

CASE
STUDY

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Environment for peace

**CLIMATE CHANGE, YOUTH, AND THE NEED FOR HOLISTIC
RESPONSE. AFGOYE, LOWER-SHABELLE REGION:
SOUTH-WEST ADMINISTRATION.**

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AS	Al-Shabaab
ATMIS	African Union Transition Mission in Somalia
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
FMS	Federal Member States (Of Somalia)
HoA	Horn of Africa
SWSS	South West State of Somalia
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
SWALIM	Somali Water and Land Information Management
IDPs	Internally Displaced People

Executive Summary

This report examines the profound impact of climate change on youth in the Afgoye district, where environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and conflict are intricately linked. The study highlights the challenges faced by young people, who are disproportionately affected by the ongoing climate crisis and the related socio-economic instability. Afgoye's climate challenges, including drought, floods, and resource depletion, are severely impacting livelihoods. Agriculture and livestock, key economic drivers, are in decline due to erratic weather patterns and reduced water availability. The scarcity of resources, such as land and water, intensifies competition, exacerbating conflict and insecurity. Youth are particularly vulnerable, as they face diminishing economic opportunities, high unemployment, and exploitation in informal sectors. Marginalized youth, including women and internally displaced persons (IDPs), are especially affected, with many forced to turn to radical groups like Al-Shabaab, as these offer alternatives for income and security.

Youth responses to these challenges include participation in informal support networks and community-driven resource-sharing initiatives. However, their efforts are hampered by weak formal institutions, limited access to education, and lack of political inclusion. Despite a high awareness of climate change, youth lack the resources and training needed to engage in sustainable climate adaptation and leadership roles. Additionally, existing early warning systems, such as SWALIM¹, remain underutilized and ineffective in fully addressing local needs. The report underscores the urgent need for holistic approaches that integrate climate resilience, conflict resolution, and youth empowerment. Recommendations include fostering inclusive decision-making, expanding youth training in sustainable agriculture, and increasing investment in climate adaptation projects. By equipping young people with the tools to actively participate in climate solutions and peacebuilding, Somalia can mitigate the risks of radicalization and promote long-term stability in the Afgoye region.

1 Somali Water and Land Information Management (SWALIM) is an information management program, technically managed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Somalia funded by a coalition of nations and aims to provide high quality water and land information, crucial to relief, rehabilitation and development initiatives in Somalia, to support sustainable water and land resources development and management. See <https://www.faoswalim.org/node-30-page>

1. Introduction



Somalia, a country that has been plagued by conflicts and humanitarian crisis for decades, is among the countries with some of the longest lasting conflicts. Somalia has been affected by political turmoil and unique challenges related to clan conflicts, poor infrastructure, insecurity and weak rule of law, fractured politics, as well as proliferation of arms among other challenges that have hindered development as well as served as obstacles to lasting peace. These challenges are further complicated by environmental degradation and climate change, dysfunctional and weak governance structures, violent extremism, and protracted economic vulnerability across the country. The ongoing conflict has had a massive impact on the country's ability to cope with the effects of the climate emergency, which are already being felt. The 2011 drought had a severe impact on the Horn of Africa (HoA), but Somalia faced a devastating famine due to a combination of factors, including pre-existing vulnerabilities and ongoing conflict.²

As sea levels rise and floods, drought, and other natural disasters increase in Somalia, food insecurity also rises, which in turn threatens security—both directly and indirectly. Somalia's dependence on natural resources, particularly for pastoralism and agriculture, renders it exceptionally vulnerable to environmental changes, with vulnerabilities further exacerbated by the population's low adaptive capacity. A low adaptive capacity that is driven by factors such as

2 https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/03_nd_review_chapter3.pdf

but not limited to: poverty, which has reduced the ability to invest in resilient infrastructure; poor governance, which can explain why fragmented institutions struggle to implement appropriate and effective environmental policies; lack of climate education, leaving communities less aware of the risks posed by environmental changes, subsequently being less equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to adapt effectively.

The country has already witnessed a stark escalation in disruption of lives and livelihoods following climatic events such as rise in sea level leading to acidification and salinification of freshwater wells, and decline in ocean health and fisheries.³ With a population of roughly 15 million people, 80 percent of whom are nomadic pastoralist, Somalia is ill prepared to withstand these shocks, adapt and mitigate; highlighting the importance of understanding the impact of climate change on livelihoods.⁴ The rapid-onset disasters and long-term environmental degradation, such as soil degradation, deforestation, and desertification, have also led to economic hardship among groups that directly depend on renewable resources such as but not limited to; water, crops, forests, grazing land, accentuating gender inequalities and increasing competition over natural resources.⁵

In the face of resource scarcity, communities often lose their ability to generate the income needed to sustain their livelihoods, which in turn weakens social cohesion and local cooperation. In practice, limited resources lead to intense competition for access, eroding trust and collaboration among community members. This competition can escalate into conflict and violence over resource access. Al Shabaab takes advantage of the region's economic challenges and the youth's search for identity and purpose, offering the lure of financial security, a sense of belonging, and a distorted form of power through armed action—a dangerous but tempting path for many young people.

The lack of access to resources often forces people to migrate in search of better opportunities, weakening community bonds and disrupting established social networks. The resulting economic hardship also puts additional strain on social safety nets that are vital for communal solidarity and mutual assistance. Internally displaced women and girls are especially vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence, both by armed men and civilians. The UN Special Representative has emphasized that the number of cases is “countless”⁶ as victims are often invisible and inaccessible, with nowhere to report these crimes, and no one to turn to. The breakdown of the social fabric has also led to an increase in gender inequality and gender-based violence, as women become more isolated from their communities and more vulnerable to attacks while searching for resources.

The prospects for women and youth are dimmed by the environmental degradation, economic hardship, and the potential for renewed conflict always looming.

Youth in Afgoye respond to climate change by relying on strong social networks, mutual support, and community leaders for conflict resolution and resource sharing, compensating for the absence of formal institutions. They engage with influential figures and NGOs to access markets,

3 Karolina Eklow & Florian Krampe, *supra* note 6, at 10 (“Somalia is highly susceptible to the effects of climate change and extreme weather conditions, such as periods of extended drought, flash floods, erratic rainfall, disruption to the monsoon seasons, strong winds, cyclones, sandstorms and dust storms. Many extreme weather events have occurred in Somalia in the past 25 years.”).

