

Conclusions and the way forward

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The conservation community is well placed to take a wide range of actions at different levels in armed conflict situations. While it is not possible to avoid all of the environmental impacts these conflicts cause, it is possible to prevent or at least mitigate some of them. This often requires new approaches in working toward long-term conservation goals. Understanding of impacts, the underlying causes, and appropriate mitigation approaches is growing, but is still incomplete. More information and analysis is needed, along with improved communication of experiences and lessons, better planning, and capacity building.

3.1 Conclusions

Major conclusions are outlined below. They stress the need for adoption of new approaches and outlooks by conservation organizations to enable them to work most effectively in times of conflict. They cover both internal organizational aspects, and key areas of activity for the conservation sector. The latter includes collaboration with other organizations and sectors.

Increase flexibility

Needs shift during times of armed conflict and some planned activities cannot be implemented under changed circumstances. Conservation organizations need to develop new and flexible strategies to continue to function effectively at such times, and must be prepared to:

- **Adapt to new circumstances.** Organizations need to be opportunistic, and may have to temporarily change the focus of their activities in order to continue to work toward their long-term goals, recognizing that there are no blueprints and that each situation is unique.
- **Adjust and intensify planning procedures.** Conservation staff need to review plans frequently, in light of shifting situations, using results from the monitoring of activities (Section 2.1.1) to help assess what changes or adjustments are needed.
- **Strengthen the capacity of local staff and field offices.** Increase self-reliance and decentralize responsibilities as appropriate and provide a degree of decision-making capacity and other skills to allow these offices to function more autonomously during times of instability.

Emphasize livelihood linkages, while staying focused on long-term goals

During humanitarian emergencies, the first priority is saving lives. During and immediately following armed conflict, the environment falls in priority relative to humanitarian concerns, but improved collaboration among environment, relief, and development sectors can often mitigate or even avoid many harmful impacts without hindering essential operations. Conservation organizations need to:

- **Recognize that economic strategies are often determined by basic survival needs at all levels.** For local communities, a shift to greater reliance on subsistence activities means that natural resources often support a larger share of livelihood strategies. These realities force the conservation sector to take a broader approach to natural resource management, one that prioritizes livelihood security as well as biodiversity conservation.
- **Identify community needs** during and following conflicts, and incorporate these needs into conservation activities.
- **Demonstrate a commitment to the welfare of the community** to build trust and clout within the community, and to provide the basis for a long-term collaborative relationship.

Strengthen capacity to maintain a presence during and especially immediately after conflict

When conservation organizations maintain a presence during conflict they tend to survive crises better, and ultimately achieve more successful conservation.

This is not to suggest that staff should stay on-site at all costs but, rather, to highlight actions that can improve security and may permit an organization to maintain a presence where it might not have otherwise been possible.

Staff need to be made aware of all emergency plans. Knowing and understanding the contents of an emergency plan is not enough, though—they need to find it acceptable and make sure they can implement it properly. Moreover, staff should also be given the chance to dissent and leave if they wish. They should not be forced to accept the consequences of staying.

Strategies for maintaining a presence include:

- **Increasing the autonomy and self-reliance of local NGOs and government field staff**, and strengthening their institutional capacity by training junior field staff. In the absence of senior staff or international assistance, these junior staff members may have to assume all responsibilities. It is often junior NGO staff who ensure that local NGOs have the minimum capacity to remain on-site.
- **Maintaining neutrality and impartiality** as much as possible, to enable working on both sides of a conflict, if necessary. Neutrality can be demonstrated by actively cultivating relationships and building trust with different actors in a conflict situation, and remaining diplomatic while advocating conservation objectives.

Use reliable, up-to-date information to assess the situation

Circumstances can change quickly during and following periods of armed conflict. In order to achieve conservation goals effectively, organizations need to understand and respond to new and changing conditions by:

- **Collecting relevant information** on the conflict, including its nature and root causes, the political, social, and macro-economic context, and the most current information about likely developments and impacts. Information should be collected at local, national, and international levels via networks of reliable sources within each country and region.
- **Assessing threats and opportunities** in the short and longer term, in light of the information collected above. This involves predicting how the conflict may develop, and assessing potential direct and indirect consequences for the environment, as well as for the organization.

- **Assessing organizational capacity to respond** to the situation, including a needs assessment (both immediate and longer term) and a resource assessment. The needs assessment should include staffing, training, funding, equipment, infrastructure, communications, and logistics. The resource assessment should cover the organization's existing or available resources.

Ensure good planning

Good, proactive planning is essential to prepare for crises and to remain effective during times of conflict. Once a crisis hits, it is often too late for such planning. This involves:

- **Developing contingency plans for before, during, and after conflict.** Organizations need to employ an approach that uses operating guidelines, contingency analysis, and flexible tactics. They need to ensure that communications systems are in place to maintain effective and up-to-date flows of information between headquarters and field offices during times of conflict. Further, staff security guidelines must be developed to facilitate decision making during crises, e.g., how to decide when to pull out of an area? Who decides? How to keep local staff vigilant? How to keep headquarters staff from overreacting? How to determine when it is safe to return? Plans should be updated frequently.

