Integrating Environment in Post-Conflict Needs Assessments

UNEP Guidance Note

March 2009

UNEP

Table of Contents

1   Introduction

The Post-Conflict Needs Assessment (PCNA) methodology, developed by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and the World Bank (WB), was reviewed by a multi-stakeholder group in 2006. This review examined PCNAs conducted from 2000 to 2006, with a view to improving and fine-tuning the methodology, and developing tools for UN Country Teams. Inter alia, the review considered how cross-cutting issues such as environment, gender, human rights and HIV/Aids were taken into account within the PCNA and made recommendations on improving the way they were addressed. **This note addresses environmental issues specifically; see Note on Integrating Gender Perspectives for specific guidance on gender, and Note on HIV/AIDS Issues for specific guidance on HIV/AIDS.**

With regard to environment, the PCNA Review concluded that "[W]here conflict analyses are conducted, particular attention has to be paid to the links between environment, conflict and peace consolidation. Overlooking or failing to prioritize environmental needs adequately presents risks to human health, livelihoods and the maintenance of ecosystem services. Bearing in mind the important role environment plays in populations' lives and the economies of most post-conflict countries, all of these risk factors can negatively impact sustained peace and recovery. Pre-existing chronic environmental problems pre-dating the conflict, e.g. land degradation, must be addressed in order to ensure sustainable recovery and reconstruction, especially where they affect livelihoods." [1]

The link between environment, natural resources and conflict is now well recognized. The UN Security Council, for example, has emphasized the need to highlight these issues in post-conflict operations.[2] Other reports, including a study recently commissioned by UNEP,[3] have demonstrated the need for interventions and capacities to better address concerns related to natural resources, the environment and conflict across the spectrum of conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding activities.

Natural resources and the environment underlie several key peacebuilding interventions (See Annex II). Not only are they critically important in articulating a peace dividend, but they can contribute to stabilization, conflict transformation, and to the prevention of conflict relapse during a fragile peace process. In other words, the way they are addressed and managed can influence the success or failure of the process itself.

Deferred action or poor choices regarding natural resources and the environment are easily "locked in," establishing unsustainable trajectories of recovery that can potentially undermine the fragile foundations of peace. This is particularly the case when environmental and natural resources management issues are not taken into account in peace agreements or negotiations.

Based on the above, the purpose of this guidance note is to:

1. **Advise** PCNA practitioners on how to ensure knowledge of environment issues is available and used during the PCNA process.

2. **Facilitate the identification of priority interventions** that may be considered for inclusion in the TRF.

3. **Give guidance on core indicators** relevant for most any context, as well as suggested indicators for specific contexts to enable monitoring and evaluation of environmental issues.

This note was developed by UNEP in consultation and cooperation with UNDG and the World Bank.

2 Pre-Assessment Phase

The first step toward assessing the environmental aspects of a given conflict is a desk study that examines the risks, impacts and opportunities related to environment and natural resources. This study will support the prioritization done during the pre-assessment.4 Previous PCNAs have included desk studies on environmental impacts and causes at the end of the assessment phase. This is far too late in the process to inform cluster leads about the environmental linkages that should be considered throughout the assessment. As a result, inputs related to environment have not been well integrated and have largely been left out of most PCNAs' main recommendations.

Desk studies use existing documentation and data combined with off-site interviews of relevant organizations, experts and stakeholders to gather and synthesize the best available information regarding the environmental dimensions of the conflict. The resulting study frames key environmental issues in terms of risks, impacts and opportunities and details the concrete steps required to validate these findings during the PCNA field mission. It is important to ensure that the desk study is linked to any pre-existing accords, treaties, peace agreements, as well as any ongoing process at country level.

More specifically, the study should:

- *Explore the links*: Frame key environmental issues related to conflict risks, impacts, and peace-building opportunities that should be addressed in the full assessment and analysis phase.

- *Map the analysis to peacebuilding*: Assess how the identified risks, impact and opportunities could potentially influence peacebuilding.

- *Map the actors*: Help identify key stakeholders related to the conflict and natural resources, including their interrelationships, as well as the actors to include in the PCNA process.

- *Help prioritize*: Guide the prioritization of interventions related to the environment and natural resources, with a specific focus on those with a high peace dividend and potential for stabilization.

