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IS THE UNITED NATIONS UNITED FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING? THE CASE OF AFGHANISTAN: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

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Abstract: *Since the end of the Cold War, studies regarding the linkages between environment, security and conflict have been increased. Parallel to this growth, the impacts of environmental problems (such as scarcity, resource curse, etc.) have begun to be seen as critical and imperative in peacebuilding processes. Within this framework, environmental peacebuilding appeared as an emerging approach that has its roots in the works of Ken Conca and Geoffrey Dabelko in 2002. In 2013, Environmental Peacebuilding Association (EnPAx) was established as a knowledge platform including the community of practice for this particular field. Besides, many international organizations such as the European Union, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN) Agencies are increasingly adopted an environmental peacebuilding*

* <https://doi.org/10.54842/ustich.1142860>

approach. In particular, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) carries out practices in this context. Within this framework, this paper will critically evaluate UNEP's assessment program in Afghanistan through the lens of environmental peacebuilding. First, the concept of environmental peacebuilding will briefly be explained. Subsequently, UNEP's initiative of "Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment in Afghanistan" will be used as a case model for environmental peacebuilding.

Keywords: *Environmental Peacebuilding, Afghanistan, UNEP*

BİRLEŞMİŞ MİLLETLER ÇEVRESEL BARIŞ İNŞASI İÇİN BİRLEŞMİŞ Mİ? BİRLEŞMİŞ MİLLETLER ÇEVRE PROGRAMININ DEĞERLENDİRMESİ: AFGANİSTAN VAKASI

Öz: *Soğuk Savaş'ın sona ermesinden bu yana çevre, güvenlik ve çatışma arasındaki bağlantılara yönelik çalışmalar artmıştır. Bu artışa paralel olarak, çevre sorunlarının (kıtık, kaynak laneti vb.) ele alınması barış inşası süreçlerinde kritik ve zorunlu olarak görülmeye başlanmıştır. Bu çerçevede, çevresel barış inşası, kökleri 2002 yılında Ken Conca ve Geoffrey Dabelko'nun çalışmalarında bulunan yükselen bir yaklaşım olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. 2013 yılında ise Çevre Barışı İnşası Derneği (EnPAx), bu alana yönelik uygulama camiasını içeren bir bilgi platformu olarak kurulmuştur. Ayrıca, Avrupa Birliği, Avrupa Güvenlik ve İşbirliği Teşkilatı (AGİT) ve Birleşmiş Milletler (BM) Ajansları gibi birçok uluslararası kuruluş, giderek artan bir şekilde çevresel barış inşası yaklaşımını benimsemektedir. Özellikle Birleşmiş Milletler Çevre Programı (UNEP), bu kapsamda uygulamalar yürütmektedir. Bu çerçevede, bu makale UNEP'in Afganistan'daki değerlendirme programını çevresel barış inşası merceğinden eleştirel olarak değerlendirecektir. Öncelikle çevresel barış inşası kavramı kısaca açıklanacaktır. Daha sonra, UNEP'in "Afganistan'da Çatışma Sonrası Çevresel Değerlendirme" girişimi, çevresel barışın inşası için bir vaka modeli olarak kullanılacaktır.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Çevresel Barış İnşası, Afganistan, UNEP*

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, studies regarding the linkages between environment, security and conflict have been increased.¹ Parallel to this growth, environmental problems (such as scarcity, resource curse, etc.) have begun to be seen as critical and imperative in peacebuilding processes.² Within this framework, environmental peacebuilding appeared as an emerging approach that has its roots in the works of Ken Conca and Geoffrey Dabelko³ and has been used as a tool to resolve two of today's most pressing and interconnected issues: violent conflict and adverse environmental change.⁴

The fundamental goal of environmental peacebuilding is to identify and resolve the underlying causes of conflicts in order to create lasting peace after years of war/conflict.⁵ Therefore, it can be understood as a 'continuum ranging from the absence of violent conflict to the unimaginability of violent conflict', which Dabelko and Conca mentioned before.⁶ Moreover, environmental peacebuilding has also been used as a mechanism for academic studies on peace, conflict and the environment, as well as for decision-makers/practitioners in their work on cases and concepts in peace negotiations, practices and agreements.⁷

In this context, Environmental Peacebuilding Association (EnPax) was established as a knowledge platform including the community of

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- 1 Michael Renner, 'Environmental security: the policy agenda', *Conflict, Security & Development* 4, no.3 (2004): 314.
 - 2 Tobias Ide, 'The dark side of environmental peacebuilding', *World Development* 127, no.104777. (2020): 1.
 - 3 Anaïs Dresse, Itay Fischhendler, Jonas Østergaard Nielsen and Dimitrios Zikos, 'Environmental peacebuilding: Towards a theoretical framework', *Cooperation and Conflict* 54, no.1, (2019): 101.
 - 4 Ide, 'The dark side of environmental peacebuilding', 6.
 - 5 Carl Bruch, David Jensen, Mikiyasu Nakayama and Jon Unruh, 'The Changing Nature of Conflict, Peacebuilding, and Environmental Cooperation', *The Environmental Law Reporter* 49, no.2, (2019): 10136.
 - 6 Mirza Sadaqat Huda, 'An ecological response to ethno-nationalistic populism: grassroots environmental peacebuilding in South Asia', *International Affairs* 97, no.1, (2021): 128.
 - 7 Tobias Ide, Carl Bruch, Alexander Carius, Ken Conca, Geoffrey Dabelko, Richard Matthew, and Erika Weinthal, 'The past and future(s) of environmental peacebuilding', *International Affairs* 97, no.1, (2021): 1-5.

practice for this particular field in 2013.⁸ Besides, many international organizations such as the European Union, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations (UN) Agencies are increasingly adopted an environmental peacebuilding approach.⁹ In particular, the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) has begun to conduct diverse networks by mobilizing practitioners and researchers in environmental peacebuilding practices.¹⁰ In line with its work, UNEP has observed that in the absence of policies regarding natural resources in post-conflict transition periods, decisions are taken by the most powerful stakeholders and these decisions are accepted by many decision makers. Once these decisions are made, it is very difficult to question, correct or reverse them. Therefore, the sooner decisions about resource governance are made, the longer it will affect whether this transition follows a peaceful or violent course.¹¹

Within this framework, this paper will critically evaluate UNEP's assessment program in Afghanistan through the lens of environmental peacebuilding. First, the concept of environmental peacebuilding will briefly be explained. Subsequently, UNEP's initiative of 'Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment in Afghanistan' will be used as a case model for environmental peacebuilding.

