



2022

# THE FUTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING

Nurturing an  
Ecosystem for Peace

A White Paper

A collaborative project guided by the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, PeaceNexus Foundation, Environmental Peacebuilding Association, Environmental Law Institute, and International Union for Conservation of Nature, and written by Oli Brown and Giuliana Nicolucci-Altman

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This paper tries to reflect, as best it can, the wisdom of the crowd. And what a crowd! It is the product of a multi-lingual, multi-stage, consultative process carried out over many months with 154 authors writing the 50 chapters in the Compendium (a listing of the authors is in Annex 1) and more than 150 people being involved in consultation and reviews of different iterations of the paper.

The project was developed through a collaboration among five organizations: the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the PeaceNexus Foundation, the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform (GPP), the Environmental Law Institute (ELI) and the Environmental Peacebuilding Association (EnPAX). The GPP is a joint project of five institutions: the Graduate Institute's Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP); the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP); DCAF – Geneva Center for Security Sector Governance; Interpeace; and the Quaker United Nations Office, Geneva (QUNO). It was guided by a Steering Committee made up of Carl Bruch (ELI, EnPAX), Rainer Gude and Achim Wennmann (GPP), Hannah Moosa (IUCN), Hesta Groenewald, Daniela Bosnjak, and Heloise Heyer (PeaceNexus). It was facilitated by Annika Erickson-Pearson of GPP.

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What is clear to me is that peacebuilding that ignores the environment is not complete. This White Paper is transforming the way in which we approach the emerging field of Environmental Peacebuilding. //

## FOREWORD

My name is Josephine Ekiru. I am a Turkana woman from the Ngara Mara community in Isiolo County in Northern Kenya. Our pastoralist communities in northern Kenya face environmental conflict on a daily basis, often driven by land degradation and increasing pressure on the scarce natural resources in our region. My work focuses on trying to avoid or calm these conflicts: I am the Peace Coordinator for the Northern Rangelands Trust in Kenya, and the 2021 recipient of the US Institute of Peace's Women Building Peace Award.

In my work, I monitor the situation with a view to providing early warning of violent conflict so that the situation can be anticipated and addressed through formal and informal interventions that bring Government and other stakeholders together. We engage communities on peacebuilding activities alongside economic empowerment programmes which are essential components to creating long-term peace in northern Kenya.

What is clear to me is that peacebuilding that ignores the environment is not complete. This White Paper is transforming the way in which we approach the emerging field of environmental peacebuilding. It frames the core issues associated with nature-based conflict and identifies future approaches and areas of focus. Not only because environmental degradation or challenges brought by climate change are often at the root of conflict but also because it can be necessary for peacebuilding, such as using the shared environmental interests of parties in conflict to reach an agreement. Peace practitioners such as myself and academics will build our work on the shoulders of this exceptional contribution to the field of Environmental Peacebuilding.

Our experience in Northern Kenya has taught us that the best means of conflict prevention is building resilience through inclusive and sustainable development which addresses inequalities and strengthens community-led institutions. The White Paper can certainly contribute to bringing peacebuilders and environmentalists together by highlighting how close both disciplines are, which will strengthen future work, both in academia and in practice.

*Josephine Ekiru*



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The White Paper on the Future of Environmental Peacebuilding is the product of an 18-month process of research and consultation with environmental peacebuilding practitioners, researchers, and policymakers from all regions. The key findings of the White Paper on the Future of Environmental Peacebuilding are presented in four sections:

### 1. THE GLOBAL CONTEXT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING

- Over the last five or so decades, the many links between the environment and our security have become a focus for political attention and academic research.
- With the end of the Cold War, some commentators were heralding the hopeful arrival of a ‘new world order’.
- However, a new world ‘disorder’ soon emerged, which triggered an urgent search to better understand the root causes of violent conflict.
- Environmental change and the poor management of resources increase the risks of conflict, especially in places already fractured by socioeconomic inequality, ethnic divisions, or ideological divides.
- The trade in conflict resources such as illegal timber, blood diamonds, and conflict minerals finances violence and encourages instability.
- The scale and cascading impacts of climate change mean it is increasingly being recognized as a security issue.
- Meanwhile, the environmental damage caused by war amplifies the human toll and complicates post-conflict recovery.
- Civil wars with a strong resource or environmental dimension tend to be harder to resolve and more likely to slip back into violence.
- Environmental issues can provide a platform for dialogue and a reason for cooperation that can help to resolve differences among communities.
- The greater appreciation of the role of environmental degradation, climate change and natural resource management in violent conflict has real impacts on peacebuilding policy and practice.

### 2. CHALLENGES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING

- While there has been general acceptance at a political level of the intuitive links between environment and violent conflict, actual action on environmental peacebuilding has rarely matched the rhetoric.
- Framing environmental issues in terms of their potential to trigger or sustain violent conflict can lead to the environment being seen as a security threat with the risk of serious, unintended consequences.
- Some environmental peacebuilding analyses have been criticized for being conceptually and methodologically sloppy.

- This may have resulted in a tendency for environmental peacebuilders to underestimate the ability of human societies to adapt to changing situations.
- Organizations active in, and setting the agenda for, environmental peacebuilding show little geographic or sectoral diversity.
- The field of environmental peacebuilding still tends to see women, Indigenous Peoples, youth and other marginalized groups as passive targets for aid rather than as change-makers and knowledge-holders in their own right.

### 3. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING

- Environmental peacebuilding has risen in prominence as its importance has been documented by a growing body of experience and evidence.
- Environmental peacebuilders are starting to have access to the necessary experience, technology, and data to be proactive rather than reactive.
- New legal processes are changing the landscape for environmental peacebuilding.
- There is a growing diversity of ideas and actors in the environmental peacebuilding field.
- There is a willingness to work together to innovate and learn.
- If managed carefully, there are ways to engage business actors constructively in environmental peacebuilding.
- A series of landmark events in 2022 are opportunities to galvanize the environmental peacebuilding movement: to share ideas and to accelerate action.

### 4. AN AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING

- Shift the mindset of the environmental peacebuilding community towards greater inclusivity and self-awareness.
- Implement and encourage more bottom-up, community-based approaches.
- Advocate for leadership that provides the necessary political space, funding, and entry points for environmental peacebuilding.
- Embed environmental peacebuilding in policy frameworks at all scales.
- Push for the implementation of robust, binding international frameworks to hold states, armed groups, and companies to account for environmental damage during conflict.
- Anticipate and respond to environmental and natural resource-related tensions before they break down into violent conflict.
- Continue to build and share the evidence base for environmental peacebuilding.
- Bridge silos and operate in a peace-positive and a nature-positive way.

# INTRODUCTION

Ask an ecologist and a political security analyst to name the countries and regions of gravest concern to them, and though their points of departure are different, their final lists might look surprisingly similar: Afghanistan,<sup>1</sup> Bangladesh, Brazil, Central African Republic, Colombia,<sup>2</sup> Haiti, Iraq,<sup>3</sup> the African Great Lakes region,<sup>4</sup> Central Asia,<sup>5</sup> the Sahel,<sup>6</sup> Somalia,<sup>7</sup> Syria, Venezuela, and Yemen, among others.

