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Global warming may increase chances of civil war in Africa

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A new study has suggested that climate change could increase the likelihood of civil war in sub-Saharan Africa by over 50% within the next two decades.

A new study led by a team of researchers at University of California, Berkeley, US, has suggested that climate change could increase the likelihood of civil war in sub-Saharan Africa by over 50% within the next two decades.

The study, conducted by researchers at UC Berkeley as well as at Stanford University, New York University and Harvard University, provides the first quantitative evidence linking climate change and the risk of civil conflict.

It concludes by urging accelerated support by African governments and foreign aid donors for new and/or expanded policies to assist with African adaptation to climate change.

"Despite recent high-level statements suggesting that climate change could worsen the risk of civil conflict, until now we had little quantitative evidence linking the two," said Marshall Burke, the study's lead author and a graduate student at UC Berkeley's Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics.

"Unfortunately, our study finds that climate change could increase the risk of African civil war by over 50% in 2030 relative to 1990, with huge potential costs to human livelihoods," he added.

"We were definitely surprised that the linkages between temperature and recent conflict were so strong," said Edward Miguel, professor of economics at UC Berkeley and faculty director of UC

Berkeley's Center for Evaluation for Global Action.

"But the result makes sense. The large majority of the poor in most African countries depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, and their crops are quite sensitive to small changes in temperature," he said.

"So when temperatures rise, the livelihoods of many in Africa suffer greatly, and the disadvantaged become more likely to take up arms," he added.

In the study, the researchers first combined historical data on civil wars in sub-Saharan Africa with rainfall and temperature records across the continent.

They found that between 1980 and 2002, civil wars were significantly more likely in warmer-than-average years, with a 1 degree Celsius increase in temperature in a given year raising the incidence of conflict across the continent by nearly 50%.

Building on this historical relationship between temperature and conflict, the researchers then used projections of future temperature and precipitation change to quantify future changes in the likelihood of African civil war.

Based on climate projections from 20 global climate models, the researchers found that the incidence of African civil war could increase 55% by 2030, resulting in an additional 390,000 battle deaths if future wars are as deadly as recent ones.

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