

Cooling the heat: mediation in a warming world

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Climate change is reshaping conflict dynamics around the world. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and environmental degradation interact with political and socio-economic pressures, exacerbating insecurity and instability, particularly in conflict-affected contexts. At the same time, shared climate and environmental risks create space for cooperation between conflict parties. Peacemaking practice is evolving rapidly in response to these dynamics.¹ Some of today's most innovative and effective mediation efforts are taking place at the intersection of climate, environment and conflict. Many conflict parties are willing to engage on these issues, and mediators are increasingly using environmental entry points to develop new approaches and achieve creative outcomes.

This briefing provides mediators with practical insights into where and how climate- and environment-related mediation is delivering tangible impact and concludes by examining the emerging geopolitical challenges of the 'green' transition.

Climate and peace mediation in action

Mediation practice is converging around seven thematic areas where climate- and environment-related dynamics create both conflict risks and opportunities for engagement. These areas reflect different levels of operational maturity and cross-sector integration.

Some of these domains – particularly *mediation of natural resource management in conflict-affected contexts* and *addressing the role of water in armed conflicts and peace processes* – are established forms of practice, with repeated application across diverse conflict settings and agreements that have reduced violence and improved resource governance. Others, such as *inter-state cooperation on climate and environmental risks*, are evolving rapidly. They are marked by growing diplomatic practice, scientific cooperation, norm development and institutional engagement. A third group, including *climate-induced displacement*; *nature conservation in armed conflict contexts*; *environmental protection in armed conflict*; and *climate action and peacemaking in conflict-affected contexts* remains an emerging area of practice. In these domains, isolated agreements have facilitated the

Overview: Degree of consolidation of the various areas of climate-related mediation practice*

Practice area	Scale: extent to which practices have been replicated across contexts	Impact: agreements and cooperation between conflict parties taking place	Integration: degree of cross-sector cooperation between mediation and climate/environmental actors	Degree of consolidation
Natural resource management in conflict-affected contexts	Extensive across multiple conflict contexts	Agreements on access, management, and dispute resolution	Well-established	Established
Water in armed conflict and peace processes	Increasingly across local and transboundary contexts	Water-sharing, protection and repairs of infrastructure, governance mechanisms	Limited but growing technical integration	Established
Inter-state cooperation on climate/environmental risks	Repeated and increasing, but geographically selective	Joint governance and coordination, mechanisms; escalation prevention	Growing scientific and diplomatic cooperation	Evolving
Environmental protection in armed conflict	Limited operational mediation practice	Isolated local arrangements, mostly infrastructure protection measures	Growing legal and environmental engagement	Emergent
Nature conservation and armed conflict	Fragmented but increasing	Management arrangements with local communities, rarely with armed actors	Nascent conservation-mediation cooperation	Emergent
Climate-induced displacement	Limited and context-specific	Isolated local agreements on relocation and land access	Little cross-sectoral engagement	Emergent
Climate action and peacemaking in conflict-affected contexts	Limited and context-specific, more policy focused	Moving towards practice, mostly local adaptation initiatives	On policy level, nascent operational partnerships	Emergent

* These reflect the operational maturity of mediation practice, rather than the political importance or future significance of a particular area.

protection of civilians, environmental protection and relocation processes, but mediation practice and cross-sectoral cooperation are still developing. Nevertheless, these areas already point to important future directions for peace mediation.

While these practices differ in scope, actors, and modalities, they collectively illustrate how mediators are adapting to today's climate and security realities and increasingly use climate and environmental issues as tools for dialogue, cooperation, and stabilisation.

This briefing highlights the specific challenges mediators are well-placed to address, while illustrating the approaches, impacts, and examples of each practice area.

“For more than a decade, mediators have supported communities and local authorities in negotiating disputes over access to and use of natural resources, often with the consent of non-state armed groups.”

