Overview C
Conservation in Times of War

Photos: Inset – Trees in front of a refugee camp, UNHCR
Background – Refugee flows in Rwanda, UNHCR

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Abstract

The main impacts of armed conflict on natural resources, biodiversity and protected areas are destruction of habitats and wildlife, over-exploitation of natural resources, and pollution. Resource extraction, for both survival and commercial profit during the conflict, and afterwards to finance reconstruction, are critical issues that need to be addressed. Environmental groups need to be aware of the relevance of conflict to their mission, recognizing actions that can be taken in planning for and continuing conservation activities before, during and after conflict situations. Small investments can provide benefits for the environment and longer-term social stability. Although they should continue to work towards their long-term goals, they may have to adopt new strategies and activities in light of changing circumstances. Conservation organizations should become better attuned to shifting social and political contexts and plan for contingencies. During conflict, they should maintain a presence where possible, but ensure that risks to personnel are minimized. The immediate post-conflict period often represents a window of opportunity for substantial policy change, and can therefore be a time for conservationists to enhance the integration of environmental management strategies into development planning. Where appropriate, they should become more vocal in advocating against the arms trade and other activities that fuel conflict and deplete resources. The paper includes recommendations for government and non-government IUCN members, IUCN commissions, IUCN regional and national offices, and IUCN headquarters.

Introduction

Armed conflict is unfortunately all too common in many parts of the world. Over a third of African countries have been engaged in conflict within the last 10 years, and the impact on human lives has been catastrophic. Millions of people have been killed during the last decade, and many have died of war-related disease and starvation. Others have been permanently disabled and millions have been displaced. In addition to these direct human consequences, armed conflict has multiple environmental impacts that affect people in the short and long term.

Some impacts on the environment may be positive: for example, vegetation and wildlife may flourish in areas where access by people is limited,[351] such as demilitarized zones. Often impacts are highly variable, and may be positive in some areas and negative in others.[352] They may affect different resources in different ways: for example, wildlife may be hunted heavily by troops while logging stops because armed conflict disrupts access by loggers. All too often, however, the impacts have adverse effects on the environment, biodiversity, natural resources and people's long-term livelihoods. Where conflict seriously affects the future livelihoods of long-term residents of a region and reduces opportunities for sustainable development, there is a major risk of continued environmental degradation and political instability.

This paper focuses on the negative impacts of armed conflict on the environment and looks at possible ways to mitigate them in order to promote long-term conservation, sustainable development and stability. While many environmental impacts are unavoidable, certain actions can be taken by various stakeholders before, during and after armed conflict to lessen some impacts and avoid others. IUCN and its members are often well placed to take a wide range of actions in this respect.

Impacts of Armed Conflict on the Environment

The main direct impacts of armed conflict on the environment occur through habitat destruction, over-exploitation of natural resources and pollution.

Habitat destruction and loss of wildlife

Habitats are sometimes directly affected during armed conflict. For example, vegetation may be cut, burnt or defoliated to improve mobility or visibility for troops. Temporary settlement of large numbers of displaced people in an area can result in deforestation and erosion, sometimes worsened by clearing of vegetation for agriculture and clear-felling for fuelwood. Since refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are often located in

ecologically marginal and vulnerable areas, the ability of the environment to recover afterwards may be limited. Protected areas may be affected if settlement occurs inside them or in adjacent areas. Vegetation may also be destroyed during extraction of valuable minerals such as diamonds and gold, as environmental controls are usually absent during times of conflict, and much greater damage can occur.

With habitat destruction, certain plant and animal species may become locally threatened or extinct, and species with limited ranges can be particularly susceptible. Although on a relatively small scale, large wild mammals may also be killed or injured by landmines (e.g., elephants).

Over-exploitation of natural resources

Over-exploitation can occur for both subsistence and commercial reasons. Local people in rural areas are often unable to grow crops during wartime due to political instability, and are therefore increasingly forced to depend on wild foods such as bushmeat and wild food plants for their survival. Displaced people often hunt and collect firewood, food plants and other natural resources in the areas they have moved to, and such increased volumes of extraction may be unsustainable even in the short term. The situation may be made worse if these displaced persons lack local knowledge of optimal resource management practices. When displaced people return to their homelands they are often forced to rely heavily on natural resources before other forms of livelihood such as agriculture are re-established. All this can result in resource and species scarcity or extinction, and may seriously affect livelihoods of long-term residents in these areas.

