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## From Conflict to Conservation: How Environmental Security can foster Peace.

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### Abstract

The article tries to explore the intricate relationship between environmental security and peacebuilding efforts. This paper delves into the notion that environmental factors are increasingly becoming intertwined with conflicts and conversely, they can also serve as catalysts for peace and stability. It highlights importance of recognizing and addressing the environmental dimensions of conflicts and how leveraging environmental resources and sustainable practices can contribute to post- conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. The paper outlines the policy implications of integrating environmental security considerations into peacebuilding frameworks. It highlights the need for international organizations, governments, NGOs to work collaboratively in order to develop strategies that prioritize both conflict prevention and environmental sustainability. It also underscores the significance of acknowledging the environmental dimensions of conflicts, while also advocating for the potential of environmental cooperation in fostering peace. One of the remarkable facets of environmental security is its inherent ability to transcend political and cultural divides.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Conservation, Environmental Security, Peace, Ecology, Resource Scarcity, Climate Change, Diplomacy and Sustainable Development.

### Introduction

The relationship between conflict and the environment has long been a topic of interest in the realms of geopolitics, international relations, and environmental studies. Historically, conflicts over natural resources have been a recurring theme in the annals of human history, underscoring the inseparable link between environmental vulnerabilities and geopolitical tensions. As the world grapples with the increasing pressures of resource scarcity, climate change and ecological degradation, understanding the intricate interplay between environmental security and peace becomes more crucial than ever. Scarce resources whether water, land or minerals often become focal points of contention, sparking confrontations at local, national and even international levels. In a world grappling with complex global challenges, the intricate interplay between environmental issues and international conflicts has come to the forefront of scholarly and policy discussions. The profound impact of resource scarcity, climate change and ecological degradation on conflict dynamics has prompted a paradigm shift in how we view security and peace. This article delves into the transformative potential of environmental security in fostering peace, elucidating how the preservation of natural resources and sustainable management can serve as catalysts for conflict resolution and the establishment of lasting harmonious relationships. This article delves into the complex dynamics between conflict and conservation, highlights how prioritizing environmental security can contribute to fostering peace on a global scale. The nexus between environmental security and peace is a profound testament to the interdependence of human and ecological systems. From conflicts fueled by resource scarcity to the potential for cooperative conservation efforts, the influence of environmental factors on conflict dynamics cannot be overlooked. By recognizing the potential for shared resources and cooperative environmental stewardship, nations can transition from adversaries to partners, establishing a legacy of peace for generations to come. The road ahead is challenging, but the promise of a world where environmental security fosters peace serves as a beacon of hope in an otherwise turbulent landscape.

### Environmental Degradation and Conflict

The link between environmental degradation and conflict is multifaceted. Scarce resources such as water and arable land can become catalysts for competition and ultimately, conflict among communities and nations. The conflicts are exacerbated by the intensifying impacts of climate change, which amplify resource scarcity, destabilize ecosystems and magnify existing social and economic inequalities. Consequently, understanding and addressing the root causes of these conflicts through the lens of environmental security becomes imperative. The struggle for control over valuable resources has historically been a driver of tensions and hostilities, exemplified by disputes over the Nile River's waters among African nations or conflicts arising from competition for oil-rich territories. Moreover, environmental degradation can exacerbate existing social and economic disparities, leading to unrest and instability within societies.

### Climate Change as a Threat Multiplier

Climate change amplifies the complexity of environmental security and its impact on rising sea levels, extreme weather events and changing precipitation patterns pose significant challenges to food security, displacement and infrastructure vulnerability. As these climate-induced stressors intensify, they can create conditions ripe for conflicts, particularly in regions already grappling with political instability. Climate change acts as a "threat multiplier", magnifying existing tensions and contributing to the potential for violence. The realization of environmental security's potential is not without challenges. The complex web of geopolitical interests, varying degrees of ecological awareness and the need for equitable resource distribution present formidable hurdles. Moreover, the realization of environmental security's promise necessitates an integrated approach, harmonizing policies related to diplomacy, conflict prevention, resource management and sustainable development. Such an interdisciplinary approach requires cooperation not only among governments but also among international organizations, civil society and academia.

### Conservation as a Path to Peace

While environmental degradation and climate change can fuel conflict, conservation efforts offer a pathway to peace. Recognizing the vital role that ecosystems play in supporting livelihoods, reducing vulnerabilities and fostering stability, governments and international organizations are increasingly embracing conservation as a strategy to prevent conflicts. The transformative potential of environmental security is perhaps most evident in post-conflict scenarios. The aftermath of protracted conflicts often leaves landscapes marred by environmental degradation, rendering them inhospitable to both human populations and ecosystems. Integrating environmental rehabilitation and restoration into post-conflict reconstruction efforts not only rejuvenates the natural environment but also aids in rebuilding social fabric. In this context, environmental restoration becomes a symbol of renewal and collaboration, embodying the prospects for a shared future free from scars of conflicts.

Here are some ways in which environmental security and conservation intersect:

1. **Transboundary Cooperation:** Shared ecosystems often straddle national borders, necessitating

cooperation among neighboring countries. Collaborative efforts to manage transboundary resources such as rivers and forests, can promote diplomatic engagement and build trust between nations that might otherwise be at odds.

