7 Asia

Afghanistan and Cambodia

Since its founding in 1992, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has launched 29 projects in Afghanistan and 81 projects in Cambodia. Considering the environment and conflict linkages and the risks posed by armed conflict, the GEF undertook portfolio-level project reviews to evaluate the extent to which they have taken into account conflict risks and how conflict sensitivity in project design and implementation affects project outcomes. This chapter summarizes the analyses from these reviews.

As in other regions, successful projects often integrated some degree of conflict sensitivity. In Afghanistan, all projects reviewed included some reference to conflict, given the instability of the country's political situation, and the analysis paid close attention to the degree of conflict sensitivity in each project to account for this political volatility.

The analysis of the GEF-supported Afghanistan projects was completed before August 2021, when the U.S. military withdrew the last of its troops from the country, nearly 20 years after first arriving. As such, the discussion of the GEF's Afghanistan projects does not account for recent changes to Afghanistan's context or conflict dynamics. Despite this, and given the country's prolonged history of conflict, assessing the impact of conflict sensitivity in the design of GEF-funded projects in Afghanistan has value for future project planning in locations affected by conflict. The fact that the operating context in Afghanistan has changed so rapidly exemplifies the value of practitioners preparing to operate in similarly sensitive environments.

Regional Background

Conflict in Afghanistan is a longstanding and highly complex situation, crossing multiple armed conflicts, each with its own set of distinct characteristics. Despite its complexity, the severity of the conflicts in Afghanistan is clear. In 2020, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs called Afghanistan "the scene of the deadliest conflict on earth" (2019, p. 4). The human cost of conflict in Afghanistan has been devastating, and it is often referred to collectively as one of the deadliest conflict settings in the world. In 2018 alone, according to a

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report from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and UNHCR (2018), 3,804 were killed, and 7,189 were injured in conflict-related violence. The conflict in Afghanistan is often seen as a result of the U.S. intervention following the events of September 11, 2001, but the conflict also has roots stretching back at least to the Soviet invasion of 1979. A collection of liberation forces then launched an insurgent campaign with devastating humanitarian consequences; by the mid-1980s, estimates of civilian deaths in Afghanistan had reached 1 million, with millions more injured, internally displaced, or made refugees (Girardet, 1987). These fighters then coalesced to form a fundamentalist political organization known as the Taliban. Before 2021, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the U.N.-recognized government, had difficulty maintaining control over its territory, a weak security apparatus deepening the impacts of the protracted conflict. Negotiations for peace between the Taliban and the U.S. government began in 2019, ending with U.S. and international troop pullout in 2021 and the Taliban takeover of the government. This change in the political regime in Afghanistan halted most international projects, including those of the GEF and its agencies. This analysis focuses on the period before the 2021 takeover by the Taliban.

Violence in Afghanistan continued. As recently as 2020, terrorist bombings were a common occurrence. In 2021, as the U.S. military finalized its withdrawal, the Taliban regained control of the country, ousting the previous regime. In the wake of this change, Afghanistan still faces heightened risks of violent conflict, including from terrorist attacks (Global Conflict Tracker, 2022).

As in Afghanistan, Cambodia's modern history has been profoundly shaped by civil and interstate conflict. From 1967 through 1997, Cambodia experienced civil war and genocide, a return to civil war, and then low-level insurgency. Although Cambodia is several decades removed from large-scale armed conflict, the legacy of conflict has deeply affected its natural environment and environmental management. Environmental degradation and increasing pressures on natural resources in Cambodia are linked to the effects of war, which left behind 500,000 tons of ordnance and contributed to high poverty rates and high dependence on agriculture, forest, and marine resources. Several GEF project documents flagged an increase in small-scale natural resource conflicts throughout the country that threaten project success. Non-conflict factors that have exacerbated these stressors include weak environmental regulation and enforcement, lack of political will and capacity to reform natural resource management, climate change, and migration patterns.

