

Peacebuilding Commission -Working Group on Lessons Learned

From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The Role of Natural Resources and Environment

Thursday 8 May 2008
ECOSOC Chambers

Chair's Summary

In order to explore the role of natural resources and environment in peacebuilding, the Peacebuilding Commission's Working Group on Lessons Learned held a meeting on 8 May 2008. H.E. Mr. Heraldo Muñoz, the Permanent Representative of Chile to the United Nations, chaired the meeting in the absence of the Permanent Representative of El Salvador, H.E. Mrs. Carmen María Gallardo Hernández. The panel was composed of Associate Professor Richard Matthew of University of California, Irvine, UNEP Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch Policy and Planning Coordinator David Jensen and Dr. Clarissa Augustinus, Chief, Land, Tenure and Property Administration Section of UN-HABITAT. The discussant was Ms. Gay Rosenblum-Kumar, Senior Public Administration officer in the Governance and Public Administration Branch of UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). The presentation slides will be available separately.

Dr. Richard Matthew explained that security cannot be treated in isolation but has to take into account the role of economic and environmental factors in contributing to conflict. The interdependence between these factors is evidenced by the recent violence in various countries triggered by food scarcities. There is a growing body of knowledge on environmental links to conflict. This knowledge needs to be converted into practical tools for more effective policy and programming. Environmental factors and natural resources might contribute to conflict in various ways: through competition over scarce resources, driving displacement, or financing and sustaining conflict. They can exacerbate ongoing conflicts or complicate these. Climate change is likely to amplify the existing drivers of conflict and evidence suggests that this relationship is intensifying. However, environmental factors and natural resources also have the potential to support peacebuilding.

Sharing UNEP's experience in post-conflict work, Mr. David Jensen provided examples of how UNEP has dealt with the direct, indirect and institutional pathways that link natural resources and environment to conflict. Environmental factors may serve to destabilize countries by undermining government legitimacy, hastening migration and weakening the economy. Responding to these risks can contribute to peacebuilding as in the case of UNEP's environmental rehabilitation project in Afghanistan by creating jobs and providing local communities with capacities to manage their environment. Similar projects by various actors have been instrumental in supporting peacebuilding efforts. However, the field would benefit from a more systematic, strategic and coordinated approach, including through baseline assessments, appropriate indicators and ongoing monitoring. Environmental interventions in post-conflict situations should seek to address concrete needs and opportunities to enhance governance capacity, environmental rehabilitation, environmental technology, and confidence building at national and local levels.

Dr. Clarissa Augustinus presented UN-HABITAT's involvement in post-conflict situations, with a special focus on land issues. According to World Bank studies, access to land has direct economic benefits. It is therefore important that national development frameworks deal with rural and urban land settlement. Land is not just any other asset: it is connected to social and cultural identity and generates strong emotional ties. Access to land, including land distribution, is a concern at various points of the conflict cycle but it is best addressed early on, based on an understanding of the indigenous land tenure systems. The complexities of land tenure are both political and technical. Thus, quality of land governance is an important peacebuilding challenge, requiring active participation by civil society and the private sector. Land issues should be considered as an important element in peace agreements. The way forward is to continue with advocacy, capacity building, training and development of tools to integrate land issues into peacebuilding.

There is growing understanding of how environment and natural resources including land can destabilize societies or contribute to post-conflict recovery. If environmental and natural resource issues are not adequately addressed, they can retard economic growth, contribute to ineffective use of aid or lead to a relapse into violence. The UN has a special role to assist in "peace preparedness" by strengthening national capacities for conflict prevention, including in the area of environment and natural resources.

In the ensuing discussion among member states, there was some concern that the topic was too theoretical and not directly connected to PBC countries. It was suggested that illegal exploitation of natural resources is actually a rule of law question. In this connection, it was noted that the challenge was turning natural resources from a peace liability into assets. The PBC principle of respecting national ownership was highlighted as fundamental in this regard. Subsequent interventions from PBC members reaffirmed that environment and natural resource issues lie at the heart of many conflicts in various regions. Access to natural resources is a major factor especially in Africa. Thus, along with good governance, the issue deserves the attention of the Working Group on Lessons Learned.

Other important observations and comments included the following:

- The problems of exploitation – and the lack of exploitation in the case of scarcities – are complex and therefore need attention by PBC, host governments, donors, civil society.
- **Environmental issues should be mainstreamed** into development and peacebuilding efforts using gender mainstreaming as a model.
- The PBC should **identify existing UN expertise** (including within the IFIs) on cogent analysis, good governance and rule of law in the management of natural resources and the environment.
- In order to gain a broad perspective on peacebuilding, the Working Group should not be limited to issues that are only relevant to countries on the PBC's agenda. On the other hand, it is important **to relate thematic discussions to specific country contexts**.
- Environment and natural resources have significant **regional dimensions and stand to benefit from regional approaches**. For example the African Peer Review Mechanism's economic governance platform is an important instrument.
- There are valuable lessons to be learned from **previous international policy responses** to natural resource issues such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the Kimberley Process.

- **The Kimberley Process** is a certification regime that successfully regulates the diamond trade by bringing the industry and civil society together on a voluntary basis.
- Similarly, **the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative** is an expanding voluntary scheme which has contributed to increased transparency of finances as government income from natural resource extraction has been compared with reports by the extraction companies
- **Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and illegal trafficking of forest products** are often neglected issues although there is growing international cooperation in these fields.
- The Working Group's review of the land problem in post-conflict setting serves as a good introduction to the Peacebuilding Commission's forthcoming meeting on **land issues in Burundi on 27 May 2008**.
- Innovative laws are needed in Africa where sometimes as little as 15% of land is covered by tenure. This means that regional and national actors need to develop **innovative, consultative and inclusive approaches to land tenure**. Without innovation there is no security of land tenure and no way to govern land issues. UN-HABITAT is working with a global coalition to create tools to build and transform knowledge in this field. If 70% of land is off record, it is hard to plan and hard to manage it. **Land scarcity** remains an outstanding concern.

While quite diverse in nature, the debate was instrumental in highlighting the need to build national capacities, institutions and policies to strengthen the equitable use of natural resources and environment as an important component of peacebuilding. The Chair closed the meeting by reiterating the importance of the topic for the work of the Peacebuilding Commission.