# Natural Resource Programming in Post-Conflict Situations

Natural resource management (NRM) programs are essential to the success of post-conflict peacebuilding. They contribute to economic recovery and job creation, serve as a basis for local livelihoods, generate revenues for governments, provide basic services, and offer opportunities for cooperation between divided groups. Capitalizing on these NRM opportunities can contribute to stabilization and provide important peacebuilding dividends. To be effective, however, NRM practitioners must understand how delivering NRM programs in a post-conflict setting is fundamentally different from working in more stable countries.

As a first step, NRM practitioners must understand the unique operating conditions of a post-conflict setting. In particular, it is essential to know how natural resources can act as drivers of division and conflict, and the measures that can be taken to mitigate further risks. Practitioners also need to be aware of the role that natural resources may have played in triggering, prolonging, or intensifying the conflict, or were used as a source of conflict financing.

This policy brief highlights nine strategies used by managers and staff of natural resource-related programs to adapt to and address the unique operational challenges faced in post-conflict contexts (see box). While post-conflict situations share many common characteristics, each country is unique. Approaches must be tailored to each situation and may vary in relevance, depending on the conflict dynamics at play and the national peacebuilding priorities.

**Success factors of NRM programs in post-conflict situations**

1. Align NRM with peacebuilding priorities
2. Address the conflict economy and the illicit use of natural resources
3. Rebuild NRM governance, institutions, and capacities
4. Design programs that can adapt to volatility, rapid change, and persistent insecurity
5. Focus on rebuilding sustainable and resilient livelihoods
6. Recognize legal pluralism and work to clarify resource rights
7. Strengthen gender equity in NRM
8. Use shared natural resources as a platform for cooperation and reconciliation
9. Adopt conflict-sensitive approaches to NRM programs

## ALIGN NRM WITH PEACEBUILDING PRIORITIES

In post-conflict situations, governments, communities, and donors tend to focus on peacebuilding priorities such as security, rule of law, basic services, the economy, livelihoods, and governance. Compared to such pressing needs, natural resource management is generally considered relevant only to the extent that it can directly support one or more of those priorities—for example, as a means of quickly generating government revenues, or as a central part of rebuilding livelihoods. It is difficult to secure funding, political will, or community support for activities that focus purely on sustainable natural resource management, environmental protection, or conservation without framing them in a manner that explicitly considers the conflict context and responds to national peacebuilding priorities. A simple forest restoration program is less likely to be supported than a forestry program that rebuilds local governance, strengthens livelihoods, creates jobs, and promotes cooperation; the same is true for an NRM

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Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo credit: UNEP.

initiative that contributes to stabilization and social reintegration by creating jobs for excombatants and for youth and other vulnerable groups.

❏ Establish a program framework that supports both national peacebuilding and NRM objectives. Integrate peacebuilding objectives into the design and implementation of NRM projects to ensure that NRM and peacebuilding projects are connected and working toward the same goals. To further strengthen program coherence and sustainability, hire program staff and diversify funding sources across multiple donors.

❏ Map pathways that articulate how natural resources can contribute to the achievement of specific peacebuilding objectives using the Theory of Change methodology.

❏ Frame NRM programs in post-conflict settings by their relevance to employment, livelihoods, health, governance, and economic recovery, rather than their conservation values.

❏ Focus on achieving peacebuilding objectives across multiple time scales.  NRM programs should aim for quick wins, as well as medium (1-3 years) and longer term (3-5 years) results. Programs should prioritize both the software

(laws, policies, training, dialogue) and hardware (site restoration, equipment, NRM infrastructure) needed to achieve peacebuilding objectives.

❏ Develop context-specific peace and conflict indicators with relevant stakeholders and integrate them into program monitoring and evaluation to better understand both the evolving post-conflict situation and the impacts of NRM interventions on peacebuilding and conflict dynamics.

