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LINKING CONSERVATION AND PEACEMAKING



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Abbreviations

CBD	Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia
HD	Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
IWRM	Integrated water resource management
PBDI	Peace and Biodiversity Dialogue Initiative
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

1. Summary

This paper explores how mediators should understand, and how they could address, conservation (including land restoration) in the context of peace negotiations and agreements.

The first chapter describes why conservation should matter to peacemaking practitioners. It highlights the linkages between conservation and peacemaking, focusing on the role of nature as a victim and driver of conflict, as well as the potential for conservation activities to contribute to sustainable peace.

Drawing on case studies and examples, the subsequent chapter outlines different opportunities to connect conservation with peacemaking activities. These include strengthening natural resource governance (e.g. through dedicated agreements), improving natural resource management at national and local levels (e.g. by supporting the establishment of protected areas and connecting mediation with land restoration efforts), or promoting transboundary management arrangements (e.g. through water diplomacy, transboundary marine resource management, or peace parks).

The final chapter sets out concrete recommendations for mediators on how to integrate and connect conservation to their peacemaking efforts. Suggestions include: (1) establishing partnerships with organisations working on land restoration to address conflict drivers, provide livelihoods and ensure sustainable peace; and (2) exploring opportunities to facilitate the negotiation of transboundary management arrangements.

2. Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increase in violence related to the environment, but also in the number of conflicts that have an impact on the environment. Environmental issues that can drive conflict include soil erosion, water scarcity, overfishing, deforestation, pollution, and resource depletion. Many of these changes result in population displacement, which can further fuel tensions (van Jaarsveld Bronkhorst & Bob, 2010). Climate change exacerbates existing conflicts and contributes to new ones. It thereby increases the potential threat and scale of conflict, and makes peace harder to achieve and sustain (United Nations, 2020).

Addressing the environment in both peace negotiations and agreements is crucial to achieving sustainable peace, as environment-related risks to human security and the depleting availability of natural resources will only grow over the coming years. While mediators have previously paid little attention to the environment in peace negotiations, and in the drafting of peace agreements, the sector is now gearing up its environmental peacemaking capacity and expertise.

In conflict mediation organisations, most environmental peacemaking efforts focus on promoting shared resource management among conflict parties, and fostering cooperation to address shared environmental challenges. In the Sahel, for example, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) facilitates the negotiation of local agreements to resolve and prevent agro-pastoral conflicts driven by the effects of climate change on scarce resources. In the South China Sea, promoting cooperative fisheries management among disputing governments is being used to build confidence and prevent a destabilising collapse in shared fish stocks.

Sharing natural resources and tackling joint environmental problems is crucial to mitigating tensions at many levels, yet shared resource governance and environmental management do not necessarily generate lasting peace and a healthy environment. If peace agreements

simply result in “coordinated resource exploitation”, for instance, they can lead to further environmental degradation which risks the renewed outbreak of conflict in the long term (Ide, 2020: 5). Peace agreements that fail to tackle the sustainability of resources in the face of climate change and do not protect the environment will struggle to ensure sustainable peace.

For peacemaking efforts to be successful, a more comprehensive understanding and perspective on the environment is needed. This broader perspective encompasses the areas of conservation and land restoration (see Box 1 for related terminology), which peacemaking practitioners are only just starting to engage with and have not yet systematically connected to their work. To inform peacemaking practice and programming, this paper examines the link between conservation and peacemaking, and explores how mediators could address conservation (including land restoration) in the context of peace negotiations and agreements.

Box 1: Terminology

Conservation

In line with the recent report on conflict and conservation from the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), this paper adopts a broad definition of conservation as “the human activity dedicated to averting the loss of nature and advancing its recovery” (IUCN, 2021: 8). Conservation thus encompasses a range of activities and concepts, “including both ‘protection’ (‘preservation’) and ‘sustainable use’, as well as ‘restoration’” (IUCN, 2021: 8). Nature includes both non-living (abiotic) and living elements, with the latter treated as equivalent to biodiversity, which comprises genetic diversity, species and ecosystems (IUCN, 2021).

Land restoration

Land restoration can be understood as the “process of ecological restoration of a site to a natural landscape and habitat, safe for humans, wildlife, and plant communities” (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, 2016). Land restoration is part of ecosystem restoration, a concept that has been identified as an important component of conservation.

Ecosystem restoration

Ecosystem restoration refers to “assisting in the recovery of ecosystems that have been degraded or destroyed, as well as conserving the ecosystems that are still intact” (UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, 2021). Different types of ecosystems include (1) farmlands, (2) grasslands, shrublands, and savannahs, (3) peatlands, (4) forests, (5) mountains, (6) freshwater, (7) oceans, and (8) urban areas. Restoration involves many different techniques and does not necessarily mean returning an ecosystem to its natural state, as there is also a need for farmland and infrastructure. Overall, ecosystems “need to adapt to a changing climate” (UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, 2021).

