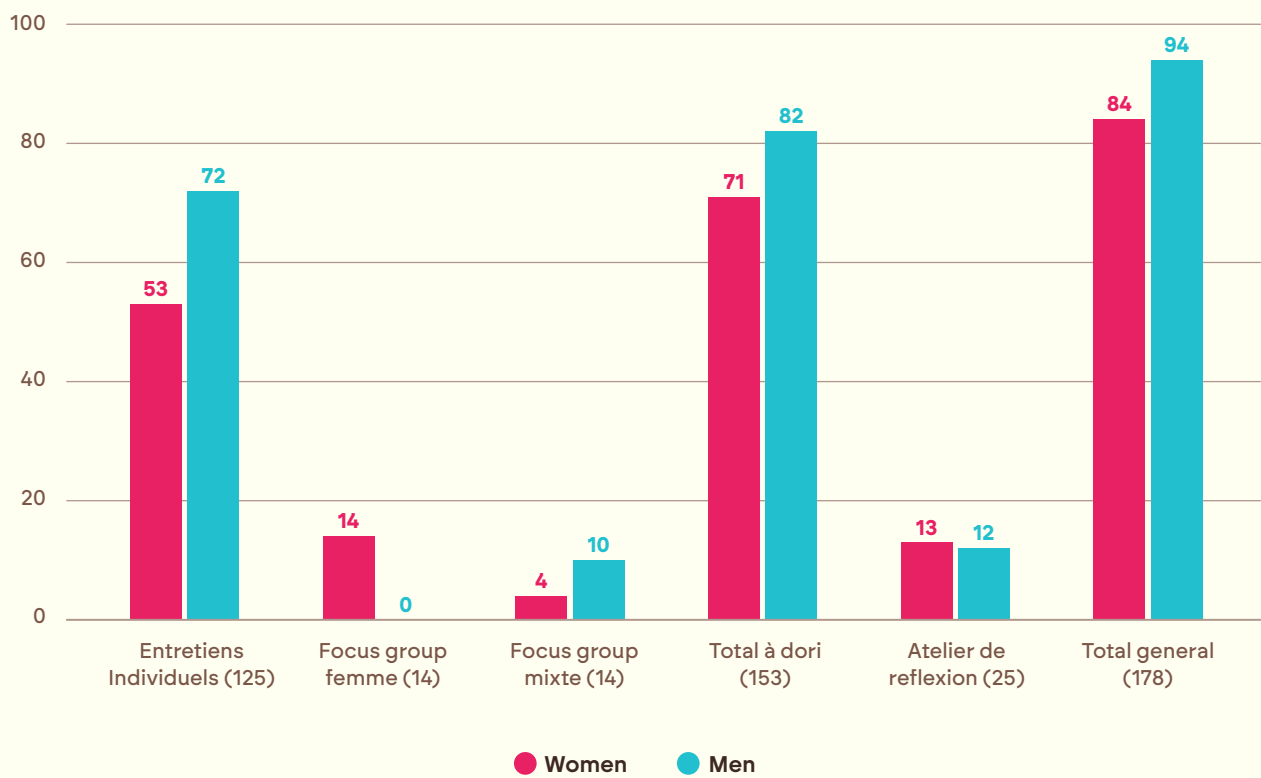
## 3.2 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The methodological approach of this research was organized into four stages. The first stage involved a literature review, which provided the framework for conceptualizing, guiding, and conducting the analysis. The second stage focused on generating data from the research target. In the third stage, the collected data was processed, and finally, in the fourth stage, the processed data was analysed.

The case study employed a mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data was gathered through individual interviews with 125 young women and men, aged 18 to 35, all of whom were residing in the town of Dori during the research period. Qualitative data was obtained from focus group discussions with 28 young people, a discussion workshop with 25 participants, and interviews with key resource persons and institutions. Both the focus groups and workshops included young women and men aged 18 to 35.

### 3.2.1 DATA COLLECTED FROM YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 18 TO 35

The primary focus of this research is on young women and men aged 18 to 35. As shown in Figure 1, a total of 178 young people participated in the data collection, comprising 84 women and 94 men. These participants can be divided into two main groups. The first group consisted of 153 young people (including 71 women) who took part in interviews and focus groups conducted in the town of Dori. The second group involved 25 young people (including 13 women) who are engaged in climate, environment, and peace issues. This latter group was gathered in Ouagadougou for a brainstorming workshop.

