EU-UN Partnership

Strengthening Capacity for the Consensual and Sustainable Management of Land and Natural Resources

The management of land and natural resources is one of the most critical challenges facing developing countries today. The exploitation of high-value natural resources, including oil, gas, minerals, and timber, has often been cited as a key factor in triggering, escalating, or sustaining violent conflicts around the globe. Furthermore, increasing competition and conflict for diminishing renewable resources, such as land and water, is on the rise. This is being further aggravated by environmental degradation, population growth and climate change. The mismanagement of land and natural resources is contributing to new conflicts and obstructing the peaceful resolution of existing ones.

To improve capacity for land and natural resource management and conflict prevention, the European Union partnered with the Expert Reference Group of the UN Framework Team (FT) in late 2008. The aim of this partnership was to develop and implement a strategic multi-agency project focused on building the capacity of national stakeholders and the United Nations system to prevent land and natural resources from contributing to violent conflict. Six UN agencies, programmes or departments have been involved, including UNDP, DPA, UNEP, PBSO, UN-HABITAT and DESA. The partnership is also designed to enhance policy development and programme coordination between key actors at the field level.

The first outcome of this project is an inventory of existing tools and capacity within the UN system and a set of four Guidance Notes on addressing natural resource management and conflict prevention. These Guidance Notes cover: (i) Land and Conflict, (ii) Extractive Industries and Conflict, (iii) Renewable Resources and Conflict, (iv) Strengthening Capacity for Conflict-Sensitive Natural Resource Management.

Based on the Guidance Notes, the second outcome of the project is to deliver a series of training modules for UN and EU field staff, as well as local partners, to enhance the knowledge and skills needed to understand, anticipate, prevent, and mitigate potential conflicts over land and natural resources. Participants will acquire the skills to formulate and operationalize preventive measures in relation to natural resource management (NRM) and conflict.

In countries where specific NRM and conflict challenges are identified, the project will aim to provide focused technical assistance in the development of conflict prevention strategies. This could include the deployment of staff and other experts to assist the UN Country Team (UNCT), including the Resident Coordinator (RC) or Peace and Development Advisor, in analysing options and designing programmes. Where needed, dedicated follow-up measures will also be undertaken on an inter-agency basis, in partnership with the EU.

This guidance note was developed under the lead of UN-HABITAT. For more information, please contact: framework.team@undp.org
Executive Summary

Land and conflict

The immediate post-conflict period is often characterized by heavy demands on natural resources. Organizations cannot avoid the temptation to reduce the human, economic, social, environmental costs of part of a broader conflict prevention strategy. Such early attention to land-related issues can be critical, as well as a possible source of livelihoods; it is also fundamental to peace and security for populations; national sovereignty for a reliable land records systems; limited overlapping rights on sufficient technical and financial resources to address restitution issues comprehensively.

Strategies to support a systematic approach to land grievances and disputes

Several cross-cutting strategies can enhance development partners’ support for a systematic approach to land grievances and conflicts. These include regular assessments and conflict analysis at different stages of conflict resolution processes; effective conflict and land tenure institutions; strengthening coordination – within government, among development partners, and between development partners and the government; to ensure coherent and sustained support to the land sector.

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**Natural resources and conflict**
Conflict areas when two or more groups believe their interests are incompatible. Conflict is not in itself a negative phenomenon. Non-violent conflict can be an essential component of social change and development, and is a necessary component of human interaction. Non-violent resolution of conflict is possible when individuals and groups have trust in their governing structures, society and institutions to manage incompatible interests.

Conflict becomes problematic when societal mechanisms and institutions for managing and resolving conflict break down, giving way to violence. Societies with weak institutions, fragile political systems and divisive social relations can be drawn into cycles of conflict and violence. Preventing this negative spiral and political systems and divisive social relations can be drawn into cycles of conflict and violence. Preventing this negative spiral and political systems and divisive social relations can be drawn into cycles of conflict and violence.

**Land and conflict**
The land and natural resource issues are almost never the sole cause of conflict. They are often a part of a wider context of historical, social, economic, and political factors. Natural resources and conflict are inextricably linked. The availability and control of land and natural resources can become a source of conflict when they are perceived to be scarce or contested.

**Addressing land issues in the conflict cycle**
- Even during periods of relative stability, latent grievances may exist, related to access to land or insecurity of tenure. Even in the absence of open conflict, many statutory land institutions in developing countries are weak, often serving only the needs of the elite. The authority of traditional institutions, where they exist, may be weak or perceived to be so, serving the interests of groups at the expense of local communities. Informal institutions may emerge to meet the needs of local populations. Fundamental reforms may be required. At this stage, however, there may be a reluctance to recognize and address the potential for latent land-related grievances to become violent.
- In periods of fragility, land-related disputes can turn increasingly violent and may result in some population displacement. Land grievances may be linked to broader security, livelihood, political and identity issues. At this stage, leadership, land institutions and the quality of governance will have a significant impact on what happens during an end stage conflict. International assistance should focus on monitoring and rapidly addressing land-related conflicts within a broader strategy of conflict prevention.

**Common land challenges and potential responses**

- The immediate post-conflict period is often characterized by a rush to render land-related conflicts as access are settled and as swiftly as possible. With land restitution schemes, competition between land institutions, poor coordination among development partners, and a lack of accurate and timely land-related information create a conflagration and fuel international institutional and capacity building. The Guidance Note presents frameworks to understand the relationship between land and conflict and is improving, a critical gap remains in implementing a systematic approach to land grievances and conflicts.

**Land and conflict international assistance: a framework for analysis and action**
- Land conflicts tend to be dynamic: the relationship between land and conflict often changes over time. Violent conflict may co-exist with peace-making efforts and can even contribute to the creation of new grievances after a peace agreement.
- The international community is to promote positive social transformation, the international community. The challenge for UN, EU and other international actors is to promote positive social transformation, while mitigating the risks and potential impacts of violent and damaging conflict.

**Environmental factors are rarely, if ever, the sole cause of violent conflict. However, the exploitation of natural resources and related environmental stresses can be implicated in all phases of the conflict cycle, from contributing to the outbreak and perpetuation of violence to undermining prospects for peace.**

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**Strategies to support a systematic approach to land grievances and disputes**
- Several cross-cutting strategies can enhance development partner support for a systematic approach to land grievances and conflicts. These include: regular assessments and conflict analysis at different stages of conflict and transition; document the impact of conflict on land tenure and institutions; strengthen coordination – within government, among development partners, and between development partners and the government – to ensure coherent and sustained support to the sector.
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