



Peace mediation in the climate crisis

Opportunities for Germany to advance climate-sensitive mediation

By Tim Epple and Amelie Overmann

This briefing explores Germany's role in advancing climate-sensitive peace mediation. Mediation theory and practice is starting to adapt to the impacts of the climate crisis and climate action. The briefing sets out key challenges associated with making peace mediation more climate-sensitive, including the risk of overloading peace negotiations with an additional topic, the unfavourable mediation environment, and the lack of financial resources. The briefing discusses Germany's track record of engagement at the intersection of climate change and mediation, and its potential to be a key thought leader, mediator, enabler, and funder in this field. Germany has the opportunity to build on its pioneering work in this area over the last two decades to responsibly and inclusively advance climate-sensitive mediation.

Key recommendations

- Center concerns of those most affected by the climate crisis and conflict in mediation policy and practice.
- Develop guidance on integrating climate change into analysis and mediation efforts.
- Establish a stand-by roster of climate experts.
- Adapt funding volume and modalities to the climate-mediation nexus and fund interdisciplinary research and mediation projects.
- Champion the climate-mediation nexus at the international level.
- Mainstream climate change issues into domestic and international mediation policy and practice.
- Reinforce Germany's credibility in the climate-mediation space.

Introduction

The climate crisis is forcing conflict parties and mediators around the world to adapt to new realities. Parties increasingly must find ways to address the impacts of climate change and climate action – particularly of mitigation and adaptation efforts – on the conflicts they are aiming to resolve. Under certain conditions, adverse effects of climate change, including desertification, droughts, and floods, can exacerbate conflict drivers.¹ In South Sudan, for example, flooding, coupled with hotter conditions and droughts, is reported to have increased the risk of cattle-related conflict. South Sudanese from different parts of the country, as one survey showed, report that climate change affects their livelihoods, with seventy percent of survey respondents stating that climate change exacerbates farmer-herder conflicts.²



The demand for climate-sensitive mediation is growing.

Climate action, too, poses risks for peace-making, but also offers opportunities. Climate finance can spur economic progress and generate peace dividends in post-conflict contexts, if managed carefully. Joint adaptation activities between populations affected by both armed conflict and climate change may offer opportunities for “environmental peacebuilding”.³ At the same time, maladaptation and uneven access to climate finance risk creating new tensions.⁴ Displacement of populations from natural reserves and the reinforcement of existing power asymmetries between communities, governments, and corporations in climate adaptation efforts highlight the “dark

side”⁵ of environmental peacebuilding and climate action.



Vulnerability to climate change is worsened by armed conflict, creating vicious cycles of environmental degradation, deprivation, and conflict.

In many contemporary mediation contexts, such as in Myanmar, Sudan, or Ukraine, where lasting ceasefires – let alone comprehensive agreements – seem difficult to forge, climate change may seem peripheral to discussions of hard military power and transactional power-sharing. Yet, the demand for climate-sensitive mediation is growing. Vulnerability to climate change across contexts such as Burkina Faso, Somalia, and South Sudan is worsened by armed conflict, creating vicious cycles of environmental degradation, deprivation, and conflict. Mediation theory and practice is therefore starting to adapt to the impacts of climate change and climate action.

Various initiatives and working groups at local, national, and international levels have been launched in recent years to make conflict resolution more sensitive to climate change and its responses. The United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (UN DPPA) has called for the drafting of “climate-adaptive” peace agreements,⁶ while the Berghof Foundation has referred to “climate-smart” mediation in a recent report.⁷ By “climate-sensitive” mediation, we refer not to the climatological meaning of the term,⁸ but mediation policies, strategies, and practices that:

- are designed based on a deep understanding of the reciprocal relationship between climate change and conflict,

- maximize opportunities for mediation offered by climate change and climate action, while
- minimizing their unintended negative consequences for mediation, and vice-versa.

