

ENHANCING CLIMATE GOVERNANCE IN SOMALIA FOR A SUSTAINED CLIMATE, PEACE, AND SECURITY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Somalia is among the world's most climate-vulnerable states, facing recurrent droughts, floods, and food insecurity, which are compounded by fragility, conflict, and weak governance (WMO, 2024). Since 2020, the country has made remarkable progress by establishing a fully-fledged Federal Ministry of Environment and Climate Change which contributed the enactment of the fundamental sector policies, legal frameworks and strategies including the adoption of the National Climate Change Policy, updating its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), and developing a National Adaptation Plan (NAP) Framework (Federal Government of Somalia, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change [MoECC], 2020; UNFCCC, 2021). However, serious implementation gaps persist due to fragmented governance, low institutional capacity, and inadequate financing (UNDP, 2022). Building on the PDRC 3rd Annual Peace Conference Communiqué (2025), this paper argues for better integration of legal frameworks, climate finance, and governance structures at local, regional, state, and federal levels. It highlights the critical roles of women and youth in inclusive, devolved climate governance that strengthens resilience and peace (PDRC, 2025).

Legal reforms are not fully binding, climate finance heavily relies on donors, and local structures often lack the necessary capacity and resources to act. Women and youth, though disproportionately impacted by climate change, continue to be underrepresented in decision-making. These gaps hinder coordinated and inclusive climate governance.

Policymakers should focus on turning national commitments into enforceable laws, developing a transparent climate finance strategy, empowering district councils to lead localized adaptation efforts, and ensuring women and youth have full participation in climate institutions to turn policy into real resilience. Somalia should urgently legislate its climate commitments, establish a National Climate Finance Policy and Strategy, and devolve implementation to local governments. These reforms would enhance resilience, attract investment, and strengthen peace.

INTRODUCTION

Somalia faces one of the world's most acute climate–fragility nexuses. Recurrent droughts have displaced millions, while floods, rising sea levels, and land degradation erode fragile livelihoods (FAO, 2023; WMO, 2024). Climate change is not only an environmental problem but a security and governance challenge, intensifying competition over scarce resources such as water and pasture (Yamin, 2011).

PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This paper connects legal frameworks, climate finance mechanisms, and governance structures to enhance coordination and facilitate devolution of climate action across all levels. It highlights the integration of traditional knowledge with modern policy, enhances transparency in climate finance, and empowers women and youth as agents of climate resilience (MoECC, 2020; UNDP, 2022).

The analysis presented here is grounded in a comprehensive desk review, examination of papers delivered during the PDRC 3rd Annual Conference on the Climate–Peace–Security Nexus, and rich reflections from panel discussions, providing triangulated and evidence-based insights into the persistent gaps in climate governance.

SECTION 1: LEGAL FRAMEWORKS FOR CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

Somalia has laid a critical policy foundation through the National Environmental Management Policy (2023), National Environmental Management Act (2024), the National Climate Change Policy (2023), the updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC 3.0, 2025), and the National Adaptation Plan (NAP, 2025) (MoECC, 2025; UNFCCC, 2025). Several Federal Member States have introduced environment-related policies. However, despite these milestones, most frameworks remain non-binding, underfunded, and poorly aligned and enforced, limiting their capacity to address escalating climate risks (UNDP, 2022). Effectiveness is further undermined by fragmentation between federal and state-level policies, overlapping mandates, and insufficient integration with customary governance systems (xeer), which continue to shape local decision-making and natural resource management (PDRC, 2025). Strengthening climate governance, therefore, requires a deliberate effort to codify national climate commitments into binding legislation, ensuring continuity across political cycles; to harmonize state-level frameworks with federal laws through inclusive consultations that respect regional priorities; and to institutionalize customary laws and indigenous knowledge into modern climate governance, creating hybrid models that are both legitimate and locally trusted. By bridging these divides, Somalia can only build a coherent and resilient legal foundation for climate action (MoECC, 2020; UNFCCC, 2021).

In many rural districts of Puntland and central Somalia, traditional leaders play a crucial role in managing shared natural resources under xeer, the customary system of social agreements. Elders mediate disputes over natural resources, primarily focusing on land, water, rangeland, and pasture, as well as forest management, by applying principles of fairness and collective responsibility. These mechanisms have long prevented conflicts and maintained ecological balance, especially during droughts. Formal institutions often overlook these systems, leading to duplication or local resistance. Instead of replacing xeer, the government, through the Federal, FMS, and local governments, should incorporate it into formal policy by recognizing and revitalizing traditional customary practices and norms, reviving and documenting local bylaws, and involving elders in planning and enforcement, as well as overall environmental stewardship.