**ADDRESS THE CONFLICT ECONOMY AND THE ILLICIT USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

In many conflicts, combatants fight over control of and access to land, high-value natural resources, and their revenues. These dynamics do not necessarily change with the signing of a peace agreement. With the continued absence of the rule of law in the immediate post-conflict setting, individuals, including former combatants, may exploit natural resources illegally, and criminal networks may emerge to control the exploitation and trade of a natural resource. Peace spoilers may seek to disrupt peacebuilding efforts in order to profit politically and economically from weak or absent governance. The collapse of traditional livelihoods, formal markets, and natural resource governance frameworks during a

conflict can also lead to the increasingly informal and unregulated extraction of and trade in natural resources. These circumstances, taken together, characterize what is referred to as a conflict economy or war economy. Natural resource concessions negotiated in a context of corruption before or during the conflict may lock countries in to unfavorable contract conditions and reduced revenue streams. All of these conditions compromise a post-conflict government's ability to raise the revenues it desperately needs to finance peacebuilding priorities. The international community is responding with targeted commodity sanctions curtailing the trade in conflict resources, and a number of UN peacekeeping missions now have mandates that include natural resource considerations.

Addressing the natural resource components of the conflict economy is crucial given the important role those natural resources play in a country's reconstruction and recovery. However, addressing these links must be done with caution, as changes to the economic interests of post-conflict stakeholders—particularly peace spoilers and criminal networks—could lead to a relapse to violence.

❒ Support the implementation and enforcement of targeted commodity sanctions and ensure that program activities involving natural resources do not contribute to financing conflict.

❒ Ensure that NRM activities abide by international and domestic legislation and standards on transparency, accountability, and reporting, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

❒ Promote transboundary coordination and legal harmonization to monitor, combat, and control illicit cross-border trade in natural resources.

❒ Encourage the demilitarization of the extractive industries' value chain by removing armed groups from resource production areas and excluding potential peace spoilers from the processing and trade of natural resources.

❒ Support efforts by peacekeeping missions to extend state authority and to secure natural resource extraction sites and trading hubs (such as airports, ports, and border crossings).

## REBUILD NRM GOVERNANCE, INSTITUTIONS, AND CAPACITIES

In many post-conflict situations, the governance mechanisms, institutions, and capacities needed to manage natural resources have been weakened by the conflict. Often, rule of law has largely collapsed; many NRM experts have either been displaced or injured; monitoring data and land records have been destroyed;


Afghanistan. Photo credit: UNEP.

equipment has been looted; and buildings, transportation networks, and communications infrastructure are damaged. When there is weak governance, corrupt officials and elites can siphon off natural resource revenues that would otherwise be used for rebuilding infrastructure, paying salaries, restoring basic public services, and promoting local development. All of these challenges can leave a post-conflict government—already strained under the weight of multiple peacebuilding priorities—without the ability to govern or manage its natural assets. The negative impacts can be severe: armed groups, criminal networks, and peace spoilers may take advantage of the chaos to profit politically and economically from illegal natural resource exploitation, while the government's weak negotiating capacity could lead to suboptimal resource contracts.

Rebuilding transparent, accountable, inclusive, and equitable NRM governance and institutions should be a priority in the peacebuilding context, and will require significant investments in strengthening capacity. A failure to address flawed resource policies or power asymmetries during the reform process could undermine popular support for the peace process.

❒ Encourage government leaders to strengthen or rebuild those NRM governance frameworks, institutions, and capacities that contribute to revenue generation, food security, and livelihood creation. This will help to generate early peacebuilding dividends and build public confidence in broader governance reforms.

❒ Empower customary NRM institutions to complement formal institutions and compensate for gaps in statutory capacities regarding NRM and dispute resolution. Customary institutions may have more local legitimacy than national institutions, and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms may be better suited to addressing local resource disputes. Encourage changes to those customary institutions that discriminate against minorities or support gender inequality.

❒ Invest in the physical infrastructure of NRM, including rebuilding offices, investing in equipment, and demarcating land-use zones and legal boundaries.

❒ Ensure that capacity-building programs cover both the technical skills required to support NRM in the field and the political and social skills needed to support good governance: vision development, public consultation, benefit sharing, transparency and accountability, and dispute resolution.