Fewer than one per cent of peace agreements signed between 1990 and 2023 explicitly mention “climate change”.⁹ Conflict parties tend to address climate issues in various implicit ways, but most climate adaptation and mitigation provisions in peace agreements are limited in scope.¹⁰ Recent peace agreements in Colombia (2016),¹¹ Northern Ireland (2020),¹² and Sudan (2020)¹³ are some of the notable exceptions. These agreements feature more advanced provisions on environmental and climate action. While the question of whether peace agreements should address climate issues ultimately rests with the conflict parties, mediators are in the market for innovation. They are increasingly looking for new ideas on how to leverage climate change as a soft-landing topic for negotiations, and how to tackle environmental, climate change, and natural resource issues in peace agreements.



Adapting mediation to the impacts of climate change and climate action is challenging, but necessary.

Adapting mediation to the impacts of climate change and climate action is challenging, but necessary. This policy brief sets out key challenges associated with the climate-mediation nexus and how Germany can respond to them. Germany is uniquely placed to advance climate-sensitive

mediation and drive innovation in this space. The German government wields considerable resources and expertise and can build on its pioneering work in this area, including its past advocacy in the United Nations Security Council to address climate change systematically. This Briefing is based on an expert workshop held in Berlin in September 2024¹⁴ and draws on academic evidence on the relationship between climate change, conflict and peace processes, as well as on recent mediation guidance developed internationally¹⁵ and in Germany.¹⁶

Challenges associated with climate-sensitive mediation

The climate crisis and its associated challenges are not new to mediation practitioners. In recent years, there have been efforts to analyse these challenges and debunk common misperceptions.¹⁷ The following list of challenges provides an overview of some of the key issues conflict parties and mediators face when dealing with climate change:

Risk of overloading peace negotiations.

Mediators find it challenging to decide whether and when to consider climate change or climate action in the peace processes they are involved in. If conflict parties feel that climate change issues are imposed on their agenda, there is a risk that this perceived imposition has negative knock-on effects on wider negotiations and the relationship between the parties and mediators. The conflict parties’ ownership of the negotiation agenda – as highlighted by the national ownership principle in Germany’s mediation guidance – needs to be respected at all times. There is a real risk of overloading negotiations, particularly in

contexts where environmental considerations are perceived as marginal to negotiations on core peace process issues, such as power-sharing and security sector reform. Mediators and mediation support actors should therefore avoid forcing the topic onto conflicting parties.



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Unfavourable mediation environment.

Reaching comprehensive peace agreements has become increasingly difficult in contemporary peace processes, while more limited deals, such as ceasefires, have become more prominent in recent years.¹⁸ Ceasefires and narrow elite deals tend to be more focused on security issues, power-sharing, and conflict management, and are less likely to include “softer” environmental and climate considerations that are important to local communities (except in cases where elites consider these issues central to their conflict or dispute resolution strategy). In the increasingly fragmented and competitive peacemaking environment, where a growing number of state and non-state actors offer themselves as mediators, climate-sensitive mediation risks taking a back seat. In contexts characterized by a multiplicity of actors and “multimediation”,¹⁹ competing mediation proposals can make negotiations more difficult and incentivize “forum shopping”. Conflict parties may, in some instances, take advantage of more limited elite-level proposals over more inclusive and comprehensive settlements, or pit different mediators against each other to stall negotiations.

Encouraging climate-sensitive mediation in the current difficult context of transactional dealmaking and multimediation may thus be a tall order.



In contexts characterized by a multiplicity of actors and “multimediation”,²⁰ competing mediation proposals can make negotiations more difficult and incentivize “forum shopping”.

Unsuitable framing. Conflict parties and wider peace process stakeholders may not find the labels of “climate change” or “climate crisis” relevant to their context. The terms could be misunderstood or considered part of an outsider’s agenda. Different peace process actors and social groups may have varying understandings of the issue and its consequences. The framing of the proposed climate change and climate action negotiation items needs to be considered carefully, and in many cases, it may be advisable to amplify the conflict parties and local communities’ own framing and language around environmental and climatic challenges that they face – be it drought, floods, or other effects. What often matters most in a conflict-affected context is the specific effect of climate change on local communities, rather than the underlying global challenge.