This integration and harmonization would strengthen legitimacy, enhance compliance, and ensure climate governance reflects both national priorities and community realities. As Somalia is among the countries whose citizens overly rely on natural resources and ecosystems for their livelihoods and prosperity, it is essential to strengthen their involvement in conserving these vital national endowments by enhancing the existing community structure and norms.



SECTION 2: CLIMATE FINANCE MECHANISMS

Somalia's climate adaptation needs are estimated at \$6.33 billion between 2025 and 2035, yet current financing falls far short (NDC, 2025). The country relies disproportionately on the existing vertical climate funds, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Adaptation Fund, and the Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF), together with Bilateral and other MDBs. At the same time, domestic budgetary allocations remain minimal due to tight chronic fiscal space and constraints. Opportunities to harness private sector contributions and diaspora investments remain underutilized, representing significant missed avenues for sustainable domestic resource mobilization (UNDP, 2022). Existing financial flows are largely donor-driven, fragmented, and heavily project-based, with weak absorptive capacity, limited fiduciary safeguards, and inadequate monitoring systems, which undermine long-term effectiveness and accountability (World Bank, 2023).

Looking ahead, Somalia holds considerable potential to unlock carbon markets as an innovative and sustainable source of climate finance. Strategic investments in rangeland rehabilitation, mangrove restoration, agroforestry, and renewable energy can generate high-quality carbon credits while advancing peacebuilding, enhancing livelihoods, and promoting biodiversity conservation (ACMI, 2022).

To realize this potential, Somalia must urgently establish a National Carbon Market Framework, develop robust and transparent Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems, create a Somalia Carbon Registry (GHG Inventory) aligned with the African Carbon Markets Initiative (ACMI), and pilot community-based carbon projects that guarantee revenues are equitably shared with local populations. Such measures would attract international investment, strengthen resilience, reduce conflict over scarce resources, and position Somalia as a credible player in Africa's emerging carbon market landscape (ACMI, 2022; World Bank, 2023).

On a similar note, the road to completion of reforms for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) is a welcome initiative to ease the burden on Somalia. This provides a huge opportunity to unlock further and enable access to new and innovative climate financing and investment windows.

The establishment of the National Climate Fund Facility in 2024 marked a significant milestone in the country's efforts to achieve meaningful access to climate finance. The NCF Facility is a dedicated mechanism that coordinates funding from various vertical and horizontal sources, including international donors, to support climate initiatives.

However, poor coordination, institutional capacity, weak transparency, and limited political will are among the key bottlenecks affecting the country's meaningful access to climate finance.

Translating the country's climate commitments and targets (from hopes to results) requires tripling the current annual climate finance flows. Locally led climate actions, local access to climate finance, and enhancing structures and institutional arrangements (at federal, FMS, local governments, and even village levels) are needed to effectively mainstream broader important issues, such as climate security and peace, into the country's climate adaptation and mitigation actions. Furthermore, the road to completing reforms for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) is a welcome initiative to ease the burden on Somalia. this provides a huge opportunity to unlock access to climate funds and investments further.



SECTION 3: GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND DEVOLUTION

Climate governance in Somalia is currently dominated by federal-level institutions, with limited authority, resources, and technical capacity devolved to Federal Member States (FMS) and district councils (PDRC 2025). This centralization has weakened the effectiveness of climate action at the community level, where the impacts of climate change are most acute. Without strong local government structures, many communities rely on traditional governance systems, led by elders and rooted in customary law (xeer), to manage natural resources and mediate disputes. While these systems provide legitimacy and social cohesion, they often operate in isolation from formal governance processes, resulting in gaps and inefficiencies (MoECC, 2020).

Therefore, a greater emphasis on devolution is essential to ensure that climate governance reflects local priorities, builds community ownership of adaptation strategies, and strengthens accountability in resource allocation (UNFCCC, 2021).. Devolving responsibilities to the local level not only enhances responsiveness but also empowers communities to play a central role in shaping resilience initiatives. To achieve this, Somalia must establish federal-state coordination platforms to align climate policy and finance, empower district councils with both the mandate and resources to design and implement local climate action plans, and formalize collaboration between traditional and formal governance systems to create hybrid, trusted models of climate governance. By institutionalizing such mechanisms, Somalia can ensure that climate action is inclusive, locally owned, and effectively implemented across governance tiers (PDRC, 2025).