Environmental Background: Afghanistan

The plural nature of conflict in Afghanistan has resulted in highly varied environmental impacts. Some of the armed conflict in the territory has caused devastating environmental damage, such as the Soviet "scorched earth" tactics that deliberately targeted the environment. Soviet armies destroyed 3,000 ancient irrigation canals,

ruining an estimated 106,000 acres of fruit orchards (Girardet, 1987). Eighty percent of Afghanis were dependent upon the agricultural sector for their livelihoods at that time—a distribution that remains largely unchanged today—making the impacts of this strategy disastrous for both livelihoods and the environment (Formoli, 1995; National Public Radio [NPR], 2021b). As the conflict became protracted, more pernicious environmental consequences arose. Land mines, in particular, have wrought serious human and environmental costs on Afghanistan. They were first used by Soviet forces in the early 1980s and later by the Taliban. According to the *Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor* (1999), Afghanistan is one of the most heavily mined nations, and buried munitions currently kill an estimated 10 to 12 people every day. These land mines also leach chemicals into the land, making it unsuitable for agriculture even after the mines themselves are removed. Experts estimate counts of buried land mines in Afghanistan number in the hundreds of thousands.

Decades of war have heavily affected prominent modes of interaction with natural resources. The Soviet invasion caused severe damage to the nation's forests and subsequent efforts to flush out insurgent forces (National Environmental Protection Agency of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008). According to the UNEP (2003), coniferous forest cover in eastern Afghan provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, and Nuristan, the most heavily forested region of the country, dropped by 50 percent between 1978 and 2002, suggesting a strong connection between conflict and forest cover as extended periods of combat required villagers to cut trees for fuel. The illegal timber trade financed conflict and further contributed to the decline of green space, particularly around Kabul (Pikulicka-Wilczewska, 2019). Exploitation of resources by various warring groups has established deep relationships between violent conflict and Afghan natural resources. The Taliban has funded its operation through trade in opium and other natural resources such as timber, talc, and other illegally mined, high-value resources (Felbab-Brown, 2021; Global Witness, 2018; NPR, 2021a; Reese, 2009).

GEF Involvement in Afghanistan

The GEF has supported 29 total projects in Afghanistan, addressing issues ranging from education to conservation and renewable energy. Of these projects, 16 have been exclusive to Afghanistan, while 13 have been part of broader regional or global initiatives. The GEF's most highly funded focal areas in Afghanistan have been biodiversity, land degradation, and climate change. Given Afghanistan's broad shortcomings in governance capacity and overall national fragility, the GEF has focused much of its work there on addressing climate resilience at both the local and national levels. Projects have involved a wide range of stakeholders, including both government and nongovernment actors.

The evaluation team reviewed the total portfolio of projects in Afghanistan to assess conflict sensitivity. Based on projects' outcomes and attention to conflict, the team selected seven projects for in-depth review (see Table 7.1), two of which

Table 7.1 GEF-Funded Projects in Afghanistan Selected for In-Depth Analysis

ID	*Project Title*	*Focal Area(s)*	*Dates*	*Category*
1907	Natural Resources and Poverty Alleviation Project	Biodiversity	2003–2007	1
2130	Restoration, Protection and Sustainable Use of the Sistan Basin	International waters	2008–2010	2
3220	Capacity Building for Sustainable Land Management in Afghanistan	Land degradation	2007–2010	3
4227	Building Adaptive Capacity and Resilience to Climate Change in Afghanistan	Climate change	2010–2018	1
5017	Developing Core Capacity for Decentralized MEA Implementation and Natural Resources Management in Afghanistan	n/a	2014–present	1
5202	Strengthening the Resilience of Rural Livelihood Options for Afghan Communities in Panjshir, Balkh, Uruzgan and Herat Provinces to Manage Climate Change-induced Disaster Risks	Climate change	2014–present	1
9531	Conservation of Snow Leopards and their Critical Ecosystem in Afghanistan	Biodiversity, climate change	2018–present	1

Note: Categories: 1. Addressed conflict dynamics by evaluating risks to the success of project outcomes and discussed mitigation measures to reduce project impact on latent social conflicts; 2. Addressed conflict dynamics only in passing (e.g., providing background context) and did not significantly evaluate risks social and/or violent conflict could pose to project outcomes; did not address mitigation measures to lessen project impact on conflict; 3. Did not substantially address conflict dynamics or risk and received unfavorable terminal evaluation scores.

included project evaluation scores. The projects were selected to provide representation in three categories:

1. projects that addressed conflict dynamics by evaluating risks they posed to the success of project outcomes and discussed mitigation measures that could be taken to reduce the impact of projects on latent social conflicts;
2. projects that addressed conflict dynamics but did so only in passing (via background context) and did not significantly evaluate risks social and/or violent conflict could pose to project outcomes and projects that did not address mitigation measures that could be taken to lessen the impact of the project on surrounding conflict; and

3. projects that did not substantially address conflict dynamics or risk and received unfavorable terminal evaluation scores.