Over the past 50 years, policymakers, researchers and practitioners have recognized that environmental degradation and contested natural resources are part of the reason why people fight and kill each other. Experience shows us that violent conflict can be driven by natural resource degradation and scarcity, by competition for control where resources are abundant, and by the enduring legacies of colonialism. Meanwhile, climate change is beginning to redraw the maps of the world with far-reaching consequences for lives, livelihoods and political stability around the globe.

The environmental devastation wrought by violent conflict exacerbates the human toll and legacies of war, while the trade in conflict resources can incentivize continued fighting, extending the duration and severity of violence. And once fighting stops, shared natural resources and common environmental interests can provide opportunities for, but also risks to, successful and sustainable peacebuilding.

Environmental peacebuilding exists at the intersection of peace, conflict, and the natural world.<sup>8</sup> It is inspired by a recognition of the many ways in which the management of environmental issues can support conflict prevention, reduction, resolution, and recovery.<sup>9</sup> It recognizes the importance of peace and human security for environmental management and sustainable development. It grows out of a multi-disciplinary acknowledgement that a healthy environment is an essential part of conflict prevention.<sup>10</sup> And it offers the opportunity to harness common resources and shared environmental challenges as a reason for cooperation, rather than a cause of division.

The term ‘White Paper’ is typically used in government circles to denote a publicly available, balanced document designed to help readers make decisions. This white paper seeks to encourage debate and discussion over the challenges, opportunities, and possibilities for environmental peacebuilding in conflict-affected states and societies. It is not a consensus document, nor does it seek to provide a single, conclusive vision of environmental peacebuilding. On the contrary, the White Paper and accompanying Compendium seek to give voice to many different stories and points of view.

1 Compendium chapter: Alavi et al. (2022) *Out with War and in with Nature: Supporting climate resilience and sustainable livelihoods through mine clearance in Afghanistan*

2 Compendium chapters: Vargas et al. (2022) *Salvar el Futuro de la Amazonia Colombiana: Una agenda para detener la espiral de violencia, deforestación y cambio climático*; Morales-Muñoz and Gorricho (2022) *Conserving Biodiversity and Building Peace in Colombia: Enabling mechanisms that solve socio-environmental conflicts in protected areas through peaceful means enhances biodiversity conservation and peacebuilding*

3 Compendium chapter: Von Lossow, Schwartzstein and Partow (2022) *Water, Climate & Environment: Beyond Iraq’s obvious conflicts*

4 Compendium chapter: Refisch (2022), *Mountain Gorilla Conservation and Environmental Peacebuilding: Conservation as a common objective for peacebuilding*

5 Compendium chapter: Huda (2022) *Environmental Peacebuilding in Central Asia: Reducing conflicts through cross-border ecological cooperation*

6 Compendium chapter: Brachet and Chekchak (2022) *When Resilience is Not Enough: Learning from nature to regenerate social and ecological systems*

7 Compendium chapter: Yasin and Roble (2022) *Environmental Peacebuilding in Somalia: Civil society responses to environmental conflict*

8 Compendium chapter: Baden et al. (2022) *The Search for Meaning: Why clear definitions make for effective engagement in environmental peacebuilding*

9 Ide, T., Bruch, C., Carius, A., Conca, K., Dabelko, G., Matthew, R. and Weinthal, E. (2021) ‘The Past and Future(s) of Environmental Peacebuilding’, in *Environmental Peacebuilding, International Affairs*, London: Chatham House

10 Compendium chapter: Sample and Paulose (2022) *Our Future is Interdisciplinary, Inclusive, and Equitable: Acknowledging and redressing physical, structural, and epistemological violence in the Environmental Peacebuilding field*





The White Paper and Compendium on the Future of Environmental Peacebuilding are timed to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1972 Stockholm Conference, which is widely considered the birthplace of the modern environmental movement.<sup>11</sup> The paper and compendium are the product of a global conversation about the future of environmental peacebuilding and they draw from extensive academic work and practical experience.

Collaboration is the driving spirit of the exercise. The aim is to give a platform to a diversity of voices from across geographies and generations. The 50 chapters in the compendium are the work of 154 authors from more than 80 organizations across 30 countries. Most of the compendium chapters have been written by authors from two or more organizations from different sectors straddling civil society, Indigenous groups, government, academic institutions, think tanks, international organizations, and the private sector. A full listing of the Compendium chapters and authors is included at the end.

## BOX 1: LANGUAGE MATTERS

The words we choose shape the way we see the world. Here are some definitions for commonly used terms in the report:

- **Natural resources** are natural assets (raw materials) occurring in nature that can be used for economic production or consumption.<sup>12</sup> They can either be renewable (i.e., replenishable within human timescales, such as forests, water or pasture<sup>13</sup>) or non-renewable (such as minerals or fossil fuels).
- **Violent conflict** involves at least two parties using physical force to resolve competing claims or interests. While a violent conflict may involve only non-state actors, the term is often used as a synonym for war that involves at least one government.<sup>14</sup>
- **Conflict resources** are natural resources whose systematic exploitation and trade in a context of conflict contribute to, benefit from, or result in the commission of serious violations of human rights, violations of international humanitarian law or violations amounting to crimes under international law.<sup>15</sup>
- **Environmental peacebuilding** integrates natural resource management in conflict prevention, mitigation, resolution, and recovery to build resilience in communities affected by conflict.<sup>16</sup>

11 The full name of this conference was the UN Conference on the Human Environment.

12 OECD (2005) *Glossary of Statistical Terms*, <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=1740>

13 Though current levels of environmental degradation and pollution mean that parts, or all, of some nominally renewable natural assets, such as the Amazon rainforest or coral ecosystems, could collapse in a way that is not naturally replenishable within human timescales.

14 Frère, M.-S. and Wilen, N. (2015) *Infocore Definitions*, [https://www.infocore.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/def\\_violent-conflict.pdf](https://www.infocore.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/def_violent-conflict.pdf); We recognize that there are a variety of definitions of conflict and violent conflict, including concepts of “structural violence” (coined in 1969 by Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung), wherein some social structure or social institution may harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs.

15 Global Witness (2006) *The Sinews of War: Eliminating the trade in conflict resources*, [https://cdn2.globalwitness.org/archive/files/import/the\\_sinews\\_of\\_war.pdf](https://cdn2.globalwitness.org/archive/files/import/the_sinews_of_war.pdf)

16 Definitions for Environmental Peacebuilding vary. This one is that used by the Environmental Peacebuilding Association: <https://www.environmentalpeacebuilding.org/>. Alternatives include “Environmental peacebuilding is the process through which environmental challenges shared by the (former) parties to a violent conflict are turned into opportunities to build lasting cooperation and peace” from Dresse et al. (2019)

// a diversity of voices and experience is essential if we are to build a resilient, dynamic 'ecosystem' for peace. //

Broadly speaking, each chapter in the Compendium proposes a 'big idea', suggests a new approach, or relays the lessons from practical experience of environmental peacebuilding. Not all the chapter authors agree on the priorities for the future of environmental peacebuilding. Some have diametrically opposed views. That's ok: Just as a diversity of species is needed in a landscape to ensure resilience and health, so too a diversity of voices and experience is essential if we are to build a resilient, dynamic 'ecosystem' for peace.

This white paper is inspired by these many voices. Though concise, the white paper hopes to emphasize the growing assortment of approaches, ideas and visions for the future of environmental peacebuilding. The white paper is divided into four parts. The first gathers perspectives on the global context of environmental peacebuilding. The second points to some of the key challenges to environmental peacebuilding practice, while part three highlights important opportunities to harness the environment for peace. The fourth presents an agenda for the future of environmental peacebuilding.

