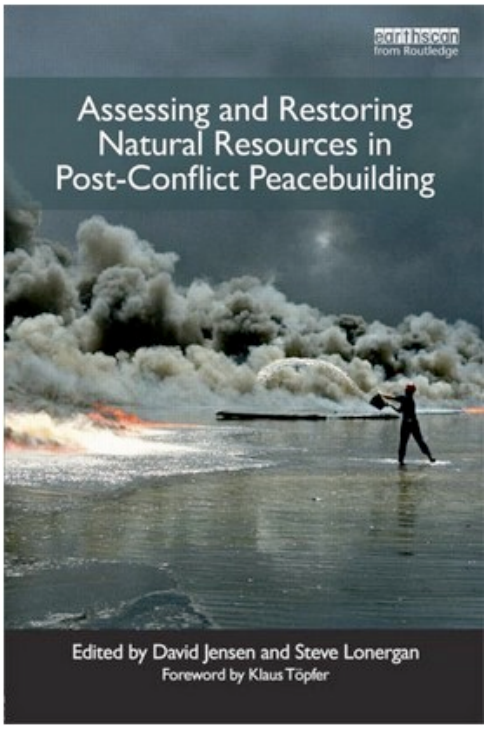
This chapter first appeared in *Assessing and Restoring Natural Resources in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding,* edited by D. Jensen and S. Lonergan. It is one of 6 edited books on Post-Conflict Peacebuilding and Natural Resource Management (for more information, see www.environmentalpeacebuilding.org). The full book can be ordered from Routledge at http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9781849712347/.



Thinking back-end: Improving post-conflict analysis through consulting, adapting to change, and scenario-building

Alexander Carius and Achim Maas [a]
[a] *Adelphi*

Online publication date: May 2013

Suggested citation: A. Carius, A. Maas. 2012. Thinking back-end: Improving post-conflict analysis through consulting, adapting to change, and scenario-building. In *Assessing and Restoring Natural Resources in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding,* ed. D. Jensen and S. Lonergan. London: Earthscan.

Thinking back-end: Improving post-conflict analysis through consulting, adapting to change, and scenario building

Alexander Carius and Achim Maas

Almost invariably, natural resources are intertwined with violent conflict in multiple ways. They can be the cause of a conflict, they can be damaged during the conflict, or they can be a source of funding for those involved in the violence. In the post-conflict period, natural resources can sustain survivors and contribute to reconstruction. Consequently, natural resources must feature in any long-term strategy to rebuild societies emerging from conflict. Individuals and organizations working in post-conflict societies should consider natural resources in two key ways: first, to ensure that disputes over natural resources do not contribute to a relapse into conflict; and second, to maximize the benefits that natural resource management can have in post-conflict reconstruction. Thus, natural resources need to be included in the analysis and planning conducted in post-conflict situations regardless of whether that planning is undertaken by the peacebuilding, humanitarian, environmental, or business communities.

This daunting challenge requires integrating two complex and crosscutting issues—natural resource management and peacebuilding—at a time dominated by severe and immediate humanitarian needs, high political volatility, pressures to act quickly, and insufficient resources. In addition, reconstruction efforts often last for years or decades; thus, actions taken today may cast a long shadow. Just as post-conflict societies are dynamic in nature, the role of natural resources as a mitigating or contributing factor in violent conflict may change as well. For instance, prices of high-value commodities, which financed reconstruction work in the beginning, may vary significantly over time, thus undermining the reconstruction efforts. Accounting for such changes is another challenge in post-conflict societies.

This chapter argues that successful post-conflict assessment processes and methodologies involving natural resources need to consider three analytical tools: (1) consultation; (2) adapting to change; and (3) building scenarios based

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Alexander Carius is the cofounder and codirector of Adelphi Research and Adelphi Consult. Achim Maas is a project manager at Adelphi Research. The authors would like to thank Irina Comardicea for many helpful comments and editorial support.

on the desired end state of the post-conflict transition. It concludes with specific questions related to the three analytical tools in an effort to identify and perhaps avoid relapsing into the violence that accompanies a fast-changing world.

ANALYTICAL TOOLS

A multitude of analytical tools are available that either focus on or include natural resources within post-conflict assessment.[1] In addition, several international aid agencies have attempted, with varying success, to develop approaches to link environment and peacebuilding.[2] All of the tools have a set of common features: they focus on identifying the causes and dynamics of conflicts, understanding how natural resources and the environment are related to these dynamics and (to varying degrees) to the broader peacebuilding process, and developing recommendations for peacebuilding interventions.

Consultation

Using analytical tools successfully requires dual ownership: first, by those who apply them; second, by the beneficiaries. The tools are typically applied by governmental agencies, international organizations, donors, or local nongovernmental organizations. In many cases, however, their staff members are burdened with multiple issues and limited resources. Understandably, they may hesitate to integrate yet another issue into their work (Carius, Tänzler, and Feil 2007). The beneficiaries, in turn, may have little awareness of the importance of natural resource management (Maas, Carius, and Wittich, forthcoming). Hence, tools need to include provisions for raising awareness, such as organizing consultative processes to disseminate knowledge, discuss and identify priorities, and widen the horizon of participants. Consultative processes can also give analysts the advantage of gaining a more nuanced understanding of the relevant context and the actors involved, while implementers and beneficiaries may gain innovative ideas from an outside perspective.

