

Johannesburg Roundtable on Environment, Development, and Sustainable Peace

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The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa offered an invaluable opportunity to help bridging the gap between Northern and Southern perspectives on environment, development, population, poverty, conflict, and peace linkages. On August 27, the Environment, Development, and Sustainable Peace Initiative (EDSP) and the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety organized the Roundtable on Environment, Development, and Sustainable Peace to explore ongoing Southern efforts in this area. The EDSP Initiative's primary goal is to facilitate a constructive dialogue among Northern and Southern policy-makers, practitioners, journalists, and scholars on mitigating environmental contributions to conflict and developing a constructive environment, development and sustainable peace agenda. The Roundtable was kicked off by Deputy Minister Gila Altmann of the German Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety. International experts from five countries raised a number of critical points. Two dominant themes were:

- The environment and security debate focuses mainly on the environmental causes of conflict and needs to **shift towards mechanisms to promote peace**. Further attention needs to be given to environmental cooperation as a tool for confidence building, looking at the specific mechanisms and means to promote peace.
- **Policy initiatives** on conflict prevention and mitigation addressing environmental conflicts in the South **require a sustained integration of Southern perspectives**.

Five major points emerged from the Roundtable:

- **Institutions play a crucial role** in preventing or mitigating conflicts over natural resources. In the water sector, river basin commissions or water authorities have proved to be effective in integrated water resource management and thus contributing to confidence building among parties. However, successful examples of transboundary water cooperation in the North cannot be transferred to river basins in the South without taking account of the given local context. In many cases, social dimensions such as poverty, inequality, and culture create specific challenges for any external model.
- Institutions gain **legitimacy through ownership** by effected communities. A sustained Southern perspective is required for institutional design and implementation. Any institutional mechanism for conflict resolution or prevention needs to be based on broad participation of relevant stakeholders.
- As a basis for any negotiation over shared waters, availability and **sharing of hydrological data** plays a crucial role. Generating and exchanging data may significantly contribute to reducing perceived threats and fostering confidence building.
- **Women and children** are most affected by environmental degradation in the South. At the same time, women play important roles in crisis management and conflict resolution which could increase peaceful outcomes to disputes.
- The **private sector** has been neglected in the analysis of both its contribution to conflict as well as to conflict prevention and resolution. Further research is required on the role of the private sector, looking specifically at the impacts of private sector engagement in conflict prevention and resolution and sustainable resource management in the South and North.

Gila Altmann (Germany)

Deputy Minister, German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety

Deputy Minister Gila Altmann stressed the links between conflict prevention and peace issues and sustainable development. Environmental degradation and unsustainable resource consumption holds the potential to contribute to conflict. Climate change holds conflict potential that stems in part from “environmental refugees” fleeing rising seas. At the same time, cross-border projects are particularly well-suited for confidence-building among neighbouring states. The Danube River Commission and southern African peace parks as examples worth emulating. Finally, Minister Altmann called for mainstreaming gender concerns into collaborative efforts to promote sustainable policies and transboundary cooperation.

Dr. Alexander López (Costa Rica)

Professor, Nacional Universidad (Costa Rica) and Researcher, Foundation of Foreign Service for Peace and Democracy (FUNPADEM)

Since the end of the Cold War, the linkages between environment, security, and conflict have become an important concern for policymakers, practitioners and researchers. Issues of access, distribution, and use of natural resources are increasingly leading to the emergence of disputes and political instability. Those tensions, according to Dr. Alexander Lopez, could arise around the renewable resources of land, forests, water, and soil. He also emphasized that such disputes are mostly taking place at a sub-national level.

To date, Northern perspectives have dominated research on these linkages. Thus, Southern perceptions of the linkages between environment and security have either been marginalized or completely ignored in much of the scholarly and policy dialogue in the last dozen years. A more balanced approach is needed which incorporates Southern perspectives on disputes over natural resources and their social and political implications. This approach could help avoid “securitizing” or militarizing environmental agendas in developing countries, a condition to be avoided given many militaries’ negative records in social and environmental terms. In addition, Dr. Lopez highlighted the importance of facilitating a cooperative transboundary approach to shared natural resources. In closing, Dr. Lopez raised two questions to be addressed from a Southern perspective: First, what kinds of institutions are needed to promote sustainable peace strategies? And finally, what are the impacts of securitization and possible militarization of the environmental agenda?

John Prendergast (United States)

Co-Director, African Program, International Crisis Group

In an overview of conflict prevention and resolution in Africa, Mr. John Prendergast drew a picture of a continent dragged down by conflict. As a result, many Africans are struggling for survival. With these immediate threats, sustainable development represents only a distant dream for Somalis who have been without a functioning government for 10 years, for opposition supporters in Zimbabwe who are denied food and facing starvation because of their political preferences, or for Southern Sudanese who are pushed off oil-rich lands.