❒ Identify, connect, and empower government staff from across the national bureaucracy who are interested in NRM and can support needed reforms. Ensure that government-based NRM programs are distributed across multiple ministries (such as environment, natural resources, and energy) to diversify corruption risks and avoid isolating programs in a single weak ministry.

❒ Make public all information on NRM projects, revenues, contracts, and policies, and build the capacity of communities, civil society, and the media to use this information to hold the government and the private sector accountable. Track and publish payments from extractive industries to the national government as well as expenditures from national agencies to subnational entities or projects.

❒ Promote the adoption of national codes to govern the terms of resource contracts. A mining or forestry code can increase transparency around resource negotiations, reduce the possible scope and complexities of negotiations, and compensate for limited government capacities.

**DESIGN PROGRAMS THAT CAN ADAPT TO VOLATILITY, RAPID CHANGE, AND PERSISTENT INSECURITY**

Post-conflict societies are in large part defined by their uncertainty. The fragile peace is often subject to a number of internal and external changes and stresses that can trigger instability and even conflict relapse. Immense political, social, and economic upheavals, population movements, unaddressed grievances and tensions, and unequal sharing of resource revenues are just a few of the domestic stresses that can contribute to a relapse to violence. Post-conflict countries can also be subject to volatile fluctuations in commodity prices, which can impact government budgets; rapidly changing food prices; climate change and natural disasters; economic crises and an unpredictable international investment context; and spillover impacts from regional conflicts. For post-conflict NRM, the complexities and natural variation of biological and ecological systems compound these uncertainties.

To cope with uncertainty, adaptive programming is critical. Adaptive programming involves planning for both anticipated and unanticipated conditions in a rapidly changing and dynamic context.

❒ Adopt an adaptive approach to programming and implementation, including risk mitigation strategies and contingency plans, to navigate the changing operational context and security landscape.

❒ Monitor political, social, and economic changes to gauge how changes could impact the achievement of programs objectives, and respond if needed with modified or new programs.

❒ Decentralize, where appropriate, program and project decision making to the site level in order to more effectively and rapidly adapt to local changes.

❒ Involve a range of stakeholders in the design of NRM programs to ensure that multiple points of view are considered. With stakeholders, generate pathways to achieving key peacebuilding objectives; identify potential obstacles, opportunities, and unintended impacts; and set milestones along each pathway.

❒ Implement initial NRM programs in more-secure areas to establish operational experience and a delivery track record, before moving to insecure zones.



Haiti. Photo credit: UNEP.

**FOCUS ON REBUILDING SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS**

Local livelihoods are significantly altered by violent conflict. Formal markets for products and services are disrupted, and the physical and human infrastructure that supports them—roads, communications networks, energy grids, and agricultural extension services—is often destroyed. With the collapse of legal systems and law enforcement, many people turn to informal or illicit natural resource exploitation and trade for their livelihoods. Investments often dry up and capital flees, leading to losses in jobs and support services. Coping strategies adopted by people under the stress of conflict focus on meeting short-term needs, with survival trumping concerns for long-term sustainability.

As a population emerges from conflict, livelihoods usually depend substantially on natural resources: farming, fishing, forestry, animal husbandry, and artisanal mining. In many cases, such livelihoods will be maladaptive—unsustainable and possibly damaging to the natural resource base. As a result, there is often a need to reorient livelihoods to be both more sustainable in their use of natural resources and more resilient to shocks and stresses. This will avoid locking in unsustainable livelihoods that could increase a population's long-term vulnerability to food insecurity and environmental change, especially under the stress of climate change. A particular focus should be placed on two segments of the population: (1) those that were most vulnerable before the conflict and have likely borne its most severe impacts, and (2) excombatants, who depend on the development of alternative livelihoods as they are reintegrated into society. Good governance is central to enabling a community to pursue its livelihood objectives and to regulating the relationships among different communities with respect to natural resource use. Restoring governance is therefore an important concern in the development of environmentally sustainable and resilient livelihoods.