Collaborate within and between sectors

Collaborating with other organizations can be an effective way to achieve conservation goals while also addressing the broadened range of needs imposed during times of armed conflict. This includes collaboration within the conservation and natural resource sector, as well as with other technical sectors, such as relief, planning, development, and democracy and governance sectors. Collaboration across institutional sectors is also important (NGOs, government, communities, donors, private sector, and military).

Such collaboration is rarely simple or easy. A considerable amount of time must be invested to build the trust and develop the relationships necessary to succeed. Collaboration can be facilitated by:

- **Improving communication,** increasing consultations, training, workshops, and joint planning through development of a disaster plan are all potential strategies to facilitate cross-learning and technical exchange.
- **Developing goodwill and trust and building relationships outside of times of conflict,** recognizing that this can take time. Create a common language between sectors to help organizations identify common ground and incorporate different perspectives.

- **Identifying common goals**—highlighting incentives as well as disincentives—for improving collaboration. With the relief sector, show that the environment is a humanitarian concern, and that a healthy environment and natural resource base are intrinsic to survival. The niches filled by each organization, with its respective roles and mandates, should be clearly identified.
- **Making environmental information more readily available during emergencies**, including information on natural resources, biodiversity, and ecologically important areas.
- **Improving communication between headquarters and field offices in all sectors**, to help implement environmental guidelines in the field.

Try to ensure continued funding during and after conflict

It is important to maintain funding during and immediately after conflict, even if at reduced levels, as this will place organizations in a better position to act when needed and help to avoid the loss of previous investments. There may be a higher risk involved with funding during times of conflict, but if the funded activities succeed, they can achieve crucial results of high value relative to the level of investment.

Strategies for funding include:

- **Ensuring ongoing and flexible support during and especially immediately after conflicts.** It should be emphasized that even modest amounts of support to pay field staff and cover basic operating expenses and field equipment may be enough to maintain a site-level presence.
- **Keeping donors informed about situations on the ground.** Provide current, on-the-ground information for donors so they can make informed decisions about risks and opportunities.
- **Seeking alternative funding sources if necessary**, such as private foundations, in the event that bilateral or multilateral funding becomes unavailable. Establish long-term funding mechanisms wherever possible.
- **Establishing emergency funding mechanisms** for maintaining and transferring funds during times of conflict—channeling funds via local NGOs, for example.
- **Repackaging, marketing, and modifying language.** Environment programs need to work harder to market themselves and demonstrate their relevance during times of conflict. They need to be creative and innovative, and modify language when necessary.

Reconcile long-term sustainable practices with immediate demands on natural resources, both during and after conflict

During and following armed conflict the environment is particularly vulnerable, yet it is usually low on the agenda and not adequately taken into account. In these times, governing authorities are often starved for cash—to finance the conflict, kick-start the economy, or pay off war debts. Further complicating matters, these are often times of confusion and poor communication within and between government ministries and technical sectors. These challenges may require strong action, including innovative approaches to achieving conservation goals, for example, by:

- **Approaching conservation from a development and economic perspective**, e.g., by helping rehabilitate tourism infrastructure and other forms of development to generate revenue that can then fund conservation activities.
- **Working with the private sector** to encourage socially and environmentally responsible practices, especially regarding post-war natural resource extraction.
- **Promoting awareness of longer term consequences of resource depletion**, and participating where possible in decision-making processes.
- **Seeking least-harmful short-term actions.**

Support formulation of post-war policy and legislation

Following conflict, there is often a window of opportunity for countries to update antiquated or inappropriate policies. Although there may be enthusiasm for policy reform, capacity for formulating and implementing new policy is often low at this time. Capacity is often inherently low in the natural resource and environment sector, even during peacetime. NGOs and donors can help by:

- **Providing information** as a basis for policy (e.g., data on biodiversity, natural resources, and community use of resources).
- **Building capacity for policy formulation** (e.g., arrange short training courses and study tours to other countries for policy makers to see different policies in action).
- **Providing funding for policy reform**, while encouraging a fair and open decision-making process. Because new policies can also demonstrate to donors that strategies have been developed for the future, they often help to attract more funding.

3.2 Recommendations for future priorities

BSP's Armed Conflict and the Environment project has worked with many partners to identify and raise awareness about the negative impacts of armed conflict on the environment, and to identify strategies for mitigating these impacts before, during, and after conflict. Many others are working in this field, and understanding of the relationships between conflict and environment is growing fast. But while much has been accomplished, more remains to be done. The issues are complex, and developing mitigation strategies in armed conflict areas is an ongoing process. For this reason, future priorities need to build on existing knowledge and experience while expanding into areas not yet sufficiently addressed.