## 1. THE GLOBAL CONTEXT FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING

*"If we did a better job of managing our resources sustainably, conflicts over them would be reduced. So, protecting the global environment is directly related to securing peace."*

Hon. Professor Wangari Maathai, Nobel Laureate

**Over the last five or so decades the many links between the environment and our security have become a focus for political attention and academic research.** While Indigenous groups have engaged in various forms of what we would now call environmental peacebuilding for centuries, the environmental peacebuilding movement in the Global North is a more recent phenomenon. It was born from a deepening public concern in the 1960s and 1970s over environmental degradation and the ecological carrying capacity of the earth, as well as the devastating effects of modern warfare. This growing environmental awareness resonated with the nerve-racking backdrop of Cold War uncertainty, and the recognition that humanity had, in the form of the nuclear arms race, invented the tools for its own destruction. In 1972, a landmark conference on the environment in Stockholm, organized by the United Nations, was a milestone in the emergence of environmental peacebuilding. It underlined the need for global solutions to tackle shared environmental challenges. It also led to the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and many other national environmental organizations.

**With the end of the Cold War, some commentators were heralding the arrival of a hopeful 'new world order'.** This, it was hoped, was one where human rights and the rule of law would be respected, and in which the UN might finally begin to function as intended by its founders. Symbolic of this renewed interest in multilateralism and cooperation around shared environmental concerns, the 1992 Rio Earth Summit saw the largest ever gathering of world leaders tackle questions of environment

and development, marking the arrival of the environment as a matter of considerable international attention. The massive civil society presence at the summit also underlined the crucial role of civil society movements—including environmental justice movements, women’s groups and Indigenous sovereignty movements—in putting the environment on national and international agendas.

**However, a new world ‘disorder’ soon emerged, triggering an urgent search to better understand the root causes of violent conflict.** In the early to mid-1990s the rise in bloody civil wars in Iraq, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan,<sup>17</sup> and the former Yugoslavia led many academics, commentators, and policymakers to search with some urgency for an explanation, often looking for answers outside traditional models of state security.<sup>18</sup> Some looked towards the role of environmental change and the management of natural resources in the causes and consequences of violence. Others focused on the power imbalances that deprive marginalized, often Indigenous Peoples of access to and control over natural resources. Such systemic forms of exclusion perpetuate an extractive relationship in which critical resources from the Global South are taken, often at great social and environmental cost, to the markets of the Global North.<sup>19</sup> Nearly 30 years on, and the importance of the environment in peacebuilding is widely acknowledged. The importance of a healthy environment and a stable climate to peace and security has risen in prominence because it makes intuitive sense. But has also been borne out by a growing body of experience. This can be summarized in the following observations.

**Environmental change and the poor management of resources increase the risks of conflict, especially in places already fractured by socioeconomic inequality, ethnic divisions, or ideological divides.** For millennia humans (mostly men) have fought over land, water, and for control over precious minerals. The conflicts of today often have their roots in the actions of yesterday. The colonial conquests of Western Europe between the 15th and 20th centuries were built on a rapacious quest for natural resources to plunder, with enduring consequences for global inequality and artificial boundaries that reverberate today.<sup>20</sup> Corruption and mismanagement of natural resources such as minerals, oil, and timber—as well as biological resources, such as land,<sup>21</sup> forests, and fishing grounds<sup>22</sup>—have been closely associated with state failure, human rights violations, increased risk of community-company disputes, as well as wider violence. Some environmental conservation projects and large infrastructure projects, for their part, have been accused of undermining peace and security if, by erecting fences around national parks or flooding valleys for dam sites, they displace local communities and Indigenous Peoples, change their access to natural resources or dislocate their relationship to particular environments.

**The trade in conflict resources such as illegal timber, blood diamonds, and conflict minerals finances violence and encourages instability.** Valuable, lootable resources such as gold, minerals, timber, and diamonds have become spoils of war, changing the incentives of rebel groups and perpetuating violence. Since 1990, at least 35 major armed conflicts have been directly financed by the trade in high-value natural resources.<sup>23</sup> In some cases local and transnational companies have actively facilitated

17 Compendium chapter: Nielsen and Uras (2022) *Natural Resources Management, Environmental Governance and Peacebuilding in Darfur*

18 Peter, A., Bruch, C. and Zazykova, S. (2018) ‘Revisiting Securitization—An Empirical Analysis of Environment and Natural Resource Provisions in United Nations Security Council Resolutions, 1946–2016’ in *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Conflict and Peacebuilding*, London: Routledge

19 Compendium chapter: Mutuku and Stern (2022) *Dealing with the Past in Environmental Peacebuilding: An African ecological perspective*

20 Compendium chapter: Acheson et al. (2022) *Environmental Peacebuilding through Degrowth, Demilitarization, and Feminism: Rethinking environmental peacebuilding to stay within planetary boundaries and to champion social justice*

21 Compendium chapter: Morales-Muñoz et al. (2022) *Using Land for Peace: How sustainable land use systems can foster climate action and support peacebuilding*

22 Compendium chapter: Robinson, Csordas and Wackernagel (2022) *Defining Limits: Ecological overshoot as a driver of conflict*

23 Bruch, C., Jensen, D., Nakayama, M. and Unruh, J. (2019) ‘The Changing Nature of Conflict, Peacebuilding, and Environmental Cooperation,’ 49(2) *Environmental Law Reporter* 10134-10154



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conflict by providing financial, military, or logistical support to one of the parties in an armed conflict as part of a ‘deal’ for natural resources.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, experts are starting to worry about the possible emergence of ‘green conflict minerals.’<sup>25</sup> These include the lithium, cobalt, and rare earth minerals required for modern energy systems and advanced technologies that have become increasingly geo-strategically significant, and so more likely to be fought over.

**The scale and cascading impacts of climate change mean it is increasingly being recognized as a security issue.** Often framed as a ‘threat multiplier’ or ‘conflict accelerant’, the direct impacts of climate change—such as extreme heat and reduced rainfall—can have severe impacts on the availability and quality of natural resources.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, population growth, growing demand for resources from our use-and-throw economy,<sup>27</sup> and environmental degradation are placing increasing pressures on scarce resources and societies that may, in places, exceed the capacity of existing mechanisms to share and manage resources.<sup>28</sup> Large-scale movements of people forced to leave their homes as a result of climate change can contribute to social tensions in the places they move to, while also exposing those people to huge personal risks. These dynamics can, at times, feed into nationalistic and xenophobic politics worldwide and fuel new tensions.<sup>29</sup>

**Meanwhile, the environmental damage caused by war amplifies the human toll and complicates post-conflict recovery.** Wars damage infrastructure, cause pollution, and leave behind unexploded ordnance that render land unusable for agriculture or building. In recent years, some of the violent conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East have seen the deliberate targeting of environmental infrastructure (such as agricultural land and water treatment plants) in order to terrorize and displace civilian populations and expand territorial control.<sup>30</sup> Wartime breakdowns in governance as well as the coping strategies that people resort to often lead to the looting and unsustainable use of resources. The environment itself often falls victim to conflict, as direct and indirect environmental damage can result in environmental risks that further threaten people’s health, livelihoods, and security.<sup>31</sup> The environmental cost of conflict prolongs human suffering and complicates recovery, and can itself generate its own tensions, setting in motion a vicious cycle of environmental damage causing new tension.