Environmental Background: Cambodia

Cambodia's prolonged history of conflict affects its natural environment today, posing challenges to natural resource management and presenting risks of conflict. A major source of environmental degradation is ordnance left by the U.S. military, which targeted airstrikes to damage agricultural productivity and installed land mines around gemstone deposits (Kohama et al., 2020). GEF documents from projects in Cambodia, including the project Developing an Integrated Protected Area System for the Cardamom Mountains, note that the damage to agricultural lands from wartime ordnance now drives deforestation in Cambodia because "much of the farmland has been mined, forcing the settlers to encroach on virgin forest" (GEF, 2001d, p. 8). The 6–9 million remaining land mines planted during the conflict obstruct biodiversity conservation by hindering data collection, conservation activities, and operations to prevent illegal logging and hunting (GEF, 1998).

Conflict also contributed to environmental degradation by incentivizing both the Khmer Rouge and its opponents to fund their operations using resources such as timber and gemstones (Global Witness, 1995a). A 1995 Global Witness report on Cambodia observed, "The conflict and corruption are funded by the profits of environmental exploitation; the environmental degradation exacerbates and is a direct cause of poverty and famine" (Global Witness, 1995b). Deforestation for timber trading contributed to severe flooding and drought, resulting in "increasingly severe failures of the rice harvest, creating widespread food shortages in Cambodia" (Global Witness, 1995a). The siltation and loss of topsoil resulting from gem mining also contributed to widespread food insecurity and poverty (Global Witness, 1995a). The post-conflict prevalence of poverty is a major environmental threat in Cambodia, noted in the documentation for all of the conservation projects. GEF documents from the Tonle Sap Conservation Project indicate that poverty drives resource overuse because people have "no option but to clear forests for agricultural land and exploit natural resources" (GEF, 2004a, p. 47). The population strain on natural resources is significant because nearly 80 percent of Cambodians live in rural areas, and 65 percent rely on agriculture, fisheries, and forestry for their livelihoods (USAID, 2022).

Several GEF projects in Cambodia also identified positive environmental outcomes from war. Armed groups frequently militarized land and blocked access to use forests to shelter and organize. This helped conserve biodiversity in some regions and deterred land conversion for agricultural use. Documents from the Tonle Sap project link high biodiversity conservation in some regions to the civil war and other political instability that "precluded large-scale industrial and agricultural development" until the 1990s (GEF, 1998, p. 1).

However, these trends reversed rapidly post conflict because widespread poverty and poor land management led to short-term overexploitation of natural resources. According to documents from the project Establishing Conservation Areas Landscape Management (CALM) in the Northern Plains, "25 years of conflict has disrupted traditional forms of land management and encouraged a prevailing attitude of insecurity, promoting a short-term approach to resource extraction based upon competition with other individuals or groups" (GEF, 2004b, p. 55). The project documents identified the military in particular as a threat to biodiversity, noting that "since [it is] armed, its capacity for corruption and illegal activities is considerably greater" (GEF, 2004b, p. 55). Military-led or -aided natural resource exploitation is common, particularly for timber, charcoal, and rubber (Weingart & Kirk, 2012; Humphrey, 2020). Civilian, military, and private sector pressures on natural resources have destroyed nearly 2.2 million hectares of tree cover from 2001 to 2018, and the annual rate of loss is increasing by almost 300 percent (Global Forest Watch, 2019).

Increasing pressures on natural resources have made ownership disputes over land and natural resources prevalent. Critical water resources, such as the Mekong River and the South China Sea, have been the subject of domestic conflicts around overfishing and fishing titles and international tensions caused by upstream hydropower development. The problem is exacerbated by a lack of clear regulation of natural resources and inconsistent enforcement. Part of the confusion over land ownership stems from the Khmer Rouge regime's destruction of all property records in the 1970s (Weingart & Kirk, 2012). Ambiguous land policies, overlapping titles, and weak implementation of laws have increased land disputes between citizens and land concessionaires. In 2014, more than 10,000 Cambodian families were involved in land disputes (Asia Foundation, 2017). Complaints about land grabbing and other land rights violations are frequent (Asia Foundation, 2017; Weingart & Kirk, 2012).

