

**NATURAL  
RESOURCES,  
CONFLICT, &  
HUMANITARIAN  
CHALLENGES:**

LESSONS  
FROM **COMMUNITY-  
BASED CONFLICT  
TRANSFORMATION**

MIKE  
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# INTRODUCTION

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The links between the humanitarian, environmental, and conflict resolution fields are increasingly overlapping. The World Bank has estimated that people living in conflict-affected states are twice as likely to lack clean water and be undernourished as those who have not experienced war<sup>1</sup>, and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) has identified poverty, disease, and environmental degradation as factors that contribute to instability and conflict.<sup>2</sup> This destructive combination creates particular challenges for practitioners of humanitarian action. A 2012 Mercy Corps report argues that environmental pressures combined with conflict reduce resilience and the adaptive capacities of communities, hindering effective recovery and presenting additional challenges for the humanitarian aid sector.<sup>3</sup>

Although environmental protection, humanitarian aid, and conflict resolution present unique challenges to practitioners in their respective fields, they also highlight the importance of increased scholarship and work to build upon various linkages to optimize outcomes. Because an intervention in one field may have implications for the other two, gaps in knowledge and practice may contribute to a vicious cycle of environmental degradation, conflict, and humanitarian emergencies. Conversely, enhanced collaboration among the three fields could facilitate virtuous cycles of environmental sustainability, peacebuilding, and resilience to disaster or external shocks. The conflict-transformation organization International Alert argues that adaptation to climate change should be conflict-sensitive and efforts must be made to ensure that peacebuilding processes are not disrupted by the effects of climate change.<sup>4</sup> Catley and Iyasu argue that aid practitioners should incorporate peacebuilding and sustainability concerns into their long-term strategies for improved outcomes; particularly regarding land use policies in the face of drought risks.<sup>5</sup> The humanitarian organization CARE discusses the need to develop risk reduction that incorporates both conflict management and consideration of potential environmental shocks, including those related to water and land, arguing that climate change, natural disasters, and conflict each “represent challenges to human well-being that require coping mechanisms and cooperation amongst different levels of society.”<sup>6</sup> World Wildlife Fund (WWF) is working to promote natural resource management and governance strategies that help resolve environmental conflicts.<sup>7</sup> Capitalizing on the growing knowledge base by fostering greater understanding of these cross-cutting issues could help practitioners in all three fields work together more effectively and therefore improve their outcomes.

In response to the growing body of scholarship on these linkages and in seeking to improve results on the ground, organizations in the humanitarian, environmental, and conflict resolution fields have begun to tackle a wider array of challenges and broadening their mandates. For example, humanitarian actors are

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1 World Bank 2011.  
2 UNEP 2009.  
3 Mercy Corps 2012.  
4 Smith & Vivekananda 2009.  
5 Catley & Iyasu 2010.  
6 Walch 2010.  
7 World Wildlife Fund 2011.

increasingly conducting interventions and projects they see as sustainable in the long-term, such as facilitating a return to normal livelihoods in the aftermath of disaster, a realm typically reserved for post-conflict reconstruction practitioners. There is also a growing trend of utilizing natural resources to create such livelihoods as well as address social grievances.<sup>8</sup> Environmental groups involved in climate adaptation efforts find themselves addressing social resilience and human vulnerability, issue areas classically associated with humanitarian aid. Conflict resolution organizations find themselves increasingly addressing the environment, as they have found that mismanagement of natural resources can exacerbate grievances (i.e., yielding inequitable wealth sharing or triggering land disputes), undermining their overall mission.

As each field's approach to its respective mission is evolving to become more comprehensive, however, important challenges are also being revealed. Differing time horizons and mission priorities among organizations in the three fields mean that certain trade-offs are inevitable, including short-term versus long-term considerations, different conceptions of what is sustainable, or tensions between political neutrality and political engagement. How specifically to address such challenges is often unclear, and highlights a major limitation to streamlining collaboration among the three fields.

Search for Common Ground (SFCG/Search) is a conflict resolution organization that has worked on dozens of conflict issues in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North America. Search seeks to build sustainable peace by working with all parties in a given location and helping them work together to find solutions to conflict. Search recognizes that differences are inevitable, but violence is not. As an organization it works to build sustainable peace through dialogue, media, and community activities by taking a conflict transformation approach. The goal is to change daily interactions between groups and individuals in conflict so that they can work together to build up their community. Search's mission is to shift away from adversarial approaches and toward cooperative solutions in the way the world deals with conflict so that differences stimulate social progress rather than trigger violence.

Many of the conflict areas in which Search works have complex humanitarian and environmental challenges; therefore, it has become clear that accumulating cross-sectoral expertise and building collaborative partnerships are important. Competition over natural resources is a key point of contention between groups and individuals. Conflicts often have major humanitarian consequences, so Search increasingly works with humanitarian actors, typically to support initiatives that address underlying grievances and help eventually to resolve crises. There are key links between natural resource issues and humanitarian challenges, and conflict-sensitive humanitarian work around natural resource management presents promising opportunities as well as significant challenges for all three sectors.

The goal of this article is to identify both the lessons we have learned and the enduring challenges we see associated with streamlining these three separate, but related, fields. It will suggest ways in which the environmental and humanitarian fields' insights and experiences can inform conflict resolution work, while also identifying gaps in knowledge. The next section will first provide a brief overview of how the conflict

resolution field has developed, stressing its institutional assumptions and approaches to problem-solving. We then explore four case studies on Search's involvement in conflicts with both humanitarian and environmental dimensions. The article concludes with a series of key insights about both opportunities challenges, and recommends specific entry points for strengthened collaboration. Some of the challenges to streamlining efforts include the organizational structure of the three fields, their differing priorities, and the different timelines with which they characteristically work. Addressing such differences and facilitating an exchange of knowledge through various entry points discussed here could address such gaps and help researchers and practitioners in all three fields achieve their goals in a way that meets the needs of their target communities and is sustainable over the long term.

## OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION FIELD

Conflict resolution seeks to understand conflicts, prevent them from occurring and escalating, mitigate their impacts, and resolve them with sustainable solutions. It is important to note that the term 'conflict' does not necessarily imply violence. Conflict is widely understood to occur when two or more groups or individuals pursue mutually incompatible goals, whether or not this results in destruction or violence. In recent years, the field has become more specialized, institutionalized, and has grown in size and legitimacy.<sup>9</sup>

The intellectual underpinnings of conflict resolution as a field trace their roots to the post-World War I era. Ramsbotham, Miall, and Woodhouse have argued that the failure of peace, socialist and liberal institutionalist movements to prevent war contributed to its development.<sup>10</sup> The two world wars undermined the notion that economic prosperity and spreading democracy would lead to peace.<sup>11</sup> The nuclear threat in subsequent decades sparked a sense of urgency that contributed to the field's institutional growth.<sup>12</sup> Around the same time, work on organizational behavior and labor management relations was providing important insights on bargaining and mutual-gains approaches to conflict resolution.<sup>13</sup> This work contributed to much of the thinking on conflict resolution in later years, although at that time scholarship on the topic was fragmented.<sup>14</sup> Other research influential in shaping the field has included psychology of aggression and group conflict,<sup>15</sup> politics, and the effects of wealth distribution.<sup>17</sup> The international development field emerged simultaneously in the post-World War II era as developed countries sought to increase the capacities of states recovering from the war and, subsequently, the less industrialized world more broadly.<sup>18</sup> During this era, development was primarily focused on economic growth, with success measured by increases in Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

9 Lederach 1997.

10 Ramsbotham, Miall & Woodhouse 1999.

11 Kriesberg 2007.

12 Ramsbotham, Miall & Woodhouse 1999.

13 Parker-Follett 1942.

14 Ramsbotham, Miall & Woodhouse 1999.

15 Dollard et al 1939.

16 Lewin 1948.

17 Brinton 1965.

18 Zelizer 2013.

and integration into the global economy. Against this backdrop, the 1960s were characterized by national liberation struggles and an increased focus on social justice issues.<sup>19</sup> Scholarship on bargaining, cooperation, and research on game theory emerged.<sup>20 21 22 23 24</sup>

In the aftermath of the Cold War the field has continued to evolve, with a greater focus on the role of social movements in conflict as groups organize along ethnic, religious, and cultural lines instead of ideology.<sup>25</sup> The end of the Cold War also created new challenges, broadening the fields of development and conflict resolution. A strong critique emerged in the 1990s of the top-down development programs of previous decades, particularly of structural adjustment programs implemented by international financial institutions. This helped spark a shift to more inclusive, locally-led models of development interventions. This shift had important implications for the conflict resolution field, since the majority of development projects take place in conflict-affected countries.<sup>26</sup> As a result, there has been a parallel shift in focus and approach within the conflict resolution field.<sup>27</sup> The change to “bottom up” strategies brought together the conflict resolution and development fields, and is a primary guiding principle of both fields today.<sup>28</sup>

Conflict resolution is multidisciplinary in that it incorporates aspects of psychology, political science, international relations, economics, and other fields to prevent and resolve conflict. Conflict is understood as a dynamic process that exists on a continuum.<sup>29 30</sup> However, for the purpose of this article, we focus primarily on violent intergroup conflict at the subnational level, as such episodes provide several of the most important insights we have derived about linkages among environmental, humanitarian, and conflict resolution challenges.

## Guiding Principles in Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution requires first analyzing conflict dynamics. Practitioners seek to identify the stakeholders involved, ascertain their motivations and abilities, and understand the interpersonal and intergroup relationships in which they are embedded. Practitioners also seek to delineate the power dynamics of intergroup relations and understand historical grievances. The goal of this analysis is to identify conflict drivers as well as potential areas of commonality between opposing stakeholders that could be used as entry points for conflict resolution.

Conflict drivers are understood as being material, psychological, or political in nature. Some material

19 Kriesberg 2007.

20 Deutsch 1973.

21 Rapoport 1965.

22 Rapoport 1970.

23 Fisher, Ury & Patton 2011.

24 Schelling 1980.

25 Kriesberg 2007.

26 Wisler 2013.

27 Ibid.

28 Kriesberg 2007.

29 Curle 1971.

30 Lederach 1997.

drivers of conflict relate to scarcity. This scarcity-conflict theory maintains that people will engage in conflict to gain material goods. The reasons for wanting such goods may be survival, greed, or a perceived inequality of resource division. Psychological drivers relate to self and group identity and the creation of an in- versus out-group narrative in an effort to achieve social cohesion. This dynamic encourages conflict by tying in-group membership to vilification of the 'other'. Similarly, social narratives can be constructed that exacerbate tensions. For example, perceived historical injustices and group membership pride can combine to escalate conflict. This has been seen along religious, ethnic, and national lines as well as other iterations of group membership. The examples described later in this article illustrate how the combination of a specific event along with deep-rooted mistrust of the other side can cause an issue to escalate. Political drivers focus primarily on disenfranchisement and political marginalization, which may result in resource scarcity for the affected population and may exacerbate psychological tensions. At best, politics can provide a productive outlet for the inter-group dynamics described above; at worst, the political situation can provide the impetus for large-scale conflict.

Much of conflict resolution practice is based on the theory that healthy relationships between groups and individuals will enable them to find cooperative solutions to grievances. Relationships are both part of the conflict and its solution. Reconciliation, an important component of peacebuilding, focuses on cultivating relationships to address both the emotional and psychological aspects of conflict. Any framework for building peace should provide avenues for direct, practical action that makes an impact on the overall conflict system.<sup>31</sup> Hence, conflict resolution organizations design interventions that aim to address the various facets of building healthy relationships with particular emphasis on communication. While third-party negotiations and mediations are often part of these programs, most interventions operate on the theory that sustainability can only be achieved by enabling local stakeholders to manage their relationships without outside assistance.

## Search's Approaches to Conflict Resolution

Search works to mediate between various communities in various ways. For example, it may choose groups of local leaders to meet, discuss, and work toward resolving a given issue by creating meaningful dialogue between various conflicting parties. Because research on conflict resolution places special importance on relationship-building, many of Search's programmatic activities focus initially on relationship skills before attempting to address the drivers of a particular conflict. For example, Search conducts trainings with community leaders and members on communication skills and dispute resolution techniques. Other practices may include facilitated dialogues between members of warring groups with the goal of humanizing each group to the other and creating a space for members to discuss and understand the opposing side. These direct, personal contacts are strategically chosen to have the greatest community impact. In Nigeria's Plateau State, the city of Jos has seen various violent clashes between Muslim and Christian populations. Search has worked with local leaders in this context to facilitate various dialogues and other opportunities for contact between women's groups and youth groups. With the help of these local leaders, Search has organized soccer matches and

built clinics to which both Muslim and Christian women can go and feel safe.<sup>32</sup> It is critical to identify and work with people who envision themselves as playing the role of peacemakers within a conflict setting and who can build bridges with their counterparts across lines of conflict.<sup>33</sup> Many organizations also spearhead community sensitization campaigns designed to ease vilification of the ‘other’ in potential conflict regions. Logistically, conflict resolution organizations can directly affect only a small percentage of the population, but it is hoped that trainees will become such “connectors” in communities.<sup>34</sup>

Search is just one of many organizations involved in an increasingly complex landscape of conflict resolution efforts. Humanitarian NGOs with a peacebuilding component and various non-conflict resolution organizations are increasingly trying to do conflict-sensitive work in an effort to improve their programs’ effectiveness. Organizations focused predominately on peace and conflict (i.e. International Alert, Interpeace, Swiss Peace, Life and Peace Institute, ACCORD, Saferworld) are increasingly operating alongside various environmental and humanitarian organizations in various contexts. Search is increasingly finding that humanitarian aid organizations (e.g., Catholic Relief, Mercy Corps, Pact, Norwegian Refugee Council, International Rescue Committee, and International Committee of the Red Cross) are incorporating components of peacebuilding as part of their work. Finally, organizations known mainly for working on poverty alleviation or implementing longer-term development initiatives (e.g., CARE, World Vision, Oxfam, Mines Advisory Group, Save the Children) are gradually operating with added conflict-sensitivity.