In all cases, the breakdown of law enforcement and traditional local controls make the situation worse. Even in areas not directly affected, incentives for local communities to conserve areas and species decrease when economic benefits from them decline (for example, when ecotourism ceases because of insecurity). Uncertainty over future access rights encourages unsustainable resource use for shorter-term gain.

In areas where fighting is occurring, large mammals are often hunted on a major scale to feed troops. And this can have a devastating impact on wildlife populations,[353] especially if military action continues for a long time in the same area. The larger species with slow reproductive rates are particularly vulnerable, and tend to disappear first.

Commercial extraction of natural resources such as timber, ivory and diamonds often occurs during periods of conflict to raise funds for military supplies and activities. When access to resources opens up again immediately post-conflict, private sector operators often move in and extract resources illegally. This is a phase when peacetime control measures are often still weak or absent. In addition, those in power are often in need of

immediate revenue, and so they sell extraction rights to which they may have only temporary or in fact no legal rights at all.

Once governmental authority is re-established on a firmer footing, governments are often forced to exploit renewable resources unsustainably to kickstart national economies bankrupted by conflict. This is a quick fix with relatively little investment compared with the slower pace of rehabilitating the agriculture and industry sectors. International financial institutions and other creditors may indirectly promote overexploitation of natural resources by demanding debt repayment.

Pollution

Pollution can be both a direct and indirect consequence of armed conflict. The 1990–91 Persian Gulf War provided dramatic examples of pollution resulting directly from armed conflict, when huge volumes of oil were deliberately released into the Persian Gulf to discourage amphibious landings, and Kuwaiti oil wells were later set on fire as Iraqi troops fled that country.[354] The spraying of defoliants in Indochina during the Vietnam War and the resulting toxic contamination of soil, water and vegetation has had enormous environmental as well as human consequences.

The pollution that results indirectly from conflict is often less obvious. For example, the presence of large concentrations of refugees and internally displaced persons living without adequate sanitary facilities or waste removal services can lead to contamination of water sources, with severe consequences for both local biodiversity as well as short- and longer-term human livelihoods. In addition, unregulated mining and other forms of resource extraction that occur in post-conflict settings can contribute greatly to soil, water and air pollution.

Consequences for the conservation sector

Infrastructure and equipment is often damaged in conservation areas. Conservation staff may be forced to abandon conservation areas or, in some cases, even killed. Senior staff often leave first, and relatively inexperienced junior staff can be left holding extremely responsible positions in very difficult situations for which they have had little or no training. "Brain-drain" may occur, where nationals with higher education in environmental fields flee the country, and do not always return. This can leave relatively few well-educated people in the sector, resulting in low capacity for post-conflict reconstruction with due regard for the environment.

Even if staff remain in conservation areas, the ability to continue conservation work is often hampered by lack of funding. Donors in many cases suspend or withdraw support from countries in conflict. Experience has shown that at certain points during conflict windows of opportunity open

for conservation activities, if flexible and quickly disbursed funding is available. Donors are traditionally slow to fund the conservation sector during conflict and the transition to peace, a time when they are focusing on humanitarian relief activities. However, this can be a crucial time when relatively small amounts of strategic funding can make a big difference for the environment, and natural resource and biodiversity conservation.

Broader consequences

Depletion of environmental quality, biodiversity and the natural resource base because of armed conflict can weaken the chances of lasting peace and sustainable livelihoods for long-term residents of a region. Although conflicts may start initially for other reasons, there is a strong risk that resource depletion and environmental degradation will drag the region back into a vicious circle of greater poverty, further political instability, more armed conflict, greater environmental degradation, and even greater poverty. Any actions that can be taken to mitigate environmental impacts early on in the cycle are very important.

What Can Be Done?

Conservation organizations can take action at many different levels, and from different institutional sectors and geographical locations.

Some (but by no means all) conservation organizations and workers have traditionally had a relatively narrow perspective, enhanced by the fact that they often work in isolated areas. It is important that they have good awareness of and involvement in broad developmental, socio-economic and political issues and challenges as they relate to conservation. These issues often change rapidly in unstable political conditions, and conservation organizations need to be well informed in order to respond as windows of opportunity open up and new threats emerge.

