

TOOLKIT AND GUIDANCE FOR PREVENTING AND MANAGING
LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES CONFLICT

Strengthening Capacity for Conflict-Sensitive Natural Resource Management

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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The United Nations
Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action

Executive Summary

Natural resources and conflict

Conflict arises when two or more groups believe their interests are incompatible. It is not in itself a negative phenomenon. Non-violent conflict can be an essential component of social change and development, and is a necessary component of human interaction. Non-violent resolution of conflict is possible when individuals and groups have trust in their governing structures, society and institutions to manage incompatible interests.

Conflict becomes problematic when societal mechanisms and institutions for managing and resolving conflict break down, giving way to violence. Societies with weak institutions, fragile political systems and divisive social relations can be drawn into cycles of conflict and violence. Preventing this negative spiral and ensuring the peaceful resolution of disputes is a core interest of the international community. The challenge for UN, EU and other international actors is to promote positive social transformation, while mitigating the risks and potential impacts of violent and damaging conflict.

Environmental factors are rarely, if ever, the sole cause of violent conflict. However, the exploitation of natural resources and related environmental stresses can be implicated in all phases of the conflict cycle, from contributing to the outbreak and perpetuation of violence to undermining prospects for peace. This Guidance Note accordingly focuses on the role of natural resources in triggering, escalating or sustaining violent conflict. Its aim is to provide practical guidance on the role that the UN and EU can play in early warning and assessment, structural conflict prevention (long-term measures) and direct conflict prevention (short-term measures). It is meant to provide a combination of strategic advice and operational guidance, as well as to unite existing tools and guidance under a single framework.

Capacity-building and conflict prevention

Conflict-sensitive natural resource management systems are an important tool for preventing violence. A natural resource management system is conflict-sensitive if the power to make decisions about vital resources can be contested by different stakeholders without violence. This, in turn, requires a government that is capable, accountable, transparent and responsive to the wishes and needs of its population. It also requires a civil society that is ready and able to engage with government to manage resources in a sustainable, profitable and non-violent manner. External actors, such as the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), can help build the capacity of conflict-affected and fragile societies to understand, manage, mediate and respond to natural resource conflicts without violence, but the process must be led from within.

This Guidance Note first identifies some of the challenges associated with capacity building for natural resource management that arise in conflict-affected and fragile states; it then focuses on the goals of natural resource management and capacity building. A country's natural resource management goals are likely to include promoting economic development and fostering sustainable resource use. But these goals will likely remain unmet so long as potentially violent tensions go unresolved. It is critically important to convince powerful stakeholders to "buy in" to governance systems and to address resource conflicts peacefully.

To help countries pursue growth and sustainability while preventing violent conflicts, EU and UN staff should:

- (1) Work with governments to build the capacity of, and mediate between, different stakeholders and
- (2) Assist civil society to participate in the natural resource management process at all levels.

STRENGTHENING CAPACITY FOR CONFLICT-SENSITIVE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Creating and maintaining social “buy in” to a natural resource management system requires that government and civil society actors not only fulfil scientific or technical roles, but also develop *peacebuilding capacities*. These capacities include: the “soft skills” of negotiation, mediation, and dialogue; the ability to communicate effectively; a culture of accountability, inclusivity, and responsiveness to the public; and a willingness to share power with other stakeholders.

EU and UN staff should help government and civil society stakeholders to strengthen both the technical and the peacebuilding skills needed to manage natural resources. Conflict-sensitive natural resource management can be broken down into four steps. At every stage, external actors can help countries develop the knowledge, institutions, leadership, and accountability necessary to address conflicts over natural resources peacefully:

- **Develop shared understandings of the resource and conflict context:** Preventing violence over resources begins with an analysis of the role of resources in conflict. Ideally, the conflict analysis process should be inclusive and participatory. Additionally, national and international actors should also assess skill gaps - in government and civil society - in order to design appropriate training. Finally, assessing environmental knowledge gaps is another important early step. Baseline environmental data is often poor in developing countries, particularly in post-conflict situations.
- **Design natural resource policies and projects:** Based on the analysis, stakeholders should be able to engage in dialogue on priority issues and begin to establish a shared vision of how different elements and actors will come together to form a sustainable and effective resource management system. Inclusion and broad participation of stakeholders is vital. Governance issues that are likely to arise include: changes to legal and

regulatory frameworks; the development of specific resource management activities ranging from land titling to construction of water infrastructure; strengthening local dispute resolution systems; and enhancing both government and civil society oversight capabilities.