Côte d'Ivoire. Photo credit: UNEP.

❒ Invest in the recovery of local livelihoods based on agriculture, forestry, and fishing to ensure post-conflict food security and poverty alleviation in a quick, low-cost way that requires few new skills and technologies. Provide the training and extension services required to increase productivity in a low-cost way, access new technologies, and transport goods to domestic and foreign markets.

❒ Target at-risk segments of the population (especially unemployed youth and excombatants) in livelihood development programs. Encourage community participation in the design and implementation of these programs to reduce possible tensions between at-risk groups and host communities.

❒ Increase the resilience of resource-based livelihoods to shocks and stresses—including climate change— by building adaptive capacities; improving the dissemination of market information; supporting traditional dispute resolution mechanisms; improving access to insurance and banking services; and constructing resilient infrastructure. Strengthen relationships among and within livelihood groups and institutions to further augment livelihood and community resilience.

❒ Increase access to land and improve tenure security through support for land reform, return of IDPs and refugees, resolution of competing claims, and the rebuilding of cadastres. Promote the extension of resource tenure and access to traditionally marginalized groups, including women.

❒ Work with communities to restore the productive capacity of natural resources and degraded ecosystems, supporting the livelihoods that depend on these resources and ecosystem services.

❒ Encourage the government to use resource revenues to promote livelihood and economic diversification, including investments in the processes and policies that add value to natural resources domestically.

❒ Maximize local job creation and employment opportunities derived from the extraction, production, and trade in natural resources. Promote local content provisions in contracts to ensure that as much of the infrastructure and labor for resource industries as possible comes from domestic sources. Offer training for communities to provide the services required to support resource extraction and production.

## RECOGNIZE LEGAL PLURALISM AND WORK TO CLARIFY RESOURCE RIGHTS

Many post-conflict societies face a compromised resource-rights administration in which documentation has been lost, titleholders displaced, and property demarcations destroyed. In addition, many post-conflict countries have weak, overlapping, or conflicting legal systems (statutory, customary, and religious regimes) governing the rights to property and other natural resources. As a result of overlapping legal systems, known as legal pluralism, rights and claims to natural resources may be decided through traditional decision-making processes, kinship ties, and personal relationships, as well as through statutory rules. Individuals or groups can take advantage of the presence of multiple, parallel legal systems governing resources—especially land—by using whichever system best supports their claims. Legal pluralism can allow room for negotiation and choice, making people less likely to engage in violence. But it can also lead to conflicting legal decisions, and

could be exploited to legitimize resource seizures and land grabbing. The challenge of resolving competing claims to natural resources is urgent and complex in post-conflict situations: livelihoods, investments, and economic development often require clear, reliable, and agreed-upon resource rights, while competing claims for land and other natural resources can be a source of tension that can escalate to violence.

❒ Work with stakeholders to identify common legal problems and assess the weaknesses and degree of ambiguity in statutory and customary law. Encourage the government to address those ambiguities most likely to undermine livelihoods or food security or contribute to a relapse to violence.

❒ Assess the extent of legal pluralism, and support the development of a long-term approach for integrating and otherwise engaging customary, religious, and statutory systems. Encourage a legal structure in which the statutory system recognizes customary resource rights and provides a clear and accessible appeal process for disputes not resolved through customary means.

❒ Analyze the potential impacts of peacebuilding programs on property ownership and rights to natural resources. Do peacebuilding activities affect property or resource values? Are resource rights firmly established? Are statutory or customary institutions strong enough to resolve competing claims to resources and enforce their determinations?

❒ Where possible, design programs that use inclusive and transparent processes to support the resolution of competing claims to property and other resources. This includes supporting mediation and local conflict resolution mechanisms.