Inadequate resourcing, implementation, and monitoring. Resourcing for both climate action and mediation is a key challenge for conflict parties and mediators, particularly in low-income, conflict-affected contexts. International climate finance mirrors the usual distribution of development assistance and predominantly targets countries with low violence levels. Adaptation

finance tends to be clustered in a small number of low-income countries, particularly Bangladesh, Uganda, Senegal and Ethiopia.²¹ At the same time, peace-related Official Development Assistance (ODA) from Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members in conflict-affected contexts has been decreasing, reaching a fifteen-year low in 2021 at USD 5.27 billion (10.8 per cent of total ODA).²² Without substantial support from external actors, conflict parties and local communities often struggle to generate the resources necessary to fund climate action, peacemaking, and the implementation and monitoring of peace agreements. Without more funding and innovative financial instruments for climate action and peace agreement implementation and monitoring, trust between parties may erode over time, putting political settlements at risk.



There is a gap between climate research and mediation practice, with little cross-sectoral funding being provided at the intersection of the two fields.

Lack of interdisciplinary exchange and expertise. Conflict parties and mediation actors may not be readily equipped with sufficient technical climate change expertise. There are very few, if any, known examples of peace process stakeholders pro-actively tapping into the expertise of natural scientists and climate change experts in the context of negotiations. Generally, there remains a gap between climate research and mediation practice, with little cross-sectoral funding being provided for projects. For mediation to become climate-sensitive, more exchange across the climate-mediation nexus is required, and expertise and cutting-edge climate

science will have to be made available to mediators in live processes. Access to climate projections, for example, may help conflict parties understand how a changing climate may affect their constituencies and whether there are any mutual benefits to be realized by managing natural resources more sustainably.

Germany's role in advancing climate-sensitive mediation

As stated in the German Peace Mediation Framework (2019)²³ and in the guidelines “Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace” (2017),²⁴ Germany aims to expand its peace mediation and mediation support engagement. Given the impact of the climate crisis in the context of armed conflicts, it is vital that Germany ensures its mediation approach is climate-sensitive. In doing so, Germany can build on over two decades of championing the climate, peace and security agenda, including at the highest policy levels.²⁵ Notably, during its 2011–2012 and 2019–2020 United Nations Security Council (UNSC) memberships and presidencies, Germany advanced discussions and resolutions on the climate, peace and security nexus and pushed the Council to consider climate protection,²⁶ including through the ministerial-level open debate in July 2020 and its proposal to establish an informal working group on the topic.²⁷ Germany has been a key driver and donor behind the Weathering Risk²⁸ initiative that implements projects and provides analysis and tools at the intersection of climate, peace and security. In 2022, Germany started funding the initiative's peace pillar that aims to “integrat[e] climate and environmental security into peace programming in regions severely

affected by conflict and climate risks.”²⁹
In 2023, Germany adopted the country’s first Strategy on Climate Foreign Policy which included a commitment to “prevent climate-induced escalation of conflicts.”³⁰



Germany is well-placed to advance climate-sensitive mediation and mediation support domestically and globally.

Germany is well-placed to advance climate-sensitive mediation and mediation support domestically and globally. Germany, including when working through the European Union and with bilateral partners, is a trusted partner in various peace and transition processes. Through its longstanding diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian relationships, Germany has significant access to peace process stakeholders. Germany is the second-largest DAC member, and fourth most generous member country relative to its economy,³¹ contributing around €34 billion in ODA in 2023.³² Germany contributes more than six percent of the UN’s regular budget.³³ Furthermore, Germany is the largest donor to the UN Peacebuilding Fund, and chairs the Peacebuilding Commission in 2025.³⁴ Despite significant pressure on Germany’s assistance budget, the country remains able to leverage its funding and expertise in peace engagement, particularly when acting through the European Union.