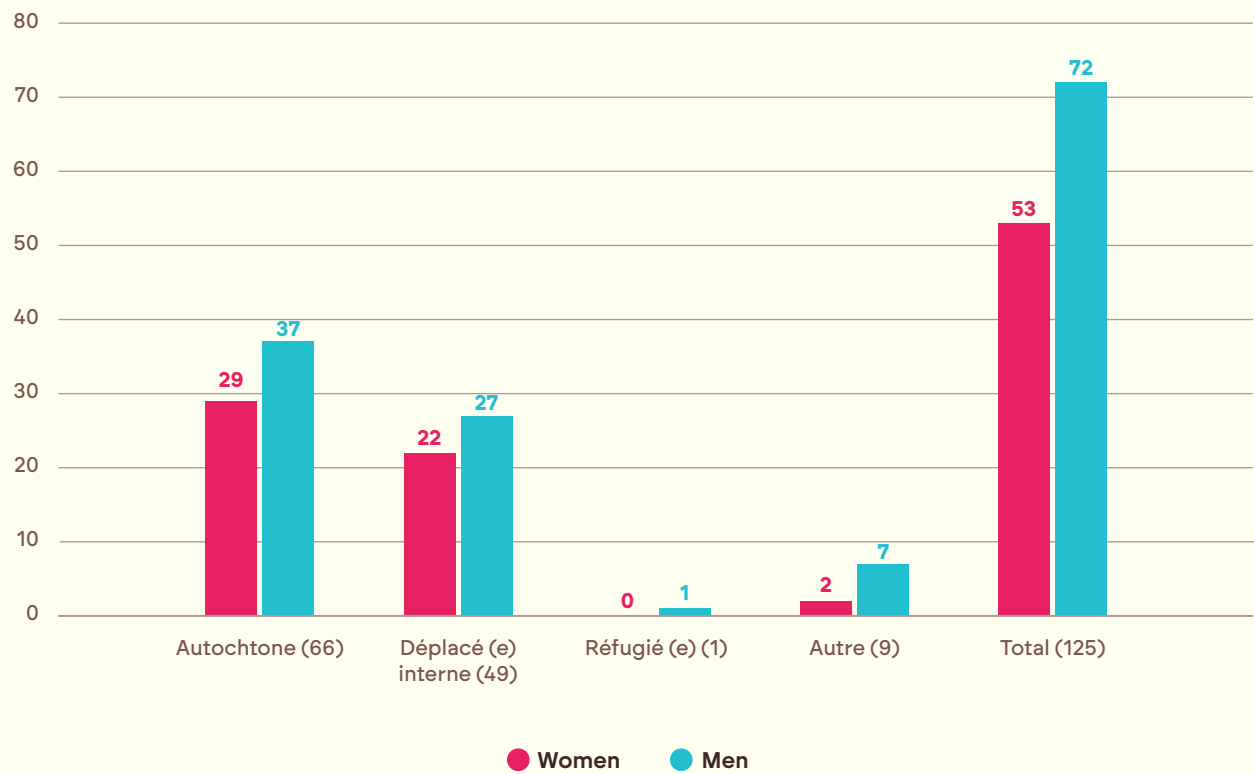


**FIGURE 1 |** Breakdown of young respondents

Source: data from the Burkina Faso case study (May and June 2024)

Figure 2 provides a breakdown of the young people interviewed individually based on their circumstances in the town of Dori. In total, 125 young people, including 53 women (42%), participated in these interviews. The majority of the participants were either locals, originally from Dori, or internally displaced persons (IDPs) who had fled their hometowns due to terrorism. Of the 125 participants, 115 fell into these two categories, with 66 (53%) being locals and 49 (39%) being IDPs. Notably, more than half of the women interviewed were indigenous to the town. Additionally, 1 refugee and 9 young people who were neither indigenous nor IDPs were interviewed. These individuals were in Dori for professional reasons.





**FIGURE 2 |** Breakdown of young people in individual interviews according to their situation in Dori  
**Source:** data from the Burkina Faso case study (May 2024)

### 3.2.2 INTERVIEWS WITH RESOURCE PERSONS AND STRUCTURES

In addition to gathering data from young people aged 18 to 35, several individuals and institutions with expertise in climate, environmental, and peace issues were consulted. In Dori, three key interviews were conducted with prominent figures: a notable member of the customary chieftaincy, a Muslim religious leader, and an officer from the regional environment department. In the capital, Ouagadougou, key interviews were held with the National Youth Coordination for the Environment and Climate (CONAJEC), while meetings were also arranged with institutional representatives from the United States Institute of Peace, CILSS, and other relevant organizations.



## 4 Analysis of Research Results



This section presents and discusses the main findings of the research in Burkina Faso, addressing four key areas. First, it explores young people's perceptions of climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict. The second part analyses the specific effects of climate change and environmental degradation on conflict. The third section examines the combined impact of these environmental factors on conflict dynamics. Finally, the fourth section focuses on potential solutions to address the interplay between climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict.

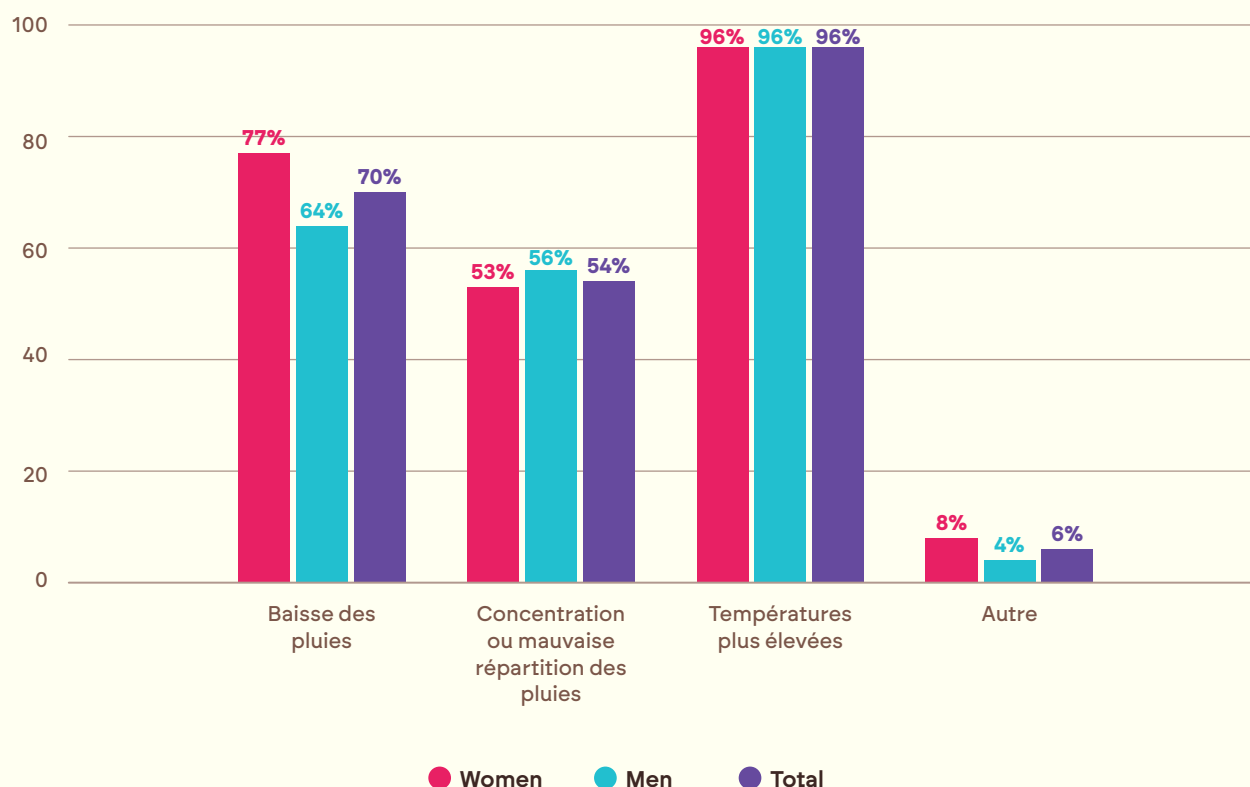
### 4.1 YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND CONFLICT

