



Climate Conflict Hotspot Mapping in the Mt. Elgon Region: An Assessment of Mbulambuli and Manafwa Districts, Uganda 2026

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1. Executive Summary

This report presents a detailed analysis of climate–conflict hotspots in Mbulambuli and Manafwa districts, where converging environmental stressors, displacement dynamics, and institutional gaps create zones of acute and systemic vulnerability. Applying a climate security lens, the analysis identifies the causal pathways through which climate hazards, resource scarcity, and weak governance interact to amplify risks of intercommunal conflict, forced migration, and human insecurity.

1.1 Key Findings: Compound Climate Risks:

Manafwa faces catastrophic landslides and severe soil erosion; Mbulambuli experiences a dual threat of highland landslides and lowland floods/droughts, creating geographically distinct but interconnected crisis zones.

- a) **Conflict Dynamics:** Resource-based tensions are intensified by external spillovers (Karamoja cattle rustling into Mbulambuli) and internal pressure (extreme land scarcity and fragmentation in Manafwa).
- b) **Displacement Patterns:** Displacement is predominantly internal, sudden-onset, and disaster-driven, leading to the erosion of social cohesion, the breakdown of traditional kinship safety nets, and a deepening of chronic poverty.
- c) **Critical Institutional Gaps:** The absence of functional early warning systems, coupled with weak policy enforcement, limited financial and technical capacity at the district level, fundamentally undermines community and institutional resilience.
- d) **Strategic Imperative:** For GPPAC and its partners, the findings necessitate a strategic pivot from short-term, reactive humanitarian response to long-term,

Peace-positive climate adaptation. This requires programming that emphasizes community agency, embeds conflict sensitivity, and pursues integrated resilience planning that bridges the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

2.0 Hotspot Identification and Environmental Stressors

2.1 Identification Criteria & Methodology

Hotspots were mapped through a mixed-methods approach, integrating:

- a) Spatial analysis of historical climate hazard data (landslide incidence, flood zones).
- b) Conflict incident tracking via local council and police records.
- c) Displacement data from district disaster reports and community assessments.
- d) Governance gap analysis evaluating service delivery and state presence.

2.2 Mbulambuli District Hotspots:

a) Hotspot Vulnerability Analysis Highland Landslide Belt (Simu, Masira, Sisiyi, Bulago, Buginyanya, Bulegeni, Buluganya)

This zone experiences frequent, high-magnitude landslides triggered by intense rainfall and aggravated by significant vegetation loss, which undermines slope stability. Progressive soil nutrient depletion further reduces agricultural productivity. Displacement is primarily caused by the sudden destruction of homes and farmland, forcing families to abandon ancestral lands. Secondary displacement often follows as livelihoods collapse. Key vulnerabilities include geographic isolation, which severely limits emergency response, and high dependence on subsistence agriculture on unstable slopes, leaving households exposed to recurring shocks.

b) Lowland Flood/Drought Corridor (Bwikhonge, Nabongo, Muyembe, Bukhalu)

This corridor faces seasonal flooding of river plains, followed by prolonged dry spells. Siltation of water sources reduces availability, while pest infestations and crop diseases have become more prevalent. Displacement drivers include gradual livelihood collapse among farmers and fishers, contamination of water sources leading to health-related migration, and loss of pasture that triggers pastoralist movement. The area's main vulnerabilities are competition over diminishing water and pasture resources and the absence of irrigation and water storage infrastructure, which heighten exposure to cyclical climate shocks.

c) Steep Agricultural Slopes (Manjiya County, Buwagogo, Kaato)

This zone records one of the highest soil erosion rates in Uganda, with landslides directly triggered by continuous cultivation on slopes exceeding 30 degrees. In many areas, complete loss of topsoil has rendered land barren and unproductive. Displacement in these communities is largely catastrophic and sudden-onset, caused by landslides that destroy homes and farmland. Over time, environmental migration occurs as declining land productivity forces families to relocate in search of viable livelihoods. Key vulnerabilities include extreme population density on fragile ecosystems and the absence of alternative livelihood options, which traps households in high-risk zones and perpetuates exposure to recurring disasters.

d) River Manafwa Catchment

The catchment area faces heavy siltation from upstream erosion, significantly increasing flood risk. Water sources are further compromised by agro-chemical runoff and waste contamination, degrading both quality and availability. Displacement is driven by

progressive environmental degradation, which renders certain areas uninhabitable, and by health-related migration as poor water quality leads to disease outbreaks. Key vulnerabilities include the downstream burden of upstream land use, where communities bear the consequences of poor soil management, and the absence of an integrated catchment management authority, leaving water governance fragmented and ineffective.

