

# **The Future of Environmental Conflict Management**

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### **Abstract**

*With the ever growing human population, coupled with decreasing environmental resources due to degradation and climate change, environmental conflicts are bound to increase across the globe but with more serious effects on developing countries. This means that states and other stakeholders must continually come up with more effective approaches to address these conflicts in light of the spirit of sustainable development. This calls for both knowledge-based and practical solutions. The author's main argument is that without continuous research and investment in environmental conflict management, sustainable development agenda may remain a mirage.*

### **1. Introduction**

Arguably, 'development policies should be an integral part of the peace-building agenda'.<sup>1</sup> In relation to this, it has also been observed that 'development has multiple dimensions from human rights to environmental sustainability, from economic growth to governance'.<sup>2</sup> Also notable is the assertion that 'the concept of security has gradually expanded from state security to human security and now includes a range of military as well as non-military threats that recognize no borders'.<sup>3</sup>

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs)<sup>4</sup> provides in its Preamble that 'the State Parties were "determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence" as "there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development".<sup>5</sup> Notably, development and more so, sustainable

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<sup>1</sup> 'Understanding the Conflict-Development Nexus and the Contribution of Development Cooperation to Peacebuilding' (GSDRC) <<https://gsdrc.org/document-library/understanding-the-conflict-development-nexus-and-the-contribution-of-development-cooperation-to-peacebuilding/>> accessed 3 May 2022.

<sup>2</sup> International Peace Academy, 'The Security-Development Nexus: Research Findings and Policy Implications' (International Peace Institute 2006), 3 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep09516>> accessed 3 May 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>4</sup> UN General Assembly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, Preamble.

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development, is a multifaceted concept that requires achieving certain milestones in various sectors, such as social, political, environmental and economic spheres.<sup>6</sup> It is for this reason that ‘the heads of state established five fields of critical importance, or the “five Ps” of the 2030 SDG Agenda, which are people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships (Emphasis added).’<sup>7</sup> This paper offers some highlights on some of the main issues that must be addressed going forward as part of strengthening conflict management in environmental matters as well as part of achieving peaceful, just and inclusive societies as envisaged under the Sustainable Development Agenda.

### **2. Enhancing Effective Environmental Conflict Management**

#### **2.1. Addressing Socio-Economic Issues**

Reduction in poverty and concrete improvements in basic education, gender equality, and basic health, all underpinned by improved governance and environmental sustainability are seen as important in building sustainably peaceful and inclusive societies.<sup>8</sup> It has been argued that development and peace-building must be integrated (not just linked) at an early stage – for example by including the political context in development policy and practice in conflict-affected fragile states and by addressing the structural causes of conflict.<sup>9</sup> In addition, it has been acknowledged that strengthening state institutions and enhancing their capacity to provide security and development based on principles of good governance are essential for sound conflict management.<sup>10</sup> In the same way, an effective, credible, and accountable security sector can provide a safe and secure environment in which to entrench other programming initiatives, all embedded in a predictable legal environment supported by culturally appropriate rule of law programs.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Social Development for Sustainable Development | DISD’ <<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2030agenda-sdgs.html>> accessed 8 May 2022; Rodrigo Goyannes Gusmão Caiado and others, ‘A Literature-Based Review on Potentials and Constraints in the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals’ (2018) 198 Journal of cleaner production 1276.

<sup>7</sup> Rodrigo Goyannes Gusmão Caiado and others, ‘A Literature-Based Review on Potentials and Constraints in the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals’ (2018) 198 Journal of cleaner production 1276, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Wood, ‘Development Dimensions of Conflict Prevention and Peace-Building’ [2001] UNDP. (June).

<sup>9</sup> Thania Paffenholz, ‘19 Understanding the Conflict–Development Nexus and the Contribution of Development Cooperation to Peacebuilding1’ [2008] Handbook of conflict analysis and resolution 272.

<sup>10</sup> Flavius Stan, ‘The Security–Development Nexus: Conflict, Peace and Security in the 21st Century’ (International Peace Institute, 14 October 2004) <<https://www.ipinst.org/2004/10/the-security-development-nexus-conflict-peace-and-security-in-the-21st-century>> accessed 8 May 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

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The worldwide community now supports the sustainable development agenda as a result of taking an integrated approach to development concerns and environmental conservation and protection. All development endeavours must be mindful of environmental preservation and protection in order to be considered sustainable.