4 “Somalia’s Economy at a Glance,” CENTRAL BANK OF SOMALIA, (Jan 2009), <https://web.archive.org/web/20090124192809/http://somalbanca.org/economy-and-finance.html>.

5 *Id.* See also Cf. Katherine J. Mach et. al., Climate as a risk factor for armed conflict, NATURE VOL. 571 193, 194, JULY 2019, [HTTPS://WWW.NATURE.COM/ARTICLES/S41586-019-1300-6](https://www.nature.com/articles/S41586-019-1300-6) (“Across the experts, best estimates are that 3–20 percent of conflict risk over the past century has been influenced by climate variability or change.”).

6 United Nations Security Council. (2023). Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia. S/2023/600

distribute resources, and voice concerns about environmental challenges. Despite the limited presence of formal structures, these youth are well-informed about climate impacts such as water scarcity and infrastructure degradation, expressing frustration over the lack of government action. Mapping these responses is essential, as it highlights youth resilience and adaptation strategies, demonstrating the critical role of informal networks where formal systems are weak. Understanding these dynamics enables more effective interventions that build on existing community strengths, ensuring climate action aligns with local needs and promotes inclusive development.

This study addresses critical gaps in understanding how the intersection of climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict in Afgoye, Somalia, creates vulnerabilities for youth that undermine peace and security. It also examines the strategies youth have adopted to mitigate these challenges. While existing research highlights the link between climate change and conflict, the specific impacts on young people and the responses they and others deploy remain less understood. To bridge this gap, the research focuses on four main themes:

1. Youth perceptions of climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict

- How do climate change, resource scarcity, and socio-economic challenges in Afgoye contribute to youth unemployment, vulnerability, and the risk of radicalization?
- How do weak formal institutions and strong social networks in Afgoye influence youth resilience, resource conflicts, and community stability amidst challenges like climate change and marginalization?

2. Influence of climate change and environmental degradation on conflicts

- How do conflicts related to land in Afgoye contribute to recurring violence and resource competition, and what factors exacerbate these tensions?

3. Combined impact of climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict on youth

- How do these combined challenges affect the lives and opportunities of young people in Afgoye, particularly regarding land access, livelihood disruptions, and displacement?

4. Responses to these interconnected dynamics of climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict, & the role of youth in these responses

- How does the disparity between climate change awareness and concrete action in Afgoye contribute to community frustration, and what measures are needed to bridge this gap and build trust between the government and the community?

This paper will begin by providing context on the situation in Somalia. It will then explore the study's methodological framework, explaining the rationale behind the case study approach and the methods used. Following this, the paper will present the findings, organized into four sections. The first section examines how youth perceive climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict. The second assesses the influence of climate change and environmental degradation on conflict. The third explores the combined impact of climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict on youth. The fourth section discusses responses to these interconnected dynamics and the role of youth in addressing them. Finally, the paper will conclude with a summary of the findings and offer recommendations for moving forward.

1.1 GENERAL CONTEXT OF SOMALIA

Somalia operates as a federal government consisting of six Federal Member States: Puntland, Galmudug, Hirshabelle, South West State of Somalia (SWSS), Jubaland, and the Banadir region, where Mogadishu, the capital, is located. Appointments to the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) are made according to the “4.5 system” (four-point-five), which dictates that representation must be equal amongst the four major clans (the *Darood*, the *Dir*, the *Hawiye*, and the *Digil-Mirifle*), with all minor clans and non-clan affiliated people collectively having representation equivalent to half of one of these groups. The clan system is patrilineal and hierarchically structured, with the major clan families breaking down into clans, sub-clans, and sub-sub-clans. The clans are led by elders, who play governance, judicial and conflict resolution roles.