One advantage of the current trend away from working in isolated protected areas towards working in broader landscapes is enhanced collaboration with many other sectors, which enables better integration of conservation in other sectoral activities. An important example of collaboration is with the relief sector. While it is important that urgent humanitarian relief during crises not be delayed by environmental concerns, it is possible to integrate sound environmental practices into relief operations. Many relief organizations are currently producing environmental guidelines and providing staff training, and the environment sector should collaborate more in these efforts, especially at the field level, to ensure that local conditions are taken into account.

There are three main phases when actions can be taken: before, during and after conflict. Priority actions change with timing.

Before conflict

In regions where there is a possibility of future political instability, strategic contingency planning should review possible impacts of armed conflict and opportunities for mitigation, along with likelihood of impacts occurring (the level of risk may well change over time). Impact mitigation should be incorporated into local and regional planning in an integrated and foresighted way, at a level appropriate for the degree of risk. Certain preparatory actions can be taken before disasters occur, such as developing working relationships with other sectors (e.g., relief, development, military) and providing them with appropriate information (e.g., location of protected area boundaries; and key species, natural systems and ecological processes which are critical to conserve). Provisions may be made to conserve species and habitats in a network of locations, rather than gambling everything on only one major location. Corridors may be planned so that if, for example, large mammals in one area are devastated during conflict, they can repopulate that area by in-migration from neighbouring areas. The capacity of junior staff should be built, not only for management and technical skills, but also in cross-sectoral collaboration and in playing an ambassadorial role for conservation.

During conflict

During conflict, it is very important for conservation organizations to maintain a presence where possible, even if the level of operation is greatly reduced. In the recent conflicts in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, protected areas where projects continued suffered less damage to biodiversity.[355] Material and moral support to field staff including good communications are critical in enabling conservation to continue, and should be a high priority. However, organizations need to assess realistically the risks to staff, and be prepared to evacuate them when necessary. Field staff may be too close to the situation to make this decision on their own.

When a presence is maintained, developments can be tracked more closely, and conservation organizations can be ready to undertake or facilitate short-term activities when opportunities arise. Organizations working at a regional level can relocate personnel, equipment and offices within a region (sometimes across international borders) when certain areas become too dangerous to work in. During long-term and relatively static conflicts, conservation organizations can help to prevent "brain drain" and loss of technical capacity by usefully employing staff in other more stable parts of the region until they can return. Capacity can be built to prepare for peacetime by providing training for nationals outside the country. Conservation training may also be provided to staff of organizations in other sectors, in order to promote closer collaboration in the future.

As in the pre-conflict phase, promotion of strong partnerships across sectors is very important. Dialogue should be developed and maintained with all stakeholders, as much as possible.[356] For international NGOs, identifying appropriate local partners through whom to channel funds can be critical.[357] Contact with military personnel can often help to lessen impacts by troops on the ground. This can be a very repetitive process due to frequent changes in military personnel. However, conservation workers should be very careful to remain neutral, or they may put themselves and their programs at risk. Finally, during conflict much policy development and planning can often be done to prepare for times of peace.

After conflict

It is often during transition times to new sets of rules when considerable change and uncertainty exist that the greatest threats to natural resources occur.[358] The period immediately after conflict is therefore a very vulnerable and critical time, as already mentioned above. By maintaining a presence during conflict, conservation organizations are poised to expand operations immediately when peace returns. After conflicts, they can restart work at site level, including rehabilitation work if necessary.

On a broad landscape level, conservation organizations can collaborate with the key players in various sectors to minimize adverse environmental impacts as displaced people are resettled and economic activities restart. Collaboration with the relief sector has already been mentioned and is very important to continue immediately after conflict; this should phase into working with development organizations that replace the relief sector to promote longer term rehabilitation and development. Raising awareness of potential environmental impacts and ways to mitigate them can make a very large contribution to sustainable development.

Sweeping new reforms and policies are often formulated during the post-war era which can have large impacts on natural resources, biodiversity and livelihoods of rural people for many years to come (for example, land policy was totally rewritten in Mozambique after the last conflict). The post-war era can be a time of great rehabilitation activity and national development, especially if new political conditions attract large amounts of donor funding. If not carefully planned, however, this phase can have very large environmental impacts. The post-war phase can also be a time of confusion and poor communication across sectors. Often there is a different group of people in control, who may have little technical training or experience in government and governance. Yet the decisions they make and the control they exert in early post-war times will have great influence for many years to come.