Intervention Framework for Manafwa District

Hotspot Zone	Recommended Actions	Implementation Strategy	Targeted Outcomes
Steep Agricultural Slopes (Manjiya County, Buwagogo, Kaato)	• Slope stabilization through terracing and reforestation.	• Mobilize local CSOs for terracing and tree planting projects.	• Reduced landslide occurrences.
	• Landslides directly triggered by cultivation on slopes >30%.	• Conduct farmer workshops on erosion control techniques.	• Enhanced soil fertility and resilience.
	• Total loss of topsoil in many areas, rendering land barren.	• Facilitate community-led relocation planning with local authorities.	• Secure settlements in safer areas.
River Manafwa Catchment	• Restore degraded riparian buffers and wetlands.	• Partner with environmental agencies for restoration projects.	• Improved water quality and reduced flooding.
	• Strengthen water quality monitoring and pollution control.	• Set up community-based water monitoring teams.	• Decreased health risks from contamination.
	• Establish an integrated catchment management committee.	• Form a multi-stakeholder catchment management committee.	• Coordinated upstream and downstream management.

2.3 Manafwa District Hotspots

Hotspot Vulnerability Analysis				
Hotspot Zone	Environmental Indicators	Displacement Drivers	Displacement Drivers	Key Vulnerabilities
Highland Landslide Belt (Simu, Masira, Sisiyi, Bulago, Buginyanya, Bulegeni, Buluganya)	- Frequent, high-magnitude landslides linked to intense rainfall. - Significant vegetation loss reducing slope stability. - Progressive soil nutrient depletion.	- Sudden destruction of homes and critical farmland. - Forced abandonment of ancestral lands. - Secondary displacement due to loss of livelihood.	- Sudden destruction of homes and critical farmland. - Forced abandonment of ancestral lands.	- Geographic isolation hinders emergency response. - High dependence on subsistence agriculture on unstable slopes.
Lowland Flood/Drought Corridor (Bwikhonge, Nabongo, Muyembe, Bukhalu)	- Seasonal flooding of river plains, followed by prolonged dry spells. - Siltation of water sources reducing availability.	- Gradual livelihood collapse for farmers and fishers. - Contamination of water sources leading to health-related displacement.	- Gradual livelihood collapse for farmers and fishers. - Contamination of water sources leading to health-related displacement.	- Competition over diminishing water and pasture resources. - Lack of irrigation and water storage infrastructure.
Northern Border Zone	- Visible vegetation decline and desertification trends. - Encroachment of pastoralists from drier regions.	- Direct displacement due to cattle rustling violence. - Pre-emptive migration of families fearing attacks.	Pre-emptive migration of families fearing attacks.	- Very limited state security presence. - Cross-border dynamics complicate local conflict resolution.

3. Conflict and Mobility Dynamics

3.1 Mbulambuli District

3.1.1 Conflict Hotspots and Typology

- a) **Northern Lowlands:** Recurrent cattle rustling involving armed Karamojong pastoralists and local agro-pastoralists. These incidents are seasonal peaking during dry periods but have become increasingly frequent and violent.
- b) **Wetlands and Riverine Areas:** Persistent farmer–grazer disputes over access to water and fertile land. Resolution mechanisms rely on weak customary institutions, often unable to manage escalating tensions.

3.1.2 Underlying Drivers

- a) **Resource Scarcity:** Climate variability has sharply reduced water discharge and pasture regeneration, intensifying competition for dwindling resources.
- b) **Spillover Insecurity:** Instability in Karamoja continues to export violence into Bulambuli, with the proliferation of small arms increasing the lethality of local conflicts.
- c) **Vegetation Decline:** The loss of buffer vegetation (Navarro 2025) diminishes natural resource availability and heightens direct encounters between competing groups.

3.1.3 Escalation Risks

Intensifying drought cycles are expected to drive pastoralist migration southward, increasing pressure on host communities. Weak state presence and the absence of formal conflict resolution mechanisms leave a governance vacuum that is frequently filled by violence and vigilantism.