GEF Involvement in Cambodia

The 81 projects funded by the GEF in Cambodia have often dealt with social conflicts over natural resource use and conflicts of interest between project goals and the goals of national government officials, local staff, and the population. Evaluating the conflict sensitivity of GEF projects in Cambodia entails looking at the link between environment and conflict, the risks posed by the history of conflict, and the increasing competition for natural resources. This can help determine how conflict sensitivity in project design and implementation affected project outcomes.

From the portfolio of GEF-funded projects in Cambodia and using the methodology described in Chapter 2, seven projects were identified for in-depth analysis (see Table 7.2). The projects were evaluated based on their conflict sensitivity and success and selection aimed to optimize diversity in conflict categories, project results, and project focal areas.

Table 7.2 GEF-Funded Cambodia Projects Studied in Depth

Project ID	*Title*	*Focal Area(s)*	*Dates*	*Conflict Risk Acknowledged*	*Category*
615	Mekong River Basin Water Utilization Project	International waters	1999–2009	No	4
621	Biodiversity and Protected Area Management Pilot Project for the Virachey National Park	Biodiversity	1999–2008	Yes	2
885	Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	International waters	2001–2014	Yes	1
1043	Establishing Conservation Areas Landscape Management (CALM) in the Northern Plains	Biodiversity	2004–2014	Yes	1
1086	Developing an Integrated Protected Area System for the Cardamom Mountains	Biodiversity	2002–2008	Yes	1
1183	Tonle Sap Conservation Project	Biodiversity	2004–2012	Yes	1
9103	Building Adaptive Capacity through the Scaling-up of Renewable Energy Technologies in Rural Cambodia (S-RET)	Climate change	2015–present	Yes	n/a (project in progress)

Note: Categories: 1. Addressed conflict dynamics by evaluating risks to the success of project outcomes and received favorable evaluations. 2. Addressed conflict dynamics by evaluating risks to the success of project outcomes but received unfavorable evaluations. 3. Did not substantially address conflict dynamics or risk and received favorable terminal evaluation scores. 4. Did not substantially address conflict dynamics or risk and received unfavorable terminal evaluation scores.

The selected projects all took place after December 1999 and focused primarily on biodiversity conservation, transboundary water management, and renewable energy technologies. Broad themes across these projects include biodiversity conservation through local capacity-building and alternative livelihood programs to promote national policies and institutional practices that support conservation and to strengthen international coordination on sustainable water use.

Projects aligned into four categories:

1. projects that addressed conflict dynamics by evaluating risks they posed to the success of project outcomes and received favorable evaluations;
2. projects that addressed conflict dynamics by evaluating risks they posed to the success of project outcomes but received unfavorable evaluations;
3. projects that did not substantially address conflict dynamics or risk and received favorable terminal evaluation scores; and
4. projects that did not substantially address conflict dynamics or risk and received unfavorable terminal evaluation scores.

No conflict-insensitive project received high evaluation scores, meaning no projects fall into Category 3 nor did the conflict-sensitive project that addressed conflict risks only minimally. All favorably evaluated projects were conflict sensitive and addressed conflict substantively.

Findings

This in-depth analysis of GEF-supported interventions in Afghanistan and Cambodia sought to provide a qualitative assessment of the ways GEF activity in Asia was suited to implementation in a conflict-affected setting. In-depth analysis of each Cambodia project was conducted using project documents, supplemented by interviews with agency staff. With these results, the relationship between a project's management of conflict risk and the GEF evaluation criteria effectiveness (project outcomes) and sustainability (GEF IEO, 2019) was also assessed. However, with final evaluations available for only two of the selected Afghanistan projects, that analysis instead focused purely on project design and the extent to which a project addressed risk, discussed potential mitigation strategies, and assessed how project success is dependent on conflict preparedness. A blended analysis was conducted of the results of both the project document word counts and in-depth assessments to assess whether GEF-supported projects were designed in a conflict-sensitive manner. In the GEF Afghanistan portfolio, conflict is always mentioned in project documents, at least in passing, if not more substantively discussed. In a context where ongoing violent conflict is central to the operating context for international organizations, passing mentions do not necessarily qualify a project as conflict sensitive. The blended analysis also made clear that the count of conflict-related terms was not ultimately predictive of a project's conflict sensitivity.

