



CGIAR systemwide program on
COLLECTIVE ACTION AND
PROPERTY RIGHTS

Environmental conflict, collective action & resilience

A collaborative initiative Concept Note – 28 June 2010

Introduction

The CGIAR [systemwide program on Collective Action and Property Rights \(CAPRI\)](#) will hold a [research workshop and writeshop](#) in late June 2010 co-organized by the [Institute for Environmental Security](#). The workshop will focus on the positive ways in which collective action to resolve problems of allocation and access to natural resources can help manage or prevent social conflict more generally. The purpose is to consolidate and synthesize experience on best practices for policy and institutional change, to communicate these internationally, and to initiate a network of researchers and practitioners to share experience and build capacity in this domain.

The longer-term vision is an active network committed to strengthening capacity from local to regional scales in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to address the roots of environmental conflict and build social-ecological resilience. This concept note provides an outline of this initiative in the making.

Background

Classic, interstate warfare has declined significantly in recent decades, while intrastate conflicts are on the rise, mostly focused in the world's poorer regions, where loss of livelihood linked to environmental degradation and competition over access to and ownership of natural resources is a driving or contributing factor (UCDP 2008; UNEP 2009). Indeed, natural resources were implicated in up to forty percent of all intrastate conflicts in the past six decades (UNEP 2009). The international development community is now grappling with twin challenges – how to provide effective assistance in post-conflict environments, and how to ensure that development assistance reduces the risks of future conflict (DFID 2009). Because civil conflict frequently erases gains from prior development assistance, and because intrastate conflicts associated with natural resources are twice as likely to relapse into conflict within the first five years (UCDP 2008), these twin challenges are closely linked.

Research on environmental resources and conflict has expanded rapidly in recent years, but important gaps remain in application to development policy and practice. One line of research has focused on the causal links between competition over natural resources and violent conflict (Homer-Dixon 1999; Le Billon 2001; Rustad et al. 2008; Welsch 2008) largely with reference to high-value extractive resources such as oil, gems, other minerals, and timber. Attention to these linkages has prompted shifts in the lending policies of development agencies, and related public advocacy campaigns have caused major multilateral corporations to redirect or adopt new standards in relation to their investments in extractive industries.

Far less attention, in both research and public advocacy, has focused on conflict over the natural resources that underpin rural livelihoods in agricultural landscapes – the subsistence use of land, water, fisheries, and forests. Concerns over resource rights and livelihoods of poor users is, however, now emerging as a sharp focus in international development policy debates. The recent surge in international “land grabs” as countries and corporations aim to secure ownership or long-term use rights for agricultural land and primary resource extraction has serious implications for food security and poverty reduction (Kugelman & Levenstein 2009). Not only do these often spawn local resource disputes but, as exemplified by the recent experience of Madagascar, they can be a factor in broader social conflict and political unrest as well. Climate change, with its associated shifts in resource productivity and migration patterns, as well as the emergence of new markets for carbon offsets for forest and land management, present additional sources of competition in renewable resource management.

Furthermore, while much existing research has focused on causal pathways to violent conflict, little progress has been made to understand how governance factors can encourage pathways to constructive cooperation over natural resources (Martin 2005), nor how cooperative use of natural resources may provide a focal point for improvements in governance and peacebuilding more generally (Carius 2006). The international development community has now explicitly identified goals of improving governance as an essential contribution to managing conflict and reducing poverty (e.g., DFID 2007), and capitalizing on the potential for environmental cooperation as a contribution to peacebuilding (UNEP 2009). New research is required to develop evidence-based, practical guidance on how to achieve these goals.