#### 4.1.1 PERCEPTIONS OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

As shown in Figures 3 and 4, both young men and women demonstrated a solid understanding of climate change and environmental degradation. Regarding climate change, young people most frequently cited rising temperatures as the primary effect they observed (Figure 3), followed by a decrease in rainfall, and lastly, irregular or poor distribution of rain. It is noteworthy that each of

these effects was recognized and understood by more than half of the young people in this study. These observations align with broader trends in Burkina Faso, where increasingly hot days and nights and a decline in cumulative annual rainfall have been recorded.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, it is worth noting that young women, on average, were more likely to mention decreasing rainfall than young men. This could be explained by the fact that women are typically responsible for water-related tasks in households, making them more attuned to changes, such as the water levels in various springs.



**FIGURE 3 |** Climate change phenomena observed by the young people interviewed

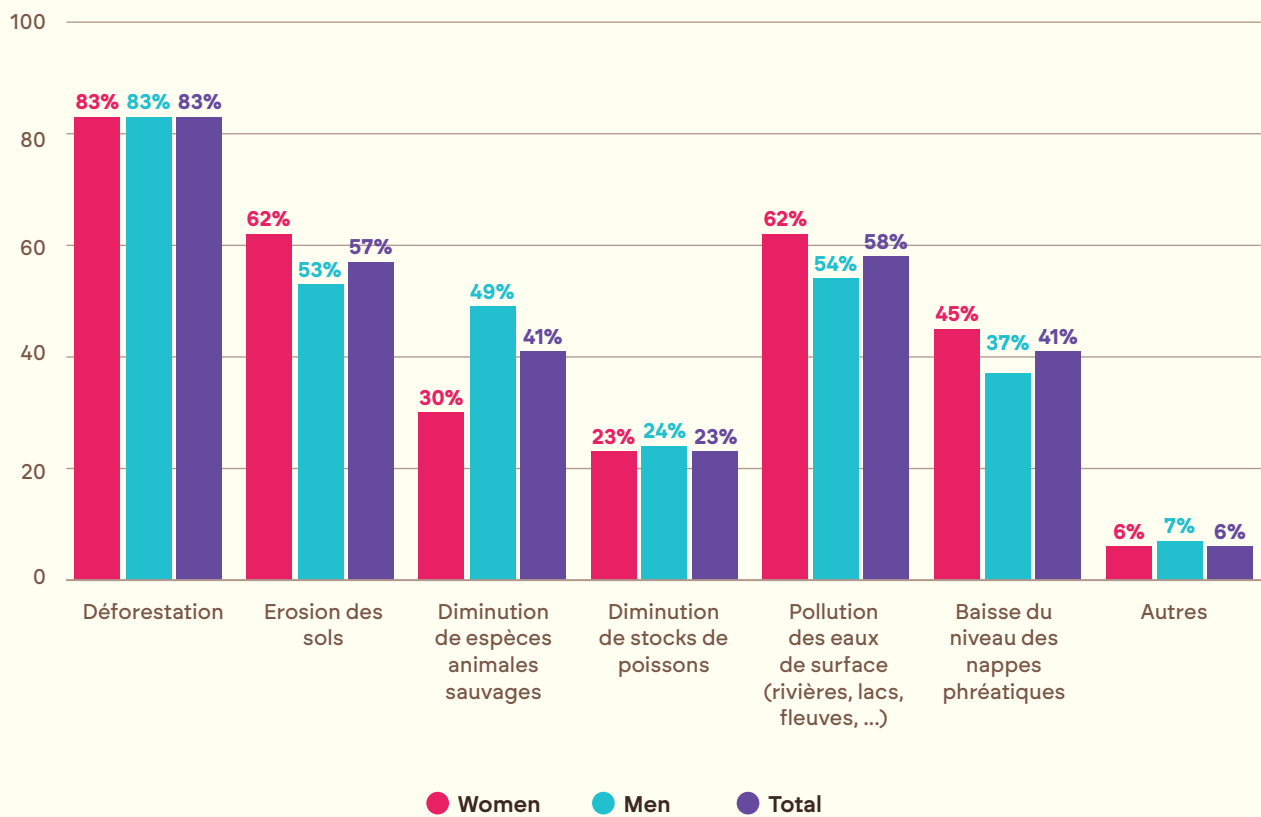
**Source:** data from the Burkina Faso case study (May 2024)

Regarding environmental degradation, Figure 4 highlights that the most frequently observed effects, in order of importance, are deforestation, surface water pollution, and soil erosion, each of which is noted by more than half of the young participants. Other observed effects, though to a lesser extent, include the decline in groundwater levels, the reduction of wild animal species, and the depletion of fish stocks.