Environmental Peacebuilding

'In reforming management of our high-value natural resources, we are finding our way along the path from conflict to peace and sustainable development.' - Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Former President of Liberia, Nobel Peace Prize Recipient¹²

8 United Nations Environment Programme, Addressing the Role of Natural Resources in Conflict and Peacebuilding, Executive Summary of Progress from UNEP's Environmental Cooperation for Peacebuilding Programme 2008-2015, (United Nations Environment Programme, 2015), 7, accessed 20 June 2022,

https://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/ECP/ECP_executive_summary_progress_report_2015.pdf

9 Ide et al., 'The past and future(s) of environmental peacebuilding', 5.

10 Ibid, 6.

11 David Jensen and Amanda Kron, 'Environmental peacebuilding and the United Nations', in *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Conflict and Peacebuilding*, eds. Ashok Swain and Joakim Öjendal, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 128.

12 'Case of Liberia', *Convention Biological Diversity*, 24 October 2016, accessed 26 June 2022, <https://www.cbd.int/peace/information/resources/liberia/>.

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There are significant changes in the form of conflicts after the Cold War. Civil wars (intrastate conflicts) and internationalized intrastate conflicts (at least one of the conflicting parties has the backing of a foreign power) have largely supplanted traditional interstate warfare.¹³ (Melander, Pettersson, and Themnér 2016: 729-730) Changes in how wars are waged and subsidized since the 1990s, increased interest in peacebuilding with more frequent UN interventions. Accordingly, changes in international environmental policies and cooperation have affected the formation of environmental peacebuilding.¹⁴ Within this framework, environmental peacebuilding has become an emerging field¹⁵ for both researchers and practitioners.¹⁶ In this regard, one of the common definitions that used by many scholars and practitioner is:

‘Environmental peacebuilding comprises multiple approaches and pathways by which management of environmental issues integrated in and can support conflict prevention, mitigation, resolution and recovery.’¹⁷

The field of environmental peacebuilding has been developed through empirical research, various statistical analyses, case studies, review papers and reports.¹⁸ In terms of case studies, environmental peacebuilding has mainly been considered for underdeveloped and developing countries that are economically and socially dependent on natural resources in an unstable political atmosphere.¹⁹ Specifically, the empirical and conceptual studies of environmental peacebuilding are based on the work (as environmental peacemaking) of Ken Conca and Geoffrey Dabelko, which analyzes whether environmental collaboration may lead to peace in a broader form.²⁰ According to

13 Erik Melander, Therese Pettersson and Lotta Themnér, ‘Organized violence, 1989–2015’, *Journal of Peace Research* 53, no.5, (2016): 729-730.

14 Bruch et al., ‘The Changing Nature of Conflict’, 10134.

15 This paper will not review the historical background of environmental peacebuilding. For a brief history of the emergence of environmental peacebuilding, see **Ide et al. 2021** and **Bruch et al. 2019**.

16 Dresse et al., ‘Environmental peacebuilding: Towards a theoretical framework’, 113.

17 Carl Bruch, ‘An Introduction to Environmental Peacebuilding: Monitoring and Evaluation’ (PowerPoint presented at the Second International Conference on Environmental Peacebuilding, Geneva, 1-4 February, 2022).

18 Ide, ‘The dark side of environmental peacebuilding’, 3.

19 Ken Conca and Jennifer Wallace, ‘Environment and peacebuilding in war torn societies: Lessons from the UN Environment Programme’s experience with post-conflict assessment’, in *Assessing and Restoring Natural Resources in Post Conflict Peacebuilding*, eds. David Jensen and Steve Lonergan, (London: Earthscan, 2012), 68.

20 Huda, ‘An ecological response to ethno-nationalistic populism’, 122.

Conca and Dabelko, environmental cooperation in a conceptual framework as an independent variable may influence peace-related dependent variables.²¹ In the past years, this field has impressed many academics and practitioners and marked its (the publication of environmental peacemaking) 20th Anniversary in 2022.

The main factor in the emergence and the development of environmental peacebuilding is the emerging extensive environmental issues that have increasingly influenced conflict zones in the course of time.²² In this regard, addressing these environmental issues has become crucial to peacebuilding processes. If necessary actions are not taken against these challenges, human misery that increases the vulnerability of populations to natural disasters may be worsened in the short run, or the government's economic and social capacity and function may be jeopardized in the long term.²³ In this regard, environmental peacebuilding offers strategic techniques and methods to strengthen peacebuilding by taking environmental factors/stresses, especially natural resources and conflict linkages, into account. Furthermore, environmental peacebuilding operates in the context of conflicts, wars, social conflicts and politically fragile settings (structural violence to armed conflict) on multiple scales at the local, national as well as international levels.

21 Ibid, 122.

22 Conca and Wallace, 'Environment and peacebuilding in war torn societies', 63.

23 Ibid, 63.

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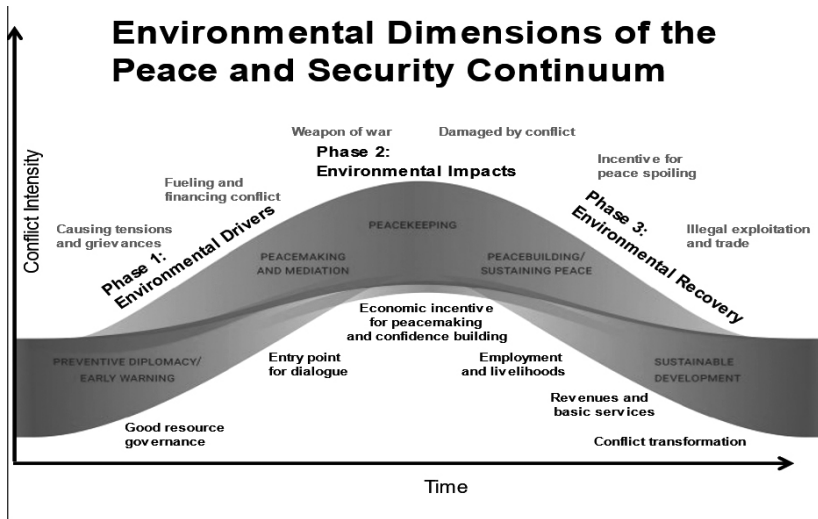


Table 1. Environmental Dimensions of the Peace and Security Continuum²⁴

In this context, initiatives to combat environmental stresses through environmental peacebuilding over time help to avert environment-related conflicts, establishing and maintaining a dialogue via cross-border environmental cooperation between conflicting parties and ensuring lasting peace while promoting conditions for sustainable development.²⁵ Hence, environmental peacebuilding has been mainly applied to the studies of ‘security, livelihoods and economy as well as politics and social relations’ to analyze the past, active and potential future conflict cases at different levels such as militarily, socially and politically.²⁶

In the light of diverse works within the literature, environmental peacebuilding provides a meta-framework that has evolved into an interdisciplinary structure including extensive study and

²⁴ United Nations Environment Programme, ‘Addressing the Role of Natural Resources in Conflict and Peacebuilding’, 2.