## STRENGTHEN GENDER EQUITY IN NRM

Gender roles often undergo significant changes during conflict and in the post-conflict period. In many post-conflict settings, women have primary responsibilities over a range of critical natural resources and subsistence activities, including farming, water provision, and firewood collection. During conflict, as men leave to fight, many women take over as de facto heads of households, increasing their control over the management of land, water, and other resources essential to livelihoods. The changes to gender roles in post-conflict situations may create new opportunities for women to assume leadership positions in their communities and in development initiatives. Moreover, capitalizing on these shifting roles can contribute to breaking down barriers to women's empowerment and enhance women's productivity in sectors that are often critical to economic recovery. However, the gender shifts that occur in NRM during conflict are often ignored or rolled back in post-conflict settings because women are often insufficiently included


Nigeria. Photo credit: UNEP.

in decisions regarding the resources over which they have direct or indirect responsibility. Women are also seldom found in senior positions within post-conflict governments. NRM laws and policies developed during the post-conflict period rarely include considerations of gender equity, and the institutions that perpetuate gender inequities are not reformed. Without the space to articulate their views and interests, women's access to, use of, and management of natural resources often remain ineffective.

❒ Promote women's participation in formal and informal decision-making structures and governance processes related to NRM in peacebuilding. Ensure that women are represented in relevant decision-making bodies. Involve women and gender specialists early in peace negotiations. Provide training and capacity building to increase women's participation in local political processes. Solicit inputs from a range of women's groups and networks when elaborating NRM policies and programs.

❒ Remove barriers and create enabling conditions to expand and fortify women's rights to land and other natural resources, and build women's capacity for productive and sustainable use of natural resources. Women need access to credit, technical support, and legal support for the enforcement of land rights and other resource rights that underpin their ability to use natural resources for their recovery.

❒ Adopt measures to protect women from resource-related risks early in the peacebuilding period. This includes conducting assessments to identify specific resource- and environment-related security and health threats for women in conflict-affected situations, increasing women's participation and capacity in security sector institutions and conflict resolution processes, and supporting awareness raising and training on women's rights.

## USE SHARED NATURAL RESOURCES AS A PLATFORM FOR COOPERATION AND RECONCILIATION

In peacebuilding, cooperation between former adversaries or across lines of division is a necessary component of reconciliation and trust building. NRM provides a unique platform for collaborative problem solving over resource issues. Cooperation over environmental issues or natural resources may gradually change perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors and help catalyze cooperation in other areas of common interest. Such cooperation around natural resources and the environment can be a progressive continuum: from initial dialogue, to information sharing, to joint assessments and planning, to joint management and coordinated action.

Shared natural resources and environmental threats hold four characteristics that make them useful, low-stakes entry points for cooperation in situations of extreme mistrust. First, when ecosystems and natural resources cross political boundaries, it is difficult for neighboring countries or communities to address issues unilaterally. Resource interdependence can serve as a strong incentive to communicate and cooperate across contested borders or religious and ethnic divisions. Second, rebuilding relationships and processes for resource governance at the local level can garner early peace dividends, helping to rebuild public confidence in wider governance reforms. Third, extracting shared natural resources or addressing common environmental threats often happens over a long period, giving stakeholders the time to build up trust and strengthen relationships in a step-wise manner. Finally, natural resources differ from other sources of conflict such as ethnicity or religion because their status can be empirically quantified. This can help parties to address scientific facts rather than rely on political rhetoric, cultural biases, or long-held perceptions. In many cases, the process of assessing natural resources and developing a shared understanding of a specific problem or mutual need can be a first step toward breaking down stereotypes, humanizing all parties, and building trust.

❒ Identify entry points for using natural resources as a platform for national or local cooperation and reconciliation between previously conflicting parties. Technical issues that are narrowly defined, politically safe, shared, and sufficiently important to engage the parties are a good starting point.

❒ Promote national or local ownership of the collaborative process, and build cooperation on local mechanisms and traditional practices. Recognize that the dynamics of local and national cooperation may be different, and that these differences could be a source of tension.

❒ Support the use of an impartial third party to act as a mediator and convener between key stakeholders.

Address major asymmetries among parties relating to power, information, and negotiating capacity. This can help promote full stakeholder participation in the process and strengthen cooperation.

❒ Sequence environmental cooperation initiatives to build trust and confidence over time. Dialogue and data sharing are good first steps; the process can then move toward full cooperation, such as joint management or coordinated legislation.