3. The relationship between conservation and peacemaking

To understand why conservation should matter to peacemaking practitioners, it is important to explore the multifaceted relationship between nature, conservation and conflict.

3.1 Nature as a victim and driver of conflict

Current analyses and maps indicate that biodiversity and conflicts tend to occur in the same regions, with conflicts often taking place near, but not necessarily in, protected areas. Threatened species are also more likely to occur in areas that have experienced armed conflict (IUCN, 2021). While this co-occurrence may not imply impact or causation, it is nonetheless important; recent evidence has shown that the natural environment is often a “silent victim” of armed conflict (ICRC, 2020: 42).

Conflict has overwhelmingly negative impacts on nature, for example by directly killing individual organisms important for food and trade, degrading ecosystems as a result of the use of weapons and military material, or reducing a community’s conservation capacity. This, in turn, has adverse effects on communities and societies living in those areas. Land mines, cluster munitions or other explosive remnants of war can “restrict access to agricultural land and pollute soils and water sources with metals and toxic energetic materials”, thereby negatively affecting people’s livelihoods and health (Conflict and Environment Observatory, 2020). Poverty and resource scarcity can then spur resource competition and lead to communities engaging in unsustainable resource exploitation, driving further environmental degradation. This is especially likely if migration or forced displacement has led to an influx of new and diverse ethnic or religious communities (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2021).

The result is a “vicious cycle between ecological degradation and conflict, wherein resource degradation leads to conflict, and the resulting conflict leads to further degradation of resources” (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2021: 2). Land degradation and the deterioration of aquatic ecosystems in particular are key factors associated with violent conflict (IUCN, 2021). However, environmental degradation and resource scarcity do not automatically lead to conflict, but rather interact with a range of other political, social and economic factors.

While nature can be both a victim and a driver of conflict, conflicts can also occasionally benefit the conservation of nature, though usually only temporarily. In Colombia, for instance, the conflict between the Colombian government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) resulted in forced internal displacement, which led to land abandonment and spontaneous regeneration in some regions. The FARC also enforced “gunpoint conservation” by “using land mines to restrict hunting, logging, land clearing and settling” in certain areas, and introduced rules and requirements regarding deforestation (IUCN, 2021: 15). However, overall, the conflict led to an increase in deforestation and the destruction of ecosystems through illegal mining (IUCN, 2021).

3.2 The benefits and risks of conservation for peace

Given the various linkages between nature and conflict, conservation can play a key role in achieving sustainable peace. Conflict-sensitive conservation can be defined as programming and implementation that takes into account the “causes, actors and impacts of conflict in order to minimize conflict risks and maximize peacebuilding opportunities” (Crawford, Brown & Finlay, 2011: 3). If this is done properly, then “conservation and the restoration of nature, including equitable natural resource governance, can contribute to

pre-empting and mitigating armed conflict” (IUCN, 2021: 55). In addition, conservation can support conflict resolution, for instance by providing an entry point for dialogue between conflict parties. Chapter 4 will outline different ways to simultaneously conserve nature and promote peace.

Nonetheless, peacemaking practitioners should keep in mind that conservation efforts do not necessarily have positive effects on peace. Conservation itself – and the politics surrounding it – can also contribute to conflict. Conservation actors may lack an understanding of how their efforts are situated within, and alter the wider landscape of, protracted violent conflict or war. They have been accused of rendering invisible the legacies of past violence (Marijnen, De Vries, & Duffy, 2021). Moreover, conservation can restrict peoples’ access to key livelihood resources, introduce new or additional economic burdens or risks, and result in the unequal distribution of benefits (Crawford et al., 2011).

In Colombia and elsewhere, the establishment of protected areas and the militarisation of conservation in response to wildlife trafficking or the targeting of ranger forces by armed groups have also led to human rights abuses, killings, forced displacement, and other tensions between conservation authorities and indigenous peoples or local communities (De Pourcq et al., 2017; Hsiao, 2021). When collaborating with conservation actors, the conflict analysis experience of mediators could help mitigate some of these risks. However, peacemaking organisations should still ensure they are aware of the potential pitfalls of conservation and familiar with the approaches and operations of prospective partners.