²⁵ Alexander Carius, *Environmental Peacebuilding: Conditions for Success*, (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2007), 61, accessed 18 June 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/CariusEP12.pdf>

²⁶ Ide et al., ‘The past and future(s) of environmental peacebuilding’, 3-4.

implementation areas, as well as the engagement of various actors. Thus, many scholars and practitioners use different definitions and terms interchangeably for environmental peacebuilding, such as ecological diplomacy, science diplomacy, environmental peacemaking and peace ecology.²⁷ Within this framework, it is generally defined as;

‘The process of governing and managing natural resources and the environment to support durable peace. It includes efforts to prevent, mitigate, resolve, and recover from violent conflict, and involves renewable natural resources (such as land, water, and fisheries), non-renewable natural resources (such as minerals, oil, and gas), and ecosystems (including their services). Environmental peacebuilding ultimately focuses on the mix of renewable and non-renewable natural resources available to a country that can support stabilization, reconstruction, and development.’²⁸

Population growth, climate change, environmental degradation and resource curse have an increasing impact on the capacity of an already unstable government to meet the needs of the population in post-conflict areas, thereby fueling conflict. In these conditions, building a lasting peace without addressing the significant role that natural resources had in shaping the commencement, financing, and conduct of a conflict is difficult, if not unachievable. Within this framework, some facts are:

- At least 18 violent conflicts have been fueled by the exploitation of natural resources since 1990.²⁹
- Looking back over the past sixty years, at least forty percent of all intrastate conflicts can be associated with natural resources.³⁰
- Considering the previous 60 years, at least 40% of all intrastate conflicts were linked to natural resources.³¹

27 Ide et al., ‘The past and future(s) of environmental peacebuilding’, 2.

28 Bruch et al., ‘The Changing Nature of Conflict’, 10144.

29 United Nations Environment Programme, *From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment*, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP, 2009), 8, accessed 10 June 2022, <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/7867>.

30 Ibid, 8.

31 Ibid, 8.

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- 336 Security Council Resolutions, or 14.4% of all Resolutions, deal with the environment or natural resources; of these, 89% are in operational.³²

Access to natural resources has been a more prominent issue in conflicts in the twenty-first century. Due to the scarcity of fresh water, forests, and land, humanity's survival is severely threatened by their devastation or loss.³³

Furthermore, environmental peacebuilding may also build both negative peace (it addresses conflict resources and other measures to end conflict) and positive peace (it addresses and seeks to resolve the underlying dynamics of conflicts by creating a context for cooperation and integration and thus it aims to make conflict unthinkable) since it works on resource curse, climate security, environmental consequences of war, conflict resources, environmental peacemaking, cooperation, sustainable livelihoods, capacity building, environmental governance, etc.

Moreover, since the UN Security Council's adoption of Resolution 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security', gender studies have also begun to work within the scope of peacebuilding and environmental peacebuilding.³⁴ There are many works in the literature containing analyzes of the gender approach in the context of the link between human beings and the environment.³⁵

In addition, environmental peacebuilding includes practices related to climate security and disaster risks.³⁶ Hence, it has been integrated into endeavors related to climate change due to the impact of climate on livelihoods through the ecosystem.³⁷ Also, Environmental peacebuilding aims to analyze and resolve conflicts that do not have a

32 Peter Aldinger, Carl Bruch and Sofia Yazykova, 'Revisiting Securitization: An empirical analysis of environment and natural resource provisions in United Nations Security Council Resolutions, 1946-2016', in Routledge Handbook of Environmental Conflict and Peacebuilding, eds. Ashok Swain and Joakim Öjendal, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 147.

33 United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, '*Peace Day 2009: A More Peaceful, Better and Greener Tomorrow*', UNAMA, 17 September 2009, accessed 28 June 2022, <https://unama.unmissions.org/peace-day-2009-more-peaceful-better-and-greener-tomorrow>.

34 Ide et al., 'The past and future(s) of environmental peacebuilding', 9.

35 Ibid, 9.

36 Ide, 'The dark side of environmental peacebuilding', 3-4.

37 Ibid, 5.

clear environmental basis, since environmental challenges are not considered as ‘high-politics’.³⁸

There is a logical interdependence between development and conflict. Conflict and insecurity hinder development and divert resources towards military purposes that may be better used for human development. Therefore, development should not be politicized, but should be sustainable and more focused on the environment, capacity-building, resilience and the strengthening of civil society. At that point, sustainable development may create security and peace in itself, since it aims to achieve a balance between ecological, social and economic interests in order to preserve the natural resource base for future generations.

In this regard, multiple entrance points are provided by Agenda 2030 for environmental peacebuilding, including SDGs 5, 10, 11 and 16.³⁹ In this regard, environmental peacebuilding exemplifies the aspects of sustainable development that pertain to peace and security. Especially, environmental peacebuilding and eight of the SDGs have at least a 70% synergy.⁴⁰

38 Ken Conca and Michael D. Beevers, ‘Environmental Pathways to Peace’, in *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Conflict and Peacebuilding*, eds. Ashok Swain and Joakim Öjendal, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 63.

39 Jensen and Kron, ‘Environmental peacebuilding and the United Nations’, 126.

40 Bruch, ‘An Introduction to Environmental Peacebuilding: Monitoring and Evaluation’.

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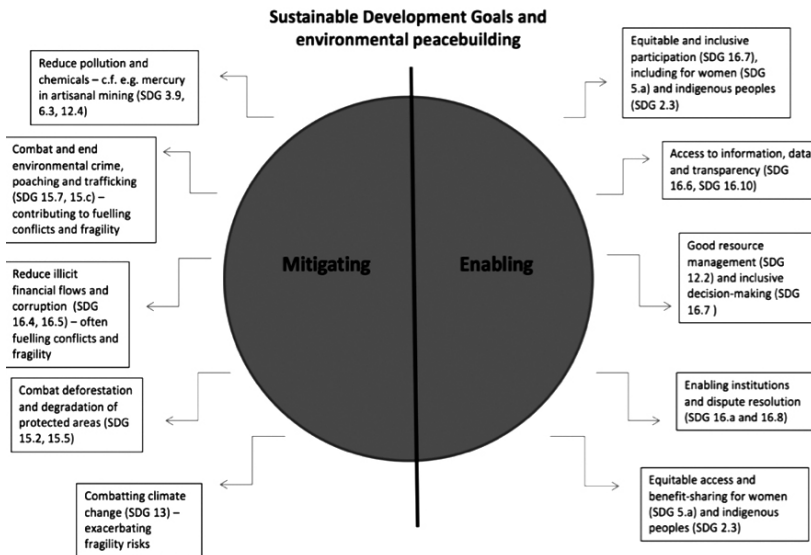


Table 2. Sustainable Development Goals and Environmental Peacebuilding⁴¹

Another feature of environmental peacebuilding is that it is both forward-looking and backward-looking: it focuses on how to achieve sustainable peace in the post-conflict years while trying to specify and resolve the underlying conditions that triggered conflict and violence in the past.⁴²