Six of the seven Cambodia projects acknowledged, to varying degrees, the country's history of conflict. The amount of attention paid to conflict may have been influenced by the nature and purpose of the particular project. For example, Building Adaptive Capacity through the Scaling-up of Renewable Energy Technologies in Rural Cambodia (S-RET) is regionally focused and began later than the others, so is further removed from past conflict. In contrast, conflict was directly

relevant in Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand, which was in effect from 2002–2014 and concerned the disputed international waters of the South China Sea.

Of the seven GEF-funded projects in Cambodia reviewed in depth, most received favorable scores for effectiveness and unfavorable scores for sustainability. Projects generally acknowledged and managed small-scale natural resource conflicts and conflicting interests at the local level with moderate success during the projects, but these resurfaced once projects ended, absent continuous government support and institutionalization. The projects' evaluations, therefore, primarily attributed negative project outcomes to non-conflict factors, such as lack of institutional and financial support from the government and minimal state or local capacity. These factors are linked significantly to Cambodia's history of conflict and the long-term damage of war. Addressing these legacies of conflict may help future projects managing conflicting interests of key stakeholders and project goals.

Concerning the studied projects in Afghanistan, a few key patterns emerged. Risk was the most common framing for a substantive discussion about violent conflict, and all projects offered such a discussion to varying degrees of comprehensiveness. For the less conflict-sensitive projects (Category 2/Category 3), these analyses were almost completely limited to conflict as a security consideration. For example, the project on capacity building for sustainable land management recognized that decades of conflict have altered a traditionally agrarian way of life in many Afghan communities, caused major environmental degradation, and diminished natural resource management practices. However, project documents did not make clear the degree to which these conflicts were escalating and whether the security situation in target geographies was ever directly threatened by resource-motivated armed conflict (GEF, 2007b). Another project, Restoration, Protection and Sustainable Use of the Sistan Basin, did not link identified threats explicitly to conflict, indicating that ongoing violent conflict in Afghanistan was not intimately tied to the immediate need for the project nor to its anticipated outcomes. Despite inaccurately characterizing Afghanistan as a "post-conflict" country, the project documents did clearly lay out the risks involved in project implementation, generally related to the remote location, with mitigation measures more typically attributed to addressing conflict, such as firm adherence to security guidelines and recruiting regional staff (GEF, 2008).

In contrast, the Afghanistan Category 1 projects encapsulated a wider range of discussions of conflict as risk. All projects in this category proposed possible mitigation strategies, although not all those proposed actions were comprehensive, and took conflict into account only for its physical danger and implementation inconvenience (e.g., conflict avoidance through target site selection). Alongside discussions of risk, all of these projects at least noted Afghanistan's fragile sociopolitical operating environment and history of armed conflict. Some projects identified this legacy of violent unrest as a key factor in the environmental damage that the project sought to address, while others provided a much more cursory overview. The project Building Adaptive Capacity and Resilience to Climate Change

in Afghanistan noted, "poverty, years of conflict and inadequate policies at local, regional and national levels have resulted in unsustainable natural resource use and severe environmental degradation" (GEF, 2010, p. 5). The project to support snow leopards and their habitat in Afghanistan recognized that "ongoing conflict, increasing human populations, internal human displacement and climate change are putting pressure on biodiversity and natural resources" in the region (GEF, 2018, p. 1). Documents for the project Developing Core Capacity for Decentralized MEA Implementation and Natural Resources Management in Afghanistan identified physical destruction of the landscape and decreased international investment under the Taliban as the causes of "little progress in developing or maintaining the physical capital of the country" (GEF, 2014, p. 7).

Conflict-sensitive design was integral to the success of the studied GEF projects in Cambodia. The project that received a low conflict-sensitivity score, the Mekong River Basin Water Utilization Project, received low evaluation scores, as did the Biodiversity and Protected Area Management Pilot Project for the Virachey National Park, which only addressed conflict risks minimally. All favorably evaluated projects addressed conflict substantively in their project documents.

