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Thematic Section A: CLIMATE CHANGE, WATER AND CONFLICTS RELATED TO WATER MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA

Section's Organizers:

The ARUA-GUILD Cluster CoRE Water and Land for Wellbeing in Africa,
The University Cheikh Anta Diop of Dakar (FLSH)
The Centre for African Studies & the Faculty of European Studies of Babeș-Bolyai University,

In partnership with:

The Institute of African Studies & the Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest,
The Ubuntu Centre of the West University of Timișoara,
The University Abomey-Calavi (CESPO)
The Free University of Brussels (CEVIPOL)
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Climate change and its effects on the dwindling of water resources constitute one of the major challenges facing societies in recent decades. Indeed, climate change exacerbates droughts and reduces available water resources, thus increasing tensions between communities. In Africa, and particularly in the Sahel, significant variations in rainfall lead to prolonged dry periods. Access to water is becoming a major issue for populations, particularly in countries such as Mali, Niger, and Chad, where competition for groundwater and surface water resources causes conflicts between rural communities and nomadic herders, as well as between farmers and sedentary herders.

According to a study published in Environmental Research Letters, water-related conflicts in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin are closely linked to soil moisture deficits and water scarcity induced by population pressure (Ubilava, 2023). Furthermore, an analysis by the International Rescue Committee highlights that climate shocks, such as droughts and floods, undermine agricultural production, increase poverty, and fuel inter-ethnic violence and vulnerabilities, thereby exacerbating conflicts in the region (International Rescue Committee, 2023).Le rapport de l'Alliance Sahel indique que les phénomènes météorologiques extrêmes, comme les sécheresses et les fortes pluies, pourraient se multiplier et s'aggraver dans la région du Sahel. Cette situation est exacerbée par une croissance démographique rapide, une faible productivité économique, l'absence de diversification de la production, des conflits et crises politiques, des tensions intercommunautaires et la montée de l'extrémisme violent (Alliance Sahel, 2024).

In short, the combination of climate change, demographic pressure, and competition for water resources creates fertile ground for conflict in the Sahel. It is imperative to implement sustainable water management strategies and promote intercommunity cooperation to prevent these tensions from escalating.

Tensions or conflicts related to water access and management are particularly heightened in contexts of high migration. The millions of displaced persons and refugees in the Lake Chad region put additional pressure on already insufficient and precarious local water resources (Refugees International, 2023). Water-related conflicts often arise between different farming and pastoralist communities, particularly due to unequal access to water sources (World Bank, 2022).

In South Sudan, access to water resources is a source of tensions between different ethnic and community groups (Climate-Diplomacy, 2023). Conflicts over water points in rural areas are increasing, exacerbated by frequent droughts and limited infrastructure to manage water equitably (World Bank, 2023).

Population movements towards cities as a result of climate change remain crucial in the development of cities (Sakho, 2014; Piguet E. and Laczko F. (eds.), 2014); World Bank, 2022). The increasing urbanization generated presents a situation of vulnerability for working-class neighborhoods that suffer from the increase in water costs, leading to conflicts between residents and local or private authorities (World Bank, 2022). The increasing urbanization generated presents a situation of vulnerability for working-class neighborhoods that suffer from the increase in water costs, leading to conflicts between residents and local or private authorities (World Bank, 2022).

Furthermore, agriculture often competes with industry and cities for access to water, creating tensions between the different sectors (World Bank, 2022). In South Africa, some regions of the country are experiencing tensions between agriculture, which uses a large portion of the available water, and the growing water needs of cities, particularly in Johannesburg and Cape Town (World Bank, 2022). Water resource management, coupled with the pressure exerted, is leading to disputes over the use of this limited resource (World Bank, 2022).

Geopolitically, access to water from major transboundary rivers, shared by several countries, is a major point of contention (Carnegie Endowment, 2023). The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) project on the Blue Nile is a prominent example of water conflicts in Africa (Carnegie Endowment, 2023). Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia are fighting over the use of the Nile River, which provides life for millions of people in these countries (Carnegie Endowment, 2023). The dispute over water sharing and dam management has led to diplomatic tensions and the potential for conflict (Carnegie Endowment, 2023).

The **Thematic Section A**, organized by the **ARUA-GUILD CoRE Water and Land Cluster for Well-being in Africa**, examines the multiple dimensions of the impact of climate change on water and conflicts related to water management. It will allow for collective reflection, drawing on diverse fieldwork, theoretical and methodological tools, and disciplinary foundations, on the following thematic areas:

1. **Water scarcity exacerbated by climate change**

Analysis of the impacts of global warming on water resources and the worsening of drought in vulnerable regions. How do climate variations accelerate water scarcity, and what are the appropriate responses?

2. Intercommunity Conflicts over Access to Water Resources

Exploring tensions between local communities, particularly in rural areas, and how these conflicts affect equitable water management. What are the local strategies for resolving these conflicts? Studying overexploitation of groundwater, conflicts over access to these underground resources, and the impact of unregulated drilling on local ecosystems.

3. Tensions surrounding the exploitation of major transboundary rivers

Studying geopolitical rivalries between riparian states regarding major rivers, such as the Nile or the Zambezi. What role for regional cooperation in the face of unilateral exploitation of these water resources? Studying geopolitical strategies surrounding dam construction, conflicts of interest between neighboring countries, and the environmental issues associated with these infrastructures. What role do major projects play in regional instability?

4. Water Privatization and Its Impact on Vulnerable Communities

Analysis of the social and economic effects of water privatization, particularly in developing countries. What is the impact on poor populations, particularly in terms of health, cost, and access?

5. Conflicts between the agricultural sector and industrial water uses

Analysis of the growing tensions between agricultural and industrial water needs, particularly in regions where water is a limited resource. How can these competing interests be reconciled to ensure sustainable management?

6. The impact of migration linked to water scarcity

Exploration of forced migration dynamics linked to water scarcity, particularly in arid areas. How does migration linked to the water crisis influence societies, and what are the challenges for welcoming migrants in neighboring countries?

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