

Executive Summary

Armed conflicts create complex challenges for conservation in many areas of sub-Saharan Africa. War devastates the lives of those in its destructive path, including civilians, local people, and, sometimes, conservation workers. In many areas, war has radically altered economic, political, and social conditions, with profound impacts on the environment, natural resources, and biodiversity. Despite these circumstances, however, experience has shown that often there are actions that can be taken to mitigate the impacts of armed conflict on the environment.

This publication is based on the results of the Biodiversity Support Program's Armed Conflict and the Environment (ACE) Project, which reviewed negative impacts of armed conflict on the environment in Africa and analyzed a wide range of practical experiences in reducing these impacts before, during, and after conflict. Chapter 1 summarizes environmental impacts of habitat destruction and loss of wildlife; over-exploitation of natural resources; and pollution. It then reviews impacts on conservation organizations and broader consequences related to political, social, and economic aspects.

Chapter 2 covers practical actions that can be taken by the conservation sector and others to reduce impacts. No blueprint exists for what to do in conflict situations, since circumstances vary widely. However, by drawing on a wide range of experiences in different parts of Africa, a number of general principles and recommendations that can help to guide the development of appropriate strategies to prevent or mitigate the impacts of armed conflict on the environment have been identified. Broadly, these principles fall under the headings of organizational response, collaboration, and issues of funding and finance.

The recommendations in this guide aim to help natural resource managers, conservation practitioners, policy makers, and donors better prepare for conflicts before they occur, cope with them while they are occurring, and recover from them after they are over. The prospective readers of this guide may work in government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), donor organizations, or academia. While the recommendations are targeted mainly at the conservation community, they will also be helpful for practitioners and policy makers from the relief and development sectors, and others who live and work in areas affected by armed conflict. Main recommendations are summarized below, along with conclusions and future steps from Chapter 3.

Look for new approaches to achieve long-term conservation goals, and enhance linkages between sustainable livelihoods and the environment

During conflict, local people often become more dependent on natural resources. The conservation community can help people meet their needs in a way that puts the least strain on these resources, so that longer-term livelihoods are less threatened. Similarly, while saving lives is the first priority during humanitarian emergencies, keep in mind that there are many actions that can be taken to reduce environmental impacts. The conservation sector can play an important role here, while still maintaining its long-term goals.

Be aware of risks to natural resources and opportunities for conservation action during transition times and post-war reconstruction

During and immediately following armed conflict, the environment is often especially vulnerable, not least because it often falls low on the agenda of those in power. At the same time, controls over natural resources are often poor. Resources may be grabbed illegally and fed into new illegal trade networks, sometimes to purchase arms. Moreover, post-war governments often turn to resources such as minerals or timber to restart the economy. The transition and reconstruction period is the time when short-term needs must be reconciled with longer-term sustainable practices. Ultimately, if long-term rural livelihood needs cannot be met because the natural resource base is depleted and ecological systems are damaged, there is a high risk of instability and a return to armed conflict. The conservation community can play an important role in influencing decisions at this time. It can also participate in post-war policy reforms to ensure that adequate environmental considerations are incorporated into the policies of other sectors.

Be flexible and adaptable, while keeping long-term goals in sight

Conditions can change quickly during conflict, and organizations need to develop new and flexible strategies to keep functioning effectively. There are no blueprints to follow. During wartime, it is important to assess the situation continuously, to adapt to new circumstances, and always to watch for windows of opportunity for action as they open.

Maintain a presence and strengthen capacity to cope with the conflict situation

Whenever possible, the conservation sector should continue to operate and maintain a presence in the field. Staff security is a prime consideration; it may become necessary to evacuate all field workers. However, experience has shown that when it is feasible to stay, a continued presence

makes a big difference to achieving conservation, even if the ongoing war severely limits conservation activities. If sites have to be abandoned, it is often possible to maintain a long-term commitment from another location. Pulling out completely puts existing investments in an area at risk and removes the capacity to respond swiftly at critical moments. Staying on enables organizations to maintain their capacity, sustain relationships and the respect of partners, build partners' capacity, and provide technical support. Conservationists able to stay in place remain poised to act at critical moments such as transition times, when the greatest damage to the environment often occurs. They can also play an important role in supporting and influencing post-war reconstruction and policy reform.

Recommendations cover the need for good personnel management (keeping staff safe, paid, and content), for good communication (both procedurally and materially), and for sound training (both for times of conflict and the return of peace). The need for neutrality is also outlined, though it can be controversial and difficult to achieve.

Ensure sound planning based on reliable information

It is very important to keep up-to-date on the conflict, its causes, changing circumstances, and likely developments and impacts. Workers who are aware of evolving threats and opportunities will be able to gauge the best ways the organization may respond. Contingency plans that address the periods before, during, and after conflict should be developed, so that the organization is ready to respond quickly when opportunities for action arise. Planning should cover security strategies.

Look for opportunities to collaborate in order to improve effectiveness

Inter- and intra-sectoral collaboration is often more important in times of conflict than during peacetime, and is one important way to mitigate impacts of armed conflict on the environment. In wartime, it is important to collaborate with a broader set of stakeholders, both inside the environment sector and in other sectors, such as relief, development, and planning. This broader collaboration can increase options by establishing a basis of common concern, increasing trust, and improving communication, and by exchanging information and expertise. This guide highlights some of the challenges of and opportunities for collaboration during times of conflict.

Try to maintain a sound funding base during and after conflict

Very often when crises loom, donors withdraw their funding. This guide presents possible courses of action for donors and conservation practitioners to consider when making decisions in times of great uncertainty. Rather than withdrawing their funds, donors may be able to review their practices and adapt to the situation. At the same time, conservation practitioners should

regard the threat of impending conflict as a warning, and begin developing new fundraising strategies—among them, broadening their funding base. Recommendations are also given on practical financial management during conflict.

Recommendations for future priorities

The analysis presented in this publication took place at a time when learning about the impacts of conflict and possible mitigating measures was rapidly increasing. These findings should be treated as a stepping-stone along the conservation community's path toward better responses in conflict situations. There is still much to learn and act on. In the future, the conservation community should:

- Continue existing analysis of environmental impacts, and expand analysis to include social, economic, legal, policy, and political aspects
- Compile databases of existing environmental information, including information that can be used as a baseline
- Continue to research the relationship between environmental degradation and conflict
- Share information, results, and lessons, and network across sectors
- Promote consumer awareness and responsible behavior
- Develop conservation sector security guidelines
- Reinforce and strengthen national and international capacities to mitigate impacts
- Build local capacity for applied research and monitoring
- Adapt and use existing in-country capacity
- Apply rapid environmental assessment methodology
- Improve ability to anticipate impacts
- Explore international legal mechanisms for redressing impacts.