

PROMOTING CONFLICT SENSITIVITY IN TRANSBOUNDARY PROTECTED AREAS: A ROLE FOR PEACE AND CONFLICT IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Anne Hammill and Charles Besançon

1. Introduction

Conflict is detrimental to conservation, while conservation is, in many respects, inherently conflictual. How can we reconcile the goals of peace and biodiversity conservation? One approach that is being promoted among donors, national governments and conservation groups is the establishment of transboundary protected areas (TBPA). By connecting two or more protected areas (PAs) across international boundaries, proponents anticipate benefits in terms of ecosystem integrity and functioning, eco-tourism revenue, community identity and regional peace and security. But protected areas – transboundary or otherwise – have a legacy of fueling tensions between various actors, particularly between PA authorities and local groups, as well as between different ethnic groups. Moreover, PAs can become embroiled in ongoing military conflicts, through their use as strategic bases for combatants or refugee camps in post-conflict settings.

Considering this complex nexus of PA and conflict issues, how will TBPAs address the issues differently or more effectively? More importantly, since many TBPAs are by definition being established in conflict zones, how can we be sure they are contributing to peace rather than conflict? In this paper, the authors draw from the experience of the humanitarian-development sector in conflict zones and propose the design and implementation of Peace and Conflict Impact Assessments (PCIA). As a means of determining an intervention's impact on local/regional peace and conflict dynamics, PCIA have been used to anticipate, monitor and evaluate projects so that at the very least, they do not increase the chances of violent conflict and at most, contribute to peacebuilding. While the structure and use of PCIA continue to be debated among development practitioners, they represent an important move towards systematically considering an intervention's impact on the broader socio-political setting. This approach should be central to the design and management considerations of TBPAs, and implementing PCIA may prove helpful in ensuring the achievement of their stated goals.

2. Background/Rationale: Protected Areas and Conflict

2.1 Protected Areas and Conflict

As methods for protecting and maintaining biological diversity, protected areas are central to global conservation strategies. But their overriding ecological goals do not render them socially and politically benign. Protected areas represent different things to different groups. For conservationists, they are an effective measure for protecting biodiversity; for private tourism companies, a basis for eco-tourism development; for pharmaceutical companies, a source of genetic information for drug development; for oil and mining companies, an unexplored supply of revenue; for the military, a refuge and strategic target during times of violent conflict; and for surrounding local communities, PAs can signify restricted access to livelihood resources, forced relocation, or opportunities for income generation through

tourism revenues. The existence of so many different political understandings of the role of PAs is a reflection of broader social, cultural and economic forces at work. When these forces include social inequality, poverty, contested resource rights, corruption, ethnic tensions, and colonial legacies, as they do in many developing countries, mechanisms of resource control and power (which is what PAs are) can become politicized and lead to resistance and conflict.

The links between PAs and open conflict are multidimensional. Protected areas can be catalysts of conflict when established in economically disadvantaged regions, where surrounding communities are heavily dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods and survival. PA policies can translate into restricted access to these livelihood resources or forced relocation from traditional lands, which can undermine economic security and cultural identities. Even where provisions are made to allow for limited local resource access or to financially compensate communities, crop damage from wild animals, unequal distribution of benefits, conflicting resource rights regimes (statutory vs. customary) and exclusionary and/or non-transparent decision-making processes can continue to fuel tensions. Where PAs bring up memories of elite control and colonial power dynamics, protected areas can symbolize legacies of imperial domination (Wilshusin et al. 2002). The perceived imposition of unjust policies may mobilize group identities and become a rallying point for resisting authority, leading to instability and conflict.

Apart from instigating social conflict, protected areas can also play a strategic role in sustaining ongoing military conflicts. This role is usually the result of inherent geographic conditions that make PAs valuable in the first place. The remote and relatively inaccessible location of some PAs can make them ideal refuges for military groups, as they offer physical protection, food, water, fuel and medicine. The high concentration of wildlife can provide a ready supply of bushmeat for armies. Guerrilla groups in Colombia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, India and Nepal, for example, have established bases in protected areas, with destructive impacts on PA infrastructure, management operations and personnel (Austin and Bruch, 2003; McNeely, 2000;). Because of their strategic value, protected areas can become targets in military operations. Some groups may deliberately contaminate water supplies and defoliate or burn forests in order to deprive opposing forces of shelter and resources. In 1991 the Rwandan army cut 50 – 100 meter swaths of bamboo forest that link the Virunga volcanoes in order to minimize the risk of rebel ambushes (Kalpers 2001).