**Civil wars with a strong resource or environmental dimension tend to be harder to resolve and more likely to slip back into violence.** Since 1950, at least 40 per cent of all civil wars have had a link to natural resources.<sup>32</sup> Where such links were present, conflict was more likely to recur within the first five years after a peace deal. Addressing natural resource issues and other environmental challenges in diplomacy and peace negotiations is increasingly being recognized as an important element in effective mediation practice. There is some evidence that peace agreements that do not take natural resources

24 Tignino, M. (2021) ‘Corporate Human Rights Due Diligence and Liability in Armed Conflicts: The role of the ILC Draft Principles on the Protection of the Environment and the Draft UN Treaty on Business and Human Rights,’ *Questions of International Law* 83, 47-67.

25 Bruch, C., Jensen, D., Nakayama, M. and Unruh, J. (2019)

26 Compendium chapter: Bruch, et al. (2022) *Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Environmental Peacebuilding: Considerations for a future of effective programming*

27 Compendium chapter: Robinson, Csordas and Wackernagel (2022)

28 Numerous reports address these relationships. For more see: Rüttinger, L., Smith, D., Stang, G., and Vivekananda, J., (2015) *A New Climate for Peace: Taking action on climate and fragility risks*, adelphi, International Alert, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, European Institute for Security Studies

29 Compendium chapter: McClain, et al. (2022) *Migration with Dignity: Opportunities for peace through migration with dignity*

30 Sowers, J. L., Weinthal, E., and Zawahri, N. (2017) ‘Targeting Environmental Infrastructures, International Law, and Civilians in the New Middle Eastern Wars,’ *Security Dialogue*, 48(5), 410–430. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010617716615>

31 Compendium Chapter: Pantazopoulos and Tignino (2022) *Strengthening the Thin Green Line: A call for an international monitoring mechanism for environmental peacebuilding law*

32 Matthew, R., Brown, O. and Jensen, D. (2009) *From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The role of natural resources and the environment*, United Nations Environment Programme. Geneva: UNEP

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into account are less likely to succeed and are more likely to slip back into conflict. Accordingly, governments and communities in post-conflict states have critical choices to make to reinforce peace, as do those companies and consumers that are buying the resources coming from conflict-prone countries. Decisions that are taken early on in post-conflict situations can determine development pathways for decades, but governments coming out of conflict are often in a poor position to plan for sustainable economic recovery or to negotiate good deals with business actors such as mining, logging, and agricultural companies. In areas suffering from or recovering from conflicts—in which local mechanisms to control the activities of foreign and local companies may be weak—activities by irresponsible private sector actors often have serious effects on the environment through various types of misconduct and neglect.<sup>33</sup>

**Environmental issues can provide a platform for dialogue and a reason for cooperation that can help to resolve differences among communities.**<sup>34</sup> In international conflicts, transboundary natural resources (such as water<sup>35</sup> or wildlife<sup>36</sup>) can serve as a starting point for cooperation between fighting parties and can sustain lines of communication that can help to defuse potentially explosive situations.<sup>37</sup> Transboundary collaboration between the three mountain gorilla states of Uganda, Rwanda and the DR Congo via the Transboundary Strategic Plan for the Greater Virunga landscape, went beyond the improved protection and management of mountain gorillas in the region, also tackling the history of violent conflicts between fishermen in the DR Congo and Uganda.<sup>38</sup> Environmental peacebuilding provides ways of harnessing our common resources and shared challenges to bring people together, rather than set them apart.<sup>39</sup> For example, in the Darfur region in western Sudan, which has experienced large scale armed conflict since 2003 as well as frequent droughts, a catchment management project that allows communities better access to the Wadi El Ku basin has managed to resolve local natural resource disputes, to re-establish trust between communities, and has enabled government staff to once again engage with the communities.<sup>40</sup> Environmental peacebuilding can happen at all scales, between communities as well as across international frontiers. Environmental issues can provide a rationale for collaboration at a technical level, even when the political climate does not permit normal relations. The Green Blue Deal for the Middle East, for example, proposes harnessing the sun and the sea to create region-wide desalinated water and energy security while educating younger generations on the importance of water and energy cooperation as an effective tool for conflict resolution and peacebuilding between Israel, Palestine and the wider region.<sup>41</sup>

33 Compendium chapter: Kerschbaum et al. (2022) *Off the Hook, On the Hook? Corporate Responsibility for Environmental Harm Abroad: Latest developments and future perspectives*

34 Conca, K. and Dabelko, G. (2002) *Environmental Peacemaking*, Woodrow Wilson Center and John Hopkins University Press

35 Compendium chapter: Hartog and Kortlandt (2022) *Blending Cross-Sectoral Approaches for Peaceful Cooperation Over Water*

36 Compendium chapter: Refisch (2022) *Mountain Gorilla Conservation and Environmental Peacebuilding: Conservation as a common objective for peacebuilding*

37 Kibaroglu, A. and Sayan, R.C. (2022) 'Water and 'Imperfect Peace' in the Euphrates-Tigris River Basin,' *International Affairs*, 97 (1), 139–155

38 Compendium chapter: Refisch (2022) *Mountain Gorilla Conservation and Environmental Peacebuilding: Conservation as a common objective for peacebuilding*

39 Compendium chapter: Bromberg and Kaplan (2022) *The Climate Crisis as an Entry Point to Environmental Peacebuilding: Can the climate resilience policies of the "Green Blue Deal" promote environmental peacebuilding in the Middle East?*

40 Compendium chapter: Nielsen and Uras (2022)

41 Compendium chapter: Bromberg and Kaplan (2022) *The Climate Crisis as an Entry Point to Environmental Peacebuilding: Can the climate resilience policies of the "Green Blue Deal" promote environmental peacebuilding in the Middle East?*

**The greater appreciation of the role of environmental degradation, climate change and natural resource management in violent conflict has real impacts on peacebuilding policy and practice.**

In entities such as the UN Security Council, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE),<sup>42</sup> the African Union, and NATO<sup>43</sup> acknowledgement of these links is creating political space for more effort, attention and resources to be devoted to environmental peacebuilding. For example, between 1990 and 2016 an estimated 19 per cent of UN Security Council Resolutions contained references to natural resources and the environment, in contrast to just 2.6 per cent of Resolutions between 1946 and 1989.<sup>44</sup> It has helped to shape Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, advanced the concept of human security, and informed agreements such as the 2018 Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Work by the International Law Commission, and many others, on the protection of the environment in areas affected by armed conflict has shifted the boundaries of what is considered permissible in conflict, drawing attention to the long-term and severe environmental damage left by conflict.<sup>45</sup> In October 2021 the UN Human Rights Council appointed a special Rapporteur on the protection of human rights in the context of climate change.<sup>46</sup>

## 2. CHALLENGES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING

**Environmental peacebuilding has moved from being a niche area of academic study to becoming one of much greater international interest.** Environmental peacebuilding now provides the focus for dozens of NGOs and research organizations, the theme for hundreds of books and the subject of countless PhDs, training sessions, and workshops. But despite its growth in both profile and professionalism, the field of environmental peacebuilding has faced some challenges and criticism.