Natural resource management in conflict-affected contexts

Climate impacts and environmental degradation – such as desertification, erratic rainfall, and declining soil fertility² – exacerbate competition over natural resources.³ These pressures trigger disputes that can intersect with broader socio-political tensions and conflict dynamics, as seen in parts of West Africa and the Sahel.⁴

For more than a decade, mediators have supported communities and local authorities in negotiating disputes over access to and use of natural resources, often with the consent of non-state armed groups.⁵ These arrangements regulate access, reduce violence, and strengthen local stability. In the last few years, they have also started incorporating climate adaptation measures, further contributing to community resilience.⁶

In Nigeria, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) has supported climate-sensitive ‘natural resource peace agreements’ that have reduced violence and strengthened cooperation among communities on how to manage shared resources.⁷ These agreements have also prompted locally led climate adaptation initiatives such as land rehabilitation, afforestation and water conservation. In the Sahel, HD has facilitated agreements between pastoralists and farmers on issues such as grazing corridors, while the European Institute of Peace has supported local mechanisms for resolving and preventing disputes over land and natural resources,⁸ contributing to improved stability and reduced violence.

Water in armed conflict and peace processes

Water scarcity alone does not cause conflict, and mediators do not deal with ‘water wars’ as such.⁹ But combined with weak governance and political disputes, water issues can exacerbate tensions from the local to the transboundary level. Water resources are also increasingly impacted by climate change and weaponised by conflict parties, and the indirect consequences of warfare (neglected maintenance, contamination, and disrupted services) contribute to escalating humanitarian needs.¹⁰

To prevent these tensions and consequences from escalating, mediators facilitate agreements on access, allocations, and governance, and help establish dispute-resolution mechanisms. These processes improve the quantity and quality of water, while reducing tensions between conflict parties.¹¹

In north-eastern Syria, local mediation processes have led to agreements on canal rehabilitation, even during the civil war. These initiatives have not only restored agricultural livelihoods for thousands of people but helped reduce intercommunal tensions.¹² In Iraq, where pressure on local water resources is increasing, dialogue led to a water-sharing agreement and new infrastructure, curbing illegal water use and ensuring fair water distribution.¹³

However, despite growing water-related mediation efforts, few initiatives fully integrate technical water resource management expertise, limiting the technical feasibility and sustainability of agreements in conflict contexts.

Inter-state cooperation on climate and environmental risks

Climate impacts and environmental degradation are not confined to national boundaries. They can heighten tensions between states,¹⁴ and intersect with rising geopolitical competition and inter-state conflicts, increasing insecurity and conflict escalation risks.

Mediators can help reduce tensions between states by facilitating dialogues that enable data sharing on resource stocks and the state of shared ecosystems, thereby developing a common understanding of shared climate change impacts and environmental challenges. These dialogues also help build institutional frameworks for long-term transboundary cooperation, escalation prevention, and environmental sustainability. Mediators are also well-placed to channel the perspectives of communities and technical experts into these dialogues, ensuring more inclusive and relevant outcomes.



Mahipur village in Bangladesh, on the Bay of Bengal, during a fishing ban.
Photo: © Mashiat Noor Prapti

In the South China Sea, the creation of a joint working group between littoral states has demonstrated how shared science can build trust across political divides.¹⁵ In the Bay of Bengal, an informal regional dialogue led to improved marine science cooperation and regional coordination instruments for maritime law enforcement agencies.¹⁶

“ Mediators can help operationalise environmental protection through dialogue with armed actors. ”

Environmental protection in armed conflict

Armed conflicts can cause severe environmental damage that frequently persists long after hostilities end.¹⁷ International legal frameworks have long sought to mitigate these risks, but have rarely been translated into practice, and modern warfare is causing unprecedented levels of environmental harm.¹⁸

Advances in legal frameworks – such as the revised ICRC guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict¹⁹ and the Principles on the Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts (PERAC)²⁰ – now provide a framework for practical measures for protecting the environment and supporting post-conflict recovery. By engaging with armed actors, governments, and environmental authorities, mediators can help put these into practice. Measures include facilitating agreements between belligerents on demilitarising protected areas, safety guarantees for environmental actors and critical environmental infrastructure, or the clearance of the remnants of war.²¹

During earlier phases of the conflict in Ukraine, OSCE-facilitated local ceasefires helped reduce environmental and public health risks by enabling repairs to damaged water, sanitation, and energy infrastructure along the contact line.²² These helped prevent further deterioration of systems whose failure risked essential civilian services, and demonstrate how mediators can operationalise pragmatic forms of cooperation amid ongoing hostilities and in the absence of political agreements.²³

“ Conservation outcomes are stronger when engagement continues during conflict, rather than pausing activities. ”