Effective climate governance in Somalia relies on the interaction between legal frameworks, financing systems, and decentralized governance. When these three pillars operate separately, reforms become symbolic, projects lack funding, and implementation is inconsistent. A cohesive approach, where binding legal frameworks facilitate access to finance, and decentralized institutions manage resources transparently, builds a foundation for long-term resilience. Strengthening the connections among these pillars will transform Somalia's climate policies from mere statements of intent into effective instruments of action.



CONCLUSION

Somalia stands at a critical crossroads; its climate risks are severe, but its potential for transformative resilience is equally significant. Effective climate governance cannot be achieved through fragmented or top-down interventions alone. It requires an integrated approach that links robust legal frameworks, innovative climate finance mechanisms, and devolved governance structures capable of responding to local realities (MoECC, 2020; UNDP, 2022).

The PDRC Communiqué (2025) underscored the urgency of adopting a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, where federal and state institutions, local governments, traditional governance mechanisms, civil society, and the private sector all play complementary roles. This paper reinforces that call and highlights the central role of women and youth, whose active inclusion in climate governance is not only a matter of fairness but also a strategic necessity for building sustainable peace, resilience, and prosperity for all. By embedding their voices at every level of governance, Somalia can transform the climate crisis from a driver of fragility into a pathway for stability and sustainable development.

CALL TO ACTION: WOMEN & YOUTH AT THE HEART OF CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

- **Guarantee Representation:** Ensure women and youth participate and are fairly represented in decision-making platforms across different tiers of governance, at Federal, State, and local climate governance platforms.
- **Invest in Leadership:** Allocate targeted funding for women- and youth-led climate initiatives in natural resource management, renewable energy, and local adaptation initiatives.
- **Foster Intergenerational Dialogue:** Create structured platforms where different actors, such as elders, women, and youth, co-design climate and peace strategies, blending indigenous and traditional knowledge with modern knowledge and innovations.
- **Prioritize Climate Peace and Security:** Climate peace and security should be mainstreamed in all government policies, strategies, and development plans, including the NTP and stabilization and peace-building initiatives, SDGs, DRM, NDCs, and other initiatives.
- **Champion Equity as Strategy:** Recognize inclusion not as an add-on, but as a core driver of compelling, legitimate, and sustainable climate action in Somalia.

KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen Legal Frameworks

- Codify national climate policies into binding legislation to ensure continuity beyond political cycles.
- Harmonize federal and state-level laws and strategies through inclusive consultation, reducing fragmentation and overlapping mandates, and in line with the federal and decentralized environmental and climate change governance.
- Institutionalize customary practices and laws (xeer) and indigenous knowledge into national climate governance, creating hybrid models trusted by communities.

2. Mobilize and Diversify Climate Finance

- Build institutional capacity of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change as the National Designated Authority (NDA) to effectively access and manage the vertical and horizontal climate finances, as well as enhance transparency and reporting of the country's climate finance flows and expenditure.
- Develop a National Climate Finance Policy and Strategy to strategically guide effective and transparent mobilization, allocation, and disbursement of climate finance from international, domestic, private sector, and diaspora sources.
- Unlock carbon market opportunities by:
 - Establishing a National Carbon Market Framework.
 - Creating robust Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems.
 - Establish and operationalize the country's Greenhouse Gases Inventory (GHGs) in line with the African Carbon Markets Initiative to enhance the transparency and reporting of the country's emissions.
 - Piloting community-based carbon projects with equitable benefit-sharing to strengthen livelihoods and reduce conflict.
- Leverage private sector investment in renewable energy, climate-smart agriculture, and green jobs, among other priorities, under adaptation & mitigation climate actions.

3. Strengthen Governance Structures and Devolution

- Empower district councils with legal authority, resources, and budget allocations to design and implement local climate action plans.
- Create federal-state coordination platforms to align climate policy, planning, and finance across governance levels.
- Formalize collaboration between traditional and formal governance systems, ensuring legitimacy and community buy-in for climate action.

4. Center Women and Youth in Climate Governance

- Guarantee meaningful representation of women and youth in climate governance bodies at all levels.
- Invest in women- and youth-led initiatives in renewable energy, natural resource management, and community adaptation.
- Strengthen capacity and mentorship programs to equip young leaders and women with technical, financial, and leadership skills.
- Foster intergenerational dialogue platforms where elders, women, and youth co-design strategies that blend innovation with indigenous knowledge.

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The background of the image is a high-angle aerial photograph of a rural landscape. It features a mix of green fields, some with small farm buildings, and a prominent, winding waterway or path that cuts through the terrain. The colors are earthy tones of green, brown, and tan.

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