In the project addressing environmental degradation in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand, the design acknowledged that the region's high political tension had "unresolved territorial disputes that potentially could disrupt the smooth operation of this project" but intended to focus on areas of mutual interest and avoid topics that were "not dependent on resolution of the unresolved issues" (GEF, 2001b, p. 10). The project Establishing Conservation Areas Landscape Management (CALM) in the Northern Plains linked biodiversity threats to the country's history of conflict, as did the project to develop an integrated protected area system for the Cardamom Mountains. The CALM project sought to address conflict by starting with "issues where there is considerable agreement between authorities and villages" to build trust and then moving to more contentious issues (GEF, 2004b, p. 7). Similarly, design of the Tonle Sap Conservation Project reflected high awareness of conflicts that threatened biodiversity, particularly "between subsistence (family-scale fishers) and large-scale users (fishing lots)" and between local authorities and villagers (GEF, 2003b, p. 39). The ongoing project that focuses on renewable energy technologies links climate adaptation to preventing future resource conflicts. With "increasing degradation and loss of forests," communities' livelihoods will be threatened, creating "potential for increased competition for forest resources, and the possibility of conflict between different forest users" (GEF, 2016, p. 74).

Several of the analyzed Afghanistan projects stood out for their nuanced discussions of conflict, the most robust of which were those that considered not only how conflict may affect project implementation, but the inverse as well: how project implementation may influence local conflict dynamics. The Natural Resources and Poverty Alleviation Project addressed how the project could potentially create conflict between social groups. Such a consideration enables an agency to pre-mitigate factors that may compromise its ability to effectively fulfill obligations related to the principle of "do no harm." This project's design provided clear approaches to mitigate any reluctance to accept conservation efforts among community groups by

keeping local and regional authorities informed and using direct consultations and workshops to continuously ensure community buy-in and directly address issues as they arose (GEF, 2003a). In a project to strengthen the resilience of rural livelihood options to manage disaster risks induced by climate change, the project design recognized that international interventions encouraging livelihood changes, even to promote community resilience and sustainability, can inflame tensions related to cultural variety surrounding traditional livelihoods. Also, the mitigation mechanism this project proposed was one of the most conflict sensitive presented in any of the GEF Afghanistan projects: "work[ing] closely with customary dispute resolution mechanisms to resolve any conflicts" and "ensur[ing] an inclusive, participatory approach involving all key stakeholders and an equitable distribution of benefits" (GEF, 2012c, p. 9).

The emphasis on local engagement was also a hallmark of the more successful projects in Cambodia. These projects tended to have positive outcomes with conflict management locally but to a lesser degree with the national government. For example, the design of the project in the Cardamom Mountains paid significant attention to the involvement and participation of stakeholders at all levels, many with conflicting interests, and engaged local communities in the protection, management, and sustainable use of natural resources. It supported existing local efforts on conflict resolution in protected areas (GEF, 2001c, pp. 20–21). However, its biggest challenges were the divergent interests of government officials at all levels, manifesting in both explicit violations of conservation goals and rules and in a lack of coordination (GEF, 2007a). The Tonle Sap conservation project achieved significant success in "boundary demarcation, management plans, trained staff, monitoring systems, livelihoods development, education curriculum and teacher training, and community awareness" (GEF, 2011, p. iv). Despite this, the project's sustainability was rated unsatisfactory because the independent continuation of its monitoring and management practices was "highly dependent on international NGO and donor funding" and largely discontinued after the project ended (GEF, 2011, p. 8). Although the CALM project was successful in developing land management plans, incentivizing biodiversity conservation, and building the capacity of government officials, its sustainability was rated unlikely because of continuing conflicts of interest with the military, which continued to be among the greatest threats to the project's success (GEF, 2004b, p. 9, 2012b, p. vi).

The Afghanistan projects' innovative mitigation strategies for conflict risks ranged from working in close coordination with or directly through local actors, using local conflict resolution mechanisms to mitigate potential conflict related to the program, and community-driven design and implementation processes, among others. Although such discussion in project documents was often relatively brief, it was present and displays the institutional analysis of potential alternatives to security-centered conflict-mitigation strategies. The project to conserve snow leopards and their critical ecosystem emphasized the importance of security alignment with local security forces (GEF, 2018, p. 9531), hiring local people who have conflict experience as often as possible, and acquiring proper security resources such as armored vehicles. The project Building Adaptive Capacity and

Resilience to Climate Change in Afghanistan was unique among projects in the country for its risk mitigation chart that presented conflict both as a logistical-security consideration and a conflict-sensitivity consideration. Conflict-sensitive mitigation tools, such as the "development of a common capacity-building and conflict-management approach to work with local stakeholders," aimed to address potential negative impacts of water scarcity (GEF, 2010, p. 18). The project's approach to mitigating potential conflict showed that the GEF is prepared to use its mandate of environmental protection as an opportunity to encourage collaborative and mutually beneficial approaches to conflict at the community level. The risk matrix offers community-based solutions to the difficulties posed by cultural barriers to accepting resiliency techniques presented by the GEF, a possible flash point for conflict.

