

Briefing: Defining Nature, Peace and Security (NPS)

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Narrow interpretations of the relationships between nature and security that prioritise the national security of only a few states risk repeating the mistakes of past environmental security discourse, alienating and excluding key stakeholders — potentially increasing contestation — and contributing little towards addressing the underlying drivers of global biodiversity loss.

Instead there is an urgent need for a more expansive understanding of **nature, peace and security** that takes a holistic approach to the complex relationships between nature, peace and security to provide a robust understanding of the drivers of biodiversity loss globally, and in areas affected by fragility and conflict. Such an understanding can be used to identify and facilitate positive roles for nature during peacebuilding and conflict transformation, as well as contributing to the security needs and aspirations of all.

Recommendations

1. Develop a common **definition** for NPS and use it consistently.
2. Convene NPS **stakeholders** to explore and identify shared objectives and a multi-year research and advocacy strategy; this should include consideration of how security fora should be used to promote NPS.
3. Begin building an informal **coalition** of states interested in exploring the potential of NPS work.
4. Use the meetings of relevant **multilateral environmental agreements** to promote NPS and engage state and non-state stakeholders.
5. Initiate **research** on the components of NPS and on perceptions of nature and security.
6. Develop and implement a **donor** engagement plan.

Context

A growing number of stakeholders are engaging with Nature, Peace and Security (NPS). Each brings different narrative frames and priorities. In some cases, frames are also being developed to attract particular stakeholders into the topic, such as governments, or specific ministries, including those of defence, foreign affairs or economy.

The history of environmental security and climate security discourse demonstrates that these narrative frames matter, and that state-security centric frames can contribute to maladaptive responses that exacerbate the underlying threat, or fail to address root causes. Narrative ownership is also important, for example a number of Global South countries have viewed Global North environmental security narratives as problematic, undermining international cooperation.¹

States such as the UK are outwardly framing the topic as “Nature Security”,² foregrounding national security threats from ecosystem collapse, as well as intersections with crimes affecting the environment.³ The theme is also being picked up across the EU and beyond, including by voices that earlier contributed to the hardening of climate security discourse. In some cases, conservation organisations and experts are amplifying narrow securitisation narratives in the expectation that this will attract policy attention. And, because nature has always received less attention than climate, there is a risk that stakeholders are even more willing to compromise values and narratives in the fight for attention.

The emergent Nature Security framing is not yet widely recognised and therefore remains malleable, offering the prospect of ensuring that this long-overdue attention on the intersection of nature, peace, conflict and human security contributes to positive outcomes while avoiding past securitisation mistakes. Key to this is for stakeholders to articulate and promote an inclusive and holistic narrative, which is expansive enough to encompass the problems that we see and contribute towards the solutions necessary to tackle them.

Components of Nature Peace and Security

Armed conflict, insecurity and peace interact with nature in many different ways and across different temporal and spatial scales. The non-exhaustive table below explores some of these relationships and the tools that could be used to address them.

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1. Mohan, V. In search of consensus: Examining Global South perspectives on climate security in UNSC debates, *Earth System Governance*, Volume 23, 2025, 100231, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esg.2024.100231>

2. DEFRA (2026) Nature security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nature-security-assessment-on-global-biodiversity-loss-ecosystem-collapse-and-national-security>

3. The UK has defined Nature Security as ‘the security threats arising from biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation and change around the world. As ecosystems lose their ability to provide services (e.g. food, water, disease regulation, and climate stability), risks to human wellbeing, political stability, economic resilience and international security intensify ... and ‘is concerned with the degradation and reorganisation of ecological systems and the services they provide, such as pollination, water regulation, and disease control, arguing that they ‘can undermine societal resilience, act as threat multipliers, and contribute to fragility, instability, and even conflict’.

Problem

Global biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse threaten national and human security.

Solution

Increase understanding and strengthen the implementation of biodiversity frameworks, including the KMGBF.

Tools

Strengthen biodiversity frameworks and the enabling conditions for national implementation, including through political leadership, financing, data and information, technical skills, communications, and National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs). Address harmful subsidies and incentives. Provide targeted assistance to critical ecosystems and migratory pathways. Address wildlife and environmental crime, illegal habitat encroachment and unsustainable resource exploitation. Increase biodiversity finance.

Develop a common, transparent and transferable methodology for assessing national security risks from biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse and encourage all states to undertake them. Enhance protected and conserved area management and undertake targeted restoration and rewilding. Better integrate Indigenous and traditional knowledge and leadership for ecosystem management. Improve nature's resilience against climate change using tools such as ecosystem-based adaptation and by increasing ecological connectivity. Strengthen community engagement with natural resource management and nature-based livelihoods, and improve land use planning to benefit nature, adopting a conflict-sensitive approach across these efforts.