3.2 Manafwa District

3.2.1 Conflict Hotspots

Densely populated agricultural slopes where micro-plots border one another, creating friction over boundaries and access to productive land.

3.2.2 Underlying Drivers

- a) **Land Scarcity:** Average landholdings fall below subsistence levels, generating intense competition for cultivable space.
- b) **Fragmentation:** Inheritance practices continually subdivide plots, producing unsustainable micro-farms and eroding household resilience.
- c) **Declining Productivity:** Soil erosion and recurrent landslides permanently remove arable land, transforming resource competition into zero-sum disputes.
- d) **Mobility Patterns:** Displacement in Manafwa is predominantly internal and intra-district, with households relocating from high-risk slopes to marginally safer areas. These movements often spark secondary conflicts with host communities over land and resources. Projections indicate that such mobility will intensify, potentially evolving into permanent, large-scale migration by 2050 under worsening climate scenarios.

4. Service Delivery and Response Gaps

4.1 Analysis of Critical Deficits

Critical Deficits and Governance Gaps by District

District	Critical Deficits	Areas Lacking Government Presence	Consequence
 Mbulambuli	- Skeletal disaster response teams with no specialized equipment. - Police posts understaffed and unable to secure vast, remote conflict zones.	- Remote highland parishes accessible only on foot. - Northern border areas effectively ungoverned.	Communities resort to self-help, sometimes militarized, increasing conflict risk. 
 Manafwa	- No functional meteorological stations for hyper-local rainfall prediction (Masiga 2013). - Roads and bridges routinely destroyed, cutting off markets and aid.	- Marginal agricultural zones receive only episodic extension services.	- Early warning is non-existent, turning predictable seasonal hazards into disasters. 

District	Mbulambuli District	Manafwa District
	- Limited disaster response infrastructure; hyper-local rainfall prediction (Masiga 2013).	- Remote highlands and northern border areas - Damaged transport systems
	- Roads and bridges routinely destroyed, cutting off markets and aid.	

In Mbulambuli District, critical institutional deficits significantly undermine both disaster response and security provision. Disaster response structures remain skeletal, lacking specialized equipment necessary to manage recurrent landslides and floods, while police posts are understaffed and unable to effectively secure expansive and remote conflict-prone areas. These weaknesses are most pronounced in remote highland parishes, many of which are accessible only on foot, and in the northern border zones, where state presence is extremely limited and, in some cases, effectively absent. As a consequence, communities are compelled to rely on self-help mechanisms for survival and protection. In high-risk contexts, such coping strategies can become militarized, thereby amplifying local insecurity and increasing the likelihood of conflict

escalation, particularly in areas already affected by cattle rustling and resource competition (UNDP and UNEP 2013, 15, 26, 348).

In Manafwa District, the deficit is more pronounced in the domain of early warning and infrastructure resilience. The district lacks functional meteorological stations capable of providing hyper-local rainfall data, severely constraining the ability to anticipate and prepare for landslides and extreme weather events (Masiga 2013, 267, 288). This technical gap is compounded by the recurrent destruction of roads and bridges during heavy rains, which isolates communities from markets, emergency assistance, and government services (Masiga 2013, 20). Furthermore, marginal agricultural zones receive only intermittent extension services, limiting farmers' access to climate adaptation knowledge and support. The cumulative effect of these deficits is that early warning systems are virtually non-existent, transforming what would otherwise be predictable seasonal hazards into full-scale disasters, thereby deepening vulnerability and accelerating distress-driven displacement (Masiga 2013, 20, 288).

5. Community Impacts and Grievances

5.1 Multidimensional Impacts

- a) **Economic:** Total loss of seasonal harvests wipes out household savings, forcing sale of assets and high-interest debt.
- b) **Social: Psychological trauma** (Ndejjo et al. 2026) is widespread, particularly among children. Displacement fractures community networks (Bulungi bwansi), eroding the primary social safety net.
- c) **Infrastructural:** Damaged roads isolate communities, increasing the cost of goods and preventing access to health facilities and markets.