Finally, Germany has unique interdisciplinary potential to foster exchange between climatologists and mediators. It benefits from hosting a vast array of organizations and institutions with expertise in both climate change and peace mediation. Germany hosts some of the leading climate

change experts, including at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), and natural and social scientists working at the cutting-edge of climate change and mediation at adelphi, Berghof Foundation, in academia, civil society, and across Ministries. With the annually recurring Berlin Climate and Security Conference, Germany has established a renowned gathering that regularly brings together climate and peace experts. In addition, in October 2024, the German Federal Foreign Office, in collaboration with the University of the Bundeswehr Munich and the PIK, launched the Climate—Conflict—Vulnerability Index (CCVI). This new tool “maps current global risks by integrating climate and conflict hazards with local vulnerabilities”³⁵ and underscores Germany’s interdisciplinary innovation in this area. The tool promises to enable more integrated analysis of climate and conflict risks to peace and mediation efforts.



The track record of leadership and access to rich expertise allow Germany to be a key thought leader, enabler, and funder at the nexus of climate change and peace mediation.

This track record of climate change and mediation leadership and access to rich expertise put Germany in a position to be a key thought leader, enabler, and funder at the nexus of climate change and peace mediation. Climate-sensitive mediation could become a brand of German foreign policy. Germany has the opportunity to build on its thought leadership over the last two decades and to responsibly advance the climate-mediation agenda.

Recommendations

As stated in its Peace Mediation Framework, the Federal Government acknowledges that “[t]here are significant expectations in conflict regions and within Germany that we should play a strong and more active role as a mediator or a supporter of mediation and negotiation processes.”³⁶ The following recommendations aim to support German governmental actors in fulfilling these expectations in the face of ever-increasing effects of the climate crisis:

Cross-cutting

1. Strengthen Germany’s credibility in the climate-mediation space.

Historically, Germany is the fourth biggest carbon dioxide-emitting country in the world, with a cumulative share of about five per cent of CO₂ emissions globally since 1750.³⁷ Germany can boost its credibility in this space if it leads on climate action globally and commits conflict-sensitive climate finance to conflict-affected countries. First and foremost, Germany needs to deliver on its climate action commitments as part of the Paris Agreement, and advance eye-to-eye discussions about climate justice as well as loss and damage with low-income countries, which are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis.

2. Engage widely and inclusively.

Domestically, Germany needs to create incentives to bridge silos between ministries and non-governmental climate and mediation actors. Only a whole-of-government approach that integrates political, economic, defence, development, humanitarian, and mediation perspectives will be able to tackle the interconnected challenges

of climate change and conflict. Moreover, for Germany to play a leading role in the climate-mediation space, it will need to engage a wide range of peace process stakeholders and local communities affected by climate change and conflict. It is crucial that Germany engages in this field without reproducing power asymmetries in the international arena, instead centering the concerns and voices of those most affected by the climate crisis and conflict in mediation policy and practice. Considering the diverse needs of marginalised groups in conflict and climate action contexts, such as ethnic minorities, women, children, and people with disabilities, will also help bolster Germany’s standing as a credible and inclusive proponent of climate-sensitive mediation.



Thinking about climate change should not be considered another burden on mediation teams, but an opportunity to more fully understand the context they are engaging in.

3. Think carefully about framing and timing.

Whether engaged in mediation directly or through partners, Germany should work with mediators to overcome the challenges described above and encourage greater engagement with the climate-mediation nexus. Considering climate change in a peace process does not mean imposing the topic on conflict parties. Primarily, it means trying to understand how climate change affects the conflict and peace process at hand. Thinking about climate change should not be considered another burden on mediation teams, but an opportunity to more fully understand the context they are engaging

in. Germany should encourage mediators to carefully consider how they frame climate change. It may not be necessary, and in some cases counter-productive, to couch conflict issues in climate change terminology, even when they are related. Narratives of inevitable resource scarcity and competition should also be avoided in favour of approaches that overcome zero-sum games and explore co-benefits for conflict parties that could arise through climate action and finance. Whether there are opportunities for environmental peacebuilding and climate change entry points in peace negotiations entirely depends on the context at hand and needs to be carefully reviewed.