It is worth noting that young women reported a higher observation of effects such as soil erosion, surface water pollution, and declining water tables. This can be explained by the fact that women are often responsible for fetching water from rivers, lakes, and wells, making them more likely to notice these environmental changes firsthand.

21 WaterAid West Africa (2021). Climate change and water security in Burkina Faso and Niger.



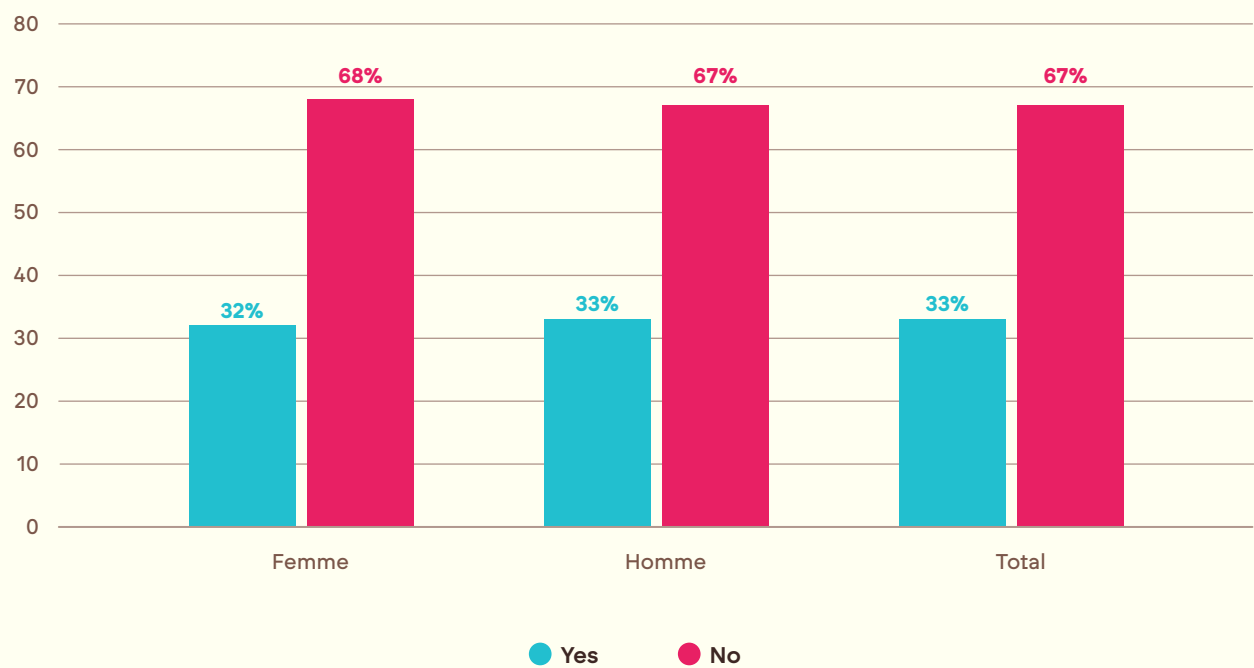


**FIGURE 4 |** Environmental degradation observed by young people

**Source:** data from the Burkina Faso case study (May 2024)

The effects of climate change and environmental degradation are particularly harmful to the population, especially young people. Interviews conducted with individuals and groups have highlighted several significant consequences. Many young people are facing increased unemployment and poverty, with some explaining that income-generating activities dependent on rainfall are slowing down or halting altogether due to environmental changes, leading to the loss of productive natural resources. This has also driven migration and rural exodus, as local opportunities diminish. Health issues are becoming more widespread, and agricultural production is in decline, as one young interviewee noted, **“people can no longer make a profit from good harvests,”** illustrating the challenges in maintaining livelihoods.

Moreover, the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation appear to affect young women and men differently. As shown in Figure 5, a third of young people believe these effects impact young men and women in distinct ways. Young men are primarily affected by the drop in income due to the slowdown in agricultural activities, which they are heavily involved in. Conversely, young women are more affected by reduced access to essential resources like water and firewood and face heightened health risks, especially during pregnancy. Surveyed young people also pointed to the rise in zoonotic and insect-borne diseases, with the spread of mosquitoes posing a significant health threat, particularly for pregnant women.



**FIGURE 5 |** Perceptions of the differentiated impact of climate change and environmental degradation on young men and women.

**Source:** data from the Burkina Faso case study (May 2024)

Speaking of the differentiated impact of climate change and environmental degradation, one focus group participant said:

*“It’s the women who do the housework. Like fetching water and wood for cooking. Because of the drop in rainfall and desertification, they are suffering to carry out these tasks, which used to take less time”.*

A young man told her that men are more affected because:

*“Men are the ones who do more farming and livestock rearing”.*



### 4.1.2 CONFLICTS AND TENSIONS IN THE RESEARCH AREA

The young people interviewed identified various types of conflicts (Figure 6), with terrorism being the most significant, mentioned by almost all participants. Following terrorism, the most commonly reported conflicts were between farmers and herders, land disputes, ethnic or religious tensions, and inheritance conflicts. The trends observed by young men and women generally align with the overall findings of the study, although some young men also mentioned conflicts related to access to natural resources.