Information exchange and technical assistance across sectors at this time can make a big difference. Capacity building is also important, in order to

build up an adequate skills base across different institutional sectors. The conservation sector can play a very important role in enhancing integration of environmental governance, conservation and sustainable use concepts into national and local policy and development plans. This includes the reconciliation of short-term needs with long-term sustainable development.

What Can IUCN and its Members Do?

The IUCN Secretariat, commissions and members are well placed to take a wide range of actions at many different levels and from different geographical locations to mitigate some of the adverse impacts of armed conflict. IUCN's unique position as a membership organization for governments and NGOs enables it to play a facilitatory and brokering role which few other organizations can do. This section contains lists of key actions that can be undertaken in the right circumstances by IUCN and its members. It is not possible to avoid all impacts, but it is possible to avoid or at least mitigate some of them. Different opportunities open up at different times and it is important to be alert to these opportunities. At other times there is little to do but wait and be patient.

Governments in Affected Countries

Affected countries include those both directly affected by armed conflict, and indirectly affected, for example, by refugees and resource pressures as a result of conflict elsewhere.

- *Develop contingency plans for before, during and especially immediately after conflict* (including for conflict which may occur in nearby countries). This includes exchanging useful information across sectors to those that need it for contingency planning purposes; making contingency plans for management of protected areas and natural resources in times of crisis; and planning ahead for the coming of peace, in order to prepare for post-conflict economic developments and short-term resource mining.
- *Build conservation sector capacity to maintain a field presence during and especially immediately after conflict.* Increase the autonomy and self-reliance of local offices and strengthen their institutional capacity by training junior field staff who may have to assume responsibilities in the absence of senior staff. These steps can help ensure that local offices have the minimum capacity to remain on-site. It is important to maintain flexibility (both organizational and programmatic) during and, especially, immediately after conflict to adjust to rapidly shifting needs.
- *Build capacity to regulate the private sector* in relation to natural resources and the environment, especially during transition periods. The worst excesses of natural resource grabbing by the private sector

usually occur during periods when controls are weak, especially immediately following armed conflict. Building the capacity to regulate the private sector as soon as possible following a conflict can go a long way toward minimizing impacts.

- *Promote cross-sectoral collaboration within government and with civil society.* Inter-sectoral collaboration often becomes vitally important during conflict. Cross-sectoral collaboration within government and with civil society can help maintain the flow of information, and find collaborative solutions to common problems. Conservation is often achieved indirectly during conflict, for example in programs that support human livelihoods through wise natural resource use.
- *Ensure appropriate inputs of environmental information and expertise in redefining national policy and legislation*. There are often good opportunities for post-war policy reform which, if well planned, can help to promote sustainable rural livelihoods and conservation. However, new policies can also be detrimental, and participation in policy reform by the environment sector is very important. There is often a good window of opportunity for countries to update old, out-of-date or inappropriate policies in a new climate of openness to adopting different systems and policy models. This includes natural resource, conservation and environmental policies as well as other sector and development policies which can impact directly or indirectly on the environment.
- *Promote sound environmental governance for long-term peace and security*. Transparency, accountability, devolution of power and authority to decentralized, democratic institutions, progress in rule of law, a participatory process, and increased attention to environmental protection legislation and enforcement can all promote sound environmental governance and promote long-term peace and security.
- *Make employment of demobilized soldiers a high priority after conflict, and control the supply of arms*. Assimilating large numbers of demobilized soldiers into the workforce and society is a major challenge after conflict. Employment opportunities are often limited, and ex-soldiers may be unwilling to return to subsistence agriculture—if indeed they have access to land. If they do not have land or employment, they may resort to banditry and pose a serious threat to security and fragile post-war stability. They may establish themselves in groups in rural areas and mine natural resources unsustainably (e.g., commercial fish and charcoal production), to the detriment of local communities dependent on those resources for their long-term livelihoods. The conservation sector should play its part in helping to overcome this problem by hiring demobilized soldiers as appropriate.

Governments in Other Countries

Donor countries:

- *Provide flexible support* during and immediately after conflict for opportunistic activities which while not guaranteed to succeed, have the potential to make a big difference (consider establishment of funds for emergency support). Where feasible, donor organizations should adopt more flexible mechanisms to increase their responsiveness in this type of situation. For example, permit reallocation of funds for different purposes within a project budget or within a partner organization; extend deadlines for expenditure of funds; and develop mechanisms for quick disbursement of small amounts of funding.
- *Provide funding for rehabilitation* of the environment sector (e.g., policy, institutions) and damaged locations as soon as possible after conflict. It is particularly important for donors to plan for contingency environmental funding during the transition to peace, when the risk of environmental damage is high.
- *Encourage good environmental governance* during post-war recovery, through donor projects and other means. As noted above, transparency, accountability, devolution of power and authority to decentralized, democratic institutions, progress in rule of law, a participatory process, and increased attention for environmental protection legislation and enforcement can all promote sound environmental governance and promote long-term peace and security.

