

STOCKTAKING REPORT

Geneva Dialogue on Environment, Climate, Conflict, and Peace (ECCP)

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About this document

This report synthesizes the substantive discussion of the *Geneva Dialogue on Environment, Climate, Conflict, and Peace (ECCP)*. It builds on Dialogue's meeting summaries in view of highlighting key contributions and reoccurring themes as an input to the reflections on the future of environmental peacebuilding and on the nature of the ECCP nexus. Despite the diversity of actors and experiences shared during 20 Dialogue meetings, this report identifies three areas of convergence, discussed below.

Launched in March 2020, the Dialogue has convened more than 20 online briefings and facilitated discussions in an environment of participatory exchange on multiple topics bringing together more than 150 participants from Geneva-based organizations and other international actors. In concrete terms, these impartial meetings are helping participants develop projects and policies that are sensitive to security contexts and climate and environmental challenges.

The Geneva Peacebuilding Platform (GPP) facilitates the Dialogues on ECCP in its role of community convenor to spark and promote cross-sectoral exchanges between practitioners and researchers, creating the space to share their work and experiences, as well as to learn from other actors' approaches to cross cutting issues on peacebuilding, conservation, climate change, and security, therefore connecting these fields.

1. The relationships between the environment, natural resources, biodiversity climate change, conflict dynamics, mediation, security, and peacebuilding are multidirectional and complex, and attempts at oversimplification should be avoided.

- ***The evidence base has matured and expanded significantly, incorporating an increasing number of disciplines, research findings, and expertise.*** For the last 30 years, academic literature analyzed the connections between the environment, natural resources and conflict mainly from the perspective of disputes for scarce resources and from theories of "resource curse". In a different but complementary direction, studies of environmental peacebuilding have identified how natural resources can promote cooperation instead of conflict, given the need for coordination across public and private sectors in local, national and international spheres, motivated by the common dependence on resources.
- ***Environmental peacebuilding should include climate mitigation projects that are also conflict sensitive.*** In addition to the perception that the environment can be an entry-point to peacebuilding, converging evidence has made clear that some of the countries most affected by climate change are also amongst the least peaceful. Peacebuilding efforts should also implement initiatives that help build a stable common environment capable of supporting thriving livelihoods, addressing grievances through the inclusion of diverse stakeholders.

- ***Environmental peacebuilding is relevant even without the climate crisis***, as environmental degradation and conflicts form downward spirals. These are especially relevant in five hotspots susceptible to collapse: the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Southern region of the African Continent, as well as the Middle East and Central Asia.
- ***Capacity for climate adaptation is very limited in conflict areas and highly dependent on institutional support***, which also leads to the environment itself becoming a casualty of armed conflicts. This reinforces the need to promote respect for International Humanitarian Law. In this direction, a series of publications from 2011 to 2016 present more than 150 case-studies on how to address water, land, high-value natural resources, governance and livelihoods in contexts of post-conflict peacebuilding.
- ***Natural resource management and climate change mitigation are valuable entry points to peacebuilding by addressing grievances and providing pathways for stability***. The Dialogues highlighted how resource curse logics can be averted by improving the governance and management of natural resources, leading to positive effects on peacebuilding processes. Bottom-up policies regulating the access to minerals, timber, and their revenue is essential in post-conflict peacebuilding, as natural resources often represent 50-80% of the exports from these countries. Furthermore, nature-based solutions for climate change, such as land restoration projects, can be successful in addressing disputes for land-tenure and water, helping sustain peace and stave off harsher climate impacts.

2. A gap exists between international and domestic actors, particularly in regard to transboundary natural resource management and migration.

- ***ECCP nexus discussion underline the need to improve how international and local actors work on issues such as transboundary natural resource management, mainly water***. According to UN Water, there are 263 transboundary lakes and river basins in the world, representing roughly half of Earth's surface. Not seldom these bodies of water prompt disputes and even conflicts, requiring coordination between local and international actors. Therefore, water management is a recurring priority for both conservation and peace actors.
- ***Better synergies between international and local actors in environmental issues, coupled with the inclusion of diverse stakeholders, are indispensable requirements to more effective programs and peacebuilding outcomes***. With varying governance frameworks across international and local levels, peace and conservation actors need to draw in nonstate armed groups, regional leaders and representatives, women and other stakeholders. For this reason, scholars have already identified that the emerging third generation of environmental peacebuilding research is a springboard for actor's integration, which is fundamental for the management of transboundary natural resources and for migration.
- ***Narratives around simplistic cause-effect assertions require demystification, clarification and if needed, refutation***. From the perspective of migration, simplistic causal relations connecting those displaced by climate change to conflicts for land and other natural resources were challenged during the Dialogues, as these visions depict migrants as the cause of conflict in the regions where they arrive. Instead, it was argued that a confluence of governance and socioeconomic factors play a larger role in driving conflicts, including land tenure, food insecurity, deficient infrastructure, and lack of governance and institutions. In addition, it was emphasized that many displaced individuals remain within their countries of origin and do not necessarily cross international borders.

- ***Involuntary immobility of affected populations can often be more disruptive to livelihoods than to move to another area, even when there is risk to exacerbate resource disputes.*** Lack of official status for those fleeing climate or environmental degradation, associated with their own financial and social vulnerabilities leads to a substantial increase in the exposure of these populations to the effects of climate change. Therefore, addressing these issues demands a better coordination between actors engaged in the field, international organizations, and States.

3. Programming and policy from the “peace” and “environment” siloes must be integrated from the highest levels to the most local.

- ***Peacebuilding operations frequently disregard climate risks, and environmental programs often fail to engage peace and security.*** However, addressing such overlapping systemic risks requires integrated approaches that combine fields of action, taking into consideration both environmental stressors and conflict dynamics. Integrated programming is also fundamental to avoid that peacebuilding operations cause climate stresses, as well as to improve social cohesion and inclusive governance, and because climate change adaptation can foster cooperation and address root causes of conflict.
- ***Integrated programming requires strong assessment of climate-fragility risks*** combining short- and long-term factors, a clear view of the desired goals (theory of change), and conflict-sensitive approaches implemented through participatory processes, as well as effective monitoring and evaluation.
- ***There is a need for better indicators.*** This is still a highly challenging issue that needs to be better developed given the lack of a common framework. How to measure the impact of environmental peacebuilding approaches? Indicators also need to integrate peace and security, yet peace is multifactorial and rarely equally implemented in all levels of society.

Concluding reflections

There are no simple lines of causation connecting climate change and the environment to conflicts, even though the climate crisis can be considered a risk multiplier and accelerate the deterioration of social fabric in many vulnerable places. What the Dialogues show is a complex interplay between actors and factors that, combined, can lead to conflict and increased environmental deterioration. For this reason, climate and the environment can no longer stay in the margins of peacebuilding processes and conflict prevention, as there cannot be peace in an unstable environment. Acting on these stressors requires a significant adaptive capacity from governments and organizations to implement policies and operations that break institutional siloes, protect the environment and build a stable ground for lasting peace.