According to the young people, several underlying factors contribute to these conflicts, exacerbating socio-economic vulnerabilities:

#### → CAUSES OF TERRORISM:

- Poverty and the quest for easy money.
- Unemployment, underemployment, and social inequalities.
- Ignorance, illiteracy, and poor education.
- Feelings of abandonment, absence of authority, and marginalization/stigmatization.
- Trafficking of drugs, humans, animals, and other illicit activities.
- Injustice, intolerance, and the desire for revenge.
- Manipulation and misunderstanding of religion. One young participant remarked:

*"We are all Muslims here, but some people talk about religion with the wrong knowledge, and some people listen to them."*

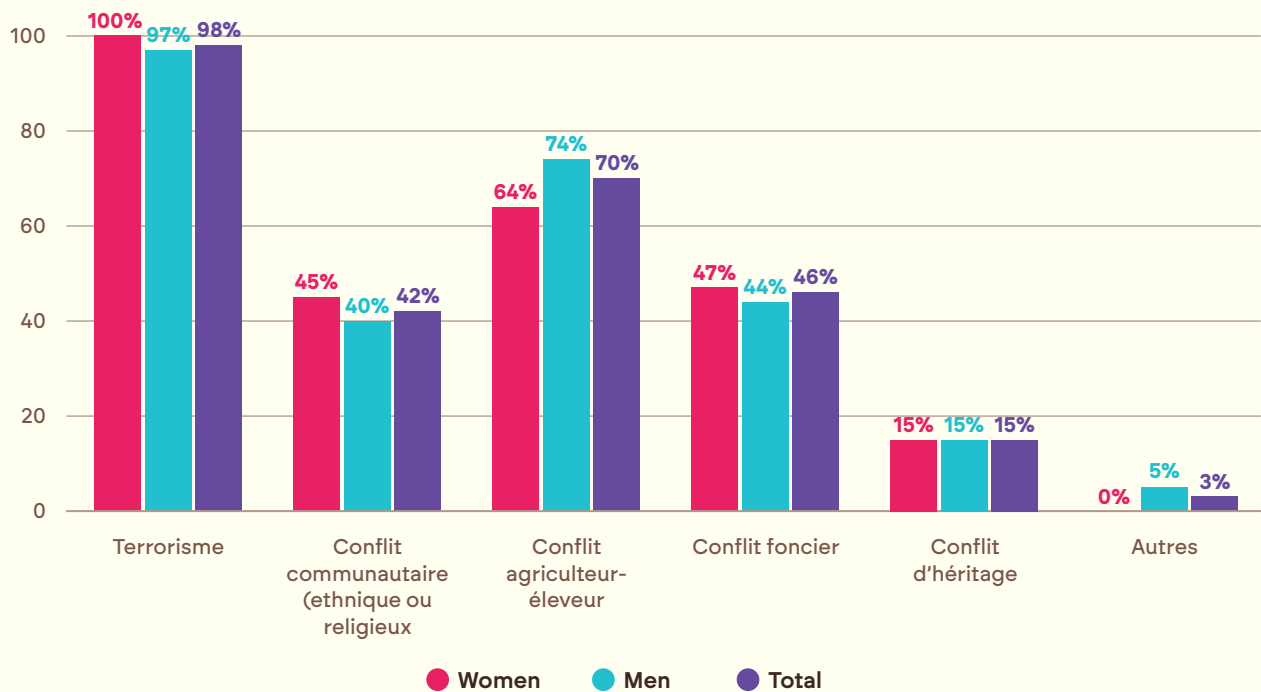
#### → CAUSES OF FARMER-HERDER AND LAND CONFLICTS:

- Disregard for designated grazing areas.
- Scarcity of plant and water resources.
- Free-ranging animals.
- Uncontrolled occupation of pond beds.
- Limited agricultural land and poor land use.
- Usurpation of land titles and ignorance of the law.

#### → CAUSES OF COMMUNITY CONFLICTS (ETHNIC OR RELIGIOUS):

- Manipulation and misunderstanding of religion.
- Loss of cultural values (such as joking kinship) and traditional conflict management mechanisms, along with the legacy of older conflicts.

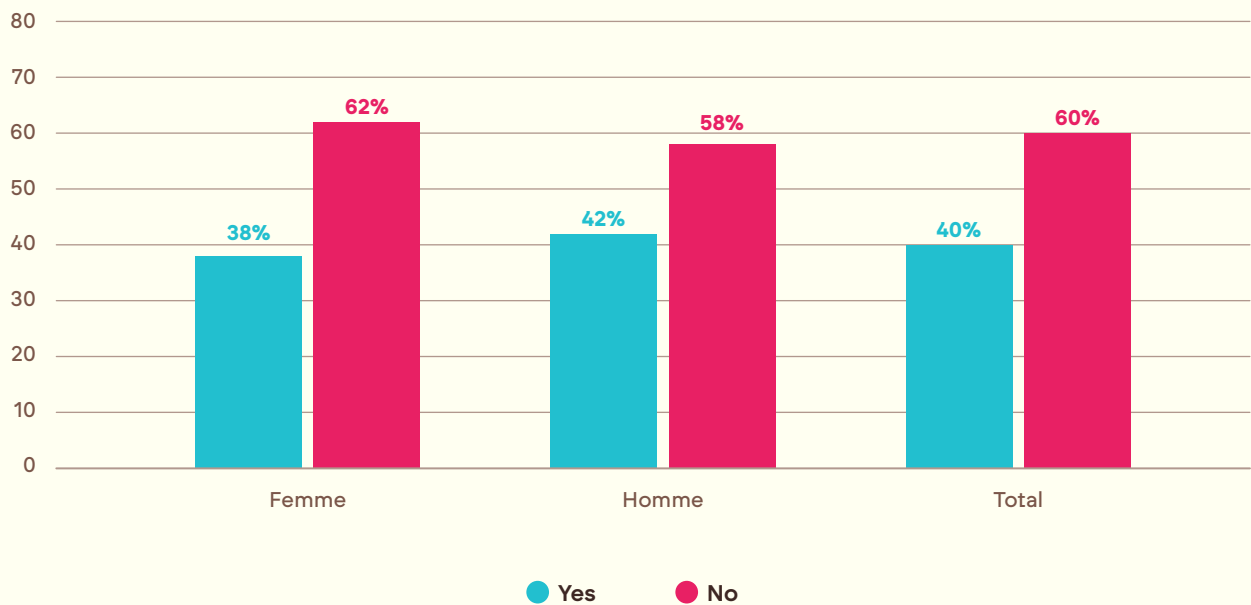
These drivers highlight the complex socio-economic and cultural dynamics that fuel the various types of conflicts in the region, according to the perspectives of the young people involved in the study.