5.2 Vulnerable Groups Analysis

- a) **Smallholder Farmers:** Their reliance on specific, climate-sensitive crops (e.g., coffee on slopes, rice in wetlands) makes them disproportionately vulnerable to shocks.
- b) **Youth:** Limited education and livelihood options make them susceptible to recruitment into armed groups or criminality as an alternative survival strategy.
- c) **Elderly & Persons with Disabilities:** Physically unable to flee disasters quickly or engage in labor-intensive adaptation work.

5.3 Governance and Grievance Landscape

- a) **Prevailing Grievances:** A profound sense of governmental abandonment. Compensation for lost land is rare, and relocation plans (e.g., after Bududa landslides) are seen as top-down and disruptive to social fabric.
- b) **Government Response Analysis:** While policies and committees exist (e.g., District Disaster Management Committees), they are chronically under-resourced. Ecosystem-Based Adaptation (EBA) projects are often pilot-scale and lack sustainable funding, failing to meet the magnitude of need.

6. Hotspot Typology and Compound Risk

Hotspot Type	Mbulambuli District Manifestation	Manafwa District Manifestation	Compound Risk Interaction
Disaster	Landslides (highlands), Floods (lowlands)	Landslides (chronic and catastrophic)	Disasters destroy assets, pushing people into poverty and competition over remaining resources.
Conflict	Cattle rustling (transboundary), Farmer-grazer disputes	Land conflicts (internal, inter-family)	Conflict destroys social capital and diverts resources from adaptation, increasing disaster vulnerability.
Displacement	Sudden-onset (floods), Fear-based (violence)	Sudden-onset (landslides), Slow-onset (degradation)	Displaced populations strain host communities' resources, potentially seeding new conflict lines.
Service Gaps	Physical inaccessibility, Insecurity	Technical deficit (early warning), Institutional weakness	Gaps prevent mitigation and response, allowing shocks to reach their full destructive potential.

These risk layers do not operate in isolation. A landslide (disaster) displaces a community into a new area (displacement), competing for land with hosts (conflict), in a zone where the government cannot mediate or provide aid (service gap). This creates a self-reinforcing cycle of vulnerability.

7. Strategic Recommendations

7.1 Foundational: Strengthen Early Warning and Data Systems

- a) Deploy a network of community-managed hydrological and meteorological sensors in priority sub-counties, with data linked to a district dashboard.
- b) Develop context-specific risk communication protocols , leveraging radio, SMS, and community loudspeakers for alerts in local languages.

7.2 Programmatic: Promote Conflict-Sensitive Climate Adaptation

- a) Integrate "Do No Harm" and conflict analysis training into all climate project design for NGOs and district staff.
- b) Support participatory land-use planning exercises that explicitly map and negotiate resource access between farmers, grazers, and displaced persons.

7.3 Institutional: Empower Local Governance and Civil Society

- a) Provide core funding and technical mentoring to District Disaster Management Committees to develop and implement sub-county contingency plans.
- b) Formally recognize and capacity-build existing community structures (Elders' Councils, Bulungi bwansi groups) as first responders and mediation bodies.

7.4 Livelihoods: Enable Diversification and Shock Absorption

- a) Establish "climate-smart" livelihood vouchers for youth and women to start non-land-intensive enterprises (e.g., beekeeping, mobile phone repair, off-season vegetable production in sacks).
- b) Facilitate partnerships between Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and micro-finance institutions to offer index-based livestock or crop insurance.

7.5 Transformative: Foster Inclusive and Accountable Governance

- a) Advocate for and support the institutionalization of community representation in district planning and budget committees, especially for climate and disaster funds.
- b) Mandate and fund gender and disability audits of all resilience programs to ensure equitable access to resources and decision-making.

8. Conclusion

The hotspot analysis for Mbulambuli and Manafwa districts reveals not a series of discrete challenges, but an integrated compound risk system. In this system, climate shocks act as the primary trigger, displacement is the immediate consequence, resource scarcity fuels social tension, and institutional weaknesses amplify every step of the cascade. The Mt. Elgon region thus serves as a clear example of climate change functioning as a threat multiplier, exacerbating pre-existing fragility.

Addressing this complexity requires moving beyond sectoral projects. The strategic recommendations outlined propose an integrated, peace-responsive adaptation framework. The core of this approach is shifting agency to communities, hardening local institutions, and intentionally designing interventions that simultaneously reduce climate risk, manage conflict, and strengthen governance. For GPPAC and partners, this represents the essential pathway for building resilient and peaceful societies in the face of a changing climate.