4. Opportunities to connect conservation with peacemaking

Conservation and peace actors alike have explored different policy options, strategies and approaches to simultaneously conserve nature and promote peace. One of the most comprehensive resources presenting different opportunities is a 2021 report titled “Conservation and Conflict” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). A clear focus of their report is on natural resource governance and management, which also seem particularly relevant for peacemaking organisations and hence are examined in more detail in this chapter.

Box 2 highlights that while the two concepts are closely interlinked in practice – with governance shaping management – important differences remain. Given these differences, and to better illustrate the tools associated with each concept, this chapter looks at natural resource governance and management in separate sub-sections. It further divides natural resource management into two categories: (i) natural resource management at local and national levels, and (ii) transboundary resource management.

Analysing natural resource management tools in this manner reflects the peace sector’s tendency to define mediation and dialogue efforts in light of the type of conflict they seek to address. Whereas resource management tools at the local and national levels are more relevant in contexts of intra-state and/or highly localised conflict, transboundary arrangements are important for inter-state conflict. These distinctions also make it easier for practitioners to understand how natural resource management tools can play out at different conflict levels, showcasing similarities and differences.

While recognising that natural resource governance can also take various forms and structures, this chapter emphasises its main components and principles, which should remain the same at all levels – whether local, national or transboundary. As this paper focuses on concrete conservation actions that can be taken in the context of peace processes and agreements, greater prominence is given to management than governance issues. Nevertheless, natural resource governance and management are both equally important concepts for sustainable solutions – as shown in Box 2.

Box 2: Natural resource governance and natural resource management

Natural resource governance

Natural resource governance includes the “norms, institutions and processes that determine how power and responsibilities over natural resources are exercised, how decisions are taken, and how citizens – including women, men, youth, indigenous peoples and local communities – effectively participate in, and benefit from, the management of natural resources” (IUCN, 2021: 31).

Natural resource management

Natural resource management encompasses a broad spectrum of actions taken to manage the supply, access to and use of natural resources such as land, water, air, minerals, forests, fisheries, wild flora and fauna (Muralikrishna & Manickam, 2017). Whereas natural resource governance is concerned with “which actors make decisions regarding nature, and how these decisions are made, natural resource management concerns the actions implemented through these decisions, and their intended outcomes” (IUCN, 2021: 38).

4.1 Strengthening natural resource governance

Improving natural resource governance contributes to the conservation of nature by ensuring its social equity, effectiveness and sustainability (Springer, Campese & Nakangu, 2021). It can also mitigate conflict risks associated with natural resources by promoting inclusive decision-making, establishing secure land tenure and resource rights, and improving accountability and transparency (IUCN, 2021).

Mediators themselves can play a role in contributing to better natural resource governance by facilitating dialogue around natural resources, especially at a community level. They can bring together divided communities to foster cooperation and promote shared, sustainable resource governance, thereby laying the foundations for lasting peace. Ideally, engaging communities in such dialogue results in peace agreements that include clauses dedicated to natural resource governance and use.

At HD, mediators have, so far, mainly focused on including natural resource management rather than governance in local-level agreements. In February 2022, for instance, HD brokered its first-ever natural resource-sharing agreement in Nigeria in the Agatu Local Government Area in Benue State, which ended decades of intercommunal violence over water and land. The peace agreement was signed by more than 20 clans from the Agatu community. It addresses the sharing of resources, free movement in the area and the return of thousands of displaced people.

Similarly, in Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, Mali and Chad, HD facilitates dialogue between farmers, herders, fishermen and relevant authorities to encourage joint efforts to peacefully and sustainably manage natural resources and prevent cattle rustling. Mediation between agro-pastoral communities has resulted in the signing of so-called *conventions locales* – local agreements focused on the management of specific natural resources (e.g. fish ponds). The agreements are based on the habits, customs and cultural traditions of natural resource exploitation in the area, as well as legal texts regulating the management of natural resources and the protection of the environment.

Although both the Agatu agreement and the various *conventions locales* are primarily concerned with natural resource management, their clauses also touch upon governance issues. The Agatu agreement, for example, stresses the importance of including women

and youth as essential stakeholders in decision-making processes related to the management of natural resources. In each *convention locale*, the signatories usually agree to create two committees tasked with overseeing and ensuring the efficient use of resources: a supervisory or surveillance committee, and a management committee. Both committees have clear mandates and aim to be as inclusive as possible by engaging a wide range of local authorities and resource users. Whereas the supervisory or surveillance committee is the decision-making body composed of village chiefs and/or traditional chiefs, the management committee is the executing body, generally composed of user representatives. Overall, both bodies aim to contribute to the accountability and transparency of natural resource governance in the area.

