

Does Environmental Good Depend on Peace?

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Introduction

Peace is a prerequisite for environmental sustainability. In conflict zones, ecosystems collapse as natural resources are plundered, governance fails, and pollution runs rampant. By contrast, stable societies implement conservation policies, manage resources sustainably, and build climate resilience. The evidence is stark: over 170 armed conflicts in 2023 displaced 120 million people while devastating forests, waterways, and biodiversity (United Nations, 2023).

Nowhere is this link clearer than in Africa, where climate change intensifies resource conflicts, and in Cameroon, where instability accelerates deforestation. From the Sahel's droughts to Lake Chad's disappearance, environmental degradation fuels displacement while undermining development (ACRA, 2024; IOM, 2025). Yet peacebuilding initiatives show that stability can restore ecosystems, proving environmental protection depends on ending violence first.

Global Context: The Link Between Peace and Environmental Protection

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) defines environmental security as the reduction of human vulnerability to environmental degradation by addressing the root causes of both ecological harm and human insecurity (UNEP, 2023). In conflict zones, environmental degradation accelerates due to unregulated resource exploitation, habitat destruction, and the collapse of governance structures. For instance, protracted conflicts in the Middle East and parts of Asia have led to severe deforestation, water pollution, and biodiversity loss, as warring factions exploit natural resources for financial gain or tactical advantage (ACCORD, 2023).

The environmental cost of conflict is profound; military activities contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, and explosive weapons generate millions of tons of debris, often contaminated with hazardous materials (Watson Institute, 2025). Furthermore, at least 40% of all intrastate conflicts in the last 60 years have been linked to natural resources, and this connection doubles the risk of conflict recurrence (UNDP, 2023).

Conversely, peace enables coordinated environmental governance, regulatory enforcement, and investment in restoration. Stable societies are better equipped to establish protected areas, implement sustainable agricultural practices, and control pollution. Peaceful conditions also enhance the capacity for climate adaptation and mitigation, which are critical in the face of escalating global climate change (UNEP, 2023). The correlation between peace and environmental sustainability is thus both causal and mutually reinforcing.

International agreements, such as the Paris Agreement, are more effectively implemented in stable regions, demonstrating how peace facilitates global climate action (UNFCCC, 2023). The UN Security Council has increasingly recognized the adverse effects of climate change and ecological changes on stability, particularly in regions prone to conflict, and has adopted resolutions that acknowledge these linkages (Security Council Report, 2023).

Africa: Peace as a Foundation for Environmental Security

Africa exemplifies the complex relationship between peace and environmental sustainability. The continent faces recurrent conflicts driven by competition over natural resources, including land, water, and minerals, which exacerbate environmental degradation and create cycles of ecological and social harm (Muigua, 2023). Population growth, climate change, and poverty further strain fragile ecosystems, increasing the likelihood of resource-based disputes (ACRA, 2024).

The Sahel region, for example, is experiencing temperatures rising at 1.5 times the global average, leading to increased unpredictability in rainfall, more frequent extreme weather events, and intensified competition over dwindling resources. This has contributed to a complex crisis, with over 4 million internally displaced people and refugees (Institute for Global Change, 2024; UNHCR, 2021). The Lake Chad Basin, shared by Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, is another stark example where climate-induced hazards like droughts and the drastic shrinking of Lake Chad (by 90% since the 1960s) have intensified competition over water, fueling inter-communal tensions and conflict (Humanitarian Practice Network, 2025). Mediation and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) have emerged as vital tools for promoting peace and environmental security in Africa. Traditional and modern mediation practices facilitate cooperation across ethnic and national boundaries, mitigating conflicts over

shared resources (Muigua, 2023). The African Union and regional bodies, such as the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), increasingly recognize that peacebuilding must incorporate environmental considerations to achieve sustainable development (African Union, 2023.). The Africa Climate Security Risk Assessment (ACRA) highlights how climate change impacts, such as droughts and floods, can intensify existing tensions. However, coordinated, peaceful responses enhance resilience and reduce conflict risks (ACRA, 2024). Initiatives like the African Union's Great Green Wall, which aims to combat desertification while fostering peace and livelihoods, demonstrate the potential of integrating environmental and peacebuilding efforts (African Union, 2023).

Cameroon: Peacebuilding and Environmental Sustainability

Cameroon's rich biodiversity and natural resources are under threat from deforestation, agricultural expansion, and resource extraction. Conflict and social unrest, particularly in the Anglophone regions, have disrupted conservation efforts and increased illegal logging and poaching (KMCO, 2023). Cameroon lost 1.07 million hectares of humid primary forest between 2002 and 2024, representing 49% of its total tree cover loss, primarily driven by agricultural expansion, logging, and infrastructure development (Global Forest Watch, 2025). Conflict exacerbates these issues by weakening governance and creating opportunities for unregulated exploitation.

In the Far North region, intercommunity tensions exacerbated by climate pressures have undermined social stability, leading to displacement and increased pressure on resources (IOM, 2025). However, local peace initiatives, including mediation and community dialogue, have demonstrated potential in restoring environmental governance. Collaborative forest management programs, for example, have reduced resource-based conflicts and improved ecological outcomes (KMCO, 2023).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has supported initiatives in Cameroon's Far North to foster peaceful coexistence between communities, integrating humanitarian, development, and peace (HDP) approaches. These initiatives strengthen local governance mechanisms and promote inter-community dialogue, directly contributing to more

sustainable natural resource management (IOM, 2025). Cameroon's participation in the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI), which supports sustainable forest management and conflict prevention, further underscores the importance of international partnerships in addressing environmental and peace challenges (CAFI, 2023).

Conclusion

Environmental sustainability fundamentally depends on peace. Conflict accelerates environmental degradation, intensifies resource competition, and undermines sustainable management. Globally and in Africa, peace fosters the conditions necessary for effective environmental stewardship, climate resilience, and equitable resource distribution. Cameroon's case illustrates how peacebuilding initiatives can directly enhance environmental security.

Policymakers and stakeholders must prioritize peace as a core component of environmental and development strategies to achieve lasting ecological and social benefits. Multilateral frameworks, such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16 (Peace) and SDG 15 (Life on Land), provide a roadmap for integrating peacebuilding and environmental protection. By addressing the root causes of conflict and environmental harm, the international community can build a more sustainable and peaceful future.

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