All countries:

- *Encourage socially and environmentally responsible practices* by the private sector, particularly companies operating from other countries. When access to resources opens up again immediately post-conflict, certain unscrupulous private sector operators often move in and extract resources illegally. This is a phase when peacetime control measures are often still weak or absent. In addition, those in power are often in need of immediate revenue, and so sell extraction rights to which they may have only temporary or in fact no legal rights at all.
- *Consider social and environmental implications of providing arms* and other military support. The availability of arms, and the exploitation of diamonds, timber, ivory and other natural resources are parts of a vicious circle in which these resources are used to purchase or barter for arms. These weapons, in turn, enable armed groups to maintain control over source areas and their resources, and also to develop and control illegal trading networks. Proliferation of arms from conflicts is

also a major cause of increased illegal hunting in many countries. Countries that provide arms and other military support need to consider the social and environmental implications of such support.

- *Encourage international policy mechanisms* to help mitigate negative environmental impacts in affected areas, including sanctions on resources whose extraction is fueling wars, and compensation for environmental damage. In the aftermath of armed conflict, there have been increasing calls for ad hoc legal mechanisms that could hold governments and individuals financially accountable for damages to natural resources and wildlife. These actions require information, and proof of who the responsible actors are.

Non-governmental Organizations

- *Develop contingency plans* for before, during and after conflict (including conflict which may occur in nearby countries). Ensure that communications systems are in place to maintain effective and up-to-date flows of information between HQ and the field during times of conflict. Develop staff security guidelines to facilitate decision-making during crises, e.g., how to decide when to pull out of an area. Who decides? How are local staff kept vigilant? How are HQ staff kept from overreacting? How is it determined when it is safe to return? Practice general crisis preparedness.
- *Raise awareness within the donor community to ensure ongoing and flexible support during and especially immediately after conflicts*. Enhance links with the donor community to try to ensure continuing support, including foundations particularly where bilateral/multilateral funding is difficult. Shifting and unpredictable policy environments often deter or discourage donors and potential investors. But even modest amounts of support to pay park staff and cover basic operating expenses and field equipment may be enough to maintain a site-level presence and some level of deterrent. Donors need to identify reliable local partners through which to channel funds during times of crisis, and to establish long-term funding mechanisms.
- *Promote improved collaboration with other conservation organizations and with relief, development and planning sectors*. It is important to build a relationship of trust with the relief and development community. But while cross-sectoral collaboration may be desirable, it can be extremely difficult. Improving communication, increasing consultation, joint planning through development of a disaster plan, clearly identifying the niches filled by every organization with their respective roles and mandates, can all help to overcome these difficulties. Sometimes it may be necessary to partially subsume identities in order

to avoid competition and overcome perceived threats from increased coordination. Often, modifying language, for example changing "biodiversity conservation" to "natural resource use for sustainable livelihoods" can help organizations to better "market" conservation and work with those coming from different perspectives.

- *Strengthen capacity to maintain a presence during and especially immediately after conflict*. Increase the autonomy and self-reliance of local NGOs and strengthen their institutional capacity by training junior field staff who may have to assume responsibilities in the absence of senior staff. These steps can help ensure that local NGOs have the minimum capacity to remain on-site. In addition, it is important to maintain flexibility (both organizational and programmatic) during and immediately after conflict to adjust to rapidly shifting needs. Maintain neutrality and impartiality in order to increase the likelihood of being able to work on both sides of a conflict, if necessary.
- *Document the impacts of armed conflict on the environment*. Facilitate information collection and sharing and networking across sectors; act as a clearinghouse for information, experiences and lessons learned; communicate results to policy-makers and implementers and provide technical inputs to post-war policy formulation and implementation.
- *Promote good environmental governance*. Enhance the voice of local communities if necessary. Where possible, especially after conflict, promote transparency, devolution of power and authority to decentralized, democratic institutions, progress in rule of law, accountability, and increased attention for environmental protection.
- *Forge links with the private sector* to promote responsible practices, as outlined above.
- *Promote consumer awareness and responsible behaviour* to reduce consumption of resources whose extraction is fueling wars. In order to hold the private sector accountable, conservation organizations may need to partner with advocacy groups to leverage knowledge of activities on the ground and help develop a transnational network to obtain and share information about businesses engaged in illegal trading of natural resources and their products. By raising international awareness about these businesses, this information can be used to "name and shame," enabling consumers to choose to avoid products that support conflict. Advocate the development of a system of certification of product origin where this does not exist.