While local-level peace processes provide useful entry points for addressing natural resource governance, peacemaking practitioners can also ensure that questions of resource governance are addressed in nationwide peace agreements. If including such clauses in a national peace agreement faces resistance, there can be scope to support local-level efforts that in turn contribute to a country's national peace process. In Myanmar, for instance, International Alert has worked with communities on improving natural resource governance in relation to forestry. The strengthening of forest governance can help support Myanmar's national peace process, as the neglect of forestry governance and management has been linked to increased conflict risks and adverse social and environmental impacts (Gray, 2019).

In addition to local- or national-level efforts, mediators can also facilitate regional or inter-state dialogues that use the governance of natural resources – especially transboundary resources – as an entry point. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has promoted transboundary water cooperation between various countries with shared rivers to address a variety of challenges, including the risk of upstream-downstream conflicts relating to water sharing (Sanchez & Roberts, 2014). Section 4.3 addresses transboundary water diplomacy in more detail.

4.2 Improving natural resource management at local and national levels

Some conservation actors, including Conservation International in Timor-Leste, are bringing communities together to conclude agreements about the use and conservation of natural resources and build trust (Pinto, 2015). Moreover, as highlighted in the previous section, mediation organisations such as HD are already addressing sustainable natural resource management by promoting the inclusion of resource-related clauses in local agreements, particularly in the Sahel.

Box 3 illustrates what this can look like, showcasing the structure and selected clauses of a *convention locale* signed by the Hombori/Mopti and Gossi/Tombouctou communities in Mali in January 2021.

Box 3: Structure and selected clauses of the *Convention Locale de la Mare de Agoufou*, Mali, 2021

- Preamble
- The users of the pond and the scope of the local agreement
- The problem of pond management
- The objectives of the local agreement
- **Rules for the management of the pond and natural resources**
 - **Chapter 1: General principles**
 - **Chapter 2: Agriculture and market gardening** (e.g. Article 8: “The installation of fields in areas set aside for the purpose of agriculture or market gardening must respect an easement of 1 km from the major bed of the pond”)
 - **Chapter 3: Sedentary and transhumant livestock farming** (e.g. Article 11: “Pastoralists should not allow their animals to roam within a 20km radius of the pond”)
 - **Chapter 4: Fishing in the Agoufou pond** (e.g. Article 16: “The use of motor pumps to evacuate water to gain access to catfish is strictly forbidden”)
 - **Chapter 5: Brick makers around the pond** (e.g. Article 18: “Access to the pond for making building bricks is free, especially during the dry season. It remains forbidden during the rainy season. To avoid conflicts with other users of the pond, brick making should be done in the area indicated for this purpose”)
 - **Chapter 6: Exploitation of wood and other forest products** (e.g. Article 21: “The mutilation of trees for other than medicinal purposes is strictly forbidden. The exploitation of protected species is strictly prohibited”)
 - **Chapter 7: Burgu millet cultivation**
 - **Chapter 8: Domestic use (water consumption etc.)**
- Management bodies of the pond and other resources
- Sanctions
- Final provisions

While including provisions related to natural resource management in peace agreements can represent a first step towards simultaneously promoting conservation and peace, most of these agreements address a broad range of natural resource management issues – often without adopting a conservation angle.

To better illustrate how improved natural resource management can support both conservation and peacemaking efforts, it helps to consider specific tools. Relevant natural resource management tools for peace at the national and local level include, but are not limited to: (I) designating protected areas; (II) restoring land; and (III) managing water usage. Each of these are further detailed in the following:

4.2.1 Designating protected areas

Protected areas maintain ecosystem services and can play a role in reducing the risks of conflict by directly contributing to livelihood security and wellbeing. They support food and water security through disaster risk reduction and provide spaces for people to relax. In Djibouti, for instance, the Day Forest Reserve protects the country’s remaining areas of

native forest, which are of prime importance to biodiversity and provide a source of food to local communities (IUCN, 2021). Protected areas can also reduce tensions “between or within countries by encouraging cooperation in addressing issues of mutual concern, sharing information and building trust” (IUCN, 2021: 39).

However, for protected areas to support conflict prevention and not to be the cause of conflict themselves, they need to be well-managed. The perceived trade-off between conservation and community needs to be carefully managed. In terms of conflict mitigation and resolution, conservation actors claim that the staff of protected areas can actively address conflict and mitigate its impact by “maintaining the law in areas where other government institutions are failing” (IUCN, 2021: 39). Moreover, protected area personnel can support negotiations and ceasefires in disputed areas by occupying a “grey area between a militarised state and rebel forces”, as seen in Colombia (IUCN, 2021: 39). Yet, such involvement does not come without risks, as park rangers are not necessarily trained in these types of actions. Involving ex-combatants in conservation activities as part of post-conflict peacebuilding is equally controversial in light of concerns about a trend towards militarised conservation that risks fuelling new tensions.