However, Dr. Prendergast expressed some optimism because conflicts are no longer hidden but are addressed more openly. This development, he stressed, will help identifying the roots of conflicts, a precondition to solving them. The recent emergence of NEPAD and cooperative efforts among African governments, civil society groups, and multilateral institutions, are quite promising for both solving conflicts on a regional level and pressing African governments into action. This cooperation could serve as a model for inclusive partnerships conflict prevention as well as conflict resolution.

Anthony Turton (South Africa)

Head of the African Water Issues Research Unit (AWIRU), University of Pretoria

The South must move from unsustainable “negative peace”, which is characterised by the absence of hostilities, towards “positive peace” where economic, environmental and political development is achieved. Water is a critical resource in this context given that there are fifteen transboundary water basins in sub-Saharan Africa. Water is perceived as a national security issue in many of these river basins. This “securitization” of water limits a state’s economic growth and sustainable development potential. The classification of water-related data leads to perceptions of insecurity which feeds growing hostilities. In order to break out of this vicious circle, water politics must be “desecuritized” through the collection, sharing, and negotiated agreement of water data throughout river basins. This data sharing can serve as a foundation for consensus and confidence building, thereby reducing perceived threats. More broadly, Dr. Turton stressed that river basin management could be the foundation for peace in Africa. However he cautioned against a one model fits all approach to river basin management that has already failed to work in certain Southern African contexts.

Dr. Úrsula Oswald Spring (Mexico)

General Secretary, Latin American Peace Research Association (CLAIP)

A new paradigm for sustainable peace cultures must be formed integrating human, gender, and environmental security perspectives. This new paradigm must include poverty alleviation, increasing quality of life conditions, greater gender equity, and a healthier environment. Dr. Úrsula Oswald identified three major factors that undergird the need for this new paradigm. First, many countries of the developing world provide environmental services (such as carbon dioxide sinks from forests, and flora and fauna that contribute to new medicines) for which they rarely receive any compensation. Second, scarce and dirty water in most parts of the world hamper development, contribute to millions of deaths annually, and disproportionately affect women and children. Third, gender disparities are manifested in the immense workload of women in most developing countries. Their primary roles in gathering scarce resources (water and firewood) or farming make environmental factors direct contributors to these inequities and heightened vulnerabilities. Linking environmental and human security offers a chance to develop a multicultural approach to sustainable development that emphasizes equity and a bottom-up approach to governance. Finally, this paradigm, according to Dr. Oswald, facilitates regional peace building efforts around shared resources and equity.

Michael Ochieng Odhiambo (Kenya)

Executive Director, Resources Conflict Institute (RECONCILE)

Law presents both opportunities and limits for management of environmental and natural resource conflicts in Kenya. Courts and judicial processes play important roles in the management of environmental and natural resources conflicts. Often these conflicts pit communities and individuals against interests that are politically powerful. Access to courts provides options for the weak in these cases, according to Kenyan lawyer Michael Odhiambo. Yet as the Kenyan experience has shown, courts are not necessarily suited to the task of managing environmental and natural resource conflicts. Court processes are complicated and costly. Lawyers are expensive and based in urban areas, where they are not easily accessible to smaller communities and the poor. The courts are an adversarial system, a zero-sum game with winners and losers. This winner takes all system is thus inappropriate for managing environmental and natural resource conflicts which are better dealt with through a win-win paradigm. It is necessary to build the capacity of court officers and legal practitioners to make the courts more effective in managing environmental and natural resource conflicts. At the same time, incorporating indigenous conflict management principles into these frameworks may also be useful to revitalize traditional conflict management institutions for use at the community level.



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EDSP is a joint project initiated by three partner organisations

The Foundation of Foreign Service for Peace and Democracy (FUNPADEM), a non-governmental, non-profit organisation based in San José, Costa Rica. FUNPADEM supports the development and strengthening of the societies of Central America.

The Woodrow Wilson Center's Environmental Change and Security Project (ECSP) in Washington, DC serves as an information clearinghouse on the views, activities and policy initiatives falling under the rubric of 'environment, population and security'.

Adelphi Research is a Berlin-based non-profit organisation active in the area of sustainability science, policy analysis and public policy consulting.

The Environment, Development and Sustainable Peace Project originated from the 2000 annual meeting of the Bellagio Forum for Sustainable Development (BFSD), and is co-sponsored by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ) through the German Agency for Technical Co-operation (GTZ), and the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC). EDSP has been endorsed by the Global Environmental Change and Human Security Project (GECHS) of the International Human Dimensions Programme on Global Environmental Change (IHDP).

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