**Geneva Dialogue on Environment,
Climate, Conflict, and Peace:**
Meeting 15

16 March, Zoom
Participants: 20 individuals from organizations and institutions around Geneva

Presentation from Wim Zwijnenburg, Humanitarian Disarmament Project Leader at Dutch Peace Organization, PAX:

- [Link to presentation](#)
- Goal of presentation: to share what nature-based solutions (NBS) are and how we could apply this thinking to conflict and peace
- The environment, climate, conflict, and peace field
  - The field currently sits on a wealth of information
    - We continue to collect more and more, but what do we do about it?
  - Some of us work in "the field", while others work in policy
    - Field/practice context
      - Some leaders in the field, like UNEP and UNICEF, are pushing towards the response side
      - How might we build on this slow progress?
    - Policy context
      - The UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) is one of the main avenues for policy development
      - There has been a struggle in past years to get proper attention on conflict dimensions of environmental conversations
- Nature-based solutions (NBS)
  - This is an umbrella concept that has a lot of traction in the international space right now, particularly driven by the IUCN and EU
  - Definition from the IUCN: "Actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits."
  - Really rapidly spreading into existing programs like the SDGs or disaster risk reduction work
  - For more on NBS, [you can follow the MOOC here](#)
- Nature-based solutions (NBS) and conflict
  - The main issue seems to be rooted in data collection
  - Conflicts have unique features
    - Context-dependent & unique
    - Some scenarios probably couldn't integrate the nature-based solutions approach (i.e. toxic remnants of war)
  - In the end, it's about reducing risk, supporting clean up and remediation of environmental damages
- Existing examples and ideas
  - Iraq - UNEP is using naturally occurring soil bacteria to decontaminate land from oil spills caused by the conflict, in collaboration with some private oil companies

- - Bangladesh - the government in collaboration with UN agencies are setting up reforestation projects in areas with large refugee camps
    - Colombia - used through collaborative tools and methods and implemented in periphery areas, empowering local communities demanding spatial justice
    - Sudan - water management through NbS
    - Broader approach in thinking of using nature as a tool to improve response, for example, in how to set up IDP camps in a way that doesn't create additional consequences for the natural environment - not to over extract local resources in the reconstruction phase
    - Large-scale deforestation in western Syria, limited ability to deal with climate impact, major carbon sinks, water usage

Discussion:
- Somali example of relationship between environment and conflict
    - The governance challenges have large implications on communities: As the government traditionally oversaw environmental use and governance, after its collapse, people are taking the environment into their own hands
    - For example, shortages of pasture land and water have led to conflict
    - Deforestation is also a major challenge
    - There is connection between these issues and the humanitarian/development spaces as well
- The risks of nature-based solutions (NBS) as a buzzword
    - NBS is the concept of the year
        - Evolved out of work on "ecosystem-based adaptations" over the years
        - This quite easily could just go out of style in 5 years time
    - Has been applied really generally to a lot of different things
        - Risk to be too diffuse a concept where it could mean everything and nothing
        - Delivered by other types of infrastructure
        - It started off with a more narrow definition
    - NBS might not be prioritized
        - For example, humanitarian organization will likely prioritize human response over environmental impacts
        - Do we want to make the case for reprioritization? What's the ask?
    - Takeaway: We must be clear and specific about how we'll use this terminology. The tighter the definition, the more useful.
- The opportunities of nature-based solutions (NBS) as a buzzword
    - The term has a fair amount of currency because it is getting attention from political actors
        - For example, the G20 (chaired by Italy) is taking NBS in cities up as one of their major ideas next Monday-Tuesday, and the conflict dimension of this is quite important
    - If there is policy excitement about it, organizations can capitalize on that
        - How might orgs make the most of it?
    - For example, in the past in the peacebuilding sector, buzzwords like "R2P," "Prevention agenda," "Sustaining peace," "SDG16," etc. have all been waves that can be surfed to tweak the system for the better

- NBS and conflict
  - Not a lot of thinking in the conflict background on what could be useful in NBS
  - Must navigate anthropocentrism
    - There is a conversation happening at the international level about the "rights of nature" - so when we talk about NBS & conflict, this is an anthropocentric approach and view
    - But when we look from the rights of the environment, does anything look different?
    - Seeing nature as anything other than a service provider will be an enormous challenge on the political level
  - Collecting data on this
    - It would be useful to have a database of NBS for peacebuilding that have been used all over and what kinds of environments have they worked in
      - Many end users are asking for examples of what could actually work as *solutions,* particularly when our field is so good at identifying risks
    - It would be helpful to learn from these approaches, and see if/where they could be applied
    - NBS must start with improved data collection
      - Need data to understand what the issue IS before you can jump in on solutions
  - The Geneva Environment Network will launch a series on NBS with IUCN focusing on water & cities, but not conflict
    - Perhaps our group could contribute something to it for conflict/peace
- Where can NBS for peacebuilding apply?
  - Urban example listed above with G20
  - Examples given in the presentation listed above
  - Grey-green reconstruction post conflict
  - Creating/improving local environmental governance structures?
  - Trees to counter the urban heat island effect; vegetation for slope stabilisation, vegetation to counter air pollution
    - How do they apply to peace & conflict? Do they?
  - https://www.calearth.org/relief-initiatives
  - NBS will work in some countries or communities, but not others
    - Connectivity between conflict and environment - a lot of conflict is arising from scarcity of resources, so how might that be integrated?
    - How might people exist within their environments so that they are not driven to conflict in order to meet their needs?
  - The opportunity mapping tool produced by our ECO DRR team is an interesting approach for using environmental data to calculate spatially ideal areas for restoration and protection (and NbS interventions!). It's a bit dated now (2017) but the methodology provides a good framework for further thematic development: https://pedrr.org/global/
    - Methodology here: http://ecodrrmapping.unepgrid.ch/documents/94/download
  - https://www.undrr.org/publication/ecosystem-based-disaster-risk-reduction-implementing-nature-based-solutions-0