There is a need for effective natural resources and environmental governance for fighting poverty, through accelerated economic growth and social empowerment of the people, effective and practical management of conflicts for peace-building, without which development cannot take place and ensuring that the right of access to justice is available to all regardless of their social, economic or political standing in the society.

The sustainable development agenda covers more than just environmental issues. This is because both anthropocentric and ecocentric viewpoints are used. Thus, it is necessary to promote sustainable development utilising the two approaches: Poverty eradication, food security, environmental democracy, environmental justice, environmental security, public participation, gender equity, access to information, and conflict resolution are just a few of the recurring themes that are influenced by the anthropocentric approach to environmental management. All of these topics are related to the larger topic of human rights while highlighting the unique connection between those topics and the environment. Conflicts caused by the environment and limited resources might quickly arise if these issues are not addressed. This is crucial given the new constitutional provisions on governance and the fact that the Bill of Rights contains Articles of the Constitution that address the environment and natural resources.<sup>12</sup>

Environmental health, environmental conservation for Mother Nature's sake, and discussions on the effects of resource extraction are all influenced by ecocentric ideas. However, advancing rights like the one to a clean, healthy environment has advantages from both an anthropocentric and an ecocentric perspective, thus it should be promoted.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Muigua, K., *Nurturing Our Environment for Sustainable Development*, Glenwood Publishers, Nairobi – 2016, pp. xi-xii.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p. xii.

## **2.2. Enhancing Meaningful Participation in Environmental Management and Governance Issues**

Environmental justice and democracy is also important for fighting climate change, environmental degradation and meaningful participation in environmental management and governance issues. The link between Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and Traditional Dispute Resolution (TDR) Mechanisms should be explored continually and how the same can be used in enhancing access to justice for the Kenyan people and Africa in general as far as environmental conflicts are concerned. It is obvious that managing many current environmental and natural resource concerns involves collaboration among all impacted parties given the complexity of social-ecological systems. This is especially true when taking into account the fact that no one stakeholder, or sub-group of impacted stakeholders, has the expertise, authority, resources, or competencies to handle such challenges on their own.<sup>14</sup>

As a result, the sustainable development agenda promotes a coordinated strategy for addressing both environmental management issues and societal social issues.<sup>15</sup> This is consistent with the strategy taken by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which has argued for inclusivity, long-term political commitment, and national ownership in addition to the necessity of gender equality, integrated planning, budgeting, and monitoring as part of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda.<sup>16</sup> There have also been proposals for an integrated strategy to execute sustainable development, with the argument that several SDGs are interrelated with one another. An integrated strategy entails managing trade-offs and maximising synergies across objectives.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Fisher, Joshua. "Managing environmental conflict." *The handbook of conflict resolution: theory and practice* (2014): 3, p.9.

<sup>15</sup> See also Hussein Abaza and Andrea Baranzini, *Implementing Sustainable Development: Integrated Assessment and Participatory Decision-Making Processes* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2002).

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Development Programme, "Implementation of 2030 Agenda has to be inclusive, participatory and bottom-up," Jul 18, 2017. Available at <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2017/07/18/implementation-of-2030-agenda-has-to-be-inclusive-participatory-and-bottom-up.html> [Accessed on 6 August 2022]; See also Rizza Ambra, 'An Integrated Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals' (Assembly of European Regions, 4 March 2019) <<https://aer.eu/integrated-approach-sdgs/>> accessed 6 August 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Rizza Ambra, 'An Integrated Approach to the Sustainable Development Goals' (Assembly of European Regions, 4 March 2019) <<https://aer.eu/integrated-approach-sdgs/>> accessed 6 August 2022.

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In terms of the rule of law and sustainable development for a brighter future for Kenyan children, there is need for embracing and implementing SDG 16 which calls on State Parties to ‘promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels’. This will be important in addressing the issues that have a direct or indirect influence on the origin or management of environmental conflicts. Notably, this should be entwined with Kenya's experience in terms of establishing effectiveness in the frameworks for managing conflicts and the environment in order to realise the sustainable development objectives.