The CGIAR works in dozens of countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America that are either vulnerable to violent conflict or recovering from conflict. Our joint work focuses on challenges of food security, poverty, and environmental resource management that are central in addressing the root causes of conflict, as well as in building resilience to avert future conflict. While collectively we have gained significant experience relevant to understanding these links, that experience has not been systematically assessed in comparative perspective. Partner networks aimed at improving resource management to sustain local livelihoods focused on particular resource sectors – including forests, land, water, and fisheries – often grapple with conflict and collective action as a core challenge, even if it is not an explicit programmatic focus. In parallel, a range of initiatives have been launched in recent years that consolidate practical learning and guidance in the new field of

environmental security, particularly as applied to post-conflict operations. Guidance on the longer-term challenge of building institutions for renewable resource management that reduce the likelihood of future conflict is much less developed.

Examining cases from forests, water, land, fisheries, and other multiple resource systems, the initiative will support action research and structured learning to address questions such as these:

- What are the defining characteristics of natural resource management institutions that prove resilient in the face of intense competition among resource uses and user groups? What is the role of collective action in creating and sustaining these institutions?
- What institutional innovations enable diverse stakeholders to assess and manage resource competition equitably? In what ways is progress in this regard dependent on more general governance attributes of stakeholder participation, distribution of decision-making authority, and mechanisms of accountability?
- In what ways do clarity, equity, or flexibility in property rights influence the likelihood of competition being resolved peacefully rather than violently? What strategies have proven most successful and why?
- What measures to reduce group inequalities related to natural resource access, use, and benefit-sharing are most effective in reducing tension and preventing broader social conflict?
- What targeted measures work effectively to build awareness and capacity so that vulnerable groups are better able to exercise their rights related to natural resource access and decision-making in practice?
- In what ways does the work of investing in collective action to resolve problems of resource allocation and access reinforce more general efforts at societal reintegration?

Answers to these questions can help improve the design of policies and strategies for development interventions in conflict-sensitive environments, and identify ways to encourage improvements in natural resources management that reinforce cooperation and avert deepening cycles of conflict.

Goal, purpose and approach

The **goal** of the initiative is to build resilient livelihoods among poor, rural producers who depend on highly contested natural resources, generating gains in nutrition, income, welfare, and human security, and reducing the likelihood of broader social conflict.

The **purpose** is to strengthen the capacity for collaboration among producer organizations and other civil society groups, governments, and private sector actors to address the sources of resource competition, and develop governance arrangements that manage future resource competition equitably.

The **approach** is to gradually build an active network of researchers and practitioners committed to strengthening capacity from local to regional scales in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to address the roots of environmental conflict and build social-ecological resilience.

As core **objectives** the network will:

1. **support local efforts at action research** that demonstrate the gains from investing in capacity to manage conflict over renewable resources
2. **exchange experience and distill further lessons** about processes of collective action and governance reform that enable progress towards resilience
3. **communicate successful approaches** and engage with public and civil society actors to see such lessons applied in international development policy and practice

Phasing of activities

Phase 1. Building a network. An international research workshop in Siem Reap, Cambodia, during 28 June – 1 July 2010, will bring together 30 researchers and practitioners from within and outside the CGIAR to systematically compare lessons learnt from work in diverse resource systems in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. A writeshop will immediately follow, in which a small core group will build on the insights of the research workshop to jointly begin synthesizing lessons for research and policy audiences. Planned outputs include:

- a policy brief providing a preliminary synthesis of principles for policy makers, civil society leaders, and development practitioners
- a book to present selected cases and findings to researchers and practitioners seeking more in-depth analysis
- a web guide to additional resources made available through the popular CAPRI website

The workshop will also constitute the initial network, identify complementary activities underway, and discuss opportunities for engaging other partners. Follow-on consultations and planning sessions will confirm core members, governance arrangements, and initial activities.

Phase 2. Deepening learning. Network members will commit to assess and share the lessons from their own activities, and in addition, to contribute to collaborative efforts determined jointly. As the network expands, geographic focal areas and local stakeholder engagement for these collaborative efforts will be determined on the strength of existing partnerships and ongoing activities of core members of the network, the opportunity to positively

influence institutional development and governance reform, and the scope for learning lessons of cross-regional importance.