**While there has been general acceptance at a political level of the intuitive links between environment and violent conflict, action on environmental peacebuilding has rarely matched the rhetoric.** The international community has acknowledged the relationship between environment and conflict and its important role in peace and security initiatives,<sup>47</sup> but it remains a formidable challenge to argue for the allocation of political will and resources needed to invest in peace through environmental protection and climate cooperation.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, some countries have blocked action on environmental peacebuilding at the highest level, including at the Security Council. Generally, this has stemmed from two concerns: either that core security

42 In December 2021 the 28th Ministerial Council of the OSCE adopted a decision committing the organization to tackle the effects of climate change. OSCE Press release (2021) *OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Linde announces new OSCE commitments on climate*, 3 December 2021 <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/506738>

43 Compendium chapter: Veeravalli and Waleij (2022) *Integrating Climate Security into NATO's Plans and Operations: Lessons learned and ways forward*

44 Peter, A., Bruch, C. and Zazykova, S. (2018)

45 Lehto, M., (2021) *Overcoming the Disconnect: environmental protection and armed conflicts*. ICRC Blog. <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2021/05/27/overcoming-disconnect-environmental-protection-armed-conflicts/>

46 OHCHR Press release (2021) *Human Rights Council appoints a Special Rapporteur on the protection of human rights in the context of climate change and a Special Rapporteur to monitor the situation of human rights in Burundi*, 18 October 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=27639&LangID=E>

47 Compendium chapter: Martinez, Rodríguez, and Won Bang (2022) *Addressing Climate-Related Security Risks: Leveraging the digital transformation for integrated climate and conflict-sensitive policy, programme, and business*

48 Compendium chapter: Nikitine and Scott (2022) *We Need Better Southern Ocean Protection: Reducing climate-related security risks, while ensuring a healthy planetary ecosystem*





institutions could be forced to work on topics that are out of their areas of competence, or that subjective assessments of environmental health could be used as grounds for interventionist action.

**Framing environmental issues in terms of their potential to trigger or sustain violent conflict can lead the environment being seen as a security threat with the risk of serious, unintended consequences.** This is a potential dark side<sup>49</sup> to environmental peacebuilding that can have adverse side effects including discrimination,<sup>50</sup> displacement, depoliticization, or degradation.<sup>51</sup> For example, the militarization of environmental protection can also come at a cost.<sup>52</sup> In the realm of wildlife conservation, for example, ‘green militarization’<sup>53</sup> lacks the ability to effectively address the root economic cause of poaching; it can also trample on the rights of Indigenous groups, put park rangers at risk, and pressure rangers to resort to ‘shoot-to-kill’ policies. Green militarization can also generate violence between local communities and conservationists.<sup>54</sup>

**Some environmental peacebuilding analyses have been criticized for being conceptually and methodologically sloppy.** The field has been criticized as too deductive and theory-driven with claims that are reliant on anecdotal evidence and that can conveniently blur the line between correlation and causation.<sup>55</sup> Some have argued that the field has an inclination to see a crisis in every environmental trend.<sup>56</sup> It also means that early warning systems focused on environmental drivers of conflict have tended to show limited predictive power and have proven hard to sustain (financially) and to validate (in terms of their results). The result has been that some analyses may have been rather deterministic, overstating the role of environmental change and ignoring positive trends that might contradict the narrative.<sup>57</sup>

**This may have resulted in a tendency for environmental peacebuilders to underestimate the ability of human societies to adapt to changing situations.** It also risks of downplaying the role of human agency in causing conflict and potentially gives dictators a free pass by allowing them to blame prevailing environmental conditions for human rights abuses.<sup>58</sup> For example, while the 2006–2009 drought in Syria may have been part of a chain of events that led to the onset of civil war in 2011, as some have argued,<sup>59</sup> that fact does not depoliticize the conflict, nor absolve the Assad regime of its actions.<sup>60</sup>

**Organizations active in, and setting the agenda for, environmental peacebuilding show little geographic or sectoral diversity.** Climate change and environmental degradation, responsibility for which lies predominantly at the feet of countries in the Global North, have disproportionate effects

49 Compendium chapter: Ide (2022) *The Dark Side of Environmental Peacebuilding*

50 Compendium chapter: Mutuku and Stern (2022)

51 Compendium chapter: Kratzer and Hillert (2021) *Operationalizing Environmental Peacemaking: Perspectives on integrating the environment into peacemaking*

52 IUCN (2021). *Conflict and Conservation*. Nature in a Globalised World Report No.1. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.

53 Compendium chapter: Dobelsky et al. (2022) *The Problem with Green Militarization: The need to explore peaceful alternative approaches to wildlife conservation*

54 Compendium chapters: Dobelsky et al. (2022); Fonseca et al. (2022) *Territorio, Biodiversidad, Desarrollo, Reconciliación, y Paz en Colombia: Las áreas protegidas, los guardaparques, y los defensores del patrimonio natural, en el marco del conflicto armado interno en Colombia*

55 Adams, C., Ide, T., Barnett, J. et al. (2018) ‘Sampling Bias in Climate–Conflict Research,’ *Nature Clim Change* 8, 200–203. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0068-2>

56 Adams, C., Ide, T., Barnett, J. et al. (2018)

57 Buhaug, H. (2015) ‘Climate–Conflict Research: some reflections on the way forward,’ *WIREs Clim Change*, 6, 269–275. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.336>

58 Raleigh, C., Linke, A. and O’Loughlin, J. (2014) ‘Extreme Temperatures and Violence,’ *Nature Clim Change* 4, 76–77. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2101>

59 Ash, K., and Obradovich, N. (2020) ‘Climatic Stress, Internal Migration, and Syrian Civil War Onset,’ *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 64(1), 3–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002719864140>

60 Ide, T. (2018) ‘Climate War in the Middle East? Drought, the Syrian Civil War and the State of Climate-Conflict Research,’ *Curr Clim Change Rep* 4, 347–354. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40641-018-0115-0>

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 ... a potential dark side to environmental  
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 including discrimination, displacement,  
 depoliticization, or degradation //

on women, who represent the majority of the world's poor.<sup>61,62</sup> There is also evidence that climate change affects Indigenous Peoples earlier and more severely than other populations. For example, they are among the first climate refugees in regions such as the Arctic and the Pacific, where sea-level rise is occurring.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, the weight of the actors active in the sector is heavily tilted towards think tanks and NGOs based in Europe (especially northern Europe) and North America. There is a distinct lack of voices from Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, and other marginalized groups. Conventional peacebuilding processes conducted inside official government channels remain male-dominated.<sup>64</sup>

**Finally, the field of environmental peacebuilding still tends to see women, Indigenous Peoples, youth, and other marginalized groups as passive targets for aid rather than as change-makers and knowledge-holders in their own right.**<sup>65</sup> Environmental peacebuilding, in common with environmental action in general, tends to suffer from Western centricity, which perpetuates the paternalistic idea that ecosystems and people in the non-Western world require 'saving' through interventions from the West. This mindset also tends to blame the non-Western world for being poorly governed and underdeveloped, and glosses over its own responsibility in causing these problems.<sup>66</sup> Yet, there is a long history of Indigenous Peoples themselves engaging in environmental peacebuilding. This experience is typically absent from the narrative on environmental peacebuilding, which is usually presented as some type of a Western invention. For example, in the Karamojong region of Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda, if inter-tribal conflicts become too violent, the elders call together warriors to sacred groves to symbolically break the spears and restore peace. These community-managed forest areas have long been important to both peacemaking and environmental security in the region, providing shade, harbouring wildlife, and preventing erosion, and so they provide important environmental as well as socio-cultural services.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, in Mashonaland Central, one of the Zimbabwe's most politically volatile provinces with high levels of gender-based violence, education programmes led by young Zimbabwean women and built upon Indigenous traditional practices rooted in Ubuntu that emphasize community, have promoted justice and accountability while challenging patriarchal norms and power structures that underlie existing environmental and governance issues.<sup>68</sup> And in the Arctic, where the melting of sea ice has resulted in the displacement of Indigenous Peoples as

