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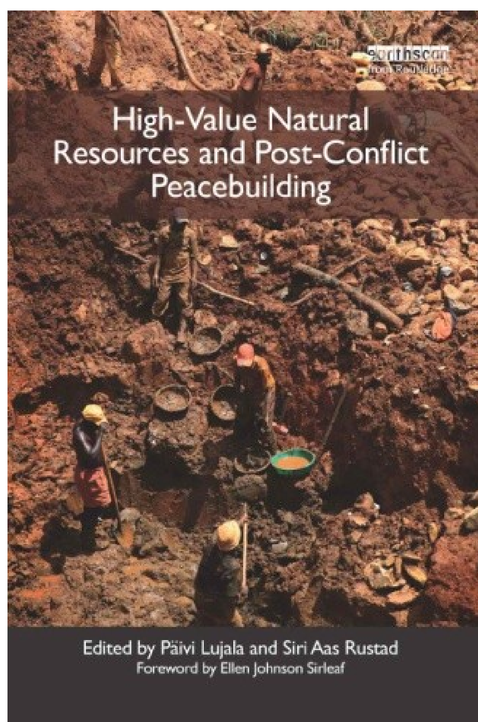

Part 5: Livelihoods: Introduction

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PART 5

Livelihoods

Introduction

It is essential for national and subnational governments, international organizations, and civil society to acknowledge the importance of resource exploitation for local livelihoods, and to take account of the tensions that can result from overlapping claims to the same resources, or to different resources in the same area. In many resource-rich countries, the small-scale exploitation of high-value natural resources, such as diamonds or forest products, may be well established before conflict, or may develop as a coping strategy during conflict. Such exploitation, which is often unofficial and even illegal, may be the economic backbone of war-torn communities. Local populations may accordingly view any disruption of their livelihoods—through large-scale exploitation or through attempts to curb peace spoilers' access to valuable resources, for example—as a negative side effect of peace. Economic development must therefore be approached on two fronts: by fostering resource projects that will maximize fiscal returns, and by formalizing and supporting the resource economies on which conflict-affected populations depend.

Tensions over access to resources have the potential to ignite old conflicts and create new ones. In a given area, those seeking livelihood opportunities in the wake of conflict—and therefore competing for access to resources—may include established residents, returning refugees, displaced persons, excombatants, and migrants. Meanwhile, national and subnational governments may be attempting to reestablish their authority over resources, and companies may be looking for opportunities to begin commercial exploitation. Under these circumstances, tensions may emerge about overlapping claims, unclear rights to resources, and differing views on which entities have the authority to grant resource rights and access; such tensions may be further aggravated by environmental damage related to resource exploitation. The resulting disputes between communities, various levels of government, and extractive firms can undermine, destabilize, or even derail the peacebuilding process.

Such issues are at the core of the fifth part of the volume. The first two chapters in part 5 focus on Afghanistan, where local livelihoods often depend on opium poppy cultivation. In "Counternarcotics Efforts and Afghan Poppy Farmers: Finding the Right Approach," David M. Catarious Jr. and Alison Russell examine the evolution of national and international policy regarding opium poppy in Afghanistan. Because of their view that opium poppy was primarily a source of criminality and conflict financing, both the Afghan and the U.S. governments initially focused on eradication and the development of alternative livelihoods. Noting that such policies have had transitory success at best—and have undermined rural livelihoods—Catarious and Russell conclude that farmers are the key to successfully reducing poppy cultivation. To develop solutions that will make it possible for farmers to quit poppy cultivation, policy makers need to

understand the complex context in which the farmers operate—that is, the economic, security, political, and environmental challenges that farmers face, and the needs that poppy cultivation meets.

In "The Janus Nature of Opium Poppy: A View from the Field," Adam Pain argues that opium poppy cultivation provides a means of coping in a country where both the national government and the international community have failed the population on many counts. Poppy cultivation provides jobs, reduces poverty, serves as hedge against the failure of other crops, and may even contribute to local conflict resolution. Thus, for many poppy farmers—whom Pain describes as the most vulnerable and victimized actors in the opium trade—the opium economy has yielded greater positive effects than reconstruction efforts and counternarcotics projects. Pain argues that a deeper understanding of the opium economy, the welfare benefits it provides, and the informal institutions of which it is a part would have led to a more appropriate response to the challenges of opium poppy cultivation and trade.

In "Peace through Sustainable Forest Management in Asia: The USAID Forest Conflict Initiative," Jennifer Wallace and Ken Conca illustrate how the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), a major player in the field of development assistance, identified and sought to address the problem of forest conflict. The goal of the USAID Forest Conflict Initiative was to increase understanding and awareness, both within and outside USAID, of the role that forests played in conflict, and to develop more conflict-sensitive approaches to management of the forest sector. The chapter describes the key obstacles that USAID encountered in its efforts to communicate the new approaches, and stresses the importance of such approaches—not only to USAID but to governments, the private sector, the donor community, and local stakeholders.

As essential as it is to recognize the significance and value of resource-based livelihoods, it is equally important to address problems that may be associated with them. "Women in the Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining Sector of the Democratic Republic of the Congo," by Karen Hayes and Rachel Perks, describes the efforts of Pact, a nongovernmental organization based in Washington, D.C., to address gender-related issues among women living and working in artisanal mining communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Women artisanal miners, many of whom are driven to mining by economic need, face discrimination, unequal participation in decision making, and the risk of violence and abuse. Hayes and Perks point out that by sidelining women, both mining communities and the country as a whole miss out on opportunities to develop the mining sector and strengthen peacebuilding.

In "Forest User Groups and Peacebuilding in Nepal," Tina Sanio and Binod Chapagain describe community forest user groups (CFUGs), a national approach to securing livelihoods that depend on forest products. In addition to managing community forests, which are an integral part of rural livelihoods, CFUGs have made a positive contribution to peace by assisting in reconciliation, reintegration, and reconstruction; mediating negotiations over property; providing returnees

with access to community forests and building materials; granting low-interest loans; and supporting small-scale enterprises. The peacebuilding potential of such groups is rarely acknowledged by governments or international agencies, however; instead, local communities tend to be viewed as passive recipients of third-party interventions. In Nepal, for example, the central government has not included CFUGs in national peacebuilding initiatives.

The final chapter in part 5 illustrates how resource exploitation can lead to wide-ranging environmental damage, put local livelihoods in danger, and create tension in a country already riddled with conflict. In "Lurking Beneath the Surface: Oil, Environmental Degradation, and Armed Conflict in Sudan," Luke A. Patey argues that if environmental destruction continues to damage livelihoods, the expectation that oil will foster development may be undermined, which would lead to an increase in oil-related conflicts. So far, violence has been sporadic and primarily directed against oil companies, but simmering conflicts have the potential to pit local groups against each other or against the government. To avoid further conflict, Patey argues for assigning priority to environmental protection and to compensation for environmental damage.

Because of their role in conflict financing, local resource economies can pose challenges to peacebuilding; at the same time, however, they can provide economic opportunities. Artisanal mining and the harvesting of forest products, for example, are labor intensive, have relatively low start-up costs, can be started quickly, and have the potential for quick economic returns for local communities. Acknowledging the importance and peacebuilding potential of local resource economies, involving the local population in resource management, and securing local livelihoods are keys to gaining the support of local populations for the peacebuilding process.