The studied projects in Cambodia generally acknowledged small-scale natural resource conflicts and conflicting interests at the local level and managed them with moderate success. Project design elements that proved helpful in mitigating local conflicts were introducing incentive schemes, training local officials and residents, and providing the technology to support sustainability goals. The CALM project included incentive schemes to reward biodiversity conservation, linking payments "directly to the conservation outcomes," rather than to activities indirectly thought to benefit conservation (GEF, 2012b, p. 33). A project staff member expressed support for continuing these incentive programs, such as ecotourism for revenue, economic disincentives for rule-breaking, and the Ibis Rice Program, which compensated farmers for not turning critical wetlands into rice fields (GEF, 2012b). The Cardamom Mountains project stressed "a participatory process to establish village conservation stewardship agreements and village development plans" using microfinancing, and created financial incentives "for monitoring and detecting wildlife and forest crime" (GEF, 2001d, pp. 16–18). Incentives were also important in the Tonle Sap conservation project, through "equipping, training, and providing salaries and operating funds" for patrols and other staff to align with conservation goals (GEF, 2011, p. 8). The project addressing the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand developed regional data-management systems and created national and regional working groups on relevant legislation (GEF, 2001a, 2001b). In contrast, the Biodiversity and Protected Area Management Pilot Project for the Virachey National Park was minimally conflict sensitive and met with mixed success, although its risk management strategies included workshops to develop consensus and commitment; local staff training, equipment, and financial support; public awareness campaigns; and working through existing village development organizations (GEF, 1999).

Despite success at local levels, the Cambodia projects often failed to secure local successes in the longer term because of a lack of financial sustainability and political will. The Cardamom Mountains project's implementation and sustainability were negatively affected by a "weak political commitment toward protected areas because they are not perceived as productive and profitable investments by the government" (GEF, 2007a, p. 47). In the unsuccessful Mekong River Basin water utilization project, evaluators noted that the project was "based on the unrealistic

premise that a fully scientific approach could replace case-by-case negotiations" (GEF, 2012a, p. x).

Conclusions

Evaluations of Cambodia projects primarily attributed negative outcomes to non-conflict factors, such as a lack of political will and financial support and insufficient state or local capacity, which often included rivalry and lack of coordination among ministries. Projects also often overestimated government commitment and readiness to adopt new and innovative approaches and neglected how the history of interstate conflict in Cambodia could shape interpersonal and interorganizational interactions.

A high-stakes area for future conflict-sensitive project design will be finding ways around these high-level conflicts of interest, perhaps using strategies such as more participatory processes and incentive-based approaches that worked at the local level, along with greater sensitivity to the history of foreign intervention. Managing these conflicts will improve both the effectiveness and sustainability of projects and, ultimately, the lives of the people and the environment of Cambodia.

For GEF-supported projects in Afghanistan, conflict sensitivity is characterized by the consistency of top-line content, paired with notable variability in the depth of discussion. Although available data for the Afghanistan situation limited the ability to draw conclusive arguments as to the correlative or causal relationship between conflict-sensitive project design and project success, the analysis clarified several top-line findings.

First, GEF projects in Afghanistan are not conflict insensitive. The magnitude and consistency of their sensitivity, however, require close examination, with the GEF Afghanistan portfolio displaying a broad range of conflict sensitivity across projects. Although the uniqueness of each project in a variety of essential qualities (goal, objectives, expected outcomes, operating environment, etc.) accounts for some variation in the importance placed on conflict dynamics in a project narrative, it does not itself explain the high degree of variability across GEF Afghanistan projects. Afghanistan is heavily affected by violent conflict, and while variability is to be expected, severely divergent approaches to conflict sensitivity, as found among these projects, indicate a need for a unified approach. Last, this analysis demonstrated the need to go beyond risk analysis. Even simply reframing discussions in a context outside of risk would allow the GEF to consider the potential for project activities to substantively and productively engage with the realities of conflict in conflict-affected countries.

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