61 UNFCCC (2019) *Differentiated Impacts of Climate Change on Women and Men; the integration of gender considerations in climate policies, plans and actions; and progress in enhancing gender balance in national climate delegations: Synthesis report by the secretariat*, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Subsidiary Body for Implementation Fiftieth session Bonn, 17–27 June 2019. FCCC/SBI/2019/INF.8

62 Compendium chapter: Åkesson and Åkerlund (2022) *We Are in This Together: Environment and climate actions and efforts for sustaining peace need to go hand in hand*

63 Maldonado J.K., Shearer C., Bronen R., Peterson K. and Lazrus H. (2013) 'The Impact of Climate Change on Tribal Communities in the US: displacement, relocation, and human rights,' in Maldonado J.K., Colombi B., Pandya R. *Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples in the United States*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-05266-3\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-05266-3_8)

64 Compendium chapter: Ensor and Tai (2022) *Bridging the Gap: Gender-inclusive multi-track diplomacy as environmental peacebuilding*

65 Compendium chapter: Zenda et al. (2022) *Feminist Environmental Peacebuilding in Zimbabwe: Lessons learned from a grassroots organization centering women, peace, and everyday security*

66 Nair, C. (forthcoming 2022) *Dismantling Global White Privilege: Equity for a post-western world*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers: Oakland

67 Hsiao, E. (2021) *Protecting Biodiversity, Not Just From War, But For Peace*, Conflict and Environment Observatory, <https://ceobs.org/protecting-biodiversity-not-just-from-war-but-for-peace/>. Other examples exist, such as the customary tara bandu process in Timor-Leste. See: Ide, T., Palmer, L., and Barnett, J. (2021) 'Environmental Peacebuilding From Below: Customary approaches in Timor-Leste', in *International Affairs*, 97(1), 103-117. doi: 10.1093/ia/iiaa059

68 Compendium chapter: Zenda et al. (2022)

// Environmental peacebuilding ... tends to suffer from Western centricity, which perpetuates the paternalistic idea that ecosystems and people in the non-Western world require 'saving' through interventions from the West //

well as the rise in geopolitical tensions in the Arctic Ocean, Arctic Indigenous Peoples have already taken steps to promote a sustainable future for the region. Arctic Indigenous leaders have convened summits and put forth recommendations that promote the co-production of scientific and Indigenous knowledge in the international action addressing Arctic environmental change.<sup>69</sup>

### 3. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING

**Fundamentally, environmental peacebuilding has risen in prominence as it has been borne out by a growing body of experience and evidence.** It can offer no-regrets ways of doing something in what might otherwise seem like an impossible situation. Transboundary conservation, for example, is desirable on its own merits in terms of conserving important wildlife and ecosystems. But it becomes more beneficial if it can also help to address underlying tensions among the communities and countries that share that landscape.<sup>70</sup> The common challenge of co-managing a resource provides a reason for groups to talk, to share their ideas and, ultimately, to work together. And the structures created by an effective peacebuilding process—such as mechanisms for dialogue and the inclusion of marginalized communities—can, in turn, support more impactful and sustainable conservation. In Colombia, for example, where the legacy of armed conflict has perpetuated a weak state, unequal access to land and natural resources and a stark deterioration of the environment, efforts between local communities, Colombian authorities and international organizations to establish Protected Areas in zones highly affected by armed conflict have both promoted both biodiversity conservation and peace, by providing farmers and park rangers spaces for dialogue to deal with socio-environmental conflicts in a peaceful manner.<sup>71</sup> Several new trends and developments provide important opportunities for environmental peacebuilding to further contribute to a peaceful, sustainable planet.

**Environmental peacebuilders are starting to have access to the necessary experience, technology, and data that allow them to be proactive rather than reactive.** We now have knowledge borne of experience of how environmental challenges can feed insecurity. Meanwhile, the sources of our information on those challenges are multiplying. We can anticipate problems that are just over the horizon. The powerful analytical capacities offered by innovative technologies such as satellite mapping, remote sensing, data analytics and artificial intelligence could provide massive amounts of data and analysis to help to improve early warning, conflict prevention, monitoring and evaluation

69 Compendium chapter: Miller and Stith (2022) *Environmental Peacebuilding in the Arctic: Reinforcing Indigenous Peoples' roles in securing a sustainable, just, and peaceful north*

70 IUCN (2021)

71 Compendium chapter: Morales-Muñoz and Gorricho (2022) *Conserving Biodiversity and Building Peace in Colombia: Enabling mechanisms that solve socio-environmental conflicts in protected areas through peaceful means enhances biodiversity conservation and peacebuilding*



// This diversity of actors results in a diversity of ideas and approaches //

of environmental peacebuilding interventions.<sup>72</sup> We are in a better position than ever to develop new and improved early warning systems and policy options that can address the roots of conflict before violence breaks out.

**New legal processes are changing the landscape for environmental peacebuilding.** In October 2021 the UN Human Rights Council adopted a landmark resolution recognizing the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.<sup>73</sup> The International Law Commission is codifying guidelines for the protection of the environment in relation to armed conflict. The 26 draft principles, if adopted by Member States, would consolidate the many developments of international law and improve the protection of the environment in times of armed conflict. At the same time, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has updated its Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict, setting out detailed commentaries on rules and recommendations of international humanitarian law that protect the environment (such as demilitarized zones), of potential interest for environmental peacebuilding.<sup>74</sup> Likewise, regions such as the European Union have adopted new conflict minerals legislation that is also putting more responsibility on the end-users of minerals to ensure that their supply chains are conflict free.

**There is a growing diversity of ideas and actors in the environmental peacebuilding field.** As evidenced by the more than 150 authors of the compendium chapters, environmental peacebuilding is attracting ever more attention. There is interest in environmental peacebuilding across sectors—from Indigenous groups, to corporations, faith-based organizations<sup>75</sup> and governments. This diversity of actors results in a diversity of ideas and approaches. In particular, there are opportunities to increase youth engagement; with around 50 per cent of the world's population under 30, the inclusion of young people in environmental peacebuilding at the decision-making table and in the field represents an important inter-generational opportunity.<sup>76</sup>

**There is a willingness to work together to innovate and learn.** The growing number of actors working on environmental peacebuilding at all scales means there is growing interest in interdisciplinary approaches. The fact that more people, from more backgrounds are working on variations of environmental peacebuilding (even if they might not use that term) at a variety of scales, from the intra-village to the international, is a source of great strength and innovation. The huge depth of knowledge and experience of environmental peacebuilding among Indigenous Peoples and civil society organizations present an important opportunity for environmental peacebuilders to bring together people from across cultures, sectors and organizations to contribute to creative solutions.

