

„ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING: ECOSYSTEMS-BASED APPROACHES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION“

An ASPR Approach

Reality Check

Environmental depletion and climate disruptions – both of which are accelerating in pace and impacts across the globe – go hand in hand. Mounting evidence points to the fact that depleting natural resources and climate impacts protract conflicts where they already exist and run the potential of creating new conflict hotspots around the world. One-dimensional environmental do-no-harm approaches by conflict resolution and crisis management actors whilst clearly important are no longer sufficient in the face of the complex nature of these crises. Therefore, an increasingly important role of these actors will be 1) understanding how environmental depletion, climate disruptions and various forms of conflict and violence intertwine in the field; 2) piloting approaches that help to tackle these issues in integrated solution pathways; 3) acting as necessary frontrunners in regeneration efforts that connect global climate action with climate adaptation, inclusive stabilisation, food and water security. These efforts are particularly needed where ASPR is already active and where we observe rising tensions over relative abundance: the MENA region and the African band ranging from West to East. Failing to address climate disruptions, environmental depletion and various forms of violence will result in compounding vicious cycles between violence, conflict, ecological and climate insecurity. Together, these will have knock-on effects on conflict protraction, the collapse of livelihoods, humanitarian disasters, migration flows and various security offshoots.

Definition

The [White Paper on the Future of Environmental Peacebuilding](#) tells us that “environmental peacebuilding exists at the intersection of peace, conflict, and the natural world. It is inspired by a recognition of the many ways in which the management of environmental issues can support conflict prevention, reduction, resolution, and recovery. It recognizes the importance of peace and human security for environmental management and sustainable development. It grows out of a multi-disciplinary acknowledgement that a healthy environment is an essential part of conflict prevention. And it offers the opportunity to harness common resources and shared environmental challenges as a reason for cooperation, rather than a cause of division.”

Peacebuilding efforts now need to understand conflict not just from the perspective of human dynamics, but from the perspective of eco-systemic integrity and that of the relationships between human societies and their natural environment. In addition, peacebuilding actors need to better understand the adverse impact of climate change on these relationships. In a first step, responses to this multidimensional phenomenon should include an analysis of the drivers of natural resource extraction and environmental depletion in any given context, and

of the relationship to violence and conflict. In a second step, peacebuilding initiatives will need to design processes and interventions that help to adapt to changing environmental circumstances, and wherever possible, support dialogue, cooperation and intervention frameworks that integrate environmental regeneration with conflict de-escalation and stabilisation. Regeneration can adapt to scale. It can either be done at micro scale through community participation, or at ecosystems level, which would entail political, social and economic process design. The latter is what is urgently needed to integrate climate action with conflict stabilisation, but it has yet to be systematized at scale.

ASPR Approach: Beyond the management of finite resources

Access to natural resources does not per se need to be regarded as a zero-sum game. On the contrary, applying dialogue and conflict resolution tools to exchange perspectives and rebuild trust between stakeholders conflicting over natural resources has the potential to transforming competition into cooperation. Where such processes lead to greater inclusiveness in governance, natural resources tend to be less depleted and better managed.

Such an approach starts but does not end with the simple management of natural resources such as groundwater. It is also imperative for natural resources to be regenerated and therefore to work with new competencies/tools towards developing innovative frameworks for the facilitation of cooperation and conflict resolution. Management alone can eventually lead to unsustainable cooperation practices due to resource scarcification. Coupled with regeneration practices it can, however, promote resilience and lead to win-win situations in the face of climate disruptions. It can have benefits in terms of food productivity, food and water security, livelihoods restoration, social resilience, and conflict de-escalation by addressing root causes in some circumstance.

Regeneration activities can be introduced through dialogue facilitation based on scenario building and territorial mapping. If conflict stakeholders and/or communities and governance actors agree on regeneration scenarios, implementation can begin through development cooperation and continuous dialogue support. Entry points can range from cost-efficient training activities of economic stakeholders in sustainable ways of farming to actual physical measures of environmental regeneration.

The ASPR's Libya project is already operating under a similar logic. In the first stage, dialogue has been strengthened between stakeholders from southern water-rich areas and those from water-consuming cities in the north of the country. In this first phase of dialogue, the workshops conducted between 2020 to 2022 discovered that Southern grievances included resentment over how the North pumps scarce water. Further dialogue is to follow, the results of which will be shared with international actors engaged in advancing the development and sustainability agenda through financing, facilitating and/or implementing environmental regeneration projects. Such projects would aim to increase water tables over time, and ideally

address fundamental drivers of conflict and tensions between the North and the South. In other words, regeneration could serve as a vessel for dialogue and as a confidence-building measure as well as addressing a major root cause of conflict protraction.

In some contexts, including in East and West Africa, it is worth noting that comprehensive environmental regeneration can address drivers of migration. In Eastern Africa, the ASPR has been involved in conflict resolution activities in Sudan and South Sudan since 2014, while the scope in more recent years extended to Ethiopia and Uganda. In Western Africa the ASPR has been leading a comprehensive training programme on increasing the coherence of humanitarian capacities in cooperation with the Austrian Development Agency and the Austrian Ministry of Defence.

Finally, ASPR plans on mainstreaming political-ecology analysis and environmental peace-making in its training activities so as to contribute to institutional coherence and effectiveness as well as conflict resolution mechanisms at policy and programme levels.