- **Build inclusive, transparent and accountable natural resource management systems:** Conflict-sensitive management is based on a governmental commitment to inclusive decision-making, transparency, and accountability. All governments can strengthen their position by providing services, information and analysis to citizens. Credibility and public support come from acting transparently and accountably, and from empowering local communities to act. For these reasons, and in order to make the best use of both limited state capacities and local knowledge and interest, devolving government authority for some decisions and functions to the community level may be critical to the success of natural resource management.
- **Monitor and evaluate environmental trends and results:** Measurement allows a society to continually determine whether conflicts are being adequately addressed, if new conflicts are emerging, whether resource use practices are moving towards environmental sustainability at a reasonable pace, and to what extent popular expectations are being met.

The second half of this Guidance Note contains practical actions that UN and EU staff can take to apply these basic capacity building concepts in the specific contexts of disputes over land, extractive resources, and renewable resources. The Guidance Note concludes by providing links to resources, partners, and reading materials that staff can draw on to support their conflict prevention and capacity building efforts.

EU-UN Partnership

Strengthening Capacity for the Consensual and Sustainable Management of Land and Natural Resources

The management of land and natural resources is one of the most critical challenges facing developing countries today. The exploitation of high-value natural resources, including oil, gas, minerals and timber has often been cited as a key factor in triggering, escalating or sustaining violent conflicts around the globe. Furthermore, increasing competition and conflict for diminishing renewable resources, such as land and water, is on the rise. This is being further aggravated by environmental degradation, population growth and climate change. The mismanagement of land and natural resources is contributing to new conflicts and obstructing the peaceful resolution of existing ones.

To improve capacity for land and natural resource management and conflict prevention, the European Union partnered with the Expert Reference Group of the UN Framework Team (FT) in late 2008. The aim of this partnership was to develop and implement a strategic multi-agency project focused on building the capacity of national stakeholders, the United Nations system, and the European Union to prevent land and natural resources from contributing to violent conflict. Six UN agencies, programme or departments have been involved, including UNDP, DPA, UNEP, PBSO, UN-HABITAT and DESA. The partnership is also designed to enhance policy development and programme coordination between key actors at the field level.

The first outcome of this project is an inventory of existing tools and capacity within the UN system and a set of four Guidance Notes on addressing natural resource management and conflict prevention. These Guidance Notes cover: (i) Land and Conflict, (ii) Extractive Industries and Conflict, (iii) Renewable Resources and Conflict, (iv) Strengthening Capacity for Conflict-Sensitive Natural Resource Management.

Based on the Guidance Notes, the second outcome of the project is to deliver a series of training modules for UN and EU field staff, as well as local partners, to enhance the knowledge and skills needed to understand, anticipate, prevent, and mitigate potential conflicts over land and natural resources. Participants will acquire the skills to formulate and operationalize preventive measures in relation to natural resource management (NRM) and conflict.

In countries where specific NRM and conflict challenges are identified, the project will aim to provide focused technical assistance in the development of conflict prevention strategies. This could include the deployment of staff and other experts to assist the UN Country Team (UNCT), including the Resident Coordinator (RC) or Peace and Development Advisor, in analysing options and designing programmes. Where needed, dedicated follow-up measures will also be undertaken on an inter-agency basis, in partnership with the EU.

This guidance note was developed under the lead of the United Nations Development Program. For more information, please contact: framework.team@undp.org

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