72 Compendium chapter: Bollettino and Darwish (2022) *Disaster Risk Reduction and Peacebuilding: Realizing the unexplored potential through environmental peacebuilding*

73 UN Human Rights Council (2021) Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council, *The Human Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment*, 8 October 2021 48/13, Resolution A/HRC/RES/48/13

74 ICRC (2020) *Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict*, International Committee of the Red Cross. <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/guidelines-protection-natural-environment-armed-conflict-rules-and-recommendations-relating>

75 Compendium chapter: Barron et al. (2022) *Three Pillars for Faith's Engagement in Environmental Peacebuilding: The transformative potential of faith and spirituality in relationship-building, dialogue, and healing*

76 Compendium chapter: Oberhauser et al. (2022) *Environmental Peacebuilding: The perspective of global youth*

**If managed carefully, there are ways to engage business actors constructively in environmental peacebuilding.**<sup>77</sup> There are many cases where local and transnational companies operating in fragile and conflict-affected states have triggered or exacerbated environmentally linked conflicts, particularly if they are engaged in large-scale extractive activities such as mining, agribusiness or logging.<sup>78</sup> That said, the majority of those business actors have, or should have, a long-term interest in peace and stability. If given the opportunity, they may be able to play a more positive role in conflict management.<sup>79</sup> Regardless of whether business actors have positive or negative impacts—or both—non-engagement will not improve the situation: business actors that are part of the problem will only become part of the solution through proactive, constructive engagement. For post-conflict countries, valuable natural resources can offer an economic boost and an incentive to keep the peace,<sup>80</sup> while better natural resource management can reinforce other peacebuilding objectives such as fostering democracy and strengthening civil society.<sup>81</sup> However, if poorly managed, those same natural resources can help to create the conditions for a return to violent conflict. The current global shift away from fossil fuels and towards green, renewable energy sources means that the companies that are doing the majority of investment in new infrastructure and technologies in fragile states have a vested interest in supporting successful environmental peacebuilding.

**A series of landmark events in 2022 offers opportunities to galvanize the environmental peacebuilding movement, share ideas, and accelerate action.** The Second International Conference on Environmental Peacebuilding in February 2022 will involve perhaps the largest gathering yet of environmental peacebuilding practitioners and researchers. At the end of the year, the 27th meeting of the parties to the Paris Agreement in Cairo (COP 27) is an opportunity to advance a consensus on how to tackle the security impacts of climate change. In the meantime, Stockholm+50 will take stock of the global environmental movement. Scheduled for June 2022, the conference can inject new dynamism into global action on environmental challenges and draw attention to the opportunities offered by environmental peacebuilding.

## 4. AN AGENDA FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING?

Environmental peacebuilding offers modest but tangible ways to tackle perhaps the most pressing challenge facing humanity: working out a way we can live together peacefully and equitably on a planet that is able to sustain both us and future generations.

But unleashing the potential of environmental peacebuilding requires courageous and transformational action. In truth there is no neat, unified agenda for the future of environmental peacebuilding. Instead, we need to encourage many different agendas, each reflecting the unique position and diverse experiences of environmental peacebuilding working on different issues, at many scales, across multiple sectors and in all countries around the world.

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77 Compendium chapter: Foster et al. (2022) *Environmental Peacebuilding: The case for human rights and conflict sensitive approaches to business activities*

78 Tignino, M. (2021)

79 Kaye, J.L., Pachoud, G. and Boutellis, A. (2021) 'Including Business in Peace', *Business and Peace Series*, Paper No. 1, TrustWorks Global, July 2021. Though it is also important to note that their economic influence means that private sector actors can also wield significant influence at the peacebuilding table that can drown out other civil society actors.

80 Compendium chapter: Krampe, Hegazi and VanDeveer (2022) *Sustaining Peace through Better Resource Governance: Three potential mechanisms for environmental peacebuilding*

81 Rustad, S.A., Päivi L., and Le Billon, P. (2012) 'Building or Spoiling Peace? Lessons from the management of the high-value natural resources', in *High-Value Natural Resources and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*. Abingdon: Earthscan

In essence we need an ‘ecosystem for peace’, in which a diversity of actors can bring together what are typically regarded as opposite camps: integrating both bottom-up and top-down approaches, combining the distinct knowledge of under-represented groups (women, Indigenous Peoples, young people) with big data and frontier technologies,<sup>82</sup> bringing together those who argue for the intrinsic value of nature with those who insist on the primacy of human protection, promoting economic development while shifting away from polluting, extractive industries, and so on.

Frankly we don’t even know all the right questions, let alone have the right answers. Nevertheless, drawing on the many ideas in the compendium, there are eight important ways in which we can work to nurture this ‘ecosystem for peace’ for the future of environmental peacebuilding.

**First, shift the mindset of the environmental peacebuilding community towards greater inclusivity and self-awareness.** There needs to be a collective recognition of the uncomfortable fact that, regardless of the good intentions of its current proponents, the Western environmental peacebuilding field, such as it is, has its roots in a long history of global inequality and the legacies of colonialism.<sup>83</sup> This requires changing mindsets through education and actively striving to bring in different perspectives. This may help to shift away from what can too often appear to be a paternalistic saviour mentality, towards a new, more inclusive approach to environmental peacebuilding. New approaches to environmental peacebuilding must be co-created with women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities and be grounded in their everyday realities and lived experience.<sup>84</sup> Future efforts must recognize the gendered character of both environmental interactions and peace and conflict processes, integrate a gendered lens into environmental and conflict research,<sup>85</sup> and address the exclusion of women and feminist perspectives in environmental peacebuilding.<sup>86</sup> This sort of approach must go beyond just promoting inclusion and help to effect transformative and structural change.<sup>87</sup>

**Second, implement and encourage more bottom-up, community-based approaches.** Community-based environmental governance is often successful in managing natural resources and mitigating environmental conflicts.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, bottom-up approaches also empower vulnerable and marginalized groups that lack seats at decision-making tables and suffer from the ‘slow violence’ of climate change and the destruction of their livelihoods and ecosystems.<sup>89</sup> In Mali, for example, cross-water collaboration conducted by the Water, Peace and Security partnership convened interlocutors at national, sub-regional, and local levels to develop a shared understanding of the links between water use, livelihoods, and related conflict in the Inner Niger Delta.<sup>90</sup> Environmental peacebuilding approaches can help to ensure that communities are informed of and included, as a matter of right, in the decisions that affect them.<sup>91</sup> While this is starting to happen, bottom-up approaches can inform, work with and improve top-down national-level approaches.<sup>92</sup>

82 Compendium chapter: Khaizourane et al. (2022) *Harnessing Science for Environmental Peacebuilding: How science diplomacy can support sustainable peace*

83 Compendium chapter: Sample and Paulose (2022); Tries, C. H., Auerbach, J. and Katti, M. (2021) ‘Decoloniality and Anti-Oppressive Practices for a More Ethical Ecology’, *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 5, pp. 1205-1212, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-021-01460-w>

84 Compendium chapters: Zenda et al. (2022); Bruch et al. (2022); Miller and Stith (2022)

85 Ide, T., Bruch, C., Carius, A., Conca, K., Dabelko, G., Matthew, R. and Weinthal, E. (2021)

86 Compendium chapter: Ensor and Tai (2022)

87 Compendium chapter: Zenda et al. (2022)

88 Ide, T., Bruch, C., Carius, A., Conca, K., Dabelko, G., Matthew, R. and Weinthal, E. (2021); Compendium chapter: Mora and Cubillos (2022) *La Participación Ciudadana Como Elemento Transcendente de la Paz Ambiental: Presupuestos para su eficacia*

