

Preface

When elephants fight, the grass gets trampled.

This old African proverb is highly relevant to the armed conflicts¹ that unfortunately are all too prevalent in Africa today. It is often not the politicians and elites who suffer the adverse consequences of armed conflicts, but the common people and the environment. Conflict brings untold direct suffering, and the impacts it wreaks on the environment bring even more suffering.

This guide grew out of a project established in 1998 in the Biodiversity Support Program (BSP) by Judy Oglethorpe after she saw the devastating environmental effects of the recent war in Mozambique. The project on Armed Conflict and the Environment aimed to identify and raise awareness about the negative impacts of armed conflict on the environment, and to promote strategies for mitigating impacts where possible before, during, and after conflict. It ran from 1998 to 2001, and was managed successively by Rebecca Ham and James Shambaugh.

The project investigated impacts of conflict and post-conflict in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa in order to highlight and better understand the challenges for conservation and natural resource management in areas affected by armed conflict. During its investigations, while consulting with many sources and collaborating with many partners, the project undertook a literature review, carried out case studies, and analyzed and communicated its findings and the lessons learned. The scope of the project was limited to mitigation of the negative impacts of armed conflict. It did not attempt to address the broader issue of how environmental degradation and resource depletion in themselves may induce conflict, although we recognize the importance of that issue.

In addition, this project did not address circumstances where conflicts reduce pressure on habitats and slow or stop resource exploitation and loss of biodiversity, as documented by McNeely (2000) and others. We acknowledge such circumstances. But these circumstances are often short-term; in many cases, they are outweighed and even overwhelmed in the long run by the enormous negative impacts of war on the environment, the broader economy, and society as a whole (Dudley *et al.*, in press). Throughout this guide, any references to “environmental impacts” refer to negative environmental impacts, unless otherwise indicated.

1. The word *conflict* may be used to refer to a physical confrontation such as a fight, battle, or struggle, or used more broadly to mean a disagreement or opposition of interests or ideas. In this guide, *armed conflict* is used synonymously with *warfare*, *war*, *civil conflict*, and *violent conflict* in which at least 1,000 deaths have resulted (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [SIPRI] 2001).

Why this guide?

In times of conflict, some environmental impacts are unavoidable. However, other impacts may be reduced or even prevented if the right actions are taken in the right places and at the right times. With the proper approach, action can be taken even under extremely difficult and abnormal circumstances.

People working in the natural resource and conservation sectors who are overtaken by armed conflict often find themselves in frightening situations well outside their normal experience. They may be in physical peril, and they often must work in great isolation. This guide aims to share some of the experiences and lessons that have emerged from the experiences of many people who have endured a wide range of conflicts in Africa. What we have learned from them, we hope, will prove useful to those who unfortunately find themselves in conflict situations.

This guide addresses the efforts and experiences of people in many different sectors, but remains grounded in the conservation and natural resources perspective. It stresses the importance of dealing with short-term issues while still keeping sight of longer-term goals. It also recognizes the critical need to save lives today, while ensuring that the environment and resource base upon which those same people depend will still be there to support their livelihoods long after the crisis has passed.

Who is this guide for?

The strategies presented in this guide are primarily for conservation and natural resource management practitioners and policy makers, and the donor community that supports them. However, some of these findings are also relevant for the relief community, development organizations, local communities, and others with a stake in mitigating the environmental impacts of armed conflict. Throughout the guide, we attempt to highlight and direct attention toward those sections that are of particular interest to certain sectors.

Conservation community: practitioners and decision makers; NGOs, government, and donor sectors

Whether working in the field or from afar, members of the conservation community can play an essential role in raising awareness of the importance of environmental concerns in times of armed conflict, and taking actions to continue conservation efforts as much as possible. There are many lessons for policy makers. Funding is often a problem at this time, and the section on funding addresses this and suggests some possible solutions. This guide also covers the importance of collaborating with other sectors.

Relief community

During the emergency phase of armed conflicts, the relief community usually intervenes, often on a large scale. Since its primary mission is to save lives and reduce human suffering, its relief

interventions often do not prioritize the environment, and sometimes damage it. In recent years, however, a number of relief organizations have begun developing protocols and guidelines to reduce the environmental impacts of their activities, both during emergencies as well as in the rehabilitation and recovery phases. This guide builds on these efforts and encourages sectors to collaborate so environmental protocols may be implemented more effectively. Relief practitioners will be particularly interested in the “Collaboration” section of this guide.

Development community and local partners

A number of development organizations have a long-standing practice of integrating environmental concerns into their programs through a variety of activities, many of which involve local communities. In some instances, the development community has also worked closely with the relief sector, and thus can play an intermediary role in bringing the relief and conservation sectors closer together in the field. It is important to realize that the development community takes over where the relief sector leaves off, making it critical that these two sectors collaborate and provide continuity for the local people affected by armed conflict.

The participation of local communities is also very important. Natural resource management initiatives developed in collaboration with local communities and based on local needs are often more likely to endure during periods of armed conflict because the community has a vested interest in them.

How to use this guide

This guide is organized into three main sections:

- **Introduction: armed conflict and the environment**

This section provides background information, briefly describing the changing nature and impacts of armed conflict in Africa today, highlighting the importance of understanding the broader political, social, and economic context, and setting the stage for developing appropriate response strategies.

- **What can be done?**

This section—the bulk of the guide—outlines a variety of practical assessment and response strategies for conservation practitioners and other stakeholders at all levels to improve conservation effectiveness before, during, and following conflict.

- **Conclusions and the way forward**

This section summarizes the main conclusions and outlines priorities for future activities dealing with this issue.

This guide is written for a broad audience and draws from experiences in a wide range of conflict situations. We encourage you to browse through it, reviewing parts that are appropriate to

your circumstances. Take from it ideas that are relevant, and think through whether they are useful for your situation.

A word of caution: It is important to remember that this guide provides ideas for possible action, rather than guidelines to follow strictly. No two situations are the same. There are no blueprints, and not all the strategies described here will be appropriate in every case. Good judgment, based on sound understanding of the circumstances, is needed to decide what approach is best in a particular situation. The actions you choose will depend on the political, geographical, and cultural context and on the kind of conflict, and even the phase of conflict, you find yourself in. Be flexible, and act with a good understanding of the situation.

Note that this guide uses the term *conservation* in a broad context, intending to encompass natural resource management, biodiversity conservation, and protected area management.

Final note

The challenges for organizations working in areas of armed conflict are considerable, and there is much work to be done. We hope that this guide will be useful. As new ideas and approaches emerge, we hope you will supplement what is presented here and share what you learn with others. We wish you well in your endeavors.

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