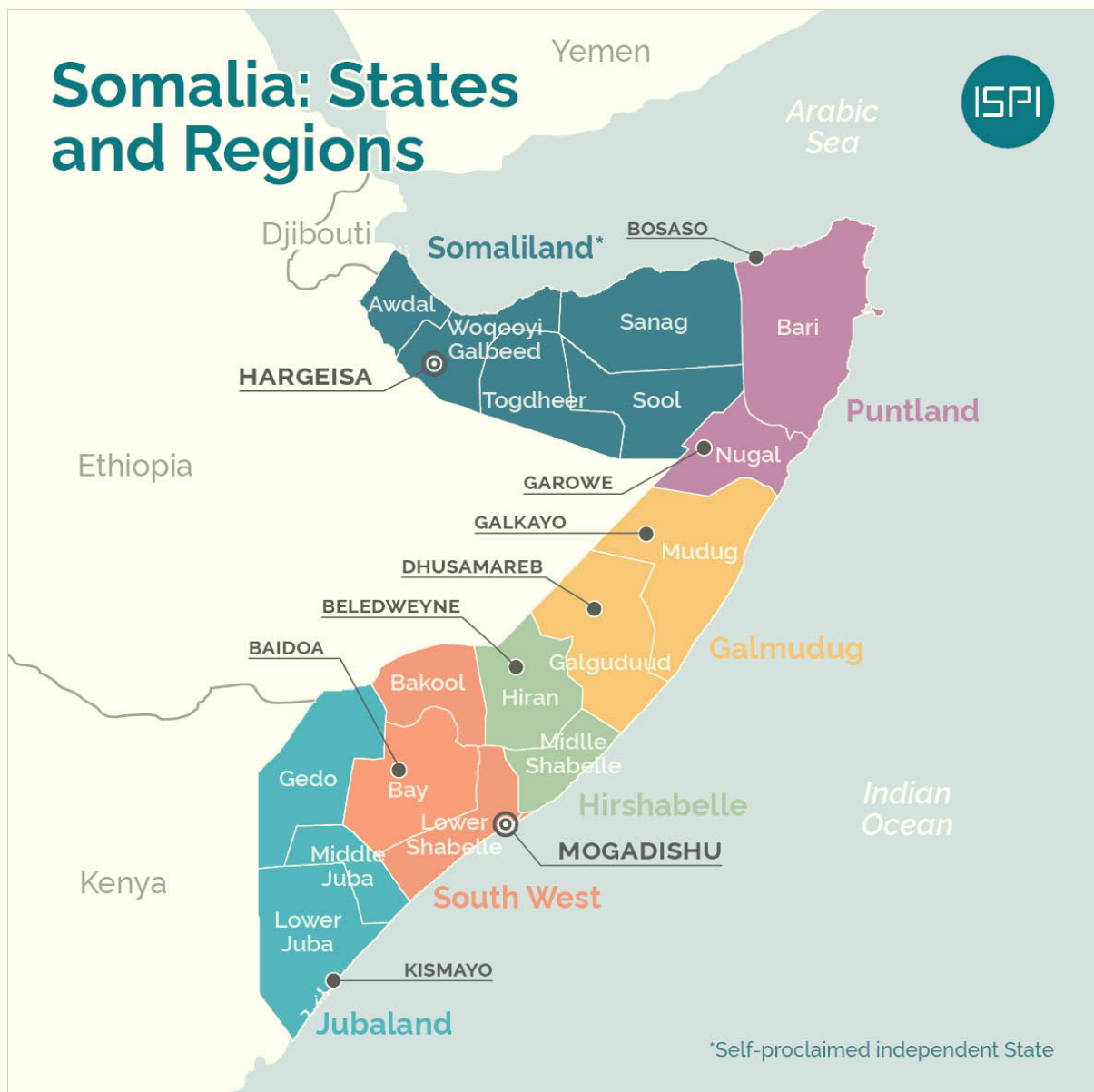


FIGURE 1 | Map of Somalia, showing all the Federal Member States⁷

Somalia, located in the HoA, shares borders with Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya, and boasts a long coastline along the Indian Ocean. The country's geographical diversity includes arid and semi-arid climates, with two main rainy seasons, *Gu* and *Deyr*, and two dry seasons, *Jilaal* and *Xagaa*. Rainfall is sparse and uneven, ranging from 50 to 200 mm in the north to 500 to 600 mm in the south⁸. Recurrent droughts and occasional floods have become more severe due to climate change, particularly affecting northern regions where temperatures can soar above 40°C.

Somalia has a predominantly young population, with over 75 percent being under the age of 30⁹, with 42 percent of these being children under the age of 14¹⁰, who are largely rural and dependent on agriculture and livestock for their livelihoods. Consequently, most Somalis were either children when Al Shabaab (AS) was formed in 2006 or have grown up in a Somalia that has been at least partially controlled by the group.

However, the country's environmental fragility, worsened by climate change, poses a significant threat to food security, particularly for pastoralist communities. While urbanization is slowly increasing, rural areas still dominate, where traditional livelihoods are becoming harder to sustain due to land degradation and water scarcity. In this challenging environment, Somalia's fragile economy—largely reliant on livestock and remittances—is especially vulnerable to environmental shocks. These issues are further compounded by the country's long-standing political instability. Decades of conflict driven by clan rivalries and insurgency from groups like Al Shabaab have contributed to approximately 3.8 million people¹¹ are internally displaced people (IDPs) in Somalia. The combination of environmental degradation and insecurity worsens the socio-economic challenges for Somali youth, who face limited opportunities and are increasingly vulnerable to radicalization. Efforts to stabilize the country and build strong governance structures continue, but progress remains slow, hampered by internal divisions and external pressures.



- 8 Somalia Humanitarian Overview, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2023, available at <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/somalia/somalia-2023-annual-humanitarian-access-overview>
- 9 USAID (2020) Somalia Youth Assessment, available at <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1860/USAID-Somalia-Youth-Assessment.pdf>
- 10 Humanium (2020) 'Somalia at a Glance', available at <https://www.humanium.org/en/somalia/>
- 11 According to the Humanitarian Needs 2023 report available on [https://crisisresponse.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1481/files/appeal/documents/20230208_Somalia percent20_HNO_2023.pdf](https://crisisresponse.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1481/files/appeal/documents/20230208_Somalia_percent20_HNO_2023.pdf)

2. Methodology:



2.1 CASE STUDY SELECTION

While Mogadishu is part of the Banadir region, Afgoye falls under the jurisdiction of South West State of Somalia (SWSS), despite being only 15 kilometres west of the capital. This proximity places Afgoye in a “twilight zone” of governance, as the SWSS administration, seated in Baidoa, is located 195 kilometres away. Although Afgoye is nominally under government control, Al Shabaab exerts considerable shadow authority in the region. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Afgoye primarily come from areas outside Lower Shabelle, with a smaller number arriving from the Bay and Bakool regions, located approximately 185 and 217 kilometres away, respectively. Ongoing displacement since 2017 has led to a growing population, yet the availability of resources has not kept pace, intensifying competition for scarce supplies.

Afgoye was selected for this case study due to its unique intersection of climate change, environmental degradation, and persistent land conflicts, all which shape youth perceptions and experiences within a context of historical inequalities and resource scarcity. Its proximity to Mogadishu and its governance by SWSS, while being a contested area with Al Shabaab influence, further complicate these dynamics, making it an ideal location for analysis. Additionally, the region faces limited economic and educational opportunities, gender inequality, and the enduring effects of conflict. These challenges, combined with Al Shabaab’s strong presence, create a complex

environment where youth are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups. Since 2011, data from the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM)¹² indicates that at least 13,000 children have been recruited by Al Shabaab, though the actual number of youths under 30 involved is likely much higher.

Despite the presence of an African Union (ATMIS) base nearby and ongoing civil-military cooperation efforts, trust between the local community and security actors remains low. Afgoye's designation as a "liberated" district has paradoxically reduced its priority for military and stabilization efforts, allowing Al Shabaab to operate relatively unchecked and rebuild its influence in the area.

2.2 METHODS

The methods used in this study were tailored to address the unique context of Afgoye in the Lower Shabelle region of SWSS. The data collection process was participatory, with a deliberate focus on marginalized groups, including women, youth, and internally displaced persons, ensuring that their perspectives and experiences were central to the research.