89 Ide, T., Bruch, C., Carius, A., Conca, K., Dabelko, G., Matthew, R. and Weinthal, E. (2021)

90 Compendium chapter: Hartog and Kortlandt (2022) *Blending Cross-Sectoral Approaches for Peaceful Cooperation Over Water: Lessons from the Water, Peace and Security Partnership*

91 Roberts, E. and Finnegan, L., (2013) *Building Peace around Water, Land and Food: policy and practice for preventing conflict*, Quaker United Nations Office

92 Compendium chapter: Eufemia et al. (2022) *Environmental Governance in State-Society Relations: Critical lessons from*





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 Ultimately all countries and all levels  
 have to recognize they have a stake  
 in, and a responsibility for, a  
 peaceful, sustainable planet. //

**Third, advocate for leadership that provides the necessary political space, funding, and entry points for environmental peacebuilding.** Compelling political leadership and genuine political commitment that focuses on social justice, human rights, and the intrinsic value of nature is critical if environmental peacebuilding actors are going to have the mandate, funds, and capacity to fulfil their potential. This leadership is not, by any means, limited to the hallways of the UN, the corridors of power of governments in the Global North or the boardrooms of the development banks. While that is important and welcome, leadership and commitment also need to come from Indigenous Peoples,<sup>93</sup> women, youth, and local communities.<sup>94</sup> Ultimately all countries and all levels have to recognize they have a stake in, and a responsibility for, a peaceful, sustainable planet.

**Fourth, embed environmental peacebuilding in policy frameworks at all scales.** Leaders change or move on, so it is important to also ensure that entry points for environmental peacebuilding are woven into the fabric of national and international policy. This includes policies such as the UN's Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines (known as the Capstone Doctrine) which was released in 2008 and still shapes the UN's approach to peacekeeping,<sup>95</sup> and the ICRC's Military Guidelines on the protection of the environment in armed conflict.<sup>96</sup> These types of policies can institutionalize environmental peacebuilding in ways that outlive the career of any one charismatic leader.

**Fifth, push for the implementation of robust, binding international frameworks to hold states, armed groups, and companies to account for environmental damage during conflict.** This needs to address the responsibility of transnational companies to ensure high standards of corporate behaviour and support host States and the international community to prosecute cases of environmental harm by corporations.<sup>97</sup> It also needs to address the responsibility of States and non-state actors to avoid unnecessary damage during conflict, through the adoption of the International Law Commission's (ILC) draft principles on the protection of the environment in armed conflict.

**Sixth, anticipate and respond to environmental and natural resource-related tensions before they break down into violent conflict.** Environmental peacebuilders can increasingly harness big data and frontier technologies to project trends and predict where problems might happen, and to ensure that peacebuilding processes are informed by a solid understanding of environmental and climate processes.<sup>98</sup> Looking to the future, such technologies can play an important role in integrating local knowledge and needs into larger datasets, measuring the impact of different interventions on the ground, facilitating transparency across different scales supporting collective action, and ultimately helping communities recover from environmental stress and violent conflict.<sup>99</sup> However, big tech and big data also come with many ethical concerns and problems related to privacy and surveillance, and their use needs to be cautiously managed and carefully evaluated.

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93 Compendium chapter: Miller and Stith (2022)

94 Compendium chapter: Mai-Bornu et al. (2022), *Green Futures for Environmental Peacebuilding in Nigeria: Challenges and opportunities for oil producing communities in the Niger Delta*

95 UN (2008) *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and guidelines*, Department for Peacekeeping Operations

96 ICRC (2020)

97 Compendium chapter: White and White (2022) *Corporate Social Responsibility in the Age of Ecocide: The case for stronger corporate governance frameworks*; Compendium chapter: Foster et al. (2022)

98 Compendium chapter: De Coning et al. (2022) *Adaptive Peacebuilding: Improving climate-related security risk management through real-time data and analysis*

99 Ide, T., Bruch, C., Carius, A., Conca, K., Dabelko, G., Matthew, R. and Weinthal, E. (2021)

**Seventh, continue to build and share the evidence base for environmental peacebuilding.**

Environmental peacebuilders need to constantly make the case for action, bringing out the lessons of what is working and what is not working in ways that are accessible and understandable by actors outside of the field of peacebuilding. In particular this means we need to develop more robust monitoring and evaluation, and continue to find ways to share best practice and integrate environmental peacebuilding into education systems and capacity building programmes.<sup>100</sup> More sophisticated, consistent, and widespread monitoring and evaluation tools will provide accountability and learning for beneficiaries, implementers, and funders alike.<sup>101</sup>

**Finally, bridge silos and be sure to operate in a peace-positive and a nature-positive way.** If this White Paper has a single message, it is that creative solutions come from people working together across sectors and areas of expertise. The idea of bridging the silos is so oft repeated to have become a cliché, but for an area that inherently cuts across the domains of environmental science, international relations, and security analysis, it is absolutely essential. Meanwhile, environmental peacebuilding, by its very nature, should seek to go beyond do-no-harm approaches and excel beyond conflict sensitivity towards actual conflict resolution and conflict transformation.<sup>102</sup>

## CONCLUSION

We know that the human species is already in conflict with the natural world—a conflict in which we can only be victims, not victors. Experience shows that it is no longer simply desirable that peacebuilding interventions integrate environmental threats; it is now absolutely imperative that we mainstream integrated, effective, and sustainable environmental peacebuilding policy and practice to secure lasting peace for the future of our planet. With often similar root causes—including weak or corrupt institutions, discrimination, inequality, poverty, marginalization, over-exploitation—the converging crises of conflict and environmental degradation can be mutually reinforcing, with climate impacts potentially exacerbating the conflict cycle and violence weakening the institutions needed to build resilience.<sup>103</sup> Environmental peacebuilding can help us ensure a future that is more peaceful, equitable, and sustainable for people and planet.

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100 Compendium chapter: McClain, Talla and Bruch (2022) *Monitoring, Evaluation, & Learning: Approaches for building resilience and sustaining Peace*

101 Ide, T., Bruch, C., Carius, A., Conca, K., Dabelko, G., Matthew, R. and Weinthal, E. (2021)

102 Compendium Chapter: Bruch et al. (2022)

103 Compendium chapter: Crawford, Hammill and Matthew (2022) *Building Peace and Climate Resilience: Aligning peacebuilding and climate adaptation in fragile states*

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# COMPENDIUM CHAPTERS

The White Paper on the Future of Environmental Peacebuilding is a product of a diverse set of ideas and experience from its accompanying compendium, a collection of 50 articles by over 150 authors collaborating across sectors and continents on the future of the field. The complete compendium can be found at: [www.ecosystemforpeace.org](http://www.ecosystemforpeace.org)

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2022

# THE FUTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING

Nurturing an  
Ecosystem for Peace  
A White Paper

The White Paper on the Future of Environmental Peacebuilding is the product of an 18-month process of research and consultation with environmental peacebuilding practitioners, researchers, and policymakers from all regions. It aims to deliver a strong, cogent message about the relevance, evidence, and promise of environmental peacebuilding to the Stockholm+50 forum in June 2022. This project was developed not only to advance a policy agenda for environmental peacebuilding, but also to foster inter-institutional collaboration and shared innovation for the field.

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