IUCN Commissions, Research and Educational Organizations

- *Undertake applied social, economic and environmental studies* on impacts of armed conflict on the environment, in collaboration with stakeholders, to enhance understanding of impacts and possible mitigating interventions. This subject falls within the scope of a number of IUCN Commissions, which should collaborate together as appropriate to find optimum solutions.
- *Communicate results to policy-makers and implementers*, so that findings and lessons can be applied in practice. It is important to bridge the two-way communication gap that often exists between field practitioners and academics: results from studies should be communicated to those who need them, but policy-makers and practitioners should also communicate their priorities for future applied research to those who will undertake studies.
- *Build capacity for applied research and monitoring* in this field, including capacity to cover social, economic and political fields as well as biological and environmental aspects.

IUCN Country Offices

Some of the actions outlined above for governments and NGOs may also be relevant for country offices, depending on circumstances. For example, if the NGO sector is weak or absent, an IUCN country office may act as an NGO. In addition, the following specific actions may be appropriate:

- *Help to identify appropriate mitigating activities and organizations*, with the advantage of being able to assess the current situation from a national rather than a local perspective. Offer advice to governments and NGOs as appropriate.
- *Facilitate information collection and sharing, and networking across sectors*, for example, by providing a reliable central location for information if one does not exist nationally, and including IUCN members in the exchanges.
- *Act as broker between government and NGO community* if necessary, and promote collaboration between them. New partnerships often become very important during conflict.
- *Contribute to new policy and legislation formulation* if appropriate, drawing on the IUCN network for outside expertise and experiences in other countries.
- *Raise awareness within the donor community* of importance and opportunities for funding, and put donors in touch with conservation

organizations that require funding. IUCN may play a role building capacity of local organizations to fundraise, manage donor funding and report to donors.

- *Encourage action* among members who are positioned to achieve mitigation.

IUCN Regional Offices

IUCN regional offices may be able to play some of the roles mentioned above. In addition, they may be well placed to undertake the following:

- *Provide technical support* for policy formulation at regional level, for example, by creating or supporting regional policy forums to tackle issues arising from conflict at a regional level.
- *Promote networking and collaboration* at regional level, for example, by facilitating collaboration to deal with transboundary conflict issues
- *Raise awareness within the donor community* of importance and opportunities for funding. If donors withdraw from a country that is directly affected by conflict, funding may still be possible from a regional donor office, or from a national office in a neighbouring country that is affected indirectly by conflict.
- *Assume the roles of an IUCN country office,* if necessary, where no country office exists and there is a clear need to step in. If a country office in the region has to evacuate, accommodate it and try to maintain its capacity so that it can return as soon as possible. Where possible support any activities which can still be done from a distance.
- *Draw on conservation experiences in armed conflict across the region* and communicate lessons learned to IUCN members and others.
- *Encourage action* among members who are positioned to achieve mitigation.

IUCN Headquarters

IUCN Headquarters may be able to assume a few of the roles already mentioned above. In addition it should undertake the following:

- *Continue the current initiative to integrate environmental security into IUCN programs*, including armed conflict aspects.
- *Promote incorporation of environmental aspects of armed conflict at international policy level*, such as international conventions and through the United Nations.
- *Raise awareness (including within IUCN offices) and act as global clearinghouse* for information, experiences and lessons learned. It is crucial

that lessons continue to be learned and shared. IUCN is uniquely positioned to play a role in sharing lessons with government and NGO members.

- *Broker and improve coordination among national agencies* in a position to mitigate impacts.
- *Encourage action* among members who are positioned to achieve mitigation.