Many guidelines and frameworks, however, do not include provisions for conducting consultative activities or integrating results of workshops or surveys in their analysis.[3] If mentioned at all, they often serve as an additional source of information feeding into a larger report (GTZ 2007). It is rarely mentioned that the very participatory nature of workshops, consultation, and deliberation can make consultation an important instrument for improving ownership—and thus acceptance of analytical findings and recommendations.

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[1] See Tänzler and Altenberg (2010).

[2] For an overview of several agencies plus an exemplary review of the European Commission's activities in this field, see Carius, Tänzler, and Feil (2007).

[3] See, for example, Goor and Verstegen (2000); CPR (2005); GTZ (2007); Hasemann, Hübner-Schmid, and Dargatz (2005); and NZAID (2008).

Identifying the needs of target audiences, how to engage them, and how to present findings should be paramount. Engaging audiences via stakeholder workshops, discussing findings with the participants, and developing comprehensive reports reflecting the key results and priorities may also improve the legitimacy of an analysis, as well as support the development of ownership.

Adapting to change

Analytical tools must also account for the dynamic nature of natural resources and post-conflict situations. Changing circumstances are inevitable, and analysis must be future-oriented. In a post-conflict situation, many forces can have an impact on the resource base: the restart of economic development; return of refugees and internally displaced persons who need shelter; population growth; and resource consumption resulting from reconstruction work. When analyzing the social, political, economic, and ecological contexts, these trends must be addressed so that scenarios can be developed for early identification and avoidance of potentially conflicting or mutually amplifying negative trends.

Analysis of post-conflict situations will be further complicated by climate change, which is likely to alter regional and local environments drastically, as well as redraw political, economic, and social maps. (See Richard Matthew and Anne Hammill, "Peacebuilding and Adaptation to Climate Change," in this book.) Research suggests this process is accelerating beyond what was imaginable only a few years ago, portending significant impacts in just a few decades (Richardson et al. 2009). But after a major conflict at least a generation is necessary for reconciliation to occur and the social contract to be renewed (Lederarch 2005). Thus, analytical tools need to support efforts to visualize the range of ways in which the environment may be significantly altered during a post-conflict transition. For instance, a resource that is abundant at the end of a violent conflict may become critically scarce a decade or two later. If tensions between former warring parties are not resolved, such a change may transform a formerly trivial resource dispute into a trigger for conflict.

This danger is not limited to climate change per se. The goal of limiting global warming to two degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels will require reductions of global greenhouse gas emissions of 80 percent and beyond, implying a radical and massive change from current modes of economic development and management of natural resources, particularly against the background of growing global population and resource demand. Integrating conflict-sensitive adaptation into post-conflict work will be critical in this context (Carius, Tänzler, and Maas 2008; Tänzler, Maas, and Carius 2009).

Building scenarios

Integrating the challenge of a dynamically changing environment will require a scenario-based approach that includes realistic projections of these changes and

how they may affect the society in the future. It is imperative to outline, deliberate, and understand the likely shape of the world in which post-conflict reconstruction takes place. Actively integrating stakeholders into such a process is crucial and can improve their ownership and their awareness of environmental concerns. Doing so may support the following activities:

- *Goal setting*: develop an overall framework of goals to be achieved in a post-conflict transition process.
- *Decision making*: provide points of orientation for policy formulation and strategy development for an uncertain future.
- *Communicating*: promote exchange of ideas, disseminate information, and shed light on priorities and trends.[4]

Scenarios are understood here as coherent, structured descriptions of what a desirable future would look like for a post-conflict society. They do not envision an ideal world: the upcoming decades will present a number of interlocking challenges related to environmental change and natural resource management (B. Lee 2009). Thus, a scenario for a desirable future needs to be embedded within the set of anticipated challenges, such as climate change. The boundaries and the timescale of the scenarios need to be clearly defined from the beginning, and the scenario itself should be within a range of plausible developments. For instance, it is necessary to keep in mind those developments that can realistically happen within the proposed time frame. It is also useful to develop a set of alternative scenarios that explore, for example, whether a certain economic sector such as agriculture should remain predominant. When developing such scenarios, caution is necessary, for the post-conflict period is typically politically charged and highly sensitive.

There are a variety of methods to develop scenarios (Kosow and Gaßner 2008). In a post-conflict situation, a creative-narrative approach may be highly suitable: a group or several groups of people jointly develop scenarios in an open, transparent manner, for example via workshops. The result is a narrative with compelling storylines regarding what desirable futures may look like. The people involved should include government officials, experts, business people, and the proverbial "man on the street." Individuals and organizations facilitating such scenario building should provide input on key factors that may influence future developments, such as the potential impacts of climate change. This requires background research, including reviewing available scientific literature. It also involves interviews with experts and local stakeholders regarding how the respective national or subnational contexts have changed over the past years, and how they may likely change in the future.[5]

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[4] Adapted from Kosow and Gaßner (2008).