In addition, environmental peacebuilding has both top-down and bottom-up approaches: (1) it is largely based on top-down leadership by international organizations, government agencies, and inter/national institutions, but also (2) it focuses on empowering disadvantaged and vulnerable groups with increasing works regarding bottom-up approach.⁴³

Within this framework, environmental peacebuilding is seen as a useful peace technique that can be well adapted with its distinctive features for

41 Jensen and Kron, 'Environmental peacebuilding and the United Nations', 127.

42 Bruch et al., 'The Changing Nature of Conflict', 10136.

43 Ide et al., 'The past and future(s) of environmental peacebuilding', 8.

conflict resolution.⁴⁴ It provides an opportunity for cooperation where conflicting parties can engage in win-win cooperation, build trust, and foster current and future integrations, including in illiberal and violent environments.⁴⁵

Besides, a critical component in achieving environmental peacebuilding is environmental awareness along with a holistic approach to cultural, economic, and social development strategies.⁴⁶ In addition, civil society engagement in environmental peacebuilding practices creates a win-win, equitable and transparent environment that is supported by financial and technical contributions.⁴⁷

Moreover, environmental issues are characterized as a means of bridging opposing groups despite their political disagreements. Therefore, it has also been regarded as a vehicle for transforming a frozen conflict into dialogue⁴⁸ and encouraging conflicting parties to build trust.⁴⁹ For some scholars, environmental peacebuilding also highlights the agency and capacity at the local level in conflict resolution and environmental protection, rather than promoting the image of the global south as the deviant other of the West.⁵⁰ Thus, environmental cooperation practices can also alleviate the rage of victims who are often socially and economically marginalized groups that suffer from the unequal dissemination of natural resources and the environment.⁵¹

As a result, environmental peacebuilding requires international cooperation, long-term perspective and participation of academia, local institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international

44 Alexander Carius, *Environmental Peacebuilding. Environmental Cooperation as an Instrument of Crisis Prevention and Peacebuilding: Conditions for Success and Constraints*, (Berlin: Adelphi Consult GmbH, 2006), 11, accessed 10 May 2022, https://userpage.fu-berlin.de/ffu/akumwelt/bc2006/papers/Carius_Peacemaking.pdf

45 Ide, 'The dark side of environmental peacebuilding', 4.

46 Emel Akçalı and Marco Antonsich, 'Nature Knows No Boundaries: A Critical Reading of UNDP Environmental Peacemaking in Cyprus', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99, no.5, (2009): 942.

47 Ibid, 942.

48 Judith Nora Hardt and Jürgen Scheffran, 'Environmental Peacebuilding and Climate Change: Peace and Conflict Studies at the Edge of Transformation', *Toda Peace Institute*, no.68, (2019): 9.

49 Carius, 'Environmental Peacebuilding: Conditions for Success', 62.

50 Ide, 'The dark side of environmental peacebuilding', 5.

51 Carius, 'Environmental Peacebuilding: Conditions for Success', 61.

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organizations (IOs). On this basis, as a practitioner of environmental peacebuilding, UNEP has a leading role within the UN by promoting the integration of environmental concerns into peacebuilding processes in more than 20 post-conflict areas. In this regard, UNEP has established a Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch PCDMB) that undertakes assessments in conflict-ridden countries. (See the table below)

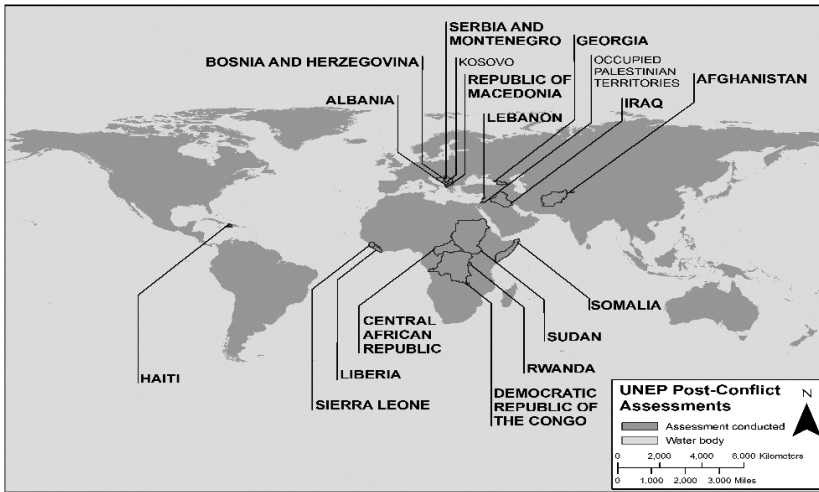


Table 3. UNEP Post-Conflict Assessments⁵²

UNEP's Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is one of the first countries that come to mind in the concept of violence and conflict. Within this framework, Afghanistan suffers from serious environmental problems that both cause and trigger violence and conflict.⁵³ Especially, land degradation, water scarcity, illicit deforestation and urban waste have become hot themes for post-conflict reconciliation in Afghanistan.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid., 65.

⁵³ United Nations Environment Programme, *Afghanistan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment*, United Nations Environment Programme, 2003), 4, accessed 14 April 2022, <https://www.unep.org/resources/assessment/afghanistan-post-conflict-environmental-assessment>

⁵⁴ Conca and Wallace, 'Environment and peacebuilding in war-torn societies', 66.

In this context, since the 2001 Bonn Agreement, the long-term restructuring commitment in Afghanistan has been stated by the international community.⁵⁵ Particular attention has been paid to addressing and evaluating the role of the environment in restructuring because armed hostilities, intensive misuse of natural resources and displacement of Afghans have seriously wreaked havoc on the country's environment.⁵⁶ In this regard, environmental peacebuilding is essential for lasting peace in Afghanistan due to the following factors:

- Livelihoods of up to 80% of the population are directly dependent on natural resources.⁵⁷
- More than 60% of Afghans earn their living from agriculture.⁵⁸
- Disasters and extreme weather events such as droughts, earthquakes and sandstorms have directly damaged more than 6.7 million people's livelihoods since 1998.⁵⁹
- Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, deforestation has been a severe issue in the country.⁶⁰
- Desertification, which worsens the situation of 2.5 million Afghans suffering from droughts and water scarcity, directly affects about 75% of Afghanistan and leaves the country vulnerable.⁶¹
- Only 31% of families have access to clean drinking water.⁶²

55 United Nations Environment Programme, 'Afghanistan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment', 6.

56 David Jensen, 'Evaluating the impact of UNEP's post-conflict environmental assessments', in *Assessing and Restoring Natural Resources in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, eds. David Jensen and Steven. Loneran, (London: Earthscan, 2012), 28.

57 Ibid, 30.

58 United Nations Environment Programme, *UNEP in Afghanistan: Laying the foundations for sustainable development*, (United Nations Environment Programme, 2009), 3, accessed 14 April 2022, <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/7669>.

59 Ibid, 3.

60 The Institute for Economics & Peace, *Afghanistan: Conflict & Crisis*, (The Institute for Economics & Peace: 2021), 3.