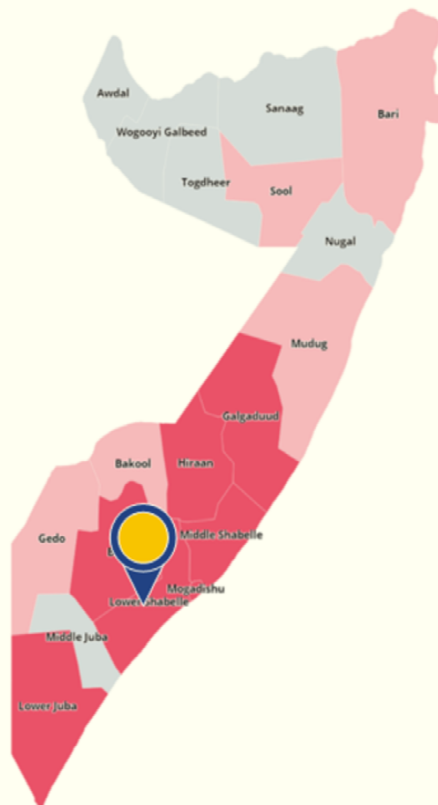


FIGURE 2 | Map of Somalia, showing where Afgoye (pinned) is in relation to other regions and cities¹³

¹² Somalia is one of 21 countries in which grave violations against children are monitored by community-based organizations who report through the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM), a UN mechanism that collects and analyses data relating to violations against children. MRM data is shared with the UN Secretary General's children affected by armed conflict (CAAC) office, and an overview of findings is presented in the UN Secretary General's annual report on Children Affected by Armed Conflict.

¹³ Map of Afgoye in relation to Lower-Shabelle Region in SWSS, available on <https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-somalia-2023/lower-shabelle>

2.2.1 PRELIMINARY SURVEYS AND OBSERVATIONS

The study was conducted by EPC over two phases of data collection, designed to capture both secondary and primary data. Phase one focused on a secondary review of literature related to the impact of climate change on youth, conflict, and peace, as well as mitigation mechanisms in Somalia. Regional and global sources were also consulted. This review provided valuable data and insights, which were later triangulated with primary findings from field interviews. It is important to note that Somalia's lack of functional state systems results in an absence of formal tracking for research conducted in the country, and there is no public repository of research outputs.

Field observations played a crucial role in phase two, serving as preliminary data collection and offering rich contextual information for subsequent research activities. This approach allowed a mixed-methods research team—comprising EPC staff from Mogadishu and youth data collectors from Afgoye—to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to climate action resilience and social cohesion in Afgoye. This understanding was essential not only for contextualizing the climate and conflict situation but also for providing upskilling opportunities to the 20 youth engaged as enumerators, many of whom were participating in such research for the first time.

The second phase of data collection, focusing on primary data, took place in May 2024. A total of 170 respondents participated, including 108 males (63.53 percent) and 62 females (36.47 percent). The team employed a semi-structured, mixed-methods survey to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. Respondents represented a range of stakeholders, including community leaders, peace committees, women, youth, religious leaders, local politicians, and IDPs. However, 71 percent of respondents were under the age of 35, a higher proportion of youth than intended, as the goal was to interview a balanced group of both youth and older stakeholders. This skewed participation highlights a broader issue of intergenerational marginalization, as young people in Somali communities often face dismissal by older individuals. Older respondents may have been reluctant to participate due to stereotypes about youth or concerns over the enumerators' ability to conduct the research effectively. This type of discrimination is often more pronounced for young women, who face additional barriers to participation due to gender-based stereotypes and expectations.



TABLE 1 | List of targeted locations in Afgoye

REGION/FMS	LOCATION	LOCATION TYPE	LOCATION NAME	
Lower-Shabelle Region South-West Administration	Afgoye	Urban-Peri-Urban	→ Dhagahtur	→ Anbagaaa
		Districts across Afgoye	→ Balgure	→ Ifiyo-aqir
		Corridor	→ Siigale	→ Damaley
		→ Stable security	→ Hawatako	→ BuulaAin
			→ Nakrum	→ Buula-shinshe
			→ Fayuuma	→ Arta
			→ Daahisoy	→ Dooday
			→ AyAro	→ Godey
			→ Ragayle	→ Doolaawe
			→ Waanjee	
Lower-Shabelle Region South-West Administration	Afgoye	Rural- Remote- Villages (and smaller Hamlets)	→ Balbaley	→ Buula-dahir
		→ Weak Security	→ Shukurow	→ Arbis
			→ Deefow	→ Kuraale
			→ Mareerey	→ Buula-hartoy
			→ Moordiile	→ Rimo-gacan

The use of qualitative methods was therefore crucial and the key informant interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were particularly helpful in capturing the opinions, views, attitudes and insights more exhaustively from youth as well as from older stakeholders not engaged in the survey. To ensure a more holistic perspective and to capture a wider range of experiences, the research included not only youth but also older community members in the focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). This approach was designed to avoid relying solely on the perspectives of young people, who may have limited exposure to the broader societal context. By including older individuals in the discussions, we were able to gain valuable insights into the historical context of the issues being studied. These individuals were able to provide valuable perspectives on how these challenges have evolved over time, often predating the experiences of the younger generation. This approach also helped to validate the experiences and perspectives of the youth participants.

Despite efforts to balance the gender of the data collection team, difficulties in recruiting young women and strict safeguarding rules led to only 29 percent female representation compared to 71 percent male. Achieving gender balance proved challenging primarily due to entrenched cultural norms that restrict women's public participation, safety concerns in the surroundings of the fieldwork areas that disproportionately affect female staff, and stringent safeguarding protocols that limited the recruitment and inclusion of young women. However, to address the gender imbalance, young female research assistants were strategically assigned to co-facilitate and support specific FGDs. All enumerators were local to the Afgoye corridors¹⁴, which facilitated data collection within rural and fringe locations.

14 The Afgoye Corridor, a strategic region connecting Afgoye to Mogadishu, serves as a vital supply route, a hub for internally displaced persons due to ongoing conflict, and a flashpoint for violence involving militant groups like al-Shabaab, while also presenting opportunities for infrastructure improvement and economic development in Somalia.