To date, examples of how protected areas could be leveraged by peacemaking practitioners in intra-state and highly localised conflicts are scarce. Protected areas are mostly discussed in the context of transboundary conservation areas (e.g. peace parks) to address inter-state tensions or conflict (see section 4.3.3). Similar to how it is done at the transboundary level, one idea could be for mediators to include the establishment of protected areas in national-level peace agreements to support conflict prevention. Alternatively, creating protected areas could be incorporated in conflict management agreements to protect the natural environment in times of armed conflict, thereby limiting conflict-related environmental degradation.

4.2.2 Restoring land for sustainable land use

Sustainable land-use systems are “productive strategies that integrate soils, water, animals and plants to support livelihoods while respecting the preferences of local farmers, ensuring the long-term productive potential of resources, and maintaining those resources’ environmental functions” (Morales Muñoz et al., 2021). Land restoration represents an important tool to support sustainable land management and reduce natural resource degradation. This, in turn, can reduce the risk of natural resource conflict and support sustainable peace, given that land degradation and resource competition are often among the root causes of conflict.

In the Sahel, sustainable land management techniques seek to re-establish biodiversity and provide economic and social benefits to local communities, thereby reducing intercommunal clashes over scarce resources (Kalilou, 2020). Planting gum acacia trees, for example, can help to maximise the benefits of rainfall by preventing water from running off and facilitating its infiltration, which improves water security. It also fosters intercommunal exchanges, and can increase the productivity of the land when gum acacia trees are interspersed with other types of plants (Kalilou, 2020).

Experts have highlighted that land restoration needs to be community-driven to be successful. Large-scale, top-down tree-planting projects – such as the African Union’s Great Green Wall initiative in the Sahel before adjusting its focus and approach – have “failed spectacularly because people do not just want trees – they want food” (Interview with a land restoration expert, 5 October 2021). Simple, low-tech, and cheap interventions developed in a bottom-up effort together with local communities are much more effective and have the potential to yield substantial gains, as shown by the success of farmer-managed natural regeneration in Niger. Such efforts can then also be scaled up and connected to national-level policy for larger impact.

Given that tensions around access to land and other natural resources are a driving force of farmer-herder conflicts in the Sahel, peacemaking and peacebuilding practitioners have started exploring opportunities to integrate land restoration into their work. They have come to realise that without land restoration, they will not secure lasting peace. With climate change, resources continue depleting and the available area of land does not increase. At the same time, land restoration experts have experienced that many of their projects are undermined by insecurity and conflict – which limits their access – as well as mistrust between communities (A Channer, personal communication, 29 September 2021).

Scientists and technical experts often have a good understanding of landscapes and the solutions needed to rehabilitate them, but they do not have the soft skills to actively engage communities and local leaders and help them understand the problems (Interview with a land restoration expert, 5 October 2021). This gap has led them to establish contact with peacemaking and peacebuilding organisations that are skilled in bringing different communities together and building trust (A Channer, personal communication, 29 September 2021). In Nigeria, for instance, the EverGreening Network for Forest and Land Restoration has worked with the Interfaith Mediation Centre to organise community conferences and use land restoration as an entry point (Interview with a land restoration expert, 6 October 2021). Yet, despite such emerging partnerships and similar projects led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and others, efforts to ‘connect the dots’ in the Sahel are still in their early stages.

4.2.3 Managing water usage

In many parts of the world, conflicts between different water users have increased due to a combination of water scarcity, environmental degradation and higher demand following population growth. Climate change further exacerbates water scarcity, making integrated water resource management (IWRM) an important tool for conflict prevention and reduction (Corbijn & Elamen, 2021). IWRM can be defined as an approach to water management that promotes “the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources in order to maximize economic and social welfare in an equitable manner, without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems” (UNEP, 2021).

IWRM differs from a conventional, demand-based water approach in that it balances water demand and supply with water availability. This ensures decisions on the construction of water infrastructure are made “bottom-up and collectively by representatives of different water user groups rather than by one specific user” (Corbijn & Elamen, 2021: 6). As such, the approach is particularly suitable for areas facing water-related conflict. The experience of development projects such as Rural Water for Sudan has shown that IWRM can reduce local conflicts or prevent their reoccurrence by enhancing mutual understanding and social cohesion among water user groups with different ethnic backgrounds and livelihoods (Corbijn & Elamen, 2021).