Nature conservation and armed conflict

National parks and wildlife reserves often overlap with – or border – regions affected by armed conflict.²⁴ Research has found that over 80% of the major armed conflicts between 1950 and 2000 occurred directly within global biodiversity hotspots,²⁵ but also that biodiversity in those



Vast forest areas in Meta Department, Colombia, were cut down after FARC rebels withdrew following the 2016 peace agreement. Photo: HuongLy BuiDuong, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)

regions was significantly more stable when conservation actors remained engaged during armed conflict.²⁶ As a result, conservation landscapes become spaces where conservation objectives, community rights, and conflict dynamics intersect.²⁷

Conservation actors are increasingly drawing on mediation approaches and actors to support them in negotiating access arrangements for park rangers or establishing inclusive and conflict-sensitive park management structures.²⁸

In Colombia, the peace process between the government and the FARC addressed environmental governance in protected areas long under the influence of armed groups. While many protected areas have seen increased deforestation since the agreement,²⁹ the case nevertheless illustrates how peace processes can create space to address conservation issues. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the *Wildlife Conservation Society* has partnered with HD to facilitate dialogue with armed actors on the demilitarisation of the Kahuzi-Biega national park, and to support discussions on deforestation and restorative justice for indigenous communities.

Climate-induced displacement

Climate impacts such as droughts, floods, and sea-level rise are driving migration and displacement,³⁰ which in turn place pressure on land and services in host communities.³¹

Mediators facilitate dialogue between displaced populations, host communities, and authorities on relocation arrangements, land access, service provision, and resource use.³² Such interventions reduce tensions and support peaceful integration or return.

Experience shared at the 2025 Bangsamoro Mediators Forum highlighted how mediators in Pacific Island contexts are already addressing conflicts related to climate-induced displacement through dialogues and agreements between island communities on land provision and relocation processes.

Climate action and peacemaking in conflict-affected contexts

Climate vulnerability and conflict often reinforce each other. Climate change affects resources, livelihoods, and governance, while conflict undermines adaptive capacity, creating a vicious cycle of vulnerability and instability.³³

“Aligning climate adaptation and peacemaking efforts can help break the cycle of vulnerability and instability.”

Integrating climate action and peacemaking helps break this cycle. Mediators can engage at this intersection in several ways. First, an increasing number of National Adaptation Plans³⁴ reference climate adaptation as a way to prevent or resolve conflict,³⁵ providing entry points for dialogue. Second, when supporting parties to reach political agreements, mediators can encourage the inclusion of explicit environmental commitments. This has been shown to lead to greater adoption of climate mitigation policies following conflict.³⁶ Third, mediators can support community resilience, for example through dialogues and agreements on issues such as the introduction of decentralised renewable energy systems.³⁷ There is ample evidence that systems such as solar mini-grids can strengthen livelihoods, improve access to basic services, reduce dependence on vulnerable fuel supply chains, and increase resilience to climate and security shocks.³⁸

Although climate-peace integration is still more policy discourse than mediation practice, efforts are increasingly aimed at operationalising joint climate and peacemaking initiatives that address shared drivers of vulnerability, strengthen resilience, and reduce the risk of future conflict.³⁹ In Somalia, environmental peacebuilding support to communities through a partnership between IOM, UNEP and the Berghof Foundation linked community-owned adaptation planning with dialogue processes and infrastructure initiatives to promote climate resilience and peace.⁴⁰

Looking ahead: green geopolitics and global security

The above practice areas demonstrate how mediation is adapting to today's security and climate realities, and that climate-sensitive mediation is an increasingly effective tool for engaging conflict parties and achieving meaningful impacts that benefit both people and planet.

The ultimate frontier for climate and peace mediation may lie at a higher level still: the global transition to low-carbon societies. The 'green' transition is increasing global demand for critical minerals – many of which are located in conflict areas and environmentally sensitive regions – and is intersecting with growing geopolitical tensions. Competition over these resources, unintended consequences of the transition, and growing climate and environmental pressures, risk generating new global conflict dynamics. Fundamental differences between states that pursue and those that oppose the green transition may further deepen geopolitical divides.⁴¹

These trends point to a landscape in which climate and environmental issues are increasingly central to global security,⁴² and where mediation actors have an active role to play in supporting a peaceful *and* sustainable future.

“Explicit environmental commitments in peace agreements lead to greater adoption of climate mitigation policies following conflict.”

Endnotes

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