The reasons for this trend are clear, as research and scholarship point to the importance of conflict-sensitivity in aid and development programs. However, practitioners of conflict resolution hold a certain level of expertise that practitioners and organizations not principally devoted to this end may be lacking—just as their expertise is not typically reproduced in conflict resolution organizations. Given the delicate circumstances in conflict and post-conflict situations, organizations seeking to meet human needs, deliver services, or promote recovery from disasters and conflicts, can unknowingly exacerbate insecurity.

## INCREASING INTERSECTION OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION, HUMANITARIAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

Humanitarian and environmental issues have become increasingly important to conflict resolution organizations for two reasons. First, the humanitarian relief sector has been expanded to include broader and longer-term goals as important tenets for achieving an effective transition from disaster to stability. Second, global trends such as climate change, population growth, and increasing demand for resources are exacerbating tensions in already fragile regions. Because of the separate but similar expansion of both the role of

32 For more information see: <http://www.plateauwillarise.org/>

33 Lederach 1997.

34 Harder 2006.

environmental practitioners and the humanitarian relief community, both of these fields have become part of the conflict resolution landscape. As this landscape gets more crowded, it presents new opportunities as well as unique challenges.

### Expanding Humanitarian Action Mandate<sup>35</sup>

The humanitarian field has grown beyond merely providing emergency assistance to supporting transitions, as captured in the concept of “relief-to-development.” The idea behind relief-to-development is that actions to address disaster should also enhance long term well-being and sustainability. As a result, there are now greater expectations of humanitarian organizations operating within conflict environments. The main humanitarian research network, the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) estimated in its 2010 “State of the Humanitarian System” report that there were 210,800 humanitarian professionals worldwide in 2008, of whom nearly half worked for the United Nations or Red Cross/Red Crescent; the remaining were based at major international or national non-governmental organizations (NGOs).<sup>36 37</sup> Although estimates and definitions vary widely, there is a clear consensus that humanitarian funding has increased dramatically over the past decade; even after accounting for spikes driven by major emergencies.

The increase in funding and personnel has coincided with a professionalization of the sector. Increased resources have led both organizations and donors to focus energies on ensuring responsible and transparent stewardship of donated funds to maximize their effectiveness. The push for improved effectiveness has contributed to the development of norms, standards, and a community of practice. This larger community, known as the “Humanitarian System,” now comprises a broad array of actors. Some deliver aid, including international NGOs, UN agencies, and the Red Cross/Red Crescent federations, but the system also includes university departments, think tanks, private sector consultants and vendors, donor organizations, professional journals and associations and, increasingly, national and local organizations based in developing countries.<sup>38</sup>

In the context of increasing professionalization, the aims of humanitarian programs have continued to evolve to encompass a broad range of goals. The two classic aims of reducing suffering and doing so with neutrality and impartiality fit within traditional notions of relief work. However, due to broadening of programmatic roles, humanitarian programs now include several objectives beyond material aid provision--notably, protection of civilians and facilitating the return to normal lives and livelihoods.<sup>39</sup> These objectives cover activities not traditionally associated with humanitarian assistance. While this expanded focus may present an opportunity in some ways, it can be problematic in others. The humanitarian response to violent conflicts in

35 See also Jobbins 2013.

36 Harvey, Stoddard, Hammer & Taylor 2010.

37 According to ALNAP, in 2008 the six largest international NGOs had a combined overseas operating budget of more than \$4 billion, of which \$1.7 billion went to humanitarian activities. The rest went to international development or other longer-term programs. These organizations: CARE, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Oxfam, Save the Children, and World Vision International, had more than 90,000 staff.

38 Harvey, Stoddard, Harmer & Taylor 2010.

39 Jobbins 2013.

the mid-1990s is especially salient. High-profile interventions in the Balkans and Somalia and the non-intervention in Rwanda brought new attention to the role of the international community as a whole in responding to major emergencies. Protracted wars alongside aid operations in Sudan and Afghanistan and the Goma Refugee crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda raised troubling questions about the role of humanitarian actors within the conflict space.<sup>40</sup> Anderson's seminal work highlighted the possibility of political manipulation of aid and how aid programs can reshape the social landscape in a way that may be detrimental to the local population.<sup>41</sup> Particularly, the choice of criteria used to allocate resources and the selection of beneficiaries is inherently a political process, and can exacerbate tensions between various groups if they perceive the process to benefit one side over the other. Additionally, aid can be used to sustain conflicts in various ways. The combination of trends toward greater professionalization and expanded mandates mean that humanitarian actors are part of the conflict resolution landscape for both good and ill.

## Increasing Attention on the Environment

The effects of climate change, whether localized or global in nature, will have significant impacts on human societies. Resource stressors, whether environmentally or socially constructed, will likely continue to increase tensions in already fragile regions. This can be seen in farmer-pastoralist tensions within several current crises.<sup>42</sup> Search is working to resolve the problems that have arisen by consulting with locals and creating negotiating structures.

The steadily increasing globalization of the commodities market, particularly in the extractive industries but also in timber and large-scale agriculture, has led to tensions between companies, governments, and communities. Population growth is also expected to increase demands for energy, water, and food. It has been argued that material resources can lead to institutional weakening in a phenomenon known as the 'resource curse.' It has also been argued that resources can exacerbate conflict by creating transferable value that can be taken by force and used to increase funding for belligerents. In fact, UNEP has said that in the post-conflict context the risk of relapse into war within five years is twice as likely in conflicts where natural resources have played a role.<sup>43</sup> According to Global Witness (2010), one-third of peacekeeping operations since 1990 have taken place in contexts where natural resources played an economic role.<sup>44</sup> A recent report published by UNEP and UNDP (2013) stressed the potential opportunities and limitations of the natural resource sector. The report highlights its role as a potential catalyst for generating jobs for returnees and ex-combatants, but also how mismanagement of natural resources can impede recovery if it yields limited access to productive resources or if wealth is shared inequitably.<sup>45</sup>

Perceptions of the interrelationships between peace, conflict, and the environment differ. The report

40 Anderson 1999.

41 Anderson 1999.

42 Mercy Corps 2012. See also ACF, IDS, Tearfund, IER, A-Z Consult & ODES 2010; HAB 2009; Hagmann & Mulugeta 2008; Pavanello 2009; Proud 2008; UN-OCHA 2011; Adano, Witsenburg & Dietz 2009.