While a participatory and collective approach, in particular, has proven instrumental for the success of IWRM projects, its implementation is not always straightforward. IWRM projects are often carried out by water experts who might not necessarily have the required knowledge and experience of conflict resolution and negotiation. There is thus a high need for training courses on mediation or conflict resolution in the water management sector. An alternative could be to involve mediation practitioners in IWRM projects to facilitate the process and its design, while water experts contribute their thematic expertise.

4.3 Transboundary management arrangements

Transboundary management arrangements have grown in importance given the rise of inter-state conflict in various parts of the world. Three options and approaches could be particularly relevant for mediators: (I) promoting cooperation around water resources; (II) managing shared marine resources; and (III) establishing parks for peace.

4.3.1 Promoting cooperation around water resources – ‘Water Diplomacy’

Pollution, agriculture, climate change impacts, and population growth are all increasing pressures on the world’s water resources, with water scarcity representing a potential or existing source of tension between communities and countries (World Vision Australia, 2018; IUCN, 2021). Water diplomacy seeks to promote cooperation around shared water resources at different levels. This can range from local water arrangements where communities regulate irrigation, to binational or multilateral treaties for monitoring the water quality of a river, to regional and global instruments that regulate the uses of transboundary watercourses (IUCN, 2021; The Blue Peace, 2021).

Currently, the term water diplomacy is mostly used in the context of transboundary tensions. While water diplomacy finds its most immediate application when water is a source of conflict, it is also useful when water could be an incentive for cooperation and not necessarily intrinsic to an ongoing conflict. Introducing water-based incentives into negotiations can offer expanded opportunities for cooperation within larger peacebuilding processes, or even to support conflict prevention.

One example of water diplomacy is the ‘Good Water Neighbours Programme’ launched by the non-governmental organisation EcoPeace in 2001. The project works with communities and municipalities across Israel, Palestine and Jordan to raise awareness of their shared water reality and create the political will for transboundary cooperation on issues of water and sanitation. Several practical outcomes have been achieved, such as the construction of a sewage network in a Palestinian community with a connection to the network of the neighbouring Israeli community (EcoPeace Middle East, 2021).

Meanwhile, in Eastern Europe, the Ministers of Environment of Ukraine and Moldova signed a 2012 treaty on the sustainable management of the transboundary Dniester River Basin. The treaty’s objective is to advance cooperation in response to environmental and economic challenges affecting one of the largest transboundary rivers in Eastern Europe. It identifies principles and provides a framework for cooperation on the prevention and control of water pollution, water flow regulation, biodiversity conservation, protection of the Black Sea environment, and sustainable development (UNECE, 2017).

4.3.2 Managing shared marine resources

Climate change is expected to contribute to a large-scale redistribution of marine resources, which has the potential to lead to increased conflict unless it is effectively managed (IUCN, 2021). Multilateral policy solutions, and the creation of cooperative management authorities, can be tools that simultaneously build or maintain peace and conserve nature. However, transboundary fisheries management is not always effective in leveraging peace, especially when a country’s foreign policy or national financial interests do not align with a peaceful resolution to a marine resource conflict, or where disagreements on jurisdiction hinder communication and cooperation (IUCN, 2021).

Nevertheless, recent practice has shown that even in such difficult contexts there can still be room to address the shared management of marine resources and promote cooperation. Since 2018, for example, HD has informally convened policymakers and experts from China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam to identify practical

steps that would ensure the sustainability of fisheries management in the South China Sea. Sustainably managing fish stocks is a common concern shared by all of these countries; by selecting a more scientific focus as well as involving technical experts in the discussions, this approach was able to help depoliticise the issue and has led to cooperation.

In September 2021, policymakers and scientists from the five countries published a shared evidence-based update on the status of skipjack tuna stocks, leveraging regional expertise and information. The assessment – officially called the “Common Fisheries Resource Analysis” – represents a first step towards preventing an imminent collapse in fish stocks that would threaten the livelihoods and nutrition of millions of people and destabilise regional politics. It is also a good example of science diplomacy, showing that scientific cooperation activities can contribute to addressing transboundary issues related to environmental problems and help improve inter-state relations (Borton, 2021).

4.3.3 Establishing parks for peace

Peace parks are designations that may be applied to any Transboundary Conservation Area “dedicated to the promotion, celebration and/or commemoration of peace and cooperation” (Vasiljević et al., 2015: 14). Their contribution to peace is arguably connected to their creation of common governance structures and mechanisms for cooperation and biodiversity conservation, which in turn can facilitate trust-building and manage tensions between different parties (IUCN, 2021). The primary goals of peace parks typically also involve stimulating socio-economic development and creating livelihood opportunities for local communities (Krampe, Hegazi & VanDeweer, 2021). Peace parks can be established either after a conflict to promote reconciliation, or proactively to address negative dynamics that may threaten to evolve into conflict.