Wars directly damage biodiversity and ecosystems.

Support peace and strengthen protection of nature during conflict.

Increase investment and commitment to conflict prevention and resolution. Where conflicts occur, enhance remote and local assessment methodologies and guidance and use targeted research to better understand ecological damage from war and to raise awareness. Strengthen international and national legal protection of nature in relation to armed conflicts and improve military training and conduct for state and non-state actors.

Strengthen local and national conservation capacity in conflict-affected areas, including through the provision of emergency ranger and park-management support. Provide capacity and training on conflict sensitive conservation. Develop International humanitarian law safeguards for environmental protectors, such as park or community rangers, and develop the concept of protected zones for areas of the greatest cultural and ecological value, together with guidelines and training resources. Increase efforts to understand and minimise the effect of particular weapons and tactics on nature.

Wars indirectly damage biodiversity.

Support peace and strengthen biodiversity governance and conservation capacity during conflict

Increase investment and commitment to conflict prevention and resolution. Where conflicts occur, document and raise awareness of the indirect drivers of biodiversity loss, including collapse of monitoring systems, funding, and governance, displacement, land grabbing, shifting resource use patterns, loss of enforcement capacity, and small arms proliferation, and integrate these into response and recovery policies. Provide emergency support for natural resource governance through community and Indigenous-led initiatives and through protecting and rebuilding natural resource management institutions.

Encourage remote or community-led monitoring where state access is denied, provide training and capacity development for local and Indigenous conservation institutions and rangers; provide contingency funding mechanisms for community-based organisations and NGOs operating in conflict settings. Increase biodiversity finance to fragile and conflict-affected areas with integrated conflict sensitivity standards. Increase collaboration and data sharing with humanitarian actors on the location of conservation or ecological important or sensitive areas to help prevent and mitigate damage linked to human displacement. Enhance collaboration with national and international law enforcement bodies to prevent and mitigate illegal wildlife trafficking and the illicit exploitation of conflict resources.

Competition over natural resources contributes to conflict and insecurity.

Environmental peacebuilding and peace-positive conservation.

Study and build awareness of the linkages between natural resources and conflict. Embed the environment in recovery and peacebuilding processes. Strengthen local and national conservation capacity. Provide capacity and training on conflict sensitive and peace-positive conservation, and conflict management. Increase biodiversity finance to fragile and conflict affected states.

Develop and establish transboundary peace parks and joint protected areas following principles of conflict sensitive conservation; joint resource-monitoring and data-sharing bodies; benefit-sharing and revenue agreements; natural resource-focused dialogue and mediation processes. Ensure that environmental issues are addressed within peace agreements, with particular attention on enforcing commitments around extractive industries and creating structures for inclusive governance.

Problem

Transitions to peace can accelerate biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse.

Solution

Integrate ecosystem recovery, conflict-response and peacebuilding.

Tools

Study and build awareness of how conflict transitions negatively affect biodiversity and ecosystems through returning populations, land rushes and weak governance. Strengthen local and community-based natural resource governance systems. Facilitate the safe return of local custodians and rapidly recover traditional knowledge and management systems where they have been lost due to human displacement. Provide capacity and training on conflict sensitive conservation and increase biodiversity finance to fragile and conflict affected areas.

Mainstream nature into humanitarian response and recovery mechanisms, including through Nature-based Solutions and conservation finance. Embed environmental provisions in peace agreements and align them with NBSAPs, and address land-use and resource-tenure planning during demining and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes. Develop livelihood and alternative-income programmes and attach environmental peacebuilding units in mediation and UN peacekeeping missions. Ensure nature is integrated into security sector reform and reconciliation or restorative justice processes.

Conservation and sustainable development projects may fuel violent conflict risks and miss opportunities to leverage peace co-benefits.

Conflict sensitive and peace-positive conservation.

Provide support and resources for conservation and development actors to take up conflict sensitive tools and methodologies, and connect these to their ongoing efforts on inclusion, rights-based approaches and safeguards.

Increase conservation funding and use it to incentivise or enable conflict-sensitive approaches such as: context analysis during design or inception phases; regular reviews; resourcing of stakeholder engagement across implementation; windows to review and agree adaptations to programming in line with context changes; capacity-building of staff and partners on conflict sensitivity programming; and develop staff conflict resolution skills. Support and foster local and community-based organisations and build their capacity to lead in conservation work locally and regionally.