[5] For an example of scenario building, see Steve Lonergan, "Ecological Restoration and Peacebuilding: The Case of the Iraqi Marshes," in this book.

Once scenarios are established, backcasting becomes necessary: identifying potential pathways to connect the desirable future with the present situation, including the events that need to happen to realize the scenarios, potential obstacles, and ways to overcome these obstacles.[6] The pathways themselves can be operationalized by defining milestones and indicators for assessing whether a post-conflict society is developing toward a desired future stage. The pathways may serve afterward as blueprints for planning peacebuilding interventions. Both the initial scenario development and the subsequent backcasting can be part of either a prolonged workshop or a series of events. Indeed, in cases of long-running conflicts and deep enmities, a slow process may be necessary, engaging a select number of figures from the parties formerly in conflict. Although scenarios may be disregarded as purely speculative at the beginning, they provide a starting point for discussion.[7]

The farther into the future a scenario looks, the more difficult it is to assess the interaction of different trajectories and trends, thus moving scenarios increasingly into the realm of speculation (J. R. Lee 2009). Despite being hypothetical, however, a well-developed, plausible scenario that offers a pathway for the next fifteen to twenty years may also highlight the need for sustained engagement. For two reasons, periodic reviews (either in the case of approaching milestones or within specific time intervals) will be necessary to assess the validity of the scenarios. First, as has been argued before, the world continues to change rapidly, and new knowledge and information needs to be integrated to assess whether the pathway to the desirable future is still possible. Second, the post-conflict society itself is changing continuously, and a reassessment can determine whether the desirable future itself is still valid.

Scenarios feature in several available guidelines, but in many cases are presented more as an add-on after the main conflict analysis is completed (Hasemann, Hübner-Schmid, and Dargatz 2005; NZAID 2008). The focus is often on potential best- or worst-case scenarios of a situation based on the analytical findings (Hasemann, Hübner-Schmid, and Dargatz 2005). This is exemplified by defining scenarios as "basically answer[ing] the question, 'What happens next?' (CPR Network 2005, 18). Such an approach is limited in two ways:

- First, it emphasizes the present over the future. Achieving a future of sustainable peace, however, should be the aim of any post-conflict reconstruction process. The future—exemplified by the scenario—should be among the central elements of analytical tools in post-conflict situations. Thus, the

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[6] For an overview and application of backcasting, see JRC (n.d.) and Future Foundation (2005).

[7] For an example of a slow process including the problem of "speculative problem-solving," see the informal Georgian-Abkhaz dialogue documented in Wolleh (2006).

question should not be, what happens next?, but instead, what should happen next?[8]

- Second, it omits the fact that global change processes and particularly climate change are transforming the context of a post-conflict situation (Maas et al. 2010). An analysis emphasizing the present may overlook the fact that the foundations of the analytical findings will change. The analysis as such becomes devalued.

Conflict analyses play a central part in identifying the key factors that will determine post-conflict transition. As such, they are highly important for developing scenarios by providing the necessary background. Indeed, the future can hardly be conceived without knowing the past (Lederach 2005). However, it is necessary to transcend this stage during a post-conflict transition and refocus the analysis toward the future instead of the present.

Aside from adding another layer of analysis, using a scenario- and future-oriented approach may provide an innovative avenue for environmental peacebuilding. Future threats of climate change are to some extent abstract and thus neutral. They can provide a platform for discussing common future challenges which is less politicized than the present post-conflict situation, including the need for joint action. If mediated by legitimate external actors, this provides a foundation for common action (Feil, Klein, and Westerkamp 2009). However, great sensitivity is needed in discussing this future. Groups which anticipate that the future will result in an adversely changed situation may today take steps to prevent such a future from happening. This may include, for instance, seeking to enhance their vital resources such as water which may today be abundant but may become scarce tomorrow.

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

Analytical tools focusing on natural resources in a post-conflict situation should take into account the following:

- First, appreciating the nature of post-conflict situations and inherently focusing on the future by taking a scenario-based approach: What should the framework and baselines be for building a new society? What are the necessary building blocks to create such a society? What role do (or could) natural resources play?
- Second, taking into account the different internal trends—such as population growth and economic development—and external trends such as climate change: How resilient will a rebuilt society be to mediate disputes peacefully, internally and externally? What will such a world look like a generation into

[8] Several tools do advise developing actions that help a best-case scenario come about (CPR 2005).

the future? Where is there potential for disputes over natural resources, and are there effective endogenous means of resolving these disputes?

- Third, capturing the perspectives and priorities of stakeholders by having strong consultative elements: Is the operational reality of those living and working in a post-conflict situation adequately reflected?

These questions may complement a basic conflict analysis and help to identify not only causes of violence but also reflect on ways to avoid the relapse into violence in a fast-changing world.

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