43 UNEP 2009.

44 Global Witness 2010.

45 UNEP & UNDP 2013.

of the World Commission on Environment and Development (also known as the Brundtland Report, after its chair Gro Harlem Brundtland) was influential in highlighting this potential link and isolated sustainability as a cornerstone of development, broadening the perception of the environment's role in stable societies.<sup>46</sup> Brock identified natural resources as a cause of conflict and noted the environmental impact of violence, while also suggesting that the environment could, conversely, serve as an opportunity to build trust.<sup>47</sup> Homer-Dixon's work on links between environmental scarcity and conflict sparked much discussion and scholarship about the causal factors involved.<sup>48</sup> <sup>49</sup> This work has been criticized by various scholars who argue that important variables are neglected in such an argument,<sup>50</sup> <sup>51</sup> and that securitizing the environment is problematic both for environmental protection and for peace.<sup>52</sup> Subsequent scholarship on this topic has pointed toward poverty and weak or dysfunctional institutions as having a stronger link to conflict-risk than resource degradation or scarcity.<sup>53</sup>

While much of the literature discusses the potential for natural resources to exacerbate conflict, it has been argued that joint management of natural resources can build trust among conflicting parties.<sup>54</sup> According to Conca and Dabelko, "environmental problems are most combustible when they exacerbate existing social tensions based on class, religion, or ethnicity," but under the right circumstances could help alleviate conflict risk factors such as mistrust, uncertainty, and divergent interests.<sup>55</sup> They argue that environmental engagement could help build a habit of cooperation, transform interstate bargaining dynamics, and deepen trans-societal linkages conducive to peaceful cooperation.<sup>56</sup> Conca argues that the environment has particular attributes that make it a comparatively low-stakes arena in which to establish a pattern of accountability and transparency.<sup>57</sup> It could also challenge the zero-sum logic of the national security arena, highlighting the need for reciprocity and cooperation and emphasizing long time horizons.<sup>58</sup> Carius takes this idea further, arguing that environmental cooperation across geographical boundaries could help shift identities from being based on political affiliation to being based around shared resources or ecosystems,<sup>59</sup> and could help create a common regional identity.<sup>60</sup> Much of the scholarship on this topic has been at the interstate level, but it can still offer important insights for community-based conflict transformation at the subnational level.

Management of environmental resources in an equitable and sustainable manner can help facilitate cooperation, assist in rebuilding livelihoods, and address basic human needs in the aftermath of violent con-

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46 Bruntland 1987.

47 Brock 1991.

48 Homer-Dixon 1991.

49 Homer-Dixon 1994.

50 Gleditsch 1998.

51 Levy 1995.

52 Deudney 1991.

53 Theisen 2008.

54 Kameri-Mbote 2007.

55 Conca & Dabelko 2002.

56 *Ibid.*, Chapter 8.

57 Conca 2002.

58 *Ibid.* See also Diehl & Gleditsch 2011; Axelrod 1984.

59 Carius 2006.

60 *Ibid.*

flict.<sup>61</sup> In these delicate circumstances, resource management can present an important opportunity to support the peace process. The environment could help the humanitarian and conflict resolution fields achieve their goals in a number of ways, some of which include building trust, providing a forum for exchanging knowledge, presenting opportunities to rebuild livelihoods, facilitating cooperation, and placing the focus on longer time horizons.

Access to resources is critical for supporting economic recovery and re-establishing livelihoods, particularly in the case of reduced government capacity in the post-war period.<sup>62</sup> The peacebuilding period can be particularly fragile as ex-combatants are likely to return to conflict if their basic needs are not met. According to UNEP, people in such settings often compete for resources under conditions of environmental stress.<sup>63</sup> Because competition can devolve into violence, it is important that practitioners consider the range of factors influencing quality of life in conflict and post-conflict situations.<sup>64</sup> This includes meeting basic needs of food, water, and sanitation, but also considering long-term needs which include environmental, economic, and political sustainability. Hence environment and natural resource issues and the actors they bring into play are part of the conflict-resolution landscape. This presents both opportunities and problems and therefore requires conflict-sensitive work.

The combination of expansion of the humanitarian aid mandate and the key role of the environment and natural resources creates a challenging landscape for conflict resolution, in which attention to sustainability considerations as well as conflict-sensitive approaches to aid and environment work become critically important.

## EXAMPLES AT THE INTERSECTION OF CONFLICT, ENVIRONMENT AND EMERGENCIES

Human insecurities during and following conflict “have a strong immediate ecological component as people struggle for clean water, sanitation, and food and fuel a context of war-ravaged infrastructure, lost livelihoods, and disrupted institutions.”<sup>65</sup> This section will detail four recent examples in which Search worked on conflicts with a strong connection to natural resource scarcity or environmental effects as well as serious humanitarian consequences. First, in a case underscoring the need for conflict-sensitive approaches to environmental work, a Chinese company operating in Sudan unknowingly sparked a community conflict when it responded to protests over environmental and other effects of its activities by handing out cash payments. Search and other groups are working to facilitate a mediation process in the community. A second example, which demonstrates the conflict potential around resources, is seen in the DRC, where competition over fishing rights gave

61 Burt & Keiru 2011.

62 Weinthal, Troell & Nakayama 2011.

63 UNEP 2009.

64 Ibid.

65 Conca & Wallace 2009.

rise to an insurgency that displaced more than 100,000 people and provoked a humanitarian crisis. Search worked with the United Nations (UN) and others to bring this conflict to a close. A third example, from Burundi, demonstrates the need for integrated resource-management, environmental, and conflict-resolution efforts in the wake of violence; land scarcity and disputes not only intensified violence during that nation's civil war, but also undermined attempts to bring refugees home after the end of the conflict. Search played a key role in promoting community-based conflict transformation and dispute resolution, yet many of the underlying environmental factors have not yet been addressed, leaving the long-term sustainability of solutions in doubt. A final example demonstrates peacebuilding potential. In the Niger Delta, Search is working to use environmental issues as a point of common interest in the context of social tension--specifically, supporting environmental clean-up actions as an opportunity to instigate community-led action.