Security activities harm nature

Increased scrutiny of military activities and enhanced mitigation measures.

Increase transparency over and scrutiny of the impacts of military activities on terrestrial and marine ecosystems in peacetime and strengthen harm mitigation frameworks. Challenge and reverse the diversion of development and conservation financing towards military spending. Scrutinise existing military exemptions and derogations from environmental law that impact biodiversity and restrict their future use.

Promote methods for border management that minimise impacts on habitats, ecological connectivity and wildlife movements and explore alternative approaches such as defensive rewilding. Challenge cultures of positive military sustainability reporting that downplay the negative impacts of military training and activity. Substantially enhance the management of military lands and waters for nature. Critically assess and mitigate the supply chain and lifecycle impacts of military materiel on biodiversity and ecosystems.

Explosive remnants of war complicate management and sustainable land use.

Nature-sensitive clearance alongside strong natural resource governance.

Accelerate the integration of biodiversity considerations into mine action activities, including through: data, awareness, training and planning, collecting ecological data in non-technical surveys; identification and piloting of least invasive clearance techniques; land-release and resettlement planning; and cooperation with community based organisations and NGOs to rebuild natural resource governance institutions in advance of clearance and land release. Undertake detailed studies on ecologically driven site prioritisation and opportunities for nature gains and nature-positive livelihoods on released land.

Recommendation

Work to fully characterise the components of NPS and to articulate effective policy responses.

Whose security?

The UK's Nature Security assessment has proved influential in communicating the national security risks of biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse to an international audience, and it is understood that other countries are in the process of producing similar assessments. However, there is a risk that the security priorities of a few better resourced Global

North countries come to frame and define international perceptions of NPS. This risks alienating the global community, reducing opportunities for a united approach and potentially leading to increased threats in the future.

This trend is not new, environmental securitisation processes often fail to be geographically representative, instead being driven by narrow or selective national or regional security interests. This has been a weakness of climate security discourse, which initially focused on the security concerns of historically high-emitting Global North countries. Given the global distribution of biodiversity — of the 17 megadiverse countries, which account for ~70% of Earth's biodiversity, **15 are part of the Global South**⁴ — it is particularly important that NPS discourse is guided by and provides for the engagement of Global South countries, some of which have historically been uncomfortable with Global North dominated environmental security narratives.

Another important consideration for any NPS agenda is to ensure the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous voices in its development. Indigenous Peoples' lands cover more than a fifth of the world's land surface, supporting high levels of biodiversity. Research has found that conflict likelihood is higher on Indigenous managed lands but that the ensuing environmental damage and anthropogenic impacts were both lower.⁵ To successfully drive global policy change, any NPS framing needs to be inclusive of global and Indigenous perspectives, as well as being informed by an understanding of community and human security, alongside national security interests.

Recommendation

Begin convening geographically representative groups of experts and stakeholders to identify and explore security relationships between nature and people.

Mainstreaming Nature, Peace and Security

There is clear momentum for a NPS agenda among some conservation sector actors — including states, NGOs and donors. This has been developing for more than a decade, and builds on early work to integrate nature into environmental peacebuilding.⁶ More recently it has manifested as practical field tools,⁷ an IUCN Congress motion,⁸ growing collaboration between conservation organisations, and awareness-raising activities in the context of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

With a growing number of stakeholders engaging, coordination has also become more urgent if we are to maximise our impact and avoid duplication of effort. However, this must be underpinned by a broad and common understanding of the scope of NPS, and its potential to help address a major blind spot in global conservation policy and practice.

4. Since 2002, a negotiating group — the Like-Minded Megadiverse Countries (LLMC) — has represented this group's interests, primarily during negotiations on access to genetic resources and benefit sharing under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

5. Beattie et al. Even after armed conflict, the environmental quality of Indigenous Peoples' lands in biodiversity hotspots surpasses that of non-Indigenous lands, *Biological Conservation*, Volume 286, 2023, 110288, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2023.110288>

6. See for example, Conservation International (2022) Conflict Sensitivity and Environmental Peacebuilding in Conservation: Lessons Learned from Conservation International: <https://cnxus.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Conflict-Sensitivity-and-Environmental-Peacebuilding-CI-Lessons-Learned-2.pdf>

7. IUCN Academy (2025) Conflict Sensitivity in Conservation: Principles and Practice: <https://iucnacademy.org/courses/conflict-sensitivity-conservation-principles-practice>

8. IUCN (2025) Ensuring conflict-sensitive conservation and protection of the environment in fragile and conflict situations, Motion 052, World Conservation Congress: <https://iucncongress2025.org/assembly/motions/motion/057>