It is also possible to use peace parks or transboundary conservation areas as a means to solve border disputes, to maintain communication during a conflict or as a platform to facilitate negotiations in conflict-affected areas. For instance, to end one of the Western hemisphere’s longest-running armed territorial disputes – between Peru and Ecuador, in the Cordillera del Condor region – the mediators incorporated peace parks into their conflict resolution efforts. Demilitarised zones were turned into bi-national ecological protection zones on both sides of the disputed border (Kakabadse, Caillaux & Dumas, 2016).

While peace parks have been praised for their potential to link conservation and peacebuilding, in practice they have often failed to remedy violence and contribute to peace dividends. This was highlighted in a doctoral dissertation on the issue by Elaine Hsiao (2019), which examined 56 transboundary agreements and interviewed practitioners. The research found that the agreements establishing peace parks typically lack conflict sensitivity and often do not identify peace, conflict, or conflict resolution as an objective or process.

In particular, most transboundary conservation areas seem to assume that peace between states or peoples/communities will be a convenient side benefit of environmental cooperation (Hsiao, 2019). References to the participation of local communities or benefit-sharing, for instance, are typically vague and generic, with clauses not defining how or in what activities communities should participate. The agreements frequently favour “trickle-down” revenue schemes that rely on ecotourism development and fall short of community expectations (Hsiao, 2019). Peace parks can thus have adverse effects, causing tensions by generating local resistance, displacing indigenous communities or negatively affecting their livelihoods.

Despite such challenges linked to the establishment of peace parks, this tool is by no means doomed to fail to support the dual goals of conservation and peace. If transboundary agreements better involve and address the needs of communities, they can contribute to resolving conflicts and promoting cooperation (Hsiao, 2019). To do so, existing governance systems should serve as alternatives to build transboundary conservation efforts upon. In addition, legal agreements for sustained cooperation should be negotiated and formalised at an appropriate level, and the transboundary conservation activities should themselves be conflict-sensitive and conflict-resilient. In times or places of violent conflict, neutral third parties can usefully facilitate ongoing transboundary engagement, for instance through meetings, activities or information-sharing (Hsiao, 2019).

Peace parks are an old concept, yet they have regained traction in recent years with a multitude of actors trying to address the shortcomings of earlier transboundary conservation areas established in the 1990s and early 2000s. One example of such renewed efforts is the work of the Peace and Biodiversity Dialogue Initiative (PBDI), launched by the Republic of Korea as President of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2015 (CBD, 2017). The PBDI focuses on promoting transboundary conservation initiatives as instruments for peace. This includes facilitating and encouraging dialogue among groups of countries to establish new peace parks and effectively manage existing ones. So far, the initiative has engaged different environmental ministries (e.g. in West Africa) in discussions to establish peace parks.

While the PBDI focuses on transboundary conservation areas in general, other organisations have suggested the creation of maritime peace parks in particular. In the West Philippine Sea, for instance, the environmental activist group Kalikasan People's Network for the Environment has repeatedly called for the declaration of the region as a maritime peace park amidst growing tensions and threats over maritime conflict. Establishing a peace park would involve demilitarising and conserving the area, which is severely affected by ecological degradation and climate vulnerability (Mayuga, 2022).

5. Recommendations for mediators

Based on analysis of existing research and available case studies, there seem to be two key ways in which conflict mediators can integrate conservation into their peacemaking efforts. These are detailed in the following.

1. Establishing partnerships with organisations working on land restoration to address conflict drivers, provide livelihoods and ensure sustainable peace.

- **WHY?** Competition over scarce resources and land degradation are at the heart of many conflicts, especially at the local level. Connecting peacemaking efforts to land restoration can reduce violent conflict and casualties by offering an opportunity to sustain conflict-affected communities' livelihoods and food security. Land restoration may also help to bolster the sustainability of any peace or violence-reduction agreement.
- **WHERE?** Areas that would be particularly suited to land restoration are the Sahel and the Middle East. In the Sahel, land degradation and tensions around natural resources are among the driving forces of conflict between farmers and herders. While some organisations have launched land restoration efforts, the responsible scientists and technical experts often impose programmes in a top-down manner and lack the skills to interact with (conflict-affected) communities in a meaningful way. At the same time, mediation tends to focus on facilitating resource-sharing agreements that typically ignore land restoration and lack perspectives for implementation.