Direct mediation

4. Integrate climate change considerations into existing conflict analysis tools and processes.

Where Germany acts as a mediator or mediation support actor, it should assess the effects of climate change and climate action on negotiations, considering different spatial (local, national and transboundary) and temporal levels (short, medium and long term). This analysis will help to better understand whether and how these effects may exacerbate existing conflict dynamics or lead to new tensions. The CCVI may be useful in this regard. It would be beneficial to support uptake of the tool among mediators and to capture end-user case studies to show how the CCVI can inform conflict analysis and negotiation strategy. Beyond quantitative data, it will be important to analyse the perceptions and narratives that conflict parties might have about climate and environmental issues. The perspectives of different societal groups, including women, men, girls, boys, minorities, indigenous populations, and displaced populations,

should be included in climate-sensitive, mixed-method conflict analysis.

5. Leverage Germany's leading natural scientists in peace negotiations.

Establish channels through which natural scientists can feed evidence from climatology and cognate fields into mediation processes. Conflict parties need to have access to state-of-the-art evidence to inform negotiations and peace agreements. This could be achieved, for example, by establishing a stand-by roster of climate experts who mediators can call upon flexibly for 'rapid response' to climate change questions in peace negotiations.

6. Explore different ways of making ongoing mediation efforts more climate-sensitive.

Germany could help the climate-mediation space innovate and find new ways to better integrate climate considerations into peace negotiations. For example, German mediators and support actors could explore and point out potential win-win situations to conflict parties – these might occur where more climate adaptation measures and sustainable natural resource management can lead to benefits for all those involved, especially when attracting international climate finance. Further, Germany could advocate for the establishment of 'climate sub-committees' as proposed by UN DPPA, where appropriate.³⁸ These committees would review peace agreement drafts in order to avoid formulations that may inadvertently exacerbate vulnerabilities to climate change, and ensure agreements are flexible enough to be able to respond to future climatic and environmental changes. Conflict parties and mediators will have to balance flexibility in peace agreements with the need to be specific enough to hold

peace agreement signatories to account for their commitments.

Mediation coordination and support

7. Support the deconflicting and coordination of mediation efforts and align efforts in the climate-mediation space.

In the contemporary environment of increasing geopolitical fragmentation and multimediation, where comprehensive peace agreements are rare and would-be mediators abound, there is a real need for enhanced coordination and coherence in peace processes. To make progress on climate-sensitive mediation in this difficult space, it will be important to understand different actors' perceptions of climate change and their willingness to support climate action. Where Germany plays a coordination or supportive role, it could attempt to create consensus between conflict actors and mediators on the role climate change plays in the conflict and peace negotiations at hand.



In an environment of geopolitical fragmentation and multimediation, there is a real need for enhanced coordination and coherence in peace processes.

8. Adapt funding volume and modalities to the climate-mediation nexus.

As per its Peace Mediation Framework, Germany aspires to be a reliable mediation partner.³⁹ Providing stable funding to third parties in mediation is critical to protect hard-won trust and gains made in peace and transition processes Germany is engaged in, and some of these funds should be earmarked for supporting climate-sensitive mediation. Germany needs to provide

this funding if it wants to play a leading role in the climate-mediation space. It will be important to work with other donors to overcome risk aversion by investing in climate action and mediation in conflict-affected contexts. Germany could open new project funding lines that are only available to inter-disciplinary projects and activities that include environmental, climate change, and peace mediation specialists. New peace-building and mediation grants should be proofed for their sensitivity to climate change, much like funding applications are evaluated for their gender sensitivity, for example.

Multilateral and bilateral mediation engagement and support

9. Champion the climate-mediation nexus at the international level.

Germany could spearhead further exchange and action on climate-sensitive mediation at the European Union and United Nations. Leveraging its position as a major international donor, Germany could lobby for stronger political support and awareness of the issue. Through its bid for a seat on the 2027-2028 UNSC, Germany could advance this topic, building on its work during its previous UNSC memberships. As incoming Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, Germany could increase its support and funding for existing multilateral mechanisms, for example, the UN Climate Security Mechanism, UN Group of Friends on Climate and Security, and the Informal Expert Group of Members of the Security Council on Climate and Security.