Enumerators faced challenges in securing participation due to respondents’ suspicion and fear of being recorded, particularly when discussing the intersection of climate and security. This issue potentially impacted data accuracy. To address this, the research team stressed the importance of confidentiality. Historically, AS had banned smartphones in their controlled areas. Although their official control has diminished in the research locations, their influence and presence persist. Contrary to expectations that youth and marginalized groups would be the most reticent, district officials were notably the least forthcoming about security-related topics. This existing fear of technology led to the decision to conduct surveys manually on paper. In some cases, where security conditions allowed, surveys were read aloud, and only voice recordings were captured on devices. This approach provided respondents with reassurance by ensuring that no photos, videos, or identifiable data were collected.

2.2.2 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FDGS)

The FGDs organized in the second phase of the data collection resulted in 21 separate discussions with a total of 168 participants (33.8 percent women and 66.2 percent men). To ensure a range of perspectives were captured and considering potential gender biases within the participant pool, the FGDs were designed with a mix of gender-specific and mixed-gender groups.

TABLE 2 | Participants in the Focus Group Discussions

FGD GROUPS	PARTICIPANTS	NO. FGDS	FEMALE	MALE
Mixed Gender	Men & Women between 18-70 years	18 FGDs held with mix representation	54	114
Gender Segregated	Women Only between 17-32 years	1 FGD with women only group	10	0

2.2.3 KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS (KIIS)

In Afgoye, KIIs provide deep, context-specific knowledge that highlights the intersection of environmental issues with daily life and conflict. This approach ensures the study reflects the complexity of local experiences and informs effective solutions.

A total of 15 individual interviews (**26.67 percent women** | **73.33 percent men**) and 2 group consultations were conducted with 7 key informants (71 percent women). The participants were selected based on their expertise, relevance to the research topic, and representation of diverse perspectives. Interviews were carried out with all ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, carefully observed.

The research employed a collaborative approach for data analysis, where the lead researcher, enumerators, and EPC experts worked together to interpret data. They organized the data, discussed patterns, and examined various perspectives to gain insights. Subsequently, the data was systematically coded and organized into the five themes presented in the findings section.

3. Findings



3.1 YOUTH PERCEPTIONS ON CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION & CONFLICT

Understanding youth perceptions of climate change in Afgoye, Somalia, is crucial as they shape how emerging generations experience and respond to environmental challenges and conflicts. These perceptions offer valuable insights into the impacts of resource scarcity, shifting livelihoods, and social tensions, helping to inform the development of effective, youth-centered interventions and policies.

The data reveals significant perceptions among youth and other respondents about the connection between climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict. A notable 41 percent of respondents believe that climate change has contributed to, or significantly contributed to, the proliferation of arms. Additionally, 56 percent agree or strongly agree that resource scarcity, driven by climate change, has increased the likelihood of acquiring weapons. Nearly half of the respondents (47 percent) see conflicts over water and land—exacerbated by climate change—as a major factor in the rise of arms proliferation. This increased availability of weapons has negatively affected individuals' sense of security, with 51 percent reporting that they feel less secure as a result. This insecurity has broader implications, such as hindering economic activities, restricting movement, and weakening social cohesion.

The survey also highlights that marginalized youth are particularly vulnerable to the combined effects of climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict. In agro-pastoral zones, droughts and other climate shocks affect entire households, as youth play a crucial role in providing for their families, often acting as the heads of households. Specifically, 65 percent of respondents report a moderate to extreme impact of climate change on their ability to earn a living, with droughts, floods, and reduced market access being major challenges. Environmental degradation, such as deforestation and pollution, affects 65 percent of respondents to a similar degree. Conflict further compounds these difficulties, with 65 percent also reporting moderate to extreme impacts on their livelihoods due to displacement, market disruptions, and loss of resource access.

A significant 68 percent of respondents believe that these challenges disproportionately affect certain groups of youth, influenced by factors such as gender, location, and access to resources. This intensifies the pre-existing pressure on young people to seek alternative income sources, making them more vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups. Al Shabaab's proximity to Afgoye exerts a powerful influence on youth, offering an attractive, though dangerous, option for those facing these compounded challenges.

"When I joined them (AS) it felt like the only choice. It was fear but also it wasn't much of a choice because I saw this happen to others before that made it easier to agree. They promised safety for my family's small herd of goats, and they would not make them pay the taxes and that would allow my family to survive and eat. It also allowed me to have more freedom, being a part of them meant you could go anywhere that was otherwise restricted. I never thought what they were doing was right if I didn't join it would impact my family and I'm the only boy, my father is too old." – Mahad (altered name)
– Young man, and past member of Elman Peace Centre Community Based Reintegration program (EPC CBR)¹⁵.

The group controls farmland, often acquired through force, and charges youth for access. They may also divert river water away from non-compliant families, further crippling livelihoods. This control over resources creates a direct line of employment for youth, particularly when faced with climate disasters when other options are scarce. AS's constant outreach and engagement stand in stark contrast to the limited options offered by other sectors, making them a seemingly attractive source of income and support for young people struggling to provide for their families.

In focus groups with community stakeholders and thought leaders, discussions centered on equipping young people with relevant skills for both formal and informal employment opportunities. They suggested potential employment markets for youth in Afgoye, such as driving and delivery services, cooking and hospitality (including fast food and juice kiosks). It was recommended that the government prioritize these sectors to address the issue and monitor progress. The Afgoye District Officials interviewed suggest that the industrial development in Afgoye is currently constrained by skills shortages and in the same location, youth are facing high unemployment.

15 The Elman Peace Community Based Reintegration program (EPC CBR) is an initiative in Somalia aimed at facilitating the reintegration of former combatants into society by providing vocational training, education, and psychosocial support, thereby promoting peace and stability while empowering communities to address the root causes of conflict and violence.

“IDPs are usually recruited into the construction sector without signing any contract and given less salary than others from the community. There is no way to regulate this and even though it is not fair it is at least a job that others do not have. The IDPs are not given good opportunities in the construction sector. It is a common understanding that people usually employ their kinship so when they hire from the IDPs, at least it is progress.” –Saciid Ali, Afgoye District Official.

This statement highlights the exploitation and discrimination faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Afgoye’s construction sector. While hiring IDPs is seen as progress, it perpetuates marginalization and stifles economic growth, underscoring the need for fair employment practices and better regulation to foster inclusive development.