**FIGURE 6 |** Existing conflicts according to the young people interviewed

**Source:** data from the Burkina Faso case study (May 2024)

The existence of these conflicts has varied consequences for young men and women, as highlighted by 40 percent of young respondents (Figure 7) and supported by focus group discussions. Young men are more likely to suffer from killings and recruitment, whether forced or voluntary, by terrorist groups, and they are generally more involved in direct conflict. In contrast, young women are often victims of sexual abuse, early and/or forced marriages, and are more frequently forced to drop out of school due to these conflict-related pressures.



**FIGURE 7 |** Perception of the differential impact of conflict on young women and men

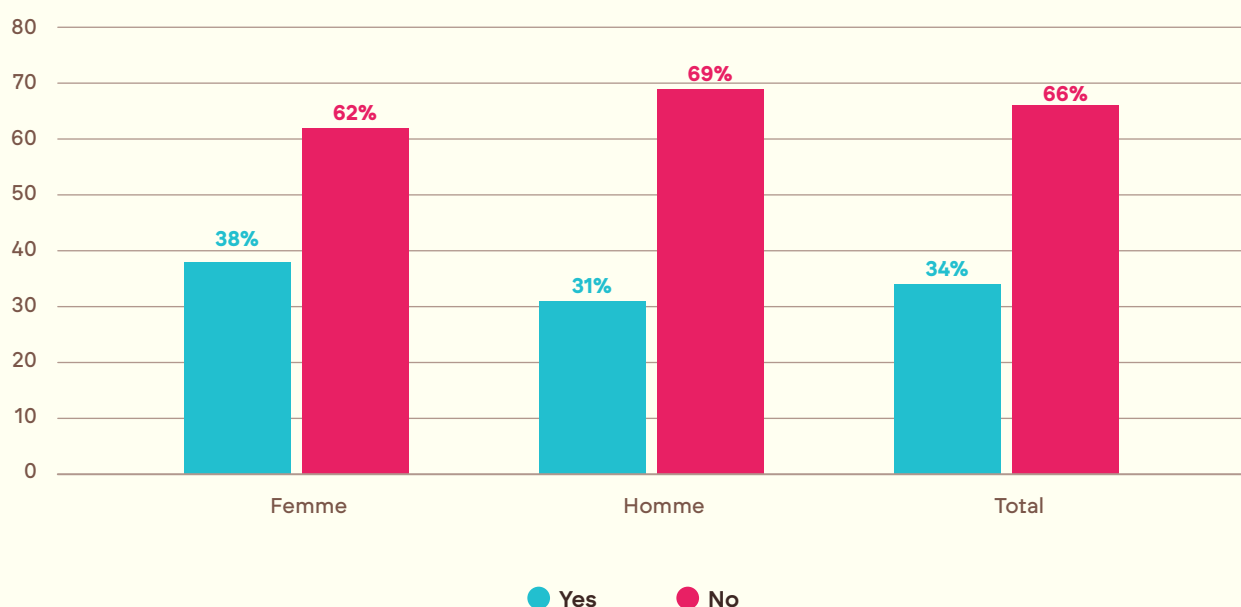
**Source:** data from the Burkina Faso case study (May 2024)

## 4.2 INFLUENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION ON CONFLICTS

Many young people and informed actors view climate change and environmental degradation as potential sources of conflict. According to Figure 8, one-third of young respondents believe that climate change and environmental degradation could threaten peace and security in the Sahel region. One interviewee noted that *“climate change generates conflicts of interest between farmers and herders, as well as conflicts over natural resources.”*

*Another young person highlighted that “climate change can lead to the loss of grazing land and farmland, resulting in unemployment and poverty among young people, which in turn can lead to crime and violence.” A young woman in a focus group added, “the lack of water resources can lead to conflicts around water points.”*

This connection between climate, environmental challenges, and conflict appears more pronounced among young women (38%) than among young men (31%). This disparity is likely because disputes over access to water, especially at watering points used mainly by women, tend to affect them more directly.



**FIGURE 8 |** Young people’s perception of the link between climate change, environmental degradation and conflict

**Source:** data from the Burkina Faso case study (May 2024)

Overall, Figure 8 indicates that only a minority (34%) of respondents view climate change and environmental degradation as direct causes of conflict. However, the data underscores the significant threat these issues pose to stability and peace in the Sahel region. A deeper analysis reveals a clear relationship between the effects of climate change, environmental degradation, and the root causes of conflict. Climate change and environmental degradation in the Sahel are driving up unemployment and poverty among young people, reducing agricultural production,

and depleting natural resources, thereby intensifying competition for the remaining resources. These outcomes are frequently cited by young people as underlying causes of conflicts such as terrorism, land disputes, and farmer-herder clashes.