### **Oil Field Compensation and Ethnic Clashes in Al-Fula, Sudan**

Lack of benefits generated to local communities in oil-rich South Kordofan, Sudan for resource extraction generated severe discontent and deep grievances. Distributive grievances combined with a complex system of land ownership gave rise to a serious crisis when a foreign company operating there disrupted the delicate traditional system of sharing resources.

The Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company consortium invests and extracts oil from Al-Fula in South Kordofan, Sudan. In response to local protests, the company began paying compensation of \$150 per affected family in the region. They were not aware that those occupying the land were not actually the owners, as there is a complicated history of land-lending between different Misseriya Arab clans living in the region. In January 2013, members of the clan who held claim to the land attacked the families that had received compensation as well as members of the oil company. The clash left 160 dead in 48 hours. Five Chinese oil workers were taken hostage and later killed. At the request of the UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Sudanese government, Search and three civil society groups led a process of documenting the clashes and the effects on the different communities. The report that was generated provided the basis for a mediation process, outlining the roles of the government, company, and relief workers. It was used to guide relief efforts that eventually resulted in the company switching from individual to collective compensation. For example, the company now builds roads and schools to benefit the community rather than giving packages to particular individuals or families. This case highlights how a humanitarian emergency could develop from an intervention informed by insufficient knowledge of local resource-sharing norms and practices. Comprehensive understanding of local resource management realities along with conflict-sensitivity expertise could have helped curb the crisis that unfolded. With more robust understanding of these dynamics, collective compensation initiatives could be designed in a way that engages community members from different clans and helps build trust, which could help avoid or de-escalate conflict in the future.

### **Fishing Disputes in Dongo, DRC**

Tension over a limited quantity of shared resources can escalate into larger-scale conflict, as was the case in

Dongo, DRC. Every year the Ubangi River floods the equatorial forest. As the water recedes, fish are trapped in the ponds left behind in the forest. These fish are an important source of cash revenue for local residents, and each village in the region has one or more fish ponds. The villages of Enyele and Monzaya have three ponds between them, and have clashed off and on since the 1940s over how to share them. In 2009, a priest named Odjani Mangbama began mobilizing villagers in Enyele, who then attacked Monzaya. Weapons and military trainers were brought in, escalating the clash into a full-blown violent conflict. Hundreds were killed and more than 100,000 people were forced to flee as the rebels took over an enormous swath of territory. Peacekeepers and the army eventually stabilized the region but refugees refused to return due to ongoing grievances, prolonging the humanitarian crisis. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Mission in the DRC (MONUC) asked SEARCH to mediate. SEARCH worked with the larger tribes to address this clan conflict. By training and supporting local committees of mediators, eventually a non-aggression pact was negotiated and a number of the local environmental differences were resolved, clearing the way for refugee return.<sup>66</sup> This case points out the clear need for expertise from the three communities of practice. Humanitarian action workers have particular knowledge about the needs and intricacies associated with refugee return, while conflict-resolution practitioners must work toward a long-standing strategy to prevent further conflict between communities. Environment practitioners have a deeper understanding of ecosystem-related challenges and what limited resources mean for environmental sustainability, and how conflict can disrupt such processes. Understanding these interrelated issues in a comprehensive way is crucial. With such knowledge, further agreements on joint management of the ponds and income-sharing from fish sales could be used as a way to prevent conflict in the future and to boost the local economy, sustaining livelihoods.

## Land Conflict Transformation in Burundi

Burundi is among the most densely populated countries in Africa. With a surface area the size of the US state of Maryland and a population of nearly 10 million people with agrarian-based livelihoods, land disputes can often drive conflict. Tensions over shared resources have been a source of conflict for generations, escalating into violence with some frequency. War drove many people out of Burundi and others had moved onto the newly vacated land and had lived there for a generation. The conflicts that took place from 1993 to 2007 provided the opportunity for score-settling between families and communities over land disputes. Land became one of the main drivers of violence in a war that left more than 300,000 dead and displaced hundreds of thousands.<sup>67</sup> As a result, striking a solution to the land problem was among the prerequisites for ensuring a durable peace and for enabling the return of refugees and an end to the humanitarian crisis. This was central to repatriation, reintegration, and reconciliation between various groups.<sup>68</sup> A combination of enormous efforts by local government, traditional leaders, conflict resolution groups (such as Search and ACCORD), and humanitarian agencies (including ADRA, UNHCR and others) took a mixed approach that included direct

66 UNHCR 2013.

67 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2011.

68 Bunte & Monnier 2011.

negotiation with the families in dispute, arbitration by government and traditional authorities, and the construction of new villages and resettlement.<sup>69</sup> This approach has been largely successful in a very challenging situation. However, there was little consideration of environmental factors. For example, many of the parcels that were divided in arbitration or agreed to in negotiation may not be viable in the long-term. This case illustrates the important role of environmental knowledge for long-term sustainable peace.

## **A Town Clean-up in Oporoza, Nigeria**

Distributive grievances among residents are a longstanding issue in the Niger Delta region. Local populations have typically received very few benefits associated with the region's natural resource wealth and this has been the impetus for violence on various occasions. Oporoza, a coastal community in Nigeria's restive Delta State, was the scene of some of the most infamous fighting between the Nigerian government and militants from the separatist Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Among the key grievances driving militancy in the Delta was the perception that residents of the region were not receiving sufficient benefits from oil extraction but were bearing a heavy cost from pollution, lost livelihoods in the fishing industry, and neglect and underinvestment by government.

In 2009, the town experienced an all-out assault by the Nigerian Army, Air Force, Navy and police that left many civilians and militants dead. The fighting provoked a humanitarian crisis, displacing thousands into remote swamps and forests. Although an agreement later that year led to an amnesty and demobilization program for the militants, the return of civilian government to Oporoza, and the reintegration of ex-militant fighters, the situation remained tense after the bitter and long history. The crisis was deeply traumatic for community members. There was distrust among those who were perceived as loyal to the government versus those who were perceived as loyal to the militants. This mistrust has created major challenges to returning to normal life.

As part of a major community-based peace and reconciliation program across the Delta, Search worked with the Niger Delta Professionals for Development, a civil society group that trains local leaders, strategizes the improvement of intra-community relationships, and supports the reintegration of ex-militants as well as the return of government authorities. The flagship initiative identified by local leaders focused on a series of high-visibility activities based upon a clean-up of litter and trash in the city. The clean-up paved the way for increased community engagement by government, and underscored the value of collective action by engaging the resources of both government and ex-militants in an effort to build trust and lay the groundwork for collaboration. In creating a shared public good that the community could rally around, those on each side of the conflict could come together and have dialogue. In this case, environmental management provided a platform for building trust and confidence, while also safeguarding important resources.