Fostering inclusive decision-making processes is critical to addressing unemployment, reducing vulnerability, and increasing youth agency. Including youth in discussions on resource management and climate change adaptation could help address their frustrations and foster a sense of ownership, contributing to peacebuilding efforts in the region.

The study found that while there was little awareness of existing structures for youth participation, there was a clear motivation and interest in getting involved. Survey data revealed that youth are significantly influenced by climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict in their willingness to engage with these issues. Notably, 54 percent of respondents reported that climate change has a moderate to extreme impact on their desire to engage in environmental issues. Similarly, 64 percent said that environmental degradation had a moderate to extreme impact on their motivation to take on leadership roles in promoting environmental sustainability. Conflict also played a role, with 56 percent noting a moderate to extreme impact on their willingness to participate in peacebuilding initiatives.

The lack of awareness about existing youth-led initiatives highlights the need for greater visibility and support. Major barriers to youth engagement include limited resources, insufficient training opportunities, a lack of support from authorities, stigma, and fear of violence. Despite these challenges, 58 percent of respondents believe that increasing youth involvement could significantly enhance the effectiveness of solutions, such as sustainable agriculture, renewable energy investments, improved water management, and community-based adaptation and peacebuilding efforts.

The interconnected challenges identified from focus group discussions, individual interviews, and surveys reveal a complex environment where marginalized youth may be vulnerable to radicalization and violence. The diverse methods used in this study provided a comprehensive view, with focus groups offering nuanced community perspectives, interviews with key informants delivering expert insights, and surveys capturing broader public opinions. These contributions revealed several key factors influencing radicalization and violence:

- A lack of trust in leadership and perceived marginalization by the state and district authorities creates a breeding ground for frustration and disenfranchisement.
- The uneven distribution of resources by the government fuels feelings of injustice and hinders community development.
- Disjointed government efforts and a lack of collaboration with civil society organizations hinder effective problem-solving.

- Superficial awareness campaigns about climate change lack concrete action plans and leave communities unprepared for its impact.
- The lack of economic opportunities, particularly for young people and women, restricts self-reliance and fuels desperation.
- Local peacebuilding and counter-violent extremism (P/CVE) initiatives lack inclusivity and proper skills, hindering their effectiveness.
- Resistance from some male youth toward women and girls' fight for equality necessitates more strategic engagement to bridge the gap.

This case study underscores how climate change exacerbates existing vulnerabilities, intensifies resource scarcity, limits livelihood opportunities, and fuels youth radicalization. The youth in Afgoye face numerous challenges, including high unemployment, gender disparities, economic instability, and limited access to education and training, all of which contribute to their vulnerability and potential recruitment by armed groups like AS. Most employed male youth engage in daily or part-time work in the service industry rather than agriculture, while employed women primarily work as vendors or in domestic roles.

These findings point to a critical need for interventions that address the skills gap and create formal employment opportunities. However, even finding work presents significant hurdles for youth, who often lack basic knowledge, sector-specific skills, and financial literacy. Additional pressure comes from cultural expectations, which dictate that young men should be the primary providers. Failing to secure well-paying jobs can lead to social stigma, exacerbating feelings of inadequacy and increasing vulnerability to radicalization. The situation is further compounded by reports of exploitation, including non-payment for work and limited access to credit, which trap youth in cycles of poverty and vulnerability.

The research also highlights the barriers youth face in accessing resources to start their own businesses. While there is potential in Afgoye's agriculture and small business sectors, youth lack the resources needed to enter trades such as metalworking, electronics repair, or tailoring. This underscores the need for investment in training programs and access to capital tailored to local needs and market demands. Addressing these challenges can provide youth with meaningful employment opportunities, reducing their vulnerability and contributing to long-term peace and stability in the region.

3.2 INFLUENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION ON CONFLICTS

Land conflicts are a significant driver of recurring violence in Somalia, and in Afgoye, they present a particularly complex scenario. In rural areas, competition for essential resources like water and arable land frequently leads to disputes, while urban areas face conflicts driven by rapid urbanization, weak legal frameworks, limited economic opportunities, and ambiguous land ownership. Data collected in Afgoye indicates that youth are particularly affected by, and acutely aware of, the role climate change and environmental degradation play in exacerbating local conflicts. Specifically, 40 percent of respondents believe climate change has intensified resource conflicts, with 18 percent strongly agreeing. Competition over resources like pasture (41 percent), land (23 percent), and water (21 percent) reflects growing tensions, with 53 percent of the community reporting that they regularly experience conflict.

Focus group discussions link erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and extreme weather events to heightened competition for resources. Youth and other community members are aware of these direct impacts, as reflected in the survey data. Extreme weather events, including droughts and floods, were reported by 40 percent and 37 percent of respondents, respectively, with 45 percent noting these events occur frequently. Displacement and migration affect 37 percent of the population, further demonstrating the severe impact on daily life. Additionally, 38 percent of respondents identified a link between extreme weather and conflict, reflecting growing awareness of how environmental pressures fuel resource-based tensions. The recurring crises of livestock loss, crop failures, and water scarcity undermine livelihoods and food security, exacerbating social tensions and conflict.

Focus group discussions and key informant interviews also emphasized the psychological and social toll of these challenges, indicating that youth are deeply affected by, and aware of, the connection between climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict. As one participant noted:

“Clan conflicts, often fuelled by historical grievances and power struggles over land, can erupt quickly from seemingly minor incidents. These conflicts spread rapidly, escalating into tribal wars. This cycle perpetuates, with each conflict rekindling the flames of tribal hatred and creating new grievances for future generations to inherit.” - Ahmed Araale Mayow (FGD Participant- Male 40 years old)

This dynamic plays out in many contemporary land conflicts in Afgoye, where historical dispossession or unequal access to resources become flashpoints for violence. For example, a recent flashpoint has been the land claim by the daughter of the former Somali president, Siad Barre. This claim, based on 1980s documentation, encompasses half of Afgoye and threatens to displace 5,000 households. This situation echoes a similar case years ago where the son of the former president displaced hundreds through land reclamation. While reclamations like these can be questionable, it leads back to the poor governance which has enabled it and though incidents like these are less frequent, they have significant impact. The protests, burning tires, and press coverage that follows, highlight the stark inequality. The situation reignites historical tribal tensions, as the former president’s family belongs to *Marehan*, a majority tribe, while Afgoye’s residents are of a historically marginalized minority tribe, the *Digil* and *Mirifle*.