61 United Nations Environment Programme, 'UNEP in Afghanistan: Laying the foundations for sustainable development', 5.

62 Ibid, 5.

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- One of the nations in the world that is most susceptible to the effects of climate change is Afghanistan.⁶³
- Events in the first decade of the twenty-first century have demonstrated how extremely susceptible Afghan communities are to hazards like drought and flash flooding. Poverty, malnutrition, food insecurity, and inequality all exacerbate this susceptibility.⁶⁴

In this context, following the Bonn Agreement, Former President Hamid Karzai's transitional government promptly sought the support of the United Nations to initiate a process of post-conflict peacebuilding.⁶⁵ Subsequently, UNEP assumed the duty of environmental assessment to address these environmental problems for the peacebuilding process.⁶⁶

As UNEP has gone beyond the direct effects of war on the environment and has begun to carry out post-conflict environmental assessments in 18 countries plagued by conflicts, UNEP's role on this task has contributed to both peacebuilding in Afghanistan and environmental peacebuilding literature.⁶⁷ Thus, UNEP's involvement in this assessment has been a changemaker for Afghanistan as a country that has been unstable for a long time and has been in a fragile position against environmental stresses. In 2002, UNEP's PCDMB closely engaged with the Interim Government of Afghanistan and worked with twenty local and international experts, divided into five teams⁶⁸ for a month by using various assessments tools and methods.⁶⁹

63 United Nations Environment Programme, 'Landscape Ecology and Physical Science', (United Nations Environment Programme, 2022), accessed: 27 June 2022,

<https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/disasters-conflicts/where-we-work/afghanistan/landscape-ecology-and-physical-science>.

64 World Bank Group and Asian Development Bank, *Climate Risk Country Profile: Afghanistan*, (World Bank Group and Asian Development Bank), 2021, 2, accessed 24 June 2022, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/36381/Afghanistan-Climate-Risk-Country-Profile.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

65 United Nations Environment Programme, 'UNEP in Afghanistan: Laying the foundations for sustainable development', 3.

66 Ibid, 3.

67 Conca and Wallace, 'Environment and peacebuilding in war-torn societies', 68.

68 United Nations Environment Programme, 'UNEP in Afghanistan: Laying the foundations for sustainable development', 3.

69 United Nations Environment Programme, 'Afghanistan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment', 8.

At the beginning of UNEP's assessment, the most difficult issues are the loss of environmental monitoring, data collection and information sharing.⁷⁰ In particular, UNEP's team notes that in Afghanistan, communication between authorities (when institutions exist and operate) and historic data were lacking, insufficient and weak.⁷¹ Within this situation, UNEP has been able to collect restricted ad hoc data⁷² but there was no consistency in the data obtained and none of the government channels had adequate resources to collect environmental information.⁷³ Also, UNEP's team states that monitoring facilities have been destroyed during the war years and only very few NGOs such as Save the Environment-Afghanistan have been able to provide environmental data to UNEP.⁷⁴ Furthermore, UNEP mentions that data in Afghanistan was not transparent, there were no clear procedures for public involvement, the media played a minimal role, and women faced considerable hurdles.⁷⁵

Moreover, UNEP's team highlights that the environmental impact assessment guidelines of funders and international organizations in Afghanistan have not been consistently implemented.⁷⁶ Besides, according to UNEP's team, urban environmental management has been neglected, the conflict has damaged rural places, and conventional community-based resource management systems have collapsed.⁷⁷

UNEP's Assessment Methods:

Since much of the data was inaccessible and incomplete, UNEP's team has developed a new methodology in order to gather and analyze necessary data for environmental peacebuilding through different ways such as satellite analyses, strategic assessment, poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP), common country assessment (CCA) and UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).⁷⁸ These methods are briefly explained below:

70 Ibid, 98.

71 Conca and Wallace, 'Environment and peacebuilding in war-torn societies', 72.

72 Ibid.,72.

73 United Nations Environment Programme, 'Afghanistan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment', 98.

74 Conca and Wallace, 'Environment and peacebuilding in war-torn societies', 73.

75 Ibid., 73.

76 Ibid., 76.

77 Ibid., 77.

78 Jensen, 'Evaluating the impact of UNEP's post-conflict environmental assessments', 20-22.

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Satellite Analyses: This study has demonstrated that high technology satellite analysis was an effective tool in Afghanistan, especially in areas that could not be accessed for security reasons.⁷⁹ UNEP's team was able to examine and compare 25 years of footage using Landsat satellite imagery for land cover analysis, enabling the detection of many environmental issues such as wetland degradation, desertification and deforestation.⁸⁰ For example, through satellite analysis, UNEP found that conifer forests in some of Afghanistan's provinces (such as Kunar, and Nuristan) have declined by an average of 50% since 1978.⁸¹ Another example revealed via satellite analysis is that 99% of the Helmand basin and Sistan wetlands in Afghanistan have dried up since 1998.⁸² Furthermore, satellite analysis also demonstrated the environmental impact of the climate in some areas. For instance, wetlands dried notably and recovered with precipitation in a cycle in the past.⁸³

Strategic Assessments: Through this method, UNEP analyzed both direct and indirect factors affecting Afghans' (local people) ability to survive and cope, as well as evaluated institutional deterioration challenges in terms of governance and capacity.⁸⁴ Hence, UNEP assessed environmental impacts beyond quantitative risk assessments which examine only environmental factors that have a direct impact on the conflict.⁸⁵ Additionally, UNEP specified potential environmental issues and related capacity gaps that could pose a threat to human health, livelihoods and security.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the findings and assessments were created for greater recovery or a lasting peacebuilding strategy by identifying the short-term needs and long-term requirements.⁸⁷ In general, this assessment method is primarily intended for use after prolonged and low-intensity

79 United Nations Environment Programme, 'Afghanistan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment', 8.

80 Ibid, 8.

81 Ibid, 11.

82 Ibid, 51.

83 Ibid, 51.

84 Jensen, 'Evaluating the impact of UNEP's post-conflict environmental assessments', 20.

85 Ibid, 20.

86 Ibid, 20.

87 Ibid, 20.

conflicts. It was created to include field assignments.⁸⁸ The primary purpose of this assessment to be used when a particular planning or policy process requires rapidly updated field information and there is not enough time to undertake a comprehensive assessment.⁸⁹

In this regard, for Afghanistan, this assessment was intended to coincide with the Securing Afghanistan's Future (SAF), national recovery strategy, by determining environmental priorities and needs, but it also contributed to the CCA/UNDAF documents and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), a 2nd national recovery plan.⁹⁰

Poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP): If a country progresses from transition to development during the post-conflict process, temporary or complete PRSPs focusing on the country's economic and financial position are prepared.⁹¹ PRSPs provide a plan to eradicate poverty and assist the economy.⁹² In this regard, Governments, stakeholders, and international partners collaborate to create PRSPs.⁹³ Within this scope, countries can use PRSPs as a tool for financial help and the partial or total remission of debts from the IMF and the World Bank.⁹⁴