❒ Support the development of strong relationships among key stakeholders, built upon directness (good communication), commonality (shared purpose), continuity (time together and a shared history), multiplexity (mutual understanding and breadth), and parity (fairness). These characteristics can be used to describe relationships between different stakeholders and to assess any improvements or deteriorations.



Sierra Leone. Photo credit: UNEP.

## ADOPT CONFLICT-SENSITIVE APPROACHES TO NRM PROGRAMS

Well-intentioned decisions that impact access to, control of, and use of natural resources have the potential—if improperly planned, designed, and implemented—to generate grievances and tensions through a number of pathways. Misdirected policies can restrict peoples' access to key livelihood resources, inequitably distribute resource benefits, create or reinforce power asymmetries, inadvertently finance conflict with resource revenues, or introduce new or additional economic burdens or risks on a given population. If not effectively addressed, these grievances can result in the reemergence of tensions and violence.

NRM practitioners operating in post-conflict situations should ensure that their programs are designed and implemented in a way that is sensitive to conflict dynamics, while also building up the

capacities of natural resource users to prevent and resolve conflicts surrounding natural resources. Conflict-sensitive programming involves analyzing the causes, effects, actors, and dynamics of a conflict; using this knowledge to assess how a program could impact the conflict; and with this understanding designing new or modifying existing programs that minimize conflict risks and maximize peacebuilding opportunities. More broadly, there is a need to build capacities in preventing and resolving resource-related conflicts.

❒ Integrate conflict-sensitivity principles into NRM institutions, organizations, and programs. Identify and reform, with public participation, NRM policies and practices that contributed to the conflict.

❒ Design and implement NRM programs based on an analysis of the causes, actors, dynamics, and history of a conflict. Understand resource uses and scarcities, benefit-sharing mechanisms, national and local mechanisms for dispute resolution, and stakeholder relationships.

❒ Understand how NRM interventions may interact with existing conflict dynamics, and integrate this understanding into the intervention's design and implementation to help ensure that it alleviates rather than exacerbates conflict risks. Revisit the conflict analysis throughout the NRM program, and make program adjustments as needed.

❒ Identify entry points to build capacity of local authorities and communities to assess and mitigate conflict risks and manage future resource conflicts.

❒ Address imbalances in power and benefit distribution.

❒ Ensure that NRM programs are undertaken across a number of communities, and that their benefits are equitably shared across relevant stakeholders, to avoid sparking new grievances or exacerbate existing tensions. Promote community ownership and development of NRM programs to reduce misgivings about top-down or externally imposed solutions.
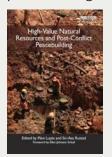
## Further Reading

For further information, please see:

Conflict Sensitivity Consortium. 2012. *How to guide to conflict sensitivity.* www.conflictsensitivity.org/sites/default/files/1/6602_HowToGuide_CSF_WEB_3.pdf.
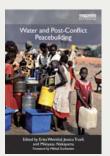
International Institute for Sustainable Development. 2009. *Conflict-sensitive conservation practitioners' manual.* www.iisd.org/pdf/2009/csc_manual.pdf.
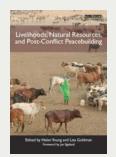
# Post-Conflict Peacebuilding and Natural Resource Management

The Environmental Law Institute, the United Nations Environment Programme, the University of Tokyo, and McGill University have coordinated a six-year global research initiative to analyze experiences in post-conflict peacebuilding and natural resource management; identify lessons; and raise awareness of those lessons among practitioners and scholars. This initiative has generated six edited books (published by Earthscan) that include 150 case studies and other analyses from 60 conflict-affected countries and territories, written by 225 scholars, practitioners, and decision makers from around the world. A seventh overarching book (published by Cambridge University Press) synthesizes the findings across resources, peacebuilding activites, and countries. Contact: Carl Bruch, Environmental Law Institute, 202.939.3870, bruch@eli.org
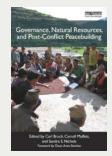


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