Population growth further exacerbates these tensions, particularly as pastoralists and internally displaced persons (IDPs) compete for Afgoye’s farmland. The limited government presence in rural areas allows Al Shabaab to fill the governance vacuum, managing land while engaging in land grabs and imposing excessive taxation. Agricultural encroachment restricts herder movements, and corruption among business people and politicians further complicates the situation. Additionally, urbanization and population shifts have reshuffled resources, leading to land grabs by clans and subclans, displacing existing communities. When coupled with the pressures of climate change, this creates a dynamic of constant movement and instability throughout the region.

This complex interplay of environmental degradation, historical grievances, and weak governance continues to fuel land conflicts in Afgoye. These issues, compounded by rapid urbanization, climate change, and resource scarcity, create a volatile environment where both youth and other vulnerable populations face growing insecurity and instability. Addressing these conflicts requires not only better governance and equitable resource distribution but also an understanding of the deeply rooted historical and social dynamics at play.

3.3 COMBINED IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION, AND CONFLICT ON YOUTH

In Afgoye, the existing partnership between men and women in pastoral and agro-pastoral communities is often overlooked in development efforts. This oversight occurs because conventional gender equality initiatives typically fail to recognize and incorporate the collaborative roles that women play in livestock and crop production. As a result, development projects may not effectively address or leverage this synergy, leading to misaligned approaches that fail to harness the full potential of these gender dynamics. This neglect can result in missed opportunities for enhancing productivity and addressing gender disparities, ultimately undermining the effectiveness of climate action and resource management strategies in Afgoye.

Women, including young women, play a central part in raising livestock, particularly sheep and goats¹⁶. At the same time, they also manage a substantial share of milk production, processing, and even sales. However, their exclusion from climate action committees and land-related conflict resolution dialogues that are organized at both federal and state level by the government with support from the international community and often convened by NGOs; the lack decentralization from Mogadishu or other major cities unlike Afgoye, signifies a substantial oversight.

The research highlights the compounding challenges faced by women and girls in Afgoye, revealing their disproportionate vulnerability to the effects of climate change, resource scarcity, and conflict. Both male and female respondents acknowledged that women have limited access to critical resources like credit and improved technologies, largely due to lower education levels. This lack of access hinders their ability to adapt to climate change and engage in income-generating activities. Women face additional burdens from environmental degradation, which increases the difficulty of accessing water and firewood while exposing them to heightened security risks. Female respondents emphasized the increased risk of sexual violence, including rape and assault, as they are forced to travel farther from home due to resource scarcity. Male respondents corroborated this, recognizing the vulnerability of women and girls in such circumstances.

Gender-based violence (GBV), including domestic abuse, was frequently mentioned as a prevalent issue, driven by socio-economic pressures and cultural norms. While the study did not focus on individual experiences of survivors, it was clear from the feedback provided by female respondents that GBV is a pervasive challenge. Internally displaced women (IDPs) face even greater risks, as their insecure living conditions in host communities make them more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Moreover, they encounter significant barriers to accessing services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, further exacerbating their vulnerability. Despite these challenges, the research points to opportunities for improvement by calling for targeted interventions to address these specific vulnerabilities effectively.

One promising avenue for empowerment lies in the economic agency already demonstrated by many young women in Afgoye. A significant portion of women are self-employed, own mobile phones, and show financial independence, suggesting potential for interventions that promote economic empowerment and encourage participation in climate-smart agriculture. To fully

16 https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_ent/@ifp_seed/documents/publication/wcms_757371.pdf

capitalize on these opportunities and address existing disparities, a shift in approach is necessary. Conversations about women's inclusion should move beyond focusing solely on risks, violence, and protection needs—although these remain critical issues—and instead actively integrate women into decision-making processes. Women already contribute significantly to pastoral and agro-pastoral activities, and efforts should focus on enhancing their access to resources, technology, and education. Moreover, promoting their involvement in climate action and peacebuilding initiatives can help address both immediate challenges and their long-term empowerment and resilience.

Recognizing and supporting women's agency and economic potential allows for a more comprehensive approach, shifting from a purely protective stance to one that enables women to drive positive change in their communities. The research participants expressed a strong desire for meaningful engagement in addressing climate and conflict issues, underscoring the importance of creating opportunities for their participation. This requires dismantling traditional gender narratives and embracing Afgoye's unique social fabric in designing and implementing climate action strategies.

Another significant challenge identified in the study is climate-induced migration, which affects both displaced individuals and host communities, particularly in Afgoye, which lies in a governance "twilight zone." Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported being affected by climate-induced displacement—27 percent had migrated themselves, while 34 percent knew someone who had. The migration experience brings numerous challenges: while 8 percent of respondents reported facing no difficulties, the vast majority (77 percent) encountered moderate to extreme issues, such as difficulties securing food, water, employment, healthcare, and integrating into new communities.

Host communities also experience significant impacts, with 77 percent of respondents reporting moderate to extreme effects, including increased pressure on resources, competition for jobs and housing, and heightened social tensions. An overwhelming 85 percent of respondents believe that climate migrants require additional support, including access to essential services, livelihood opportunities, and education, as well as efforts to foster social integration. Additionally, 63 percent of respondents reported moderate to extreme conflict with host communities, highlighting the risk of escalating violence due to resource competition and strained social cohesion.

Addressing these challenges requires proactive measures, such as promoting dialogue, initiating resource-sharing programs, and implementing conflict resolution strategies. By fostering greater social integration and ensuring that both migrants and host communities have access to the resources they need, it is possible to mitigate the tensions that arise from climate-induced displacement and create more resilient and cohesive communities.

3.4 RESPONSES TO THESE INTERCONNECTED DYNAMICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION, AND CONFLICT & THE ROLE OF YOUTH

Strong social networks exist alongside weak formal institutions in Afgoye, creating both challenges and opportunities for youth resilience. Understanding and leveraging these networks can inform the development of more effective and sustainable solutions for building a more enabling environment to enhance youth resilience and create better opportunities for their economic and social development.