Common country assessment (CCA) and UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF): CCA and UNDAF can also be used in the post-conflict process when a country is in a post-transition development stage.⁹⁵ In this context, the UN Country team uses CCA regarding a national recovery plan, PRSP or development strategy to identify how national priorities can be achieved by the United Nations.⁹⁶ Later, for each area, UNDAF provides specific results and indicators along with a detailed

88 Ibid, 20.

89 Ibid, 20.

90 Ibid, 29.

91 Ibid, 22

92 Ibid, 22

93 Ibid, 22

94 Ibid, 22

95 Ibid, 22

96 Ibid, 22

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costing, which are also covered in CCA. Then, a time schedule is created with the certain agencies and partners listed.⁹⁷

The Results of UNEP's Assessment:

When the UNEP team arrived, the situation in Afghanistan was not encouraging. Military operations, forced displacement of people, intensive resource extraction, and insufficient institutional capability for natural resource management all severely damaged the environment.⁹⁸ An environmental assessment could not even be undertaken since the national government was in turmoil and lacked the capacity to conduct.⁹⁹ In this situation, UNEP's environmental assessment, in partnership with the National (Afghanistan) partner Ministry of Irrigation, Water Resources, and the Environment, played a crucial role in providing an overview of environmental requirements that may guide recovery priorities.¹⁰⁰

The findings and recommendations obtained as a result of UNEP's assessment with these methods were published as a 176-page report called 'Afghanistan Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment Report' with 63 sectoral and area-based recommendations to support the national recovery plan at a press conference held in Kabul in 2003.¹⁰¹

One of the findings in this context is that the peace process was jeopardized by severe environmental stresses (deforestation, water scarcity, land degradation, etc.) that lead to the population living in an environment that suffers from poverty, displacement and disease burden and economic turmoil.¹⁰²

In this context, the Afghan Government strongly supported SAF which includes the sustainable use and management of natural resources for secure and egalitarian peacebuilding in terms of economic, social, environmental, and political aspects.¹⁰³ In line with this, determined

97 Ibid, 22

98 Ibid, 28.

99 Ibid, 28.

100 Ibid, 29.

101 Ibid, 29.

102 Ibid, 29.

103 Ibid, 29.

priorities were sustainable management of natural resources; conservation and restoration of productive land, water, forests and pastures; building and developing institutional capacity; new supportive policies and legislations.¹⁰⁴ In order to achieve these priorities and to establish peace, the Afghan Government promoted an integrated approach to natural resource management, with people and the private sector using natural resources effectively and sustainably for economic growth and promoting equity, security, and peacebuilding.¹⁰⁵ In this regard, the SAF, which established an important precedent in this area, was the first national reconstruction plan to clearly integrate natural resource management and rehabilitation to peacebuilding and security.¹⁰⁶

This assessment of UNEP was not only a determinant of SAF, but it was also a decisive factor for the 2004 CCA and 2006–2008 UNDAF.¹⁰⁷ For example, according to CCA, unsustainable use of natural resources over time and inadequate governance of institutions were the main threats to peace, security, economy and public welfare.¹⁰⁸ With inputs from UNEP, the CCA suggested that UN support for Afghanistan must focus on three key themes: human rights and peacebuilding; good governance and participatory development; and basic social services and environmental sustainability.¹⁰⁹ This was particularly notable because for the first time in a post-conflict nation, environmental sustainability has been deemed a crucial priority.¹¹⁰

In terms of 2006-2008 UNDAF, the essential role of natural resources for Afghan people and economy was acknowledged, predicated on the CCA's analysis.¹¹¹ The UNDAF also stated that sustainable development which includes natural resource management and environmental governance is a must in line with national targets.¹¹²

UNEP's environmental assessment also worked effectively for ANDS, Afghanistan's PRSP, and the issue of managing natural resources was

104 Ibid, 29.

105 Ibid, 29.

106 Ibid, 29.

107 Ibid, 30.

108 Ibid, 30.

109 Ibid, 30.

110 Ibid, 30.

111 Ibid, 30.

112 Ibid, 30.

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specifically explored in two areas: infrastructure-natural resources and agriculture-rural development.¹¹³ Within the scope of SAF, CCA/UNDAF and ANDS, which includes the findings on the management of natural resources and the needs of environmental governance, UNEP presented a multi-stage capacity building program to the Ministry of Irrigation, Water Resources, specifically to the Department of Environment.¹¹⁴ This program was focusing on 5 areas: institutional development, environmental law and policy, environmental impact assessment and pollution control, environmental education and community-based natural resource management.¹¹⁵ After this initial work, in 2005, the Department of Environment became the independent National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA).¹¹⁶

The 2003 Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment of Afghanistan is the first environmental study assessed in the last 30 years since UNEP began its work in Afghanistan, and the findings indicated a more dire situation than expected.¹¹⁷ For example, there was no capacity to manage natural resources, and community engagement mechanisms were not functioning.¹¹⁸ In addition, it has been determined that 50-70% deforestation occurs in some regions, leaving the local people vulnerable.¹¹⁹ Given that 80% of the population was directly dependent on natural resources (land, forests, soils, and water, etc.), the report persuaded national authorities, the UN country team, and funders that sustainable management and restoration of natural resources would be essential for future peace and security.¹²⁰

UNEP's assessment had a major impact in Afghanistan as its work led to the first characterization of the concept of sustainability (environmental sustainability) as a vital priority in a country's post-conflict period.¹²¹ In this context, the impact of UNEP's post-conflict

113 Ibid, 30.

114 Ibid, 30.

115 Ibid, 30.

116 Ibid, 30.

117 Ibid, 31.

118 Ibid, 31.

119 United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations Development Programme, *The role of natural resources in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration: Addressing risks and seizing opportunities*, (UNEP UNDP, 2013), 46, accessed 20 June 2022, <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/14218>.

120 Jensen, 'Evaluating the impact of UNEP's post-conflict environmental assessments', 31.

121 Ibid, 31.

environmental assessment on SAF, CCA/UNDAF and ANDS both shaped and affected post-conflict peacebuilding in many ways.¹²² The UNEP's strategy was all-inclusive, concentrated on restoring local capacities, gave communities control, and used pilot projects to show the benefits of sustainable resource management.¹²³ From the beginning, national ownership and turnover were fundamental management tenets.¹²⁴ In this regard, within the framework of 4 documents reflecting the assessment of UNEP, eight main actions taken during post-conflict peacebuilding.