Conclusion

Armed conflict presents conservationists with a new set of challenges often far outside their previous experiences. Natural resources and biodiversity that have been carefully managed and nurtured over many years in peacetime can suddenly be at risk in an outbreak of conflict. In order to prevent or mitigate adverse impacts, conservationists have to learn and adapt fast to rapidly changing conditions where the ground rules can fluctuate wildly. They have to seize unexpected opportunities when they arise, but at other times remain patient and maintain sight of long-term goals when direct action is not possible in the shorter term. They often find themselves collaborating with unlikely partners in new technical fields, and becoming much more involved in holistic approaches to human livelihoods and use of natural resources.

This paper has attempted to outline some of the major impacts and possible mitigation measures. Lessons on successful interventions are still emerging, and it is very important that they continue to be analyzed, documented and communicated. While each conflict situation is unique, there are some general trends and lessons that can be applied in different situations. Armed conflict tends to isolate people in difficult and dangerous circumstances. Yet this is the time when they could most benefit from lessons learned elsewhere, as well as from outside moral support. Continued networking, learning and sharing of armed conflict lessons is crucial for conservation.

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Environment and Security Brief 13

The International Ombudsman Centre for the Environment and Development

Many regions possessing unexploited natural resources of agricultural or industrial value are often biodiversity-rich and home to traditional subsistence communities. Under these circumstances, development projects can pose serious threats to the integrity of valuable ecosystems and to the livelihoods and well being of local communities. Moreover, vast cultural and geographic distances frequently separate the beneficiaries of these projects from those who are directly impacted, and the latter are oftentimes politically or economically marginalized. This combustible mixture of resource wealth, inequity and cultural contrast can be a recipe for conflict. In an effort to address such situations, IUCN and the Earth Council Foundation joined forces to establish the International Ombudsman Centre for the Environment and Development (OmCED) in July of 2000. Above all, the Centre was a response to the long-perceived need for a non-adversarial, non-judicial, but well-respected international mechanism to prevent and resolve conflicts concerning environment, natural resources and sustainable development.[359]

The OmCED identifies, investigates and mediates actual or potential conflicts relating to individual and group rights of access to land, resources and benefits from those resources. Cases are usually referred to the OmCED by National Councils for Sustainable Development, other professional bodies, NGOs, governments, international organizations or, when directly affected, individuals and communities.[360] The decision to undertake a case is based on a number of relevant factors, including:

- the importance of the issue, especially to the interests of the poor and disadvantaged;
- the availability of other dispute resolution mechanisms;
- attitudes of the concerned parties with respect to the role of OmCED;
- the capacity of OmCED to mobilize the required expertise; and
- the availability of the funds necessary to undertake the case.[361]

Upon accepting a case, the OmCED chooses it own methodology for handling the dispute, whether it is through convening panels or assign-

ing issues and tasks to one or more individuals. The Centre relies on relevant national and international legal, social and economic instruments and standards in formulating recommendations. While its decisions are not legally binding (unless parties agree to such an arrangement beforehand), it can facilitate and influence a resolution. Moreover, the Centre derives substantial authority from the extensive membership network of its co-founding organizations, IUCN and the Earth Council, as well as from its location at the United Nations affiliated University for Peace campus in San José, Costa Rica.[362]

The OmCED has been operating on a trial basis and will undergo an evaluation in due course in order to ascertain its effectiveness. The following is a short overview of OmCED's recent activities:

1. Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) – Bolivia: OmCED, upon request of the Inter-American Development Bank and the Government of Bolivia, formed a panel of experts to advise on a minimal set of social/environmental measures to be taken to mitigate the possible negative effects of the upgrading of the road between Santa Cruz and Puerto Suarez.
2. OmCED was requested to form part of a small working group to look into the possibilities of forming *citizen-coalitions* on both sides of a disputed frontier area particularly rich in biodiversity. Progress is very slow mainly as a result of the political situation in the respective countries.
3. OmCED has commissioned a desk study to identify potential or actual conflictive situations involving indigenous and tribal peoples.
4. OmCED is in correspondence with a coalition of NGOs who may formulate a request to investigate some areas of concern related to the Mexican-Central American development plan known as Plan Pueblo-Panama.
5. OmCED has been requested to facilitate between local indigenous communities and an electricity company on the issue of complaints and compensatory measures related to the construction of a dam. Discussions are under way.
6. OmCED has been looking into the matter of a possible complaint by an indigenous community in Chile related to an international logging company. No formal request has been made to date.

OmCED generally acts where legitimate development clashes or threatens to clash with equally legitimate environmental or social concerns.

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360. OmCED web site: http://www.omced.org

361. *Ibid*.