Research supports this link between climate variability and conflict, showing that environmental degradation contributes to conflict by destabilizing livelihoods, altering living conditions, and exacerbating food insecurity.<sup>22 23 24</sup> In particular, Sahelian countries face a heightened risk of violent conflict due to the socio-economic vulnerabilities created by climate change, given their heavy reliance on rainfall.<sup>25</sup> The SWAC/OECD (2010) report also highlights that deteriorating socio-environmental conditions, combined with weakened State authority, are expanding the influence and recruitment capacity of armed groups in Burkina Faso. Furthermore, the FAO (2021) identifies climate change as one of the main structural, long-term drivers of conflict in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali.

### 4.3 THE COMBINED IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND CONFLICT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

The combined impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict are likely to exacerbate the socio-economic vulnerability of young people in Burkina Faso's Sahel region, affecting several key areas:

- **Increasing poverty:** Climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict are collectively driving youth poverty. Disruptions in rainfall, loss of farmland, and forced displacement due to conflict are severely affecting farming and livestock breeding, the region's main economic activities. Many young people are experiencing reduced income, and some have lost the ability to continue these activities altogether.
- **Reduced opportunities and increased unemployment:** These challenges have created significant obstacles to productive investment and economic development in the region. Many initiatives have been halted or relocated, leaving young people with fewer opportunities. Additionally, armed groups have blockaded the region, preventing young people from seeking opportunities elsewhere, thus exacerbating unemployment.
- **Shift to non-decent and/or illicit activities:** As traditional economic activities such as agriculture, livestock farming, and trade diminish, many young people are turning to alternative activities to survive, including banditry, drug trafficking, and prostitution, particularly among displaced persons.
- **Human exploitation:** The loss of traditional livelihoods has also created conditions ripe for human rights violations, particularly among young women. Desperate for resources, many women face indecent proposals, including exchanging help or goods for sex.

22 SWAC/OECD. (2010). Security implications of climate change in the Sahel: policy perspectives.

23 Anab, O. G., Andrew, E. Y., & Kheira, T. (2021). Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet: Sahel (2021). Stockholm: SIPRI. Retrieved from <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2021/partner-publications/climate-peace-and-security-fact-sheet-sahel-2021>

24 Kheira, T., Katongo, S., Anne, F., Elisabeth, L. R., Asha, A., Kyungmee, K., Florian, K. (2023, December). Climate, Peace and Security Research Paper: Insights on Climate, Peace and Security. Stockholm: SIPRI. Retrieved from <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2023/partner-publications/climate-peace-and-security-research-paper-insights-climate-peace-and-security>

25 Anab, O. G., Andrew, E. Y., & Kheira, T. (2021). Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet: Sahel (2021). Stockholm: SIPRI. Retrieved from <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2021/partner-publications/climate-peace-and-security-fact-sheet-sahel-2021>

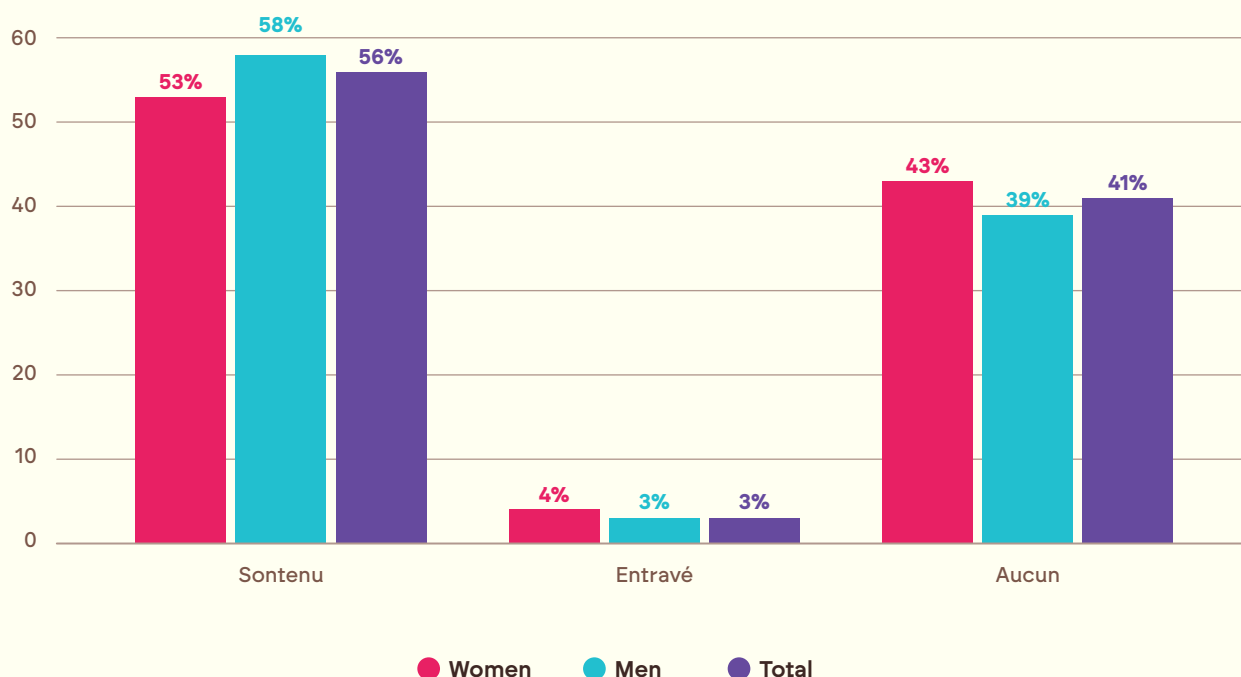


- **Impact on education:** Extreme weather events, such as violent winds and rains, as well as conflict, including terrorism, have led to the destruction and closure of educational infrastructure. Many schools in the Sahel region have been forced to shut down, leading to temporary or permanent interruptions in schooling. This disruption is also linked to the early or forced marriage of young women. Additionally, extreme temperatures make learning more difficult, further impacting education.
- **Impact on health:** The destruction or closure of health facilities due to extreme weather or conflict, combined with a loss of income from reduced economic activities, limits access to quality healthcare. Furthermore, extreme weather events like flooding, drought, and dust storms contribute to respiratory diseases and illnesses such as cholera and dengue fever, which thrive in such conditions. Young people often bear the burden of caring for vulnerable populations, including the elderly, pregnant women, and those with chronic conditions like sickle cell anaemia, diabetes, or hypertension, whose health problems worsen with extreme climatic phenomena.