- *Prepare the way*: Outline the steps required in anticipation of the assessment phase, including by identifying knowledge gaps, and suggesting methods of operation and expected outcomes for the final assessment. Key guidance and tools should also be identified, as the PCNA team will need to decide which tools or methodologies to use to conduct environmental assessments.

When planning for and conducting this exercise, it is important to bear in mind often considerable limitations in terms of data, information and capacity. These are often unreliable in a conflict-affected context, in particular where the conflict has been protracted, where the capacities of local stakeholders are minimal, and where international presence has been limited. Furthermore, the dynamics between key stakeholders, natural resources and the environment might differ significantly between the beginning and the end of the conflict. Field-based work, during the full assessment phase, is thus critically important.

a. Assessing risks, impacts and opportunities from natural resources and the environment[5]

The desk study should help answer the following questions:

- How did natural resources and the environment contribute to the conflict and how could they contribute to conflict relapse?

- How were natural resources and the environment impacted by the conflict and what are the implications for human health, livelihoods and security?

- What opportunities exist for natural resources and the environment to concretely contribute to peacebuilding?

The study, therefore, ascertains the main risks, impacts and opportunities to be addressed within the full assessment and analysis phase. These can include:

- Risks. Natural resources and the environment can increase the risk of conflict or conflict relapse by:

- *Contributing to the outbreak of conflict*: Natural resources can contribute to the outbreak of conflict or prompt violence between interested groups or individuals over access, wealth sharing and ownership.

- *Financing and sustaining conflict*: Natural resources and associated management institutions can help finance belligerents and enable the continuation of conflict.

- *Undermining peacemaking*: The prospect of peace may be undermined by individuals or groups that could lose access to the revenues generated by resource exploitation if peace were to prevail. The role of the socio-economic elite – which often acts as a peace "spoiler" – should also be examined in the analysis of risks, as it is critical actor in peacebuilding efforts.

- **Impacts**. Conflict can impact on natural resources and the environment, as well as environmental management institutions by:

  - *Directly damaging* natural resources and ecosystems, including physical damage and the release of hazardous substances (e.g. direct impacts).

  - *Indirectly damaging* natural resources and ecosystems through the coping strategies employed by local populations and displaced people (e.g. indirect impacts).

  - *Reducing* the management capacity of relevant institutions and policy mechanisms (e.g. institutional impacts). It is important to bear in mind that the collapse of governance institutions, including those related to the management of natural resources and the environment, can allow opportunistic entrepreneurs to establish uncontrolled systems of resource exploitation, thus fuelling conflict through new channels.

- **Opportunities**. Natural resources and the environment can play an important role in peacebuilding by:

  - *Supporting economic recovery*: Properly governed and carefully managed "high-value" resources can support economic development, employment, and budget revenue, which are critical to building a peace dividend and achieving stability.

  - *Developing sustainable livelihoods*: Managing environmental damage caused by conflict, coping strategies and chronic environmental problems, and minimizing vulnerability to natural hazards and climate change through the management of natural resources and the introduction of appropriate technologies can boost sustainable livelihoods and access to essential services.

  - *Contributing to dialogue, cooperation and confidence-building*: The environment, for instance through the management of common resources and cooperation on environmental priorities, can be an effective platform for dialogue and reconciliation between divided groups, within states and across borders.

The pre-assessment desk study should address each of these linkages and determine which issues are relevant in the given conflict situation. The study should also note which issues have had the largest impact in the past, and which can be expected to play a significant role in the future.

b. National and sub-national capacity[6]

An important part of the study is to assess national and sub-national capacity for resource management and environmental governance. This helps determine the degree of international technical assistance required and where capacity-building efforts should be focused. This analysis should consider three key indicators of capacity:

- **Institutional, policy and legal framework**: In order for environmental and natural resource management to be effective, national and sub-national authorities must be backed by laws, regulations and ministerial mandates, as well as mechanisms for enforcement that are strong enough to implement best practices. Elements to evaluate include the level of

legitimacy that the environment ministry has vis-à-vis other ministries, and the existence of up-to-date environmental laws, regulations, and functioning enforcement methods at national and sub-national levels.