In the Middle East, land restoration – especially the regeneration of agricultural land – could be of interest to mediators as well. In Iraq’s Basra governorate, for instance, a combination of conflict, reduced water supplies, pollution and climate change has devastated agriculture, leading to rural migration, unemployment, poverty, a flourishing of informal and illicit economies, and the growth of violent groups. Tensions between Iraq and Iran, as well as Iran’s dominant influence in the border area, have further exacerbated the situation (Hasan, 2022). The sustainable recovery of agricultural lands could help reduce instability and provide the foundation for more sustainable peace. Peacemaking organisations could contribute to this by mediating access to hard-to-reach areas to enable demining and reforestation activities.

- **HOW?** Peacemaking organisations know how to build trust between different groups and could create the space to kick-start community-led discussions, supported by scientific input. They could use their detailed social, political and cultural understanding of the local context as well as their vast network and access to hard-to-reach areas to help partner organisations carry out restoration activities. Peace sector actors are also in a good position to liaise with national government actors to eliminate any obstacles to land restoration efforts at the local level.

In the Sahel, for instance, peacemaking actors could continue their current agro-pastoral mediation work, bringing local communities together with leaders to mediate issues of natural resource access and use. In addition to this, with the help of partners engaged in land restoration (including UNEP, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), World Vision and the EverGreening Network for Forest and Land Restoration), they could use dialogues to communicate the benefits of land restoration to local communities. Communities would have the space to discuss land restoration in relation to their livelihood needs. Overall, mediators would have to ensure that any peace agreement or declaration explicitly addresses land restoration activities, which would then be implemented by communities with the help of local land restoration partners.

2. Exploring opportunities to facilitate the negotiation of transboundary management arrangements.

- **WHY?** Transboundary resource management is particularly important in light of the risks and impacts of climate change, which are not country-specific and thus require cross-border cooperation and agreement. Transboundary cooperation is also important to guarantee ecological connectivity and the protection of migratory species. Moreover, as highlighted above, transboundary cooperation on environmental issues such as marine resources can play a key role in conflict prevention or mitigation. Private diplomacy actors are facilitating or planning to facilitate several inter-state dialogues touching on environmental issues, especially at a regional level. Looking ahead, they could build on their current science diplomacy efforts by engaging with a broader range of conservation actors and investigating different transboundary cooperation models.
- **HOW?** Peacemaking actors could explore two approaches linked to transboundary management:

(1) Water diplomacy

Peacemaking organisations could support the negotiation of agreements on water use and access to build confidence among parties, promote cooperation and prevent violence by combining their expertise in dialogue and mediation with the knowledge of water experts. A water diplomacy approach could be particularly suitable to address ‘frozen’ conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, as there are many transboundary waterways and shared concerns about water pollution.

(2) Biodiversity conservation agreements

Peacemaking organisations could also increase their engagement with conservation actors who seek to facilitate agreements around biodiversity conservation and the creation of so-called peace parks. While supporting the creation of peace parks might be beyond peacemaking organisations' current mandate and pose significant risks, conservation could present an entry point for discussions between conflict parties. Moreover, peacemaking actors could use cooperation around biodiversity conservation as a confidence-building measure. To identify the feasibility and appropriateness of such approaches, peacemaking actors should liaise with key conservation actors such as the CBD Secretariat and IUCN.

6. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of growing violence related to the environment and the need for more environmentally-sensitive mediation practice, this paper explored how peacemaking practitioners could address conservation in the context of peace negotiations and agreements. In doing so, it sought to expand the perspective of peacemaking organisations beyond existing environmental peacemaking efforts, which rarely consider conservation and its contribution to sustainable peace.

The paper showed that natural resource governance and management in particular offer a variety of opportunities to connect conservation and peacemaking at different levels. These range from facilitating local-level agreements on shared, sustainable resource governance to engaging communities in dialogue around land restoration or using transboundary conservation as an entry point for discussions. While pursuing these opportunities requires engaging with new actors and themes, the role of peacemaking organisations does not have to change fundamentally. Though they should have a basic understanding of conservation and the conservation community, mediators do not need to become conservation experts. Instead, peacemaking practitioners should continue doing what they know best – using their networks to facilitate dialogue or mediate between conflict parties and find creative ways of building trust and confidence.

Establishing partnerships with conservation actors can help create more systematic linkages between biodiversity conservation and peacemaking, leading to mutually beneficial outcomes that simultaneously benefit nature and promote peace. From a mediator's perspective, the need to achieve such dual outcomes will only grow over the coming years. In a world characterised by the climate and biodiversity crises, where environment-related human security risks are intensifying, mediation and dialogue efforts that seek to ensure lasting peace cannot ignore environmental protection or sustainable resource sharing and governance.

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