Phase 3. Extending influence. As a robust set of lessons are developed through experience in diverse environments, the network will intensify dialogue with key institutions in development policy and practice at global, regional, and national levels. The aim is not only to build awareness about strategies for positive collective action that support resilience and prevent violent conflict, but to improve policy and institutional reforms and shift investment patterns in support that goal.

Partnerships

The initiative is in the very early inception stage, and we are in discussion with partners to co-design and co-invest in its longer-term development and joint implementation. Principles of partnership include shared responsibility, complementary strengths, commitment to action learning, and alignment of efforts around a common purpose and objectives. While members will naturally pursue a range of other activities, the expectation is that each will define a portion of its work as contributing to the common purpose of the initiative, and seek to leverage additional resources in support of that purpose. Membership will include both institutions and individuals.

Partnership discussions have been initiated with a range of organizations that include:

- Network nodes in the field of environmental security – the Institute for Environmental Security (the Hague), Adelphi Research (Berlin), the Environmental Change and Security Program of the Woodrow Wilson Center (Washington) and the Environmental Law Institute (Washington).
- Research and advocacy networks linking civil society and international organizations – the International Land Coalition (Rome), the Rights and Resources Initiative (Washington), and the International Cooperative in Support of Fishworkers (Chennai).
- The leading global network supporting social entrepreneurs committed to catalyzing systemic institutional change at national or regional level – Ashoka (Washington).
- Core multilateral agencies in international development and environment, including World Bank, IFAD, FAO, UNEP, and UNDP.

Contact for further information:

Blake Ratner
Program Leader, Governance
WorldFish Center
B.Ratner@cgiar.org

Ruth Meinzen-Dick
CAPRI Coordinator
International Food Policy Research Institute
R.Meinzen-Dick@cgiar.org

CGIAR Systemwide Program on Collective Action and Property Rights (CAPRI)
<http://www.capri.cgiar.org/>

Institute for Environmental Security
<http://www.envirosecurity.org/>

Workshop on Collective Action, Property Rights, and Conflict in Natural Resources
Management
http://www.capri.cgiar.org/wks_0610.asp

References

- Carius, Alexander 2006: Environmental Peacebuilding. Environmental Cooperation as an Instrument for Crisis Prevention and Peacebuilding. Conditions for Success. Paper Commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. Adelphi Report 03/07. Berlin: Adelphi consult.
- DFID. 2007. *Preventing Violent Conflict*. DFID Policy Paper. London: Department for International Development. Online: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Pubs/files/preventing-conflict.pdf>
- DFID. 2009. Eliminating World Poverty: Building our Common Future. Background paper to the DFID conference on the future of international development, March 2009.
- Homer-Dixon, Thomas 1999: Environment, Scarcity, and Violence. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kugelman, M., and S.L. Levenstein (eds.) 2009. Land Grab? Race for the world's farmland. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.
- Le Billon, P. 2001. The political ecology of war: natural resources and armed conflicts. *Political Geography* 20(5): 561-584.
- Martin, A. 2005. Environmental conflict between refugee and host communities. *Journal of Peace Research* 42(3): 329-346.
- Rustad, S.C.A., J.K. Rød, W. Larsen, and N.P. Gleditsch. 2008. Foliage and fighting: Forest resources and the onset, duration, and location of civil war. *Political Geography* 27(7): 761-782.
- UCDP (Uppsala Conflict Data Program) & Centre for the Study of Civil War. 2008. UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset version 4.0. In Binningsbø, H. & Rustad, S. A. (2008). PRIO working paper: Resource conflicts, resource management and post-conflict peace. Uppsala University & International Peace Research Institute, Oslo.
- UNEP 2009: From Conflict to Peacebuilding. The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment. Nairobi: UNEP.
- Welsch, H. 2008. Resource abundance and internal armed conflict: Types of natural resources and the incidence of 'new wars'. *Ecological Economics* 67(3): 503-513.