A number of recommendations for future priorities are listed below. While these are primarily targeted at policy makers and practitioners from the conservation community, other sectors may find them useful as well.

Information gathering and analysis

- **Continue existing analysis of environmental impacts, and expand analysis to include social, economic, legal, policy, and political aspects.** Expand on current efforts to develop a more comprehensive understanding of armed conflict and its environmental impacts. Integrate environmental data with social, economic, legal, policy, and political data relevant to the circumstances. Use this information to assess risks and opportunities and to develop appropriate response strategies.
- **Compile databases of existing environmental information, including information that can be used as a baseline, and key ecological indicators,** both within and between regions, from the site to the landscape level. Accurately assessing the impacts of armed conflict on the environment is impossible without good baseline data indicating the state of an area prior to the conflict. Develop more scientifically rigorous and realistic methods for evaluating the impacts of armed conflict on the environment. Expand monitoring and evaluation capabilities. Integrate this information with existing databases.
- **Continue to research the relationship between environmental degradation and conflict,** to help policy makers and practitioners become more proactive and enable them to address causes as well as impacts of environmental degradation and conflict.

Communication

- **Share information, results, and lessons, and network across sectors.** The results and lessons from experiences of working in areas of armed conflict need to be

shared both within and across sectors. Present information in a manner that is appropriate for each audience. Communicate results to policy makers and practitioners, ensuring that research findings reach practitioners in the field. Create a clearinghouse for information, experiences, and lessons learned by gathering local-, regional- and international-level information, experiences, and lessons learned on conservation in areas of armed conflict. (IUCN might be a suitable organization to host a clearinghouse.) Create new networks and build on existing networks of expertise in these issues, and compile centralized consultant rosters. Maintain a listserv to facilitate communication and increase collaboration among policy makers and practitioners from relief, development, and conservation organizations working in areas affected by conflict. Tap into global experience with conservation in conflict areas by collaborating with governments, NGOs, and research institutions in other regions to gather relevant lessons.

- **Promote consumer awareness and responsible behavior** by addressing the demand side of resource extraction as well as the supply side and by reducing consumption of resources whose extraction is fueling conflicts. Partner with advocacy groups to leverage on-the-ground knowledge to help control illicit trade in natural resources. Advocate the development of a system of certification where one does not exist. Identify the key players in these situations, their vulnerabilities, and the options available to them.

Planning and capacity building

- **Develop conservation sector security guidelines** for disaster preparedness, mitigation, and rehabilitation, building on existing relief sector guidelines as appropriate. Determine appropriate organizational processes for making difficult decisions under crisis conditions (deciding whether and how to maintain a presence, defining an appropriate role during times of conflict).
- **Reinforce and strengthen local, national, and international capacities** for impact mitigation through targeted training courses and workshops, both during and after conflict. Focus efforts on local staff, and find ways to maintain morale, even during times of conflict and instability. Introduce conflict and impact mitigation findings into the curriculum at African wildlife colleges and universities.
- **Build local capacity for applied research and monitoring.** Provide specific training on conflict and conservation to local NGOs, as they often have to address the impacts of conflict alone. Modify existing local impact monitoring tools and provide technical support to develop locally measurable indicators (e.g., wildlife surveys, water quality analysis).

- **Adapt and use existing in-country environmental impact assessment (EIA) methods and capability**, if they exist. Transfer findings and lessons learned between natural disasters and armed conflict situations.
- **Modify existing rapid environmental assessment (REA) methodology** for gathering critical environmental data quickly and efficiently during crises. Such assessments can help prioritize and direct interventions to minimize environmental impacts during crises (Kelly 1999).
- **Improve ability to anticipate impacts** from conflict before they occur. Identify patterns in conflict and impacts, and develop indicators to better anticipate impacts before they occur. Develop proactive response strategies based on this information, in collaboration with partners. Disseminate findings to decision makers and practitioners globally.

International legal mechanisms

- **Explore international legal mechanisms** for redressing negative environmental impacts of armed conflict. Gather better on-the-ground information to improve accounting for damages and assignment of responsibility. Make greater use of international protocols and conventions to address this issue, following the example of the World Heritage Convention, among others.

3.3 Final Thoughts

Preparing for, coping with, and recovering from conflict are persistent challenges that every generation must face. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations in this guide will be of use to those working and living in areas affected by armed conflict. The need for effective conservation does not change with the rise and fall of conflict. Organizations are encouraged to persist and be creative about finding ways to continue working while remaining safe and healthy, and to build on the knowledge in this publication by adding ideas, experiences, and lessons learned. No one can provide all the answers to the complex and troubling questions that arise in times of conflict, but by sharing collective knowledge and experience, much progress can be achieved.