10. Mainstream climate issues into international mediation policy and practice.

This can be achieved by establishing dedicated policy and reporting frameworks

and by drawing on lessons learned from the mainstreaming of Women, Peace, and Security issues. Germany could advocate for greater mainstreaming of climate change consideration with mediation support units in multilateral and regional organizations, and encourage multilateral, regional, national, and local actors in the mediation arena to exchange information and good practice. Local voices will have to be pro-actively supported to make it into these higher-level policy spaces. Germany should continue its voluntary contributions to the UN Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisers, which will benefit from climate change expertise in the future.

Domestic conceptual development and professionalization

11. Bolster Germany's thought leadership in the climate-mediation space.

Two dimensions of Germany's leadership in the climate-mediation space have been critical to date – first, the growing research, programming, and expertise of German governmental and non-governmental actors, and, second, public events that have helped build a community of practice in Germany and beyond. The Berlin Climate and Security Conferences have played a key role in nurturing this community and it is important to continue this series to sustain Germany's role as a key convenor in this space. Through these events, Germany has the opportunity to advance thought leadership on climate-sensitive mediation and climate justice jointly with countries and populations most affected by climate change and armed conflict. In addition, Germany should sustain its funding for research and programming at the climate-mediation nexus. Germany could create a university professorship to this end, and support academic research into practical

examples of when conflict parties and mediators have addressed climate change issues in peace negotiations.

12. Increase the in-house expertise on climate and mediation across the German government.

This applies in particular to the Federal Foreign Office, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Federal Ministry of Defence. German officials and their partners could benefit from training on the climate-mediation nexus, either as part of standardized mediation training, or as stand-alone sessions. German nationals seconded to international peace operations and political missions would equally benefit from specialized training.



Germany can advance thought leadership on climate-sensitive mediation and climate justice jointly with countries and populations most affected by climate change and armed conflict.

International conceptual development and professionalization

13. Develop step-by-step guidance on how to integrate climate change into mediation processes.

Based on cutting-edge evidence and successful examples, Germany could work with international partners to develop a step-by-step guide. This guide would provide practical advice and case studies for conflict parties and mediators on how to deal with climate change issues in peace negotiations.

14. Expand training and capacity-building measures.

These should focus on the climate-mediation nexus, targeting conflict parties, insider mediators, and outsider mediators. Germany could host or fund leading training programs to equip peace process stakeholders with technical expertise and tools to address climate change-related issues in their own negotiations.

15. Foster interdisciplinary and regular exchange in the climate-mediation space.

Germany should help bridge the current divide between climate science and mediation practice. Germany could support networking and knowledge transfer between practitioners and researchers working in the climate-mediation space. Mediators would benefit greatly from building relationships with technical experts on frequent climate change-related peace process issues, such as natural resources, access to water, agriculture, and disaster risk management. Germany could provide spaces for exchange on monitoring, evaluation, and learning efforts to improve evidence-based decision-making in mediation. Germany could also lead efforts to create and disseminate a collection of successful examples of climate-sensitive conflict resolution efforts.

Concluding remarks

These recommendations show how Germany can build on its past advocacy and action in advancing climate-sensitive mediation holistically and inclusively. Germany and its partners will have to overcome significant challenges in adapting mediation to climate change and climate action. This briefing has provided entry points for Germany to tackle

these challenges and to become a credible thought leader, enabler, and funder at the increasingly important intersection of climate change and peace mediation.

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Photos

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The Authors

Tim Epple is the Managing Director of the Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform ([PeaceRep](#)) led by Edinburgh Law School.

Amelie Overmann was Head of Project “Strengthening Mediation and Dialogue Capacities” in the Policy, Partnership & Innovation team at the Center for International Peace Operations ([ZIF](#)) from 2023 to 2025.

Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF)
Ludwigkirchplatz 3–4 | 10719 Berlin | Germany
research@zif-berlin.org
[@ZIF_Berlin](#)
[Linked in](#)
www.zif-berlin.org



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