2. **Resource Management:** Sustainable management of natural resources, including water, fisheries and forests can reduce competition and prevent conflicts over these assets. Equitable access and distribution of these resources can mitigate grievances and create a more stable environment.
3. **Community Engagement:** Involving local communities in conservation efforts empowers them to safeguard their natural resources. This empowerment can foster a sense of ownership, strengthen community cohesion and contribute to the prevention of conflict.
4. **Economic Opportunities:** Conservation initiatives often create opportunities for sustainable livelihood such as eco-tourism and sustainable agriculture. These economic activities can contribute to poverty reduction and promote stability within communities.
5. **Environmental Diplomacy:** Environmental issues can provide a common ground for dialogue between conflicting parties. Environmental diplomacy focused on shared concerns like pollution, deforestation and climate adaptation can facilitate communication and build bridges between adversaries.
6. **Preventing Displacement:** Conservation efforts that protect ecosystems also protects habitats and homes. This can prevent displacement of communities due to environmental degradation, reducing the potential for conflicts caused by forced migration.
7. **Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:** Environmental agreements and protocols can serve as confidence building measures that create a foundation for broader peace negotiations. Collaborative efforts to address environmental challenges can establish a positive precedent for resolving larger disputes.

### Examples of Environmental Security in Conflict Zone

Environmental security in conflict zone refers to efforts and strategies aimed at protecting and managing the environment amidst ongoing conflicts. Here are a few examples:

1. **Water Resource Management:** In conflict areas, access to clean water can be compromised. Efforts to ensure equitable access to water sources, distribution and treatment facilities can help reduce tensions arising from water scarcity.
2. **Biodiversity Protection:** Preserving local flora and fauna is crucial in conflict zones where natural habitats may be affected by military activities. Conservation initiatives and protected areas can help prevent further degradation.
3. **Landmine Removal:** Removing landmines and unexploded ordnance not only reduces the risk to human life but also contributes to environmental safety by preventing soil contamination and allowing for land restoration.
4. **Pollution Prevention:** Addressing pollution caused by conflict-related activities such as burning of fossil-fuels, waste disposal and oil-spills can mitigate long-term environmental damage and health risks for both the environment and local populations.

5. **Forest Conservation:** Conflicts can lead to deforestation through activities like illegal logging and resource exploitation. Collaborative efforts to enforce anti-logging laws and promote sustainable forestry can help protect valuable ecosystems.
6. **Renewable Energy Initiatives:** Introducing renewable energy sources like solar and wind power can reduce the reliance on fossil fuels, which often become scarce and expensive during conflicts.
7. **Emergency Response Plans:** Developing plans to respond to environmental emergencies like chemical spills or natural disasters during conflicts can help minimize their impact on ecosystems and local population.
8. **Peace Park Creation:** Creating transboundary peace parks or protected areas can encourage cooperation between conflicting parties for conservation and resource management.
9. **Waste Management:** Implementing proper waste disposal and recycling systems can prevent accumulation of hazardous materials and reduce the risk of environmental contamination.
10. **Environmental Agreements:** Including environmental considerations in peace negotiations and agreement can ensure that rehabilitation and protection of the environment are prioritized alongside other conflict resolution efforts.

#### Case Studies in Environmental Peace building

There are several case studies that illustrate the transformative potential of prioritizing environmental security in conflict zones:

1. **Jordan River Basin:** In the midst of political tensions between Israel, Jordan and Palestine, co-operative efforts to address water scarcity in the Jordan River Basin have fostered trust and collaboration among the parties involved. The Jordan River Basin serves as a testament to how shared environmental challenges can catalyze diplomatic engagement.
2. **Columbia's National Parks:** In Columbia, efforts to establish and protect national parks in areas formerly controlled by rebel groups have contributed to post-conflict recovery and reconciliation. These parks not only preserve biodiversity but also offer economic opportunities for local communities.
3. **Gorongosa National Park, Mozambique:** Ravaged by civil war, Gorongosa National Park has become a symbol of recovery and peacebuilding. Conservation efforts have not only revived the Park's ecosystems but have also created jobs and facilitated dialogue between former adversaries.
4. **Transboundary Conservation Areas:** The Virunga Massif in East Africa, shared by Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, demonstrates how protected areas can encourage cross-border collaboration and stability.
5. **Indus Water Treaty:** The treaty between India and Pakistan, despite their political differences, has maintained water sharing from the Indus River system, highlighting how water resources management can contribute to stability.
6. **Mekong River Commission:** Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam cooperate through this commission to manage the Mekong River's resources, balancing economic development and environmental protection.

7. **FARC's Transition in Colombia:** The peace process involving the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) has led to reforestation initiatives, showing how post-conflict efforts can be intertwined with environmental restoration.

#### Conclusion

The interconnectedness of environmental security, conflict and peace underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach to global challenges. As environmental degradation and climate change continue to pose threats to stability and peace, proactive conservation measures hold immense potential in preventing conflicts and fostering co-operation. Enterprises aimed at environmental conservation and sustainable resource management emerge as potent pathways to not only mitigate conflicts but also lay the groundwork for enduring peace. A remarkable example of this phenomenon can be found in the shared management of transboundary water bodies. Collaborative efforts between neighboring countries to sustainably harness and allocate water resources not only reduce the potential for disputes but also foster a spirit of cooperation, bolstering diplomatic relations. Moreover, the pursuit of renewable energy sources and the transition to green economies not only mitigate environmental degradation but also creates opportunities for economic growth, reducing competition over finite resources. By recognizing the shared responsibility for preserving the planet's resources and ecosystems, nations can lay the foundation for a more peaceful and sustainable world. Through transboundary co-operation, community engagement and economic empowerment, environmental security can become a bridge from conflict to conservation and ultimately to lasting peace. The notion of a shared planet, with interconnected ecosystems that transcend national boundaries, beckons nations to collaborate in order to address shared challenges. Conservation efforts that recognize the significance of biodiversity and ecosystems offer a common ground for nations to engage in cooperative endeavors, transcending the often rhetoric of traditional security concerns. This cooperative spirit can lay the foundation for trust-building measures and dialogue, indispensable components of conflict resolution.

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