

that light. The questions relate to the underlying themes and should help the reader identify issues at different levels (local, structural etc.) from various perspectives.

The toolkit proved a challenging exercise due to the very tight space constraints. While the briefing paper cannot reflect the full complexity of forest and conflict links, it specifically informs a non-specialized but very active audience on this relationship. In view of this tool's structure as a vehicle for spreading important issues, insights and ideas, it would be interesting to expand and frequently update the program options section. Later, indicators relating to each of the program option approaches could be defined to enable development practitioners to identify progress in this area, and in a second feedback loop the toolkit could be enhanced and fine-tuned.

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PROTECTING NATURE IN WAR: HOW DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS CAN HELP

By Esther Blom

The issue of nature conservation during conflicts is often neglected, since the human tragedy and the necessary humanitarian aid are given preference over conserving ecosystems and species. However, preventing ecological disasters, habitat degradation and species extinction effectively contributes to maintaining the quality of people's environment, facilitating the restoration of livelihoods after and even during conflict; therefore, it deserves more attention from the international community.

Since its establishment in 1975, the Working Group Ecology and Development –a group of independent Dutch nature conservationists– has aimed to put neglected issues of development and nature conservation on the national and international agendas. Because the issue of nature in war was important and largely neglected, the Working Group organised an international seminar on the subject in 2000 and published the book "Nature in War, biodiversity conservation during conflicts" (Blom *et al.* 2000, eds.: Blom, E., Bergmans, W., Dankelman, I., Verweij, P., Voeten, M. & Wit, P. *Mededelingen No 37. Netherlands Committee for International Nature Protection. Publisher: Backhuys Leiden.- announced in this issue p 125*). Since then it has been fuelling the discussions on this subject through lectures at universities and international meetings. Members of the working group have also been contributing

to nature conservation in the field during and after conflicts through the CIMIC initiative (see below).

During the international seminar, a number of recommendations were formulated for the various stakeholders that may be involved in conflicts.

International nature conservation organisations need to establish cooperation with local groups because these are well informed on the current situation in the area and can often continue their work in the region even when a conflict has developed. Promoting cross-border cooperation is also important, especially in regional conflicts, since it could promote dialogue and contribute to peace building. It is of little use to start a conservation programme in times of conflict; the basis should already be there before the conflict starts. It is important to use any possible means (like humanitarian programmes) to stay in contact and to support the nature conservation network in the conflict area.

Local and international NGOs often must build or maintain relations with the various parties involved in a conflict, and must find their own way to fulfil their tasks. This requires evident neutrality towards the various parties even while cooperating with them and, where possible, creating greater awareness of the need to protect the environment and natural resources of the people affected by the conflict.

Local NGOs should seek diverse financial support. In times of conflict, this may even become crucial since donors are often inclined to withdraw their financial support when a conflict breaks out.

Donors should provide a certain degree of funding flexibility; flexible and independent minimum funding should be available, the use of which may be adapted to the situation. An example of a flexible funding mechanism is provided by the Netherlands Committee for IUCN (NC-IUCN). Their small grants (on tropical rainforests, wetlands, dry areas and purchase of nature areas) have supported numerous nature conservation initiatives of local NGOs during intensive or moderate conflicts. Some of these projects were specifically aimed at mitigating the impact of the conflicts but others were just focused on keeping the regular conservation work going, despite the chaotic and sometimes life-threatening situations.

Examples of small projects continuing in conflict situations

Two wetland projects in the lowlands and one project in the Himalayas in Nepal managed to continue work, albeit with restrictions, in the Government–Maoists conflict. In DR Congo a project by ‘*Promotion des Initiatives Locales*’ helped a group of refugees that had established themselves in an ecologically vulnerable area relocate to a new area and assisted them in developing sustainable agriculture. In Colombia, the Fundación Biodiversidad del Trópico protected the last remnants of the Middle Magdalena lowland forest in the Central Cordillera from expanding agriculture, infrastructure and mining, their work under threat from paramilitary groups in the area. In Burma, the Pan Kachin Development Society –supported by the Netherlands Committee for IUCN– started up awareness campaigns on environment and human rights, despite the high density of military in the state.

Governments or international entities considering intervention in an area of actual or potential conflict should include in the arguments the damage by armed conflicts to ecosystem functioning, biodiversity and natural resources of the local people. In this regard, the environmental sensitivity of the hosting areas should also be taken into consideration in managing and directing refugee flows.

Intervention forces should have guidelines for military and peacekeeping activities that include measures to prevent or limit, where possible, environmentally harmful activities. Awareness and sensitivity should be created among the staff on environmental issues in general and biodiversity issues specifically. Intervention forces should try to assess the actual damage that conflicts have imposed on the environment so that this information can be used when rehabilitating the area. Priority should be given to enabling those organisations that incorporate conservation of nature and natural resources in their activities.

An interesting development in this context is NATO's CIMIC initiative. CIMIC stands for Civil-Military Cooperation and involves six partner countries. Its main aim is to rehabilitate civil society in conflict areas. CIMIC has been active in the Balkan, Iraq and Afghanistan. It provides functional specialists –professionals with expertise that can be applied in the conflict areas. The five clusters of expertise are governance, humanitarian aspects, infrastructure, economy and trade (including agriculture). Environment and nature are not specific focal subjects but their importance is recognised. The Working Group Ecology and Development has a link with this task force through the recent participation of one

of its members as nature and environment specialist.

Consumers, governments and politicians should be clearly aware of the origin of the products offered from conflict areas such as timber, gold, diamonds or coltan and the violent circumstances under which the production takes place. Consumers should demand that the products they buy are clean in the sense that no bloodshed or environmental destruction should be involved in their production. Labelling of products, like the FSC label for sustainably produced timber, may be applied to other products as well. In some branches, as in the diamond industry, first steps have been taken to prevent trade in these products from conflict areas.

There is an urgent need for further information sharing and data collection in order to determine the actual impact of conflicts on the environment. International fora, involving the whole spectrum of stakeholders, could further strengthen and promote the mutual actions. Preventing and mitigating negative impacts of conflicts on nature should appear higher on the international and national agendas.

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