## LESSONS LEARNED

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Three general lessons may be taken from these examples. First, the environmental, humanitarian, and conflict resolution fields interact on multiple levels, generating windows of opportunity for sustainable recovery from conflict, but also creating the possibility for major mistakes to be made. Robust analysis of these intertwined processes would help support effective interventions. Second, there is a need for greater conflict and environmental sensitivity to be mainstreamed into humanitarian action programs. This is necessary for meeting the needs of target populations without exacerbating short- or long-term grievances, and to ensure that aid lays a foundation for sustainable recovery. Third, the conception of the environment as a shared interest should be cultivated, so that it can function as a platform for peacebuilding at the local level.

### **There Are Multi-layered Interactions between the Three Fields**

Each of the case studies demonstrates a facet of the complex relationships and dynamic interaction among conflict, humanitarian crises, and environmental variables. They highlight the importance of a holistic understanding of the long-term interplay of environment and conflict. Environmental and natural resources feature prominently among the causes, consequences, and solutions to many armed conflicts.

In each of these cases, grievances linked to environment were part of the underlying causes of conflict. Perceived injustices linked to the exploitation of resource wealth in Nigeria and Sudan led to militancy and conflict, and competition over scarce basic necessities, including agricultural land in Burundi and fishing rights in the DRC, led to clashes between communities. At the same time, the immediate consequences of conflict, particularly forced displacement, have led to other environmental crises. Refugees and internally displaced peoples (IDPs) compete with established communities for energy supplies, water, and agricultural land. In some cases, the architecture associated with international assistance such as bases and warehouses, vehicles, and newly-constructed infrastructure can have inadvertent deleterious effects on surrounding areas.<sup>70</sup>

Environmental action can also play a key role in accelerating or impeding the resolution to a crisis. Many armed conflicts, especially those with serious humanitarian consequences, occur against the backdrop of scarcity. This scarcity may be created either by environmental factors such as population growth, growing consumption levels, climate change, or resource depletion, but may also be socially created by changing the terms of access to the resource base or the legal framework for resource management.<sup>71</sup> Humanitarian and environmental practitioners can play a crucial role in shaping the availability of local resources and addressing underlying conflict dynamics. For example, constructing agricultural feeder roads, bringing new technologies for efficient resource use, or constructing water points can ease grievances. At the same time, underlying scarcity can expand and prolong a crisis. Scarcity of land, as in the Burundi refugee crisis described above,

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70 Sudmeier-Rieux, Masundire, Rizvi & Rietbergern 2006; Roodman & Lenssen 1995; World Wildlife Fund & American Red Cross 2010 (Module 6).

71 Homer-Dixon 2001.

prevented many refugees from returning from exile in Tanzania and elsewhere.<sup>72</sup> In the Dongo case, the lack of a comprehensive resolution to the dispute over fishing rights led many refugees in Congo-Brazzaville to fear a resurgence of conflict, and therefore many opted to remain in the camps.<sup>73</sup>

Existing modes of analysis on the relationship between armed conflict and the environment tend to focus on only one realm or the other. Within the peace and conflict field, environmental factors are often considered and addressed as structural variables, as contextual information that increases or decreases stress on intergroup relations, or as linked to the underlying interests of parties in conflict, whether through necessity or greed. However, this analysis treats environmental factors as static; it fails to account for how resource competition and environmental factors themselves are changed during a conflict, or how humanitarian and environmental interventions may change the availability of or stresses upon natural resources. There is a need for dynamic, integrated analysis that accounts for the multiple ways in which resources and environment intersect with the trajectory of conflict and peace. Having such an analysis would aid in identifying and addressing gaps in knowledge, and therefore help practitioners in all three fields understand the cross-cutting issues that they all face. Having such a comprehensive understanding would help organizations coordinate for more effective interventions, while also avoiding critical mistakes that are sometimes made in the early stages of recovery.

### **There Is a Need for Conflict- and Environment-sensitive Response in all Fields**

Broadly, environmental and conflict analysis are being integrated into the humanitarian realm, but relatively little synergy between the two fields is being mainstreamed into humanitarian response. For example in many refugee contexts, such as in the central African refugee camps in southern Chad, refugees compete with local residents for firewood, land, and water. There are established dispute resolution systems, consisting of joint committees to mediate disputes and carry out sensitization campaigns—but they are largely divorced from the efforts of actors addressing long-term interventions such as more efficient cook-stoves.<sup>74</sup> In the Burundi case described above, the conflict resolution and arbitration processes that were held to resolve land disputes were largely conducted in the absence of systematic environmental analysis. In the future, this could become problematic. Outcomes from arbitration between rival group land claims could result in ‘splitting the baby’ solutions, which may effectively resolve a problem in the short term by providing land for each group, but at the cost of economically non-viable agricultural plots. Moving forward, solutions should account for all of these factors to ensure long-term sustainability.

At the same time, commodity prices are stimulating increased exploration and exploitation in hard-to-reach and unstable places. As demonstrated in the Al-Fula case, this exploration can have significant unanticipated consequences. While it is not clear the extent to which the Greater Nile Company undertook social and environmental impact assessments of the sort commonly used by western companies, the case highlights

72 Kamungi, Oketch and Huggins 2005.

73 Hege 2010.

74 UNICEF & Search for Common Ground 2013.

the complexities of working in deeply divided regions. and the case also points to the usefulness of mining companies understanding local dynamics and conflict-awareness, particularly as gold and other raw materials drive interest in the DRC, Mali, and elsewhere.

Although humanitarian assistance programs are intended to be neutral, impartial to local politics, and distributed based upon objective criteria, the processes of resource allocation are nonetheless inherently political.<sup>75</sup> Most of the decisions taken by international humanitarian agencies in emergency situations and supported by external donors are the same kinds of decisions that would ordinarily be undertaken by government, such as reconstructing schools and identifying healthcare priorities.<sup>76</sup> As a result, the mechanisms through which individuals in the affected areas provide input into the process, how decisions are then made, the overall objectives being served, and how they are communicated are particularly important and potentially controversial. This is especially true in conflict-affected communities, which are often characterized by divisions, mistrust, and lack of consensus on legitimate decision-making processes. As a result, partnerships between leading conflict resolution organizations are on the rise, including CDA, Search for Common Ground and International Alert, with major humanitarian actors such as UNICEF, World Vision, Save the Children, and CARE. Similar collaborations aimed at reducing deleterious effects of humanitarian response are also being explored, including measures aimed at reducing the impact of humanitarian activities on local energy, water, and other supplies.<sup>77</sup>

The relief-to-development paradigm shifted humanitarian programming to consider how assistance could be used simultaneously to address the symptoms and the causes of conflict.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, efforts to address the environment should include both short-term assistance to address immediate need, and long-term assistance to ensure sustainable resource use. For example, in addressing hunger, a combination of food distribution and irrigation/seed knowledge transfer would be useful. In the case of natural disasters, providing water in the immediate aftermath of the event, but also building environmentally-friendly infrastructure for long-term access, is important for sustainable development.<sup>79</sup> Environmental interventions are needed that address the immediate needs of target populations while also alleviating future resource stressors that could exacerbate tension and conflict. These approaches require a diverse skill set, different forms of analysis, and a distinctive form of engagement with local leaders. There are important benefits to be had in making initiatives both conflict-sensitive and environment-sensitive.

