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Drought, war and rural livelihoods in Syria's northeast: a spatiotemporal perspective

Dr. Lina Eklund and Dr. Pinar Dinc

Mismanagement, drought, migration, civil war, and more drought. The social-ecological situation in Syria is worsening due to climate stress and prolonged conflict. While the research community is still debating the role of the 2007-2009 drought in the onset of the civil war, farmers in the northeast continue to suffer from degraded resources, reduced river flows, and conflict related violence. Warnings of a collapse in water and food production due to multiple drought-induced crop failures in the northeast showcase a vulnerable population at risk of severe food insecurity and devastated livelihoods. In this paper we investigate the effects of drought and armed conflict on the social-ecological system in Syria's northeast, from 2000 until 2020. We do that through a spatiotemporal analysis of drought focusing on rainfall, river flows, and agricultural production. We also look into patterns of land abandonment, indicative of migration, and their relationship to drought and local violence. With this paper we wish to move away from the debate about the role of climate stress in the Syrian civil war, and instead highlight the impacts of drought and conflict on rural livelihoods in north-eastern Syria.

Key words: Environment/Climate Change, Conflict, Migration