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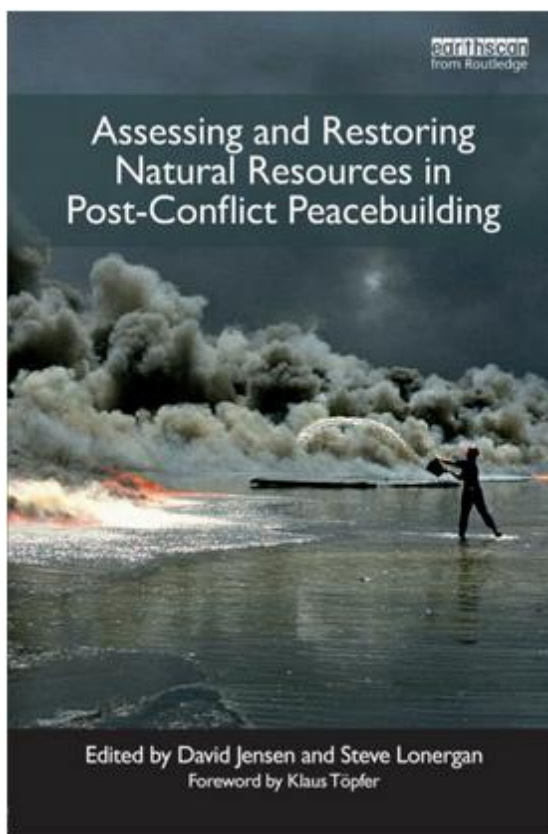
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This chapter first appeared in *Assessing and Restoring Natural Resources In Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, edited by D. Jensen and S. Lonergan. It is one of 6 edited books on Post-Conflict Peacebuilding and Natural Resource Management (for more information, see www.environmentalpeacebuilding.org). The full book can be ordered from Routledge at <http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9781849712347/>.

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Foreword to *Assessing and Restoring Natural Resources in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*

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Online publication date: May 2013

Suggested citation: K. Töpfer. 2012. Foreword to *Assessing and Restoring Natural Resources in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, ed. D. Jensen and S. Lonergan. London: Earthscan.

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Foreword

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In early 1999, one year into my tenure as Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the conflict in Kosovo escalated into an international war. The range of modern weaponry involved and the deliberate targeting of industrial and military facilities made it clear that the Balkans faced not only a humanitarian crisis of tragic proportions, but also potentially serious environmental damage.

In the face of dire predictions of environmental disaster, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan asked UNEP to conduct an impartial and scientific investigation of the effects of the Kosovo conflict on the environment and human settlements. To conduct the assessment, UNEP and United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) established the Joint UNEP/UN-HABITAT Balkans Task Force.

The resulting report, *The Kosovo Conflict: Consequences for the Environment and Human Settlements*, was published in October 1999. In addition to outlining general linkages between armed conflict and environmental damage, the report identified four environmental hot spots—heavily contaminated sites where remediation was essential to protect human health—and recommended, on humanitarian grounds, a series of urgent cleanup measures. On the basis of the report, UNEP raised significant financial resources from the international community to implement remediation efforts, which were undertaken in partnership with local authorities.

This pioneering work raised awareness of the environmental impacts of conflict and paved the way for the development of new expertise within UNEP to address such impacts. The investigation of the environmental consequences of the Kosovo conflict was followed by similar field assessments throughout the Balkans and in conflict-affected regions across the globe, from Afghanistan to Gaza, Iraq, and Sudan. Each assessment was designed to fit the unique geographic, political, and security conditions of the particular situation.

Ultimately, UNEP's work in the Balkans led to the creation of the Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch, which is tasked with undertaking assessments that allow war-torn communities to know whether their water is safe to drink, whether their air is safe to breathe, and whether their land can be

cultivated without risk. Moreover, such assessments have helped to ensure that environmental and natural resource management issues are included in recovery and reconstruction plans, enabling communities to “build back better”—that is, in ways that bolster sustainable, long-term development and strengthen peace and stability. Today, one of UNEP’s six priorities is to assess and address the environmental dimensions of disasters and conflicts; and neutral, objective, post-crisis assessments remain a cornerstone of UNEP’s operations.

As global awareness of the complex relationship between natural resources and conflict increases, more national and international organizations are seeking to address the connections. In 2011, for example, the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross identified the protection of the environment during armed conflict as one of four themes that need to be reinforced by humanitarian law. Within the European Union (EU), the policies pertaining to stability and conflict prevention call for the mismanagement of natural resources to be addressed. The UN and the EU have also created a partnership on natural resources and conflict prevention to issue guidance, conduct training, and develop joint programs in fragile states. Within the UN family, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support adopted a new policy, in 2009, to limit the environmental footprint of peacekeeping operations; the UN Peacebuilding Commission has held high-level meetings to examine the ways in which natural resources can support peacebuilding; the Department of Political Affairs has added mediators with expertise on land and water conflicts to its global roster; and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his July 2010 *Progress Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict*, formally called on member states and the UN system to “make questions of natural resource allocation, ownership and access an integral part of peacebuilding strategies.”

The examples of post-conflict environmental assessments, restoration, remediation, and reconstruction presented in this book make clear that the work of the Balkans Task Force and the Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch is only part of the wide range of initiatives being undertaken to manage natural resources to support peacebuilding. The links between natural resources and violent conflict are now generally accepted; the tasks that remain for practitioners, policy makers, and researchers are threefold: first, to help communities address—and ultimately prevent—violent conflict over natural resources, as well as the environmental damage that results from such conflict; second, to transform natural resources so as to maximize opportunities for sustainable livelihoods, employment, economic diversification, and reconciliation without causing new conflict or environmental degradation; and third, to restore the productivity of degraded natural resources and to begin using them on a more sustainable basis. This book, together with the other five edited books in the series, represents an important step toward achieving these goals. I am proud that UNEP’s early assessment work in the Balkans helped to catalyze such important follow-up efforts, and I can only hope that the lessons contained in these books improve programming and impact at the field level.