## Environment Is a Shared Interest that Can Function as an Opportunity

The role of environmental stewardship as a point of collaboration is well-recognized, and has been the subject of growing interest at the transnational level. For example, there has been much research on the negotiations and functioning of international agreements on water-sharing, peace parks, and conservation as a way to cre-

75 Anderson 1999.

76 Jobbins 2013.

77 UNEP 2007.

78 Jobbins 2013.

79 World Wildlife Fund & American Red Cross 2010.

ate space for dialogue and facilitate cross-border exchange.<sup>80</sup> Peace parks in particular can act as an “ecological buffer zone,” between conflicting parties.<sup>81</sup> In contexts where distrust, hostility, and violence are endemic, environmental issues present an opportunity to sustain dialogue irrespective of the wider conflict.<sup>82</sup> Case studies on such initiatives have found that mutual interest and collaboration in the preservation of the natural environment can provide a cornerstone to begin building relationships between divided parties, setting a precedent for cooperation in other arenas.<sup>83</sup> The goal is that such collaboration will help to buffer the conflict, create a habit of cooperation, transform divisive identities, and highlight the benefits of joint protection of the environment.

The potential for environmental issues to function as a point of cooperation and commonality is relatively under-exploited at a local level. As shown in the Oporoza example above, care for a shared space can provide a point of commonality at a local level while improving the health of the natural resources themselves. This approach is used more commonly in the maintenance of other forms of public goods such as repairing a road, maintaining a clinic, or contributing to the functioning of a school, but could easily be adapted to the realm of environmental management.

## AREAS FOR EXPLORATION AND POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP

Search’s experience has generally revealed three main entry points for collaboration that conflict resolution, humanitarian, and environmental organizations may find useful for future development and exploration: increasing the focus on prevention, transforming zero-sum gamesmanship, and integrating environmental sensitivity into post-conflict planning.

### Increasing Forecasting, Analysis and Prevention

The high human and financial costs of humanitarian crises and conflicts have rightly led governments, donors, and NGOs to focus on developing early warning systems and capacities to prevent, rather than merely respond to, crises. FEWSNET, which collects rainfall and pricing data to ascertain and prepare for famine

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80 Warner 2000.

81 Carius 2006.

82 Ibid.

83 Examples: the 2005 “Declaration of Goma” between Rwanda, Uganda, and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) established joint patrols, information exchanges, and revenue sharing to manage protected areas and monitor gorilla populations, and was largely considered useful for confidence-building; Ecuador and Peru established peace parks through the Acta Presidencial de Brasilia in 1998 to protect biodiversity and aid in conservation efforts that promote social, cultural, and economic development of local communities and foster continued bilateral cooperation; Afghanistan and Iran worked together with UNEP to manage the wetlands of the Sistan Basin as droughts and mismanagement were resulting in emigration, unemployment, and a destabilized border; Technical experts from Iraq and Iran met in 2004 to facilitate information sharing regarding the Mesopotamian marshlands which helped foster trust between the ministries of the two countries; Water provided a platform for dialogue for North and South Sudan in 2006 and 2007 as stakeholders met to discuss overlapping laws and mandates regarding shared waters.

risks, is one example of relative success in developing such systems for more effective response.<sup>84</sup> Conflict early warning systems have also been established, including those linked to regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in Eastern Africa, and those piloted (with relatively less success) by a variety of civil society and NGO groups at the local level.<sup>85</sup>

Despite such developments, opportunities that arise from linkages among environment, conflict, and crisis have not yet been adequately cultivated. Environmental forecasting has been improving and now includes information about climate change and variability, demographic growth, and land use patterns. Yet within communities with which Search works in Africa, these technologies have rarely been adopted by national and sub-national governments or communities. As a result, conflict resolution interventions, particularly where natural resources are concerned, tend to be short-sighted. This includes the policy interventions and dispute resolution efforts of governments, communities, civil society organizations, and NGOs such as Search, all of which tend to focus on the immediate manifestations of conflict without taking into account future resource stresses and change. For example, negotiations between farmers and herders over the migratory routes for livestock are typically based upon the current population, number of cattle, and land use patterns. These agreements can become obsolete very quickly with the growth of human and cattle populations, degradation of agricultural land, and climate change.<sup>86</sup> Available technologies in the environmental realm could enhance the ability to prevent conflict and develop more durable solutions. The short-term focus on conflict resolution makes adding an environmental component less obviously helpful, but lack of such a component makes it harder to see developing trends and sketch the time horizon of conflict resolution. Environmental forecasting could help humanitarian and conflict practitioners anticipate and respond to challenges with greater efficacy and efficiency.

## Transforming Zero-Sum Gamesmanship

The perception of zero-sum relationships, in which one party can only gain at the expense of another, drives violent conflicts which lead to humanitarian emergencies. This was the case in the land disputes in Burundi, outlined above. The search for a “win-win” solution forms the basis of many conflict-resolution strategies. Finite but essential natural resources such as land, water, and energy are among the most commonly perceived sources of zero-sum competition. Typical conflict resolution interventions such as dispute resolution programs, community-based dialogues, information campaigns to reduce misinformation or break stereotypes, and others have particular difficulty in addressing conflicts that feature these structural competitions in the context of scarcity.

As a result, there is the need and opportunity for enhanced cooperation and integration of other forms of analysis to identify strategies to “grow the pie.” This can be done through synergies with environ-

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84 Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET). <http://www.fews.net/>

85 Wulf and Debiel 2009.

86 Lengoiboni, van der Molen, & Bregt 2011; Institute for Security Studies, International Organization for Migration, UN Environment Programme, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2010.

mental, humanitarian, and economic development actors, whose actions can help alleviate the underlying stresses through improved management techniques and technologies, new livelihood options, or investment in infrastructure to make more resources such as water and accessible land available.

## Integration of Environmental Sensitivity into Post-Conflict Interventions

Just as conflict sensitivity is increasingly integrated into humanitarian programming, environmental sensitivity should be integrated to facilitate durable solutions in post-conflict situations. While the “build back better” philosophy has resulted in increased integration of disaster risk reduction into post-disaster recovery programs, there has been relatively less focus on environmental issues in post-conflict settings.