- **Funding and staff**: In many countries, environment-related ministries lack sufficient financial and material resources. In addition, they often do not have the technical expertise to manage and regulate natural resources effectively, or resolve disputes over access and ownership. Issues to consider include the level of annual financing, the number and technical strength of staff, political support, level of monitoring and enforcement of regulations, number of successful prosecutions, and access to basic office and field equipment.

- **Public participation and access to information**: In many post-conflict countries, natural resource allocation and management is done in an ad-hoc, decentralized, or informal manner. Elements to consider include the level of capacity at the national and local levels of government to engage civil society, the private sector, donors and other development agents in discussions on key development priorities; the level of public access to information on environment and natural resources; and transparency and accountability of decision-making, including a transparent role for the media.

c. Outcomes

The final desk study should synthesize all three main areas of interest – links between environment and the conflict, links with other clusters, and national and sub-national capacities – in a concise, accessible form suitable for multiple audiences. A successful study should have achieved five key outcomes:

- **Raise awareness of national environmental issues** to assist the national priority-setting process.

- **Identify key environmental focal points (cluster, sub-cluster and/or other)** to ensure an adequate flow of information on environmental issues.

- **Brief cluster leads** on the key environment and natural resource impacts of conflict in the country, and the environment-related peacebuilding risks and opportunities. The study should help cluster leads understand how environment and natural resources impact their cluster and how the environment will be integrated within other clusters.

- **Enable a determination of next steps**, including whether an environment and natural resources cluster or sub-cluster is needed in the given PCNA, the scope of the environmental analysis to follow, and the human and financial requirements needed during the PCNA.

- **Identify knowledge gaps** about the role of environment and natural resources in the conflict that can be prioritized during the field assessment. Information about natural resources, such as verifiable data on resources exports, reserves, and access to or ownership of valuable resources, is often unavailable on a desk basis.

The 2006 PCNA review emphasized that improving information-sharing and the competence of cluster leaders would be important to strengthening the PCNA. A well-designed and implemented pre-assessment phase is essential to achieving these aims and setting the stage for good communication and cooperation during the rest of the PCNA process.

3   Assessment and Analysis

a.   Cluster, sub-cluster, or cross-cutting issue

Based on the country context, environment and natural resources will be included in the PCNA as a key cross-cutting issue, but it may also be appropriate to create a cluster or sub-cluster on environment and natural resources. This step is advisable when the desk analysis indicates that environment and natural resources have played a strong role in causing, exacerbating or financing the conflict, or where environment and natural resources could play a key role in peacebuilding efforts. In these cases, addressing environment only as a cross-cutting issue is not sufficient. The best integration of environmental needs has occurred when environment has been treated both as a cross-cutting issue and as a cluster.

b.   Field analysis

Once the composition of the environmental team and organization within the mission has been established, the linkages explored in the pre-assessment phase must be effectively validated and expanded upon during the actual assessment. The results of the pre-assessment phase feed directly into this work, with cluster leads and national authorities integrating the main findings of the desk study into fact-finding activities on the ground.

The field analysis should be focused on several main tasks. First, it must evaluate the assumptions and conclusions made in the desk study to determine their applicability and usefulness. Insofar as possible, any gaps in knowledge identified in the desk work should also be investigated on

and how the international presence can best assist the peace consolidation process through these avenues.

The risk of not having adequate access – in particular to groups of stakeholders who play an important role in the management and/or exploitation of natural resources (i.e. rebel groups, populations in remote areas) – must be appreciated during this phase. Their exclusion from the process of assessment and prioritization of post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction needs, and of the role that natural resources can play in the process may undermine prospects for peace. Risks of manipulation of the process must also be assessed.

c.   Keys to success in the assessment

Several key ingredients are essential to the success of post-conflict environmental assessments:

- **Environmental leads**: There are many options for leading the effort to cross-cut environment (or lead a cluster or sub-cluster). One effective method is joint coordination of partner organizations (e.g. WB-UN). In the 2008 Georgia PCNA, for example, a co-coordinators model was used, with each partner mobilizing different but complementary capacities.

- **Environmental lead integrated on the ground**: One key to success is having a field-level presence for environment and natural resources issues during the PCNA. If environment is a cluster/sub-cluster, substantial technical expertise will need to be deployed to properly assess environmental issues. Even