First, in response to the UNEP report's emphasis on the relationship between the environment and the economy, the Afghan Government established the Afghan Conservation Corps (ACC) to meet the needs of disadvantaged people and reintegrate former conflicting parties.¹²⁵ Thus, former combatants and members of disadvantaged groups were employed by the ACC to help with reforestation efforts in the Pistachio Woodlands and the Eastern Conifer woods.¹²⁶ ACC has completed 350 projects in 23 provinces by 2009, providing around 400,000 working days for disadvantaged people while repairing and conserving, 108 nurseries, 32 public parks, planting 226 hectares of pistachio seeds in seven provinces and 150,000 conifers and 350,000 fruit trees.¹²⁷

Second, SAF's budget was determined as 27.8 billion USD for the 2004-2011 period for the recovery in Afghanistan.¹²⁸ 15 million USD of SAF's budget was set for environmental management and local capacity building, 98% of which was covered.¹²⁹ In particular, the European Commission contributed as the main financier while the Governments of Canada, Finland, Luxembourg and Switzerland and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) supported as co-financiers.¹³⁰

122 Ibid, 31.

123 Ibid, 31.

124 Ibid, 31.

125 United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations Development Programme, 'The role of natural resources in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration: Addressing risks and seizing opportunities', 46.

126 Ibid, 46.

127 Ibid, 46.

128 Jensen, 'Evaluating the impact of UNEP's post-conflict environmental assessments', 29.

129 Ibid, 31.

130 United Nations Environment Programme, 'UNEP in Afghanistan: Laying the foundations for sustainable development', 32.

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Third, UNEP's report not only identified Afghanistan's national development priorities. It also directly influenced the policymaking of the European Commission which decided to create, support and finance natural resource management policies and programs in-country strategy documents for the 2003–2006 and 2007–2013 periods.¹³¹

Fourth, a seed grant was provided to assist UNEP's involvement in the peacebuilding process, enabling NEPA to promote environmental issues at the forefront of the political agenda as well as strengthen its institutional capabilities in the national reform process.¹³²

Fifth, embracing the principle of national ownership and transfer, UNEP took an active role for the environment in its project office in Kabul, strived for NEPA to work more effectively and advocated inclusive environmental agenda.¹³³

Sixth, studies were carried out on the empowerment of women. In line with this, 'the Women's and Youth Protection Corps' initiative was launched through various projects such as women's garden revitalization, women's dormitories and school compound beautification, planting fruit tree seedlings in their homes for future income and cultivating home nurseries.¹³⁴

Seventh, employment opportunities were created for the conservation of forests in various places such as Nuristan. Three projects were built on garbage removal activities that helped Nuristan get rid of 1000 m³ of waste while providing employment.¹³⁵ For example, Forest Management Committees (FMCs) supported by the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) were established by elders in the community. As a result of these projects on forest management, the villagers in Shareek Yaar, the largest pistachio forest area, were able to increase their income from the 2006 pistachio harvests by 65%.¹³⁶

Last but not least, in addition to local efforts, UNEP funded the formation of the Afghan National Ozone Unit, which began to

131 Jensen, 'Evaluating the impact of UNEP's post-conflict environmental assessments', 31.

132 Ibid, 31.

133 Ibid, 31.

134 Ibid, 46.

135 Ibid, 46.

136 Ibid, 46.

implement The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, at NEPA in 2004.¹³⁷ Subsequently, in 2006, the Ozone Depleting Substances Trade Regulation went into effect, and yearly consumption data of ozone-depleting substances were presented.¹³⁸ During the 20th anniversary and 19th Meeting of the Parties of Montreal Protocol, the Ozone Secretariat awarded the Afghanistan Ozone Officer the Best Practitioner Award in recognition of these achievements.¹³⁹

Current Situation in Afghanistan

After a protracted armed conflict, western crisis management efforts, Covid-19 and Taliban came in power, Afghanistan still remains one of the most violent places in the world. Afghanistan has been viewed by many as a failing and collapsing state for a long time due to the accountable government's inability to provide adequate security, social welfare, and the rule of law.¹⁴⁰ A civil war economy in Afghanistan that is dependent on aid has resulted in severe environmental degradation and rendered agricultural land uncultivable.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, infrastructure for irrigation and water supply has been devastated by years of internationalized armed warfare, corruption, and poor management by governments and parties.¹⁴² Besides, Afghanistan is very vulnerable to the effects of climate change, including increased frequency of extreme weather events, shifting precipitation patterns, and rising temperatures.¹⁴³ The current drought in Afghanistan is the country's worst in 27 years, and when combined with Covid-19 and the economic downturn that followed the Taliban taking control of the government in August 2021, it has significantly increased food

137 United Nations Environment Programme, 'UNEP in Afghanistan: Laying the foundations for sustainable development', 15.

138 Ibid, 15.

139 Ibid, 15.

140 Markus Gauster, 'Ecological threats to security and state resilience in Afghanistan', *Security&Defence* 33, no.1, (2021): 32.

141 Ibid, 33.

142 Ibid, 33.

143 Cedric De Coning, Florian Krampe, Anab Ovidie Grand, Andrew E.Yaw Tchic, Elisabeth L. Rosvold, Kheira Tarif, Elizabeth Smith, Katongo Seyuba and Kyungmee Kim, 'Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet Afghanistan', (NUPI and SIPRI, 2022), 1, accessed: 28 June 2022, <https://www.nupi.no/en/media/files-open/climate-peace-and-security-fact-sheet-afghanistan>.

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insecurity and livelihood insecurity, as well as fueled a growing humanitarian emergency.¹⁴⁴ Within this framework, in Afghanistan:

- Food insecurity and the failing conditions for livelihoods reliant on agriculture are rendered worse by climate change.¹⁴⁵
- Internal displacement has grown and migration patterns have shifted as a result of conflict and the effects of climate change. High levels of displacement exacerbate food shortages and livelihood instability and make marginalized groups, especially women, more vulnerable.¹⁴⁶
- Nearly half of the country's population, or 19 million people, suffer from extreme food insecurity and urgent aid is required.¹⁴⁷
- Also, Climate change's effects can be linked to increased risks of frequent and violent local disputes over land and water as well as increased tensions over transboundary resources.¹⁴⁸
- The ability of local governments and communities to adapt to climate change and handle the current humanitarian catastrophe has been weakened by conflict. As a result, there are more risks for marginalized groups and possibilities for elites to manipulate and benefit from land and water disputes.¹⁴⁹
- Conflict and high rates of poverty also impose limits on an individual's ability to adapt to all these environmental consequences. By the middle of 2022, 97 percent of the population would be living in poverty, according to UNDP's scenario.¹⁵⁰

144 Ibid, 1.

145 Ibid, 1.

146 Ibid, 1.

147 Assem Mayar, *Global Warming and Afghanistan: Drought, hunger and thirst expected to worsen*, (Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2021), accessed: 28 June 2022, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/en/reports/economy-development-environment/global-warming-and-afghanistan-drought-hunger-and-thirst-expected-to-worsen/>

148 De Coning et al., 'Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet Afghanistan', 1.

149 Ibid, 1.

150 United Nations Development Programme *Economic Instability and Uncertainty in Afghanistan after August 15: A Rapid Appraisal*, (UNDP, 2021), 1, accessed 27 June 2022, <https://www.undp.org/publications/economic-instability-and-uncertainty-afghanistan-after-august-15>

- Every year, the Institute for Economics and Peace releases the ‘Ecological Threat Register (ETR) Report’, which uses extensive ecological data to evaluate each nation’s capacity to deal with extreme ecological shocks both now and in the future.¹⁵¹ According to the ETR 2021 report, Afghanistan received the lowest overall rating, making it the nation least able to handle the ecological shocks it is currently experiencing and will experience.¹⁵²

Evaluation of UNEP’s Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment Report in Afghanistan Through the Lens of Environmental Peacebuilding

Able to distinguish between success and failure might not be visible or simple. If the strategies ignore fundamental political problems or act as a smokescreen for other interests, achieving positive results will be far more challenging. However, within the given framework of environmental peacebuilding, in many aspects, UNEP’s work in Afghanistan was successful in terms of the implementation of environmental peacebuilding.