The increasing instances of natural disasters, droughts, floods, deforestation, soil nutrient depletion, and depletion of fisheries are having profound effects on communities around the world. Such trends are expected to undermine efforts to reduce poverty and foster stable economies by “[threatening] to weaken social institutions and stake societal tensions by putting pressure on relationships, institutions, and government programs upon which peaceful conduct of societies rely.”<sup>87</sup> There are various mechanisms through which this may occur, including destruction of livelihoods,<sup>88</sup> forced migration, and undermining institutions, creating a “cyclical, self-perpetuating pattern of social and environmental destruction.”<sup>89</sup> The conflict in Darfur was understood to have been the outcome of environmental stress combined with historical grievances, which led to widespread deforestation due to demand for fuel wood and a breakdown of governance structures.<sup>90</sup> McArthur argues that “it is critical for peacebuilding efforts to also address the natural landscape of a conflict situation, particularly when hostile groups stand to gain materially from the continued exploitation of natural resources without the added restraints and regulations of a peacetime society.”<sup>91</sup> Initiatives that integrate conflict sensitivity into environmental projects and conflict resolution programs that incorporate environmental sustainability considerations are very much needed.

At the most fundamental level, the post-conflict peacebuilding process represents the practice of forging a social consensus at a local or national level on the causes of a conflict and agreeing to a social contract linking state, society, and different communities in the aftermath of violence. Whether manifested in peace agreements and revised constitutions, community dialogues, or truth and reconciliation commissions, these processes aim to profoundly reshape social relationships. The process of refugee return and reintegration after a humanitarian crisis, and of reconstituting new communities and building new infrastructure to support them, also has long-lasting environmental effects. Yet these processes are guided (within civil society, national governments, and the international community) predominantly by people with backgrounds in political science and law, which inevitably shapes wider understanding of the issues. This research suggests that there is a role for the natural sciences and environmental management personnel in planning for post-conflict recovery,

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87 McArthur 2013.

88 Ohlsson 2000.

89 McArthur 2013.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

yet very few organizations or individuals with that skill set are available or participate.

## CHALLENGES TO COOPERATION

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Search has found that environmental, conflict, and humanitarian actors face several challenges in coordinating their efforts. These can be divided broadly into two themes: cultural divisions and differing time horizons. Cultural divisions refer to incompatible institutional environments, different mission priorities, and other divergent organizational characteristics. Divergent time horizons relate to the different project timelines and donor expectations characteristic of each field. Both themes present major barriers to expanding and streamlining cooperation across the three fields.

### Cultural Divisions

The three types of organizations have different institutional cultures and different priorities. While conflict and humanitarian actors have become progressively better at cooperating, there is very little engagement of either with environmental actors. The improved coordination among humanitarian actors, including the cluster system, security coordination mechanisms, and joint projects, have helped strengthen formal and informal information-sharing among interveners.<sup>92</sup> Regular meetings, common funding mechanisms, some overlap in institutional cultures, and the circulation of staff from one humanitarian organization to another strengthen formal and informal relationships among organizations and individual managers.

While this has led to a more effective humanitarian response, it also has the inadvertent effect of creating a culture that is relatively closed to outsiders, including environmentalists and, to a lesser extent, traditional development actors. As a result, even in places like North Kivu, DRC, where humanitarian, conflict resolution, and environmental groups work side-by-side, there are relatively few examples of direct collaboration. In some cases, there are real or perceived differences of mandate and mission, where humanitarian response or conflict resolution strategy may be at odds with conservation goals. For example, clearing land for agriculture may seem expedient in the near term for humanitarian or conflict-resolution aims, but may have long-term effects on that environmentalists will oppose. Such contradictions, differing priorities, and difficult trade-offs are equally present around environmental initiatives—for example, between food security and agricultural livelihoods groups in the debate over providing food aid, which may undermine local farmers' livelihoods.<sup>93</sup>

### Time and Geography

Integration could highlight divergences between organizations with regard to time frames, as well. Environmental, humanitarian, and conflict-resolution actors operate on different time horizons due to different man-

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92 See Christopher & Tatham 2011.

93 See: Oxfam 2005.

dates and project goals. Humanitarian actors often intervene to address the immediate needs of communities after a disaster or other emergency, operating on as short of a timeline as a few days or weeks. Humanitarian and conflict resolution projects are often by necessity short-term and seek rapid solutions to time-sensitive problems. Conversely, by their very nature, environmental protection efforts are set up to seek sustainability over the long term. Conservation efforts often take the “watchmaker approach,” setting up favorable conditions and letting the environment heal itself with minimal future interventions.

The spatial scales on which organizations work also differ, as does the cast of characters with whom they work. The solution is to turn these differences into complementarities by making practitioners aware of the synergies between the three fields. This could be done through trainings, impact assessments that consider different timelines, scales, and concerns, and more targeted information-sharing. Such a process could enhance social and environmental adaptability by highlighting the interrelationship of these three issues as an asset rather than a point of contention.

## Conclusion

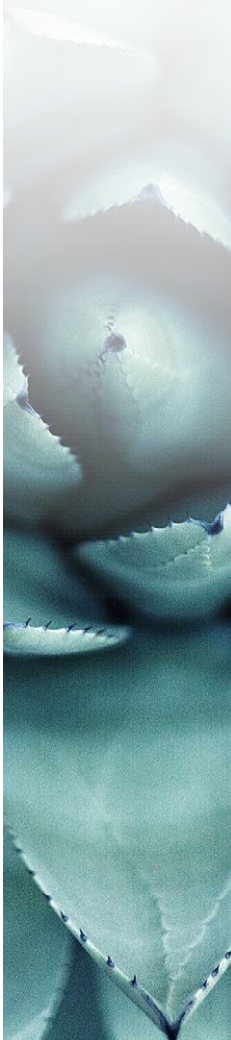
The relationships between humanitarian crises, the natural environment, and the conflict space are complex and overlapping. Conflict systems are profoundly shaped by the availability of and competition over natural resources, and humanitarian operations play a key role in this dynamic. Search has extensive experience working in conflict environments on relationship-building and reconciliation between various oppositional groups. Search works with humanitarian organizations in the field to improve the human condition, albeit through differing approaches and visions. Search has found that in many contexts, there is an important environmental component to achieving conflict resolution goals, as meeting local natural resource needs (i.e., food and water) is critical in the aftermath of crises. Additionally, the environment plays a major role in long-term development and consequently the prospects for peace and stability in post-crisis situations. Incorporating an environmental perspective along with humanitarian projects would assist Search’s efforts in resolving conflicts. There is an urgent need to streamline and build upon the expertise in these three fields for organizations to achieve their respective mandates effectively, in a way that meets the immediate needs of target populations and is socially and environmentally sustainable in the long term.

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