## 4.4 SOLUTIONS TO THE INTERCONNECTED ISSUES OF CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND CONFLICT

In response to the challenges posed by climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict, various stakeholders are involved to different extents in the research area. These stakeholders include the State, represented through its infrastructures, the army, and local volunteer groups (Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland), as well as civil society organizations (CSOs), NGOs, youth groups, local religious and customary authorities, and respected community elders. Their activities primarily focus on security and anti-terrorism efforts, raising awareness, reclaiming degraded land, reforestation initiatives, mediation, job training and providing equipment support for young people, constructing boreholes, applying traditional conflict resolution methods, and organizing convoys for goods and people.

The impact of public policies and programs aimed at helping young people respond to these challenges is perceived differently. According to Figure 9, just over half of the young respondents believe that these policies and programs have enhanced their capacity to cope with the challenges. However, 2 percent of young people feel that the policies have hindered their ability to respond. Meanwhile, 41 percent of respondents were uncertain, likely due to a lack of awareness or familiarity with these policies and programs.



**FIGURE 9 |** Perceived impact of policies and programmes on young people's coping skills

**Source:** data from the Burkina Faso case study (May 2024)

Despite the numerous initiatives aimed at addressing climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso, including those led by young people, several obstacles persist. Young people in the region cite challenges related to poverty, unemployment, insufficient material and financial resources, a lack of awareness about the real issues, ongoing insecurity, limited involvement in decision-making processes, poor coordination of efforts, and inadequate training and skills. Additionally, young leaders who participated in a workshop in Ouagadougou identified further difficulties such as burnout among association leaders, bureaucratic hurdles, language barriers that limit access to international opportunities, and the withdrawal of donors from Burkina Faso.

Nevertheless, young people proposed a range of solutions to address these challenges. The proposed actions are aimed at different target groups—namely the government of Burkina Faso, its technical and financial partners, civil society organizations, and community leaders. The key proposals include:

- **Encouraging and supporting environmental education programs** to raise awareness about climate and environmental issues.
- **Supporting community projects and encouraging local businesses** to invest in sustainable development initiatives.
- **Developing action plans that include specific measures to address the needs of vulnerable young people.**
- **Supporting youth entrepreneurship**, especially initiatives focused on environmental sustainability.
- **Building the capacity of young people involved in civil society organizations (CSOs)** to fight climate change, protect the environment, and promote peace.
- **Recognizing and promoting youth organizations and leaders engaged in these issues.**

- Promoting volunteerism within large NGOs to provide young people with valuable experience and knowledge.
- **Creating more spaces for discussion and reflection** among young people on climate, environment, and conflict issues.
- **Improving access to finance for young people to support their initiatives.**
- **Pooling resources on the ground** to enhance the effectiveness of existing projects.
- **Focusing on monitoring and evaluation** to better capitalize on the impact of youth-led actions.
- **Facilitating youth participation in international** initiatives aimed at combating environmental degradation.
- **Strengthening youth advocacy** activities to give young people a stronger voice in these issues.

Additionally, several proposals were specifically directed at the government of Burkina Faso, including:

- **Offering vocational training programs** tailored to the specific needs of young people, especially young women.
- **Increasing reforestation efforts** and ensuring rigorous monitoring of planted trees.
- **Integrating and reinforcing environmental and climate themes in school curricula** to spark greater interest among young people.
- **Involve young people in decision-making processes** and promote dialogue between them and traditional and religious leaders.
- **Engage younger generations early** by raising awareness about environmental issues.





## 5. Conclusion



This case study focused on the town of Dori in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso, where data was collected from 178 respondents aged 18 to 35 through individual interviews and focus groups. The findings highlight several key observations. Young people reported rising temperatures and declining rainfall, with poor temporal distribution, illustrating the effects of climate change in the region. Additionally, various forms of environmental degradation were identified, with deforestation, surface water pollution, and soil erosion being the most significant. Other concerns include a drop in the water table and a decline in animal species. The region is also facing multiple conflicts, with terrorism being the most prominent, followed by conflicts between farmers and livestock breeders, as well as land and community disputes.

These climatic, environmental, and conflict-related challenges have severe socio-economic consequences for the local population, contributing to increased poverty and unemployment due to the loss of economic activities and shrinking job opportunities. This, in turn, has led to the rise of illicit activities and banditry and has negatively impacted education. As a result, many young people view climate change and environmental degradation as threats to peace in the area, fearing these issues will further exacerbate conflicts.

To effectively address these challenges and their harmful consequences, young people have put forward several recommendations, summarized as follows: (i) Raising awareness among all stakeholders, including children, to build collective consciousness about climate and environmental issues, (ii) Building the capacities of young people and enhancing educational programs to include more environmental education, (iii) Supporting youth socio-economic initiatives and involving them more in local and national decision-making processes, and (iv) Pooling efforts and resources to take more coordinated and effective action.

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