First, this work of UNEP was evaluated by researchers and implemented by practitioners in accordance with the nature of environmental peacebuilding. The two groups worked in an integrated and coordinated manner.

Second, with the effect of UNEP’s report, the Afghan Government’s national recovery strategies made environmental governance a priority within the framework of managing natural resources, building administrative capacity and finding sustainable trajectories as environmental peacebuilding advocates for post-conflict rebuilding.

151 Geneva Centre for Security Policy, *Institute for Economics & Peace Releases Ecological Threat Register 2021*, (Geneva Centre for Security Policy 2021), accessed 28 June 2022, <https://www.gcsp.ch/global-insights/institute-economics-peace-releases-ecological-threat-register-2021>.

152 The Institute for Economics & Peace, *Ecological Threat Report 2021: Understanding Ecological Threats, Resilience and Peace*, (IEP: 2021), 4, accessed 25 June 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ecological-threat-report-2021-understanding-ecological-threats-resilience-and-peace>.

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Third, with the support of UNEP, implementation of peacebuilding by the Afghan Government has both bottom-up (For example: Forest Management Committees established by community elders to benefit from local people's knowledge and experience) and top-down (For example: Afghan Conservation Corps was established by high-level government officers for the needs of vulnerable populations) approaches.

Fourth, UNEP's work also included backward-looking (analyzing the data from the last 25-30 years) and forward-looking (post-conflict recommendations) analyses.

Fifth, UNEP's work in Afghanistan influenced the European Commission's priorities regarding the environment in its policies and programs.

Sixth, UNEP's assessment and recommendations were not only recognized and added to the policy making reports, strategies or in general on paper, but also used in practice as toolkits by the national government on multiple scales at the local, national as well as international levels. It is an important development in terms of building the foundation for evidence that the Global South may act in favor of the environment. Thus, environmental peacebuilding implementation in Afghanistan is considered as a useful tool to promote peace, rather than promoting the image of the global south as the deviant other of the West.

Seventh, another factor supporting the concept of environmental peacebuilding in Afghanistan is that UNEP's work had a gender approach (For example: the establishment of the Women and Youth Protection Corps).

Eighth, environmental peacebuilding practices which were recommended by UNEP and implemented by the Afghan Government contributed to Sustainable Development Goals. The decisions and initiatives taken upon the assessment of the UNEP have provided a link between economic redevelopment and environmental protection. To this end, it has created livelihoods for people while promoting sustainable resource management and better environmental governance, critical components of environmental peacebuilding. For instance, three projects involving garbage cleaning activities in Nuristan helped to create employment while collecting 1000 m³ of waste.

As a result, within the work of UNEP, the Afghan Government and institutions, environmental peacebuilding was a useful peace mechanism for post-conflict reconciliation. Furthermore, the case of Afghanistan may serve as an example for post-conflict rehabilitation, recovery or strategy.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, it is stated that environmental peacebuilding emerged at the intersection of the environment, conflict and peace studies. Over the past 20 years, academics and practitioners have developed the field of environmental peacebuilding in both theory and practice, with the involvement of local, national and international actors. One of the main reasons to this development is that environmental dimensions of conflicts may pose increasing threats to livelihoods and ecosystem services. Within this framework, environmental peacebuilding comprises techniques and methods to prevent a return to conflict, meet basic needs (water, food, and other resource-dependent essentials for societies), eliminate threats (conflict resources, sources of underlying contestation) and build as well as sustain peace.¹⁵³ The following stand out as the key characteristics of environmental peacebuilding in the literature, despite the fact that its field cannot be defined precisely due to its interdisciplinary structure: it has an inclusive nature; it has both forward-looking and backward-looking approaches; it may also build both negative peace and positive peace; it examines from both top-down and bottom-up views; and it favors gender empowerment and sustainable development.

Later, UNEP's approach towards environmental peacebuilding was examined via UNEP's initiative of 'Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment' in Afghanistan in 2003. Within this framework, UNEP's assessment methods were explained and the impacts of the assessment in Afghanistan were used as a case model. In terms of the conceptual framework of environmental peacebuilding, the assessment and subsequent impact of UNEP, which looks at post-conflict rehabilitation in Afghanistan from alternative perspectives and angles and is there to support state resistance and good governance, has been found successful for Afghanistan. It was stated that Afghanistan is one of the

¹⁵³ Bruch, 'An Introduction to Environmental Peacebuilding: Monitoring and Evaluation'.

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first countries that come to mind when it comes to violence and conflict. Nevertheless, the successful impact of environmental peacebuilding may change this perception about Afghanistan.

However, considering the current situation in Afghanistan, which was also mentioned in this article, it is worth noting that the recovery in Afghanistan does not provide a sustainable or generalizable model. In terms of peace, there is no gold strategy or method or a global formula that works for any country. Peace is something that can never be guaranteed and its sustainability cannot be assured. As can be seen from the current situation in Afghanistan, the progress in the field should not be taken granted by assuming that the field will remain the same or will continue. Due to the changing and moving nature of the field, it is necessary to understand the different politics, concepts, dynamics, actors and legal systems rather than to create a global formula that will have similar impacts or effects in each region, country or nation. In line with this, this paper does not claim that environmental peacebuilding is a must or the only component for conflict prevention, mitigation, resolution and recovery. Rather, this article emphasizes that environmental peacebuilding provides a broader, more diverse and inclusive field. Since environmental issues are experienced in every country, the effects of these problems may differ in each country due to the various geopolitical, economic, social, cultural and environmental factors. Especially today's environmental stresses such as climate change, food insecurity and droughts have an increasing influence on conflicts in terms of exacerbating existing social, economic and environmental structures. The current Covid-19 crisis has also revealed the fragility of these problems. As a result, focusing on different approaches, disciplines, actors, tools and strategies may help to meet these challenges, explore trans/national issues, understand economic, political, cultural as well as environmental factors, evaluate profound changes and overcome hurdles in conflict as well as post-conflict zones.

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