



**The Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment
Institute for Environmental Security
Adelphi Research**

Forum & Exhibition on Environment, Conflict and Cooperation

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Summary of Forum Discussion

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I. The new and emerging environmental threats and conflicts

- Evidence of environment, security and cooperation linkages is reflected in the growing number of resource-related conflicts manifesting around the world. But there is a real disagreement about the role of environmental degradation in conflict. Conflict is multi-causal and sometimes environmental degradation is either a root or proximate cause, sometimes it propels conflict, or is used to advance political agendas. The causes must be closely examined and must be taken into account in combination with other factors and in terms of the spill-over effect.
- Climate change is rapidly changing risk potential and elevating conflict intensity even though resources have not been increased accordingly. Environmental security must therefore be seen as the disarmament and peace-making policy of the future.
- A key question is how to optimize the peacemaking potential of environmental protection and cooperation—in foreign policy, in development cooperation and in the development of international environmental agreements?
- Natural resources are considered vital interests over which states will theoretically go to war when they are at stake. However this has not always been the case in actual experience on the ground. Natural resources do not necessarily lead to violent conflict, except in African civil wars. Environment is not the major driver in conflict, but if you talk with major strategic decision makers it is becoming increasingly important. We do not know how low-level low-intensity conflict will increase with corresponding increase in environmental degradation. How does it

play a tipping point role?

- It is important to look at the need for secure livelihoods and sustainable development which also deals with quality of life as a central concept. This transfers the problem to another domain in terms of the issue of what constitutes quality of life (access to resources to fully realise capabilities). The Human Development Index is increasing in rich countries with a time delay of 100 years for poor countries.
- Increasing quality of life will require ecological capital, which in turn will lead to conflict and strife. It is hard to know where the thresholds are in terms of the amount of ecological capital needed for quality of life. In many cases, in some regions the thresholds are nearby.
- Promoting sustainable energy systems throughout the world in both industrialised countries as well as developing countries will be essential in order to avoid collapse of the climate system.
- There are considerable methodological challenges, which must be addressed in terms of understanding the linkages between environment and conflict.
- The energy chain at all levels is becoming increasingly vulnerable to attack. Spare capacities are decreasing. The attack on Saudi Arabia facilities is a frightening example in light of the strategically important role of Saudi Arabia for global oil supplies. The number of military risks is increasing in all aspects of the energy system.

II. The policy and political challenges

- The geo-political dimension of energy security is becoming increasingly prominent, especially in terms of the use of oil to advance political objectives. When gas supplies seemed to be stalled in Ukraine, the EU got a wake-up call. The perception was that foreign policy is playing an increasing role. We are seeing what China is doing to secure its energy supplies. China will become increasingly dependent on energy imports and in order to secure that, Chinese foreign policy is increasingly related to that potential reality. A key challenge is to commence meaningful political dialogues with countries such as China whose oil consumption will be critical in the energy security debate.
- Many countries such as The Netherlands lack the political structure to effectively operationalise sustainable development goals. This is evident in terms of policy fragmentation between environment, development and security spheres. Dutch foreign security agenda is not driven by the development agenda. If it was, we

would have a much more significant presence in Africa. There is more work to be done to put theory into practice.

- Environmental conflict must be elevated on the political agenda, especially in light of how environmental scarcity and over-exploitation can lead to violent conflict. The low profile of environmental threats was particularly evident in the work of the UN High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change.
- Many countries such as the UK are examining the role of natural resource and conflict in their foreign policy approaches, especially illegal trade in diamonds and timber. The issue is whether that is in fact the right approach?
- There is enough empirical evidence about how transboundary cooperation has spilled over into the political framework. We know much about conflict timber, but we know very little about water cooperation and conflict.

III. Innovative responses to environmental conflicts

- The UK Conflict Prevention Pool and the German Conflict Prevention Pool are important examples of innovative approaches that attempt to bridge the different policy spheres.
- The Netherlands Stability Fund attempts to link development and security which is funded entirely by Ministry of Development Cooperation.
- The Netherlands has started local level programmes to bridge differences between different social groups and prevent potential conflict. Locally these approaches have worked, but it is still hard to say whether this approach can be replicated at the national level.
- The Nile River Basin is an important example of cooperative approaches to environmental conflict. Regional cooperation is also being undertaken in the Great Lakes region with aims to enhance ecological security and poverty reduction, and to support legitimate authorities to protect ecosystems, and to enhance security by combating illegal trade in natural resources.
- A growing array of initiatives around the world, including peace parks, joint river basin management plans, regional maritime agreements, and joint environmental monitoring programmes are all combining ecology and politics to achieve peace.

IV. Key lessons learned

- We must take a different view about environmental conflict and turn the issue around and address not only how environmental degradation can trigger violent conflict. Environmental cooperation can also serve as a peacemaking tool. Similarly, how can peace through sustainable energy approaches be stepped up. In terms of conflict management these are very worthwhile examples that should be pursued.
- Sustainable development is an important framework for peace and security. However, the peacemaking potential of environmental policy and sustainable development remains untapped. How can we tap that potential in concrete terms?
- Cross-border environmental cooperation is often difficult to achieve but when it takes root it leads to positive results. Regional identities emerge around shared resources.
- There is a clear trend in international security thinking away from traditional military approach to security to a more comprehensive security approach.
- Nevertheless, the ‘disconnect’ between the security, environment and development communities is evident at global, regional and national levels.
- **Concrete next steps must include:** (i) developing new forums for governments to share experience in addressing environment and conflict; (ii) understanding the right entry approaches i.e. security sector reform (iii) applying the vast amount of information into conflict mainstreaming strategies in terms of mainstreaming environmental concerns into security analyses; (iv) more analysis is needed in terms of understanding the different levels of causality that environmental degradation plays in generating conflict; (v) develop conflict sensitivity analysis for conflict prone regions.