There will certainly be varying levels of complexity in each manifestation of environmental conflict with regard to each of the characteristics of environmental conflicts. This also calls for different approaches in their management, whether formal or informal, based on their nature.<sup>18</sup> It has also been suggested that since social and ecological systems are intertwined, it is challenging to totally and permanently resolve an environmental issue. This is partly because each action has unanticipated and unforeseen effects on the dynamics of the broader system. Therefore, it may be preferable to create solutions that aim to manage disputes in a productive way rather than trying to resolve them.<sup>19</sup>

Some of the main reasons why environmental conflicts ought to be resolved expeditiously are that they greatly affect the livelihoods of people and also have the potential to overflow to other sectors of a country's framework.

It is worth pointing out that environment-related or natural resource use conflicts are not only political conflicts, although most of them are connected to public policies, policy programs, political controversies and political actors, unequal exchange and various forms of conflict resolution. The conflicts may originate in everyday practices of resource users, private persons or organisations that act in the institutionally channeled and regulated forms of cultural, political, economic and other specific forms of social systems.

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<sup>18</sup> Fisher, J., "Managing environmental conflict." *The handbook of conflict resolution: theory and practice* (2014): 3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.9.

### **2.3. Need for Inter- and Transdisciplinary Knowledge Syntheses**

It has also been rightly pointed out that ‘political or governmental structures or actions are not always necessary for conflict mitigation. Many conflicts involving the use of resources take the form of multi-sectorial, multi-dimensional, and multi-scale conflicts that are concurrently economic, political, social, cultural, and ethnically charged. They can also be conflicts involving values, interests, user and property rights, and conflicts involving the requirements and needs of both human and non-human resource users. They demonstrate how many social realms, social systems, and ecological systems are interconnected due to their multidimensionality’.<sup>20</sup>

In order to effectively manage and resolve conflicts, it is necessary to analyse the social, economic, and ecological systems and environments in which disputes and conflicts arise. These must transcend the existing widely accepted notions of sustainability or sustainable development in environmental science, environmental law, and international environmental governance.<sup>21</sup>

There is a need for inter- and transdisciplinary knowledge syntheses to demonstrate the necessity and the forms of new development perspectives and improved conflict resolution procedures, given the likelihood of additional and intensifying conflicts as a result of global environmental change and the already present difficulties of conflict resolution. This must be done while keeping in mind the interconnectedness of conflict resolution and sustainable transformation in the context of global social and environmental change.<sup>22</sup>

Particularly, the social and natural sciences are needed for multidisciplinary knowledge syntheses. Learning how to integrate empirical research, theories, and practical application, as well as how to combine information from social and natural scientific research, are the two main components of the overall socio-ecological transformative process. Both types of knowledge integration require methodological direction, critical analysis, evaluation, and the ability to learn from previous research and policy models, as well as from their successes and mistakes.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Olsson, E. Gunilla Almered, and Pernille Gooch, eds. *Natural resource conflicts and sustainable development*. Routledge, 2019, p. 195.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 191.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 195.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 195.

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Notably, Article 11 of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 recognises the place of science and cultural knowledge in the development of the nation. There is a need for exploring the indigenous knowledge and environment and conflict management alongside the scientific knowledge in the quest for more effective conflict management and resolution approaches backed by empirical research, theories, and practical application by and from researchers and target communities. Thus, any existing or new approaches developed to address environmental conflicts must facilitate the active and meaningful participation of affected groups of persons or communities if the same are to bear lasting outcomes. The aggrieved persons must be made to feel that they have accessed justice and have also been part of the process for them to appreciate and embrace the outcome(s) of such processes.

### **3. Conclusion**

This paper offers a discussion on how state agencies and other stakeholders can invest in conflict management in environmental matters through engaging all the stakeholders as well as investing in research and multi-sectoral knowledge in order to appreciate and make use of this knowledge in identifying and addressing the conflicts. The author argues that unless there is continuous engagement with stakeholders and appreciation of the past, current, future and all the contemporary issues surrounding environmental conflicts, finding lasting solutions may not be possible. Addressing these conflicts effectively is a fundamental requirement of achieving sustainable development agenda. The future of Environmental Conflict Management is clearly in our hands.

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