Respondents overwhelmingly identified the lack of strong institutions as a key factor contributing to violent conflict over natural resources. According to feedback from 21 focus group discussions with 168 youth and community members, 78 percent highlighted the absence of effective institutional mechanisms as a significant issue. The absence of systems to protect natural resources or adapt to climate change creates a gap in addressing underlying issues. This lack of institutional control contributes to environmental degradation and intensifies competition for scarce resources. Uncontrolled proliferation of arms and the easy availability of small arms without government oversight exacerbates intercommunal conflict as armed clan groups encroach on each other's land. Something echoed by respondents, as 46 percent believe the government isn't doing enough to address the issue. Respondents acknowledged the need for effective institutions to manage weapons and enforce laws, which are currently lacking in Afgoye.

Despite the institutional shortcomings, the research also identified a powerful counterpoint; Afgoye boasts strong social networks that offer hope and an entry point for inclusive social peace and localized climate action. About 70 percent of interviewees spoke positively about the community's culture of mutual support and resource sharing, which often relies on informal leaders such as women and religious figures for conflict resolution and guidance. These social networks serve as a crucial safety net where formal institutions are weak. These informal structures act as a safety net in the absence of strong formal institutions. With more than 50 percent of respondents recognizing NGOs to play a crucial role in Afgoye and that they act as brokers between the community and the government at times in a constructive way, providing a voice for those who fear reprisal by officials for voicing their concerns. These networks offer potential avenues for information dissemination and capacity building, elaborated on in the recommendations section of the report.

Influential figures in Afgoye, including trusted community leaders and business owners offering flexible payments, play a key role in local leadership and resource distribution. However, their potential to reach and impact more people is not fully utilized. These networks provide opportunities for building upon existing community structures for peacebuilding and climate action efforts. The interviews also revealed that some market systems rely on traditional clan structures to facilitate access to many services and markets, such as live-stock trade and yet these structures exclude marginalized sub-clans. Findings showed that inclusive committees could provide these services in a more inclusive manner if they had more capacity and diversity. Understanding and leveraging these strong social networks can be instrumental in developing more effective and sustainable solutions for building youth resilience.

The paradox in Afgoye regarding climate change was revealed in the discussions with key informants that confirmed a high level of awareness about environmental degradation and its impact on social cohesion, livelihoods, necessities and the limitation of concrete climate action happening on the ground. The research revealed a well-informed community, with respondents readily discussing the negative impacts of climate change. While the sample size of 170 respondents was relatively small, over 60 percent demonstrated a strong understanding of the issues, including water scarcity due to dilapidated irrigation infrastructure and inconsistent surface water availability. They also expressed frustration at the lack of resources for establishing climate forecasting systems and the disinterest of government officials in mitigating climate-related disasters. The singular focus of the government on security sector reform and reconstruction, rather than climate action, further exacerbates this frustration in the community. A significant disconnect exists between the government's narrative and the community's experience.

While the government has made public commitments to prioritize climate action and invest in prevention, the community continues to face ongoing challenges related to climate-related disasters. This disconnect arises from the perceived lack of tangible progress and the exclusion of community members from decision-making processes. The government's public statements about its achievements may not align with the lived experiences of the community, leading to scepticism about the government's genuine commitment to service delivery and accountability. By fostering more inclusive and transparent governance, the government can bridge this gap and build trust with the community. NGOs and district officials reported in the KIIs various climate initiatives, yet these actions seem largely invisible or unknown to the community that was interviewed. This fosters a sense of scepticism and a belief that government pronouncements are mere rhetoric without tangible impact. For example, the recent launch of the DRIVE project, intended to provide financial services and market access to pastoralists, was met with suspicion by the community, highlighting the lack of trust and communication between them and the government, as all were not aware of the initiative.

The case study also reveals a mixed perception of existing early warning systems, such as the Somalia Water and Land Information Management (SWALIM). While there is some awareness of these systems, 53 percent of respondents consider them to be somewhat or less effective. Despite this, there is a strong consensus on the potential for improving these systems by addressing the underlying challenges posed by climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict. Specifically, 62 percent of respondents believe that enhancing the effectiveness of early warning systems can be achieved by leveraging existing solutions. This highlights a recognition of the need for more effective systems and the role that improved strategies can play in mitigating these complex issues.



4. Conclusion



The investigation into Afgoye reveals that climate change significantly exacerbates resource scarcity and limits opportunities for youth, highlighting a critical gap in understanding their lived experiences and aspirations. The community faces challenges from climate-induced tensions, poor resource management, and a lack of inclusive decision-making processes. Youth and women are particularly marginalized, and their integration into resource management and climate adaptation efforts is essential. Furthermore, inadequate systems for natural resource protection and law enforcement worsen environmental degradation and conflict. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive understanding and targeted interventions.

5. Recommendations



1. Invest in Climate-Smart Agriculture and Technology:

Promote climate-smart agriculture and technological innovations in Afgoye. Enhance skills training programs to be more diverse, modern, and aligned with current and future needs, extending beyond agriculture to other fields.

2. Enhance Resource Management and Infrastructure:

Implement initiatives in waste management, water resource development, and reforestation to create employment opportunities for youth. Improve infrastructure and service delivery to address resource mismanagement and reduce conflict.

3. Foster Inclusive Decision-Making:

Integrate youth and internally displaced persons (IDPs) into decision-making processes related to resource management and climate adaptation. This inclusion can mitigate feelings of voicelessness and enhance community engagement.

4. Strengthen Community Networks:

Leverage and empower existing social networks, including youth and trusted community leaders, to improve outreach, awareness, and information sharing on climate action and social issues. Build capacity for ground-up monitoring and response mechanisms.

5. Promote Gender Inclusivity:

Integrate women into climate action committees and land-related conflict resolution dialogues to address their marginalization and ensure a more inclusive decision-making environment.

6. Enhance Institutional Strengthening:

Develop robust systems for natural resource protection, weapons control, and law enforcement to address environmental degradation, reduce competition for scarce resources, and mitigate intercommunal conflict.

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