In addition to providing physical support to military groups, resources in protected areas help to finance military operations. Wildlife, timber, oil or minerals can be plundered and sold to local and foreign markets in order to pay troops and purchase weapons. For example, the Angolan rebel group UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) reportedly financed their military campaign through sales of ivory, teak, oil and diamonds (Austin and Bruch, 2003). Similarly in Mozambique, elephant poaching and the ivory trade helped finance insurgent activities, while Charles Taylor's coup in Liberia was made possible through revenues from timber and valuable minerals (Boutwell and Klare 2000). Moreover, the consequences of financing wars with natural resources from protected areas extend further than immediate biodiversity loss or ecosystem degradation. According to Austin and Bruch,

Aside from depriving a country of capital that is desperately needed for development or social programs, financing wars with natural resources prolongs the misery of war and often wreaks greater environmental harm, as constraints and mitigation requirements that may be placed on resource extraction during peacetime are ignored in the urgency of conflict. The emphasis of short-term gains over long-term

sustainability drains national resources and makes it more difficult to return to peaceful life after the conflict. (2003, p. 172)

In fact, post-conflict settings can give rise to new conflict issues for protected areas. Refugees, internally displaced people (IDP) and demobilized troops move into protected areas, as they contain unsettled lands and livelihood resources. In some instances, resettlement in PAs can be encouraged by governments when there is no other land available and the overarching priority is to establish peace, address immediate humanitarian needs and create some semblance of order. Following the Rwandan genocide in 1994, fifty per cent of the country's population was estimated to be displaced or temporarily settled. Hundreds of thousands of refugees crossed the border into the Democratic Republic of Congo and settled in and around Virunga National Park (Lanjouw 2003), while the Rwandan government opened portions of Akagara National Park to resettlement and considered proposals for degazetting five per cent of Volcano National Park to accommodate IDPs. The acute need for land, shelter and resources that draws displaced and demobilized populations to PAs (and their immediate surroundings) have the potential for fueling further tensions and conflict. When host communities, who are also dealing with the social and environmental consequences of war, are faced with competition for livelihood resources from refugees and IDPs (sometimes of different or previously opposing ethnic groups), tensions can rise and conflicts can (re)ignite. When considered against a background of widespread arms circulation, demobilization, and general disorder and confusion in post-conflict settings, the gathering of different groups in refugee camps or settlements around relatively resource-rich protected areas can become a conflict risk.

Thus, protected areas are linked to the conflict *problematique* through their interaction with the complex social and political forces that traditionally fuel tension. The impacts of PAs on local livelihoods, resource rights, distribution of wealth, established management and power structures, and group identity can create grievances that, when left unaddressed, can escalate into more open forms of conflict. The more strategic and passive role of PAs in supporting militarization, warfare and post-conflict reconstruction, on the other hand, is often the result of geography, resource abundance and a breakdown in governance and authority. Protected area (mis)management can therefore be both a contributor to and a symptom of local/regional conflict dynamics.

This is not a new or unexplored development – the conservation community has long searched for an optimal resolution to people vs. nature conflict, where biodiversity protection goals would not be met at the expense of social and cultural needs. Similarly, in the wake of rising levels of local and regional violent conflicts, conservationists have been developing guidelines and management strategies for maintaining basic levels of biodiversity protection in times of conflict (Shambaugh et al 2001). One approach to PA management that may help to address some of the causes and symptoms of conflict is the establishment of transboundary protected areas (TBPA). As a concept and practice that is gaining more currency in conservation and development circles, TBPAs can potentially offer a different and more focused understanding of the links between protected areas and conflict if developed and managed effectively.

2.2 Transboundary Protected Areas and Conflict

IUCN – The World Conservation Union defines a transboundary protected area as:

An area of land and/or sea that straddles one or more borders between states, sub-national units such as provinces and regions, autonomous areas and/or areas

beyond the limit of national sovereignty or jurisdiction, whose constituent parts are especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed cooperatively through legal or other effective means”.

While the origins of TBPAs go back to the early part of the 20th century, when Waterton Glacier International Peace Park was established across the borders of Canada and the US in 1932, there has been a relatively recent resurgence and enthusiasm for the transboundary approach. TBPAs are being established at an unprecedented rate. In 1998 there were a total of 59 transboundary complexes involving 136 countries. By 2001, the number had jumped to over 169 complexes involving over 666 countries.

This recent proliferation of TBPAs has been generally welcomed as a sign of good will and cooperation, particularly in areas with relatively recent histories of conflict. Touted as ‘a concept embraced by all’¹, TBPAs represent the confluence of several seemingly mutually reinforcing interests, namely those of biodiversity conservation, economic development, cultural integrity and regional peace and security. The possibilities are impressive and attractive (especially to donors): large, contiguous ecological habitats that simultaneously protect biodiversity, create widespread opportunities for tourism venture investment, alleviate poverty, reunite previously separated ethnic groups, and promote good political relations between neighboring states.

The latter point has led some TBPAs to be called ‘Peace Parks’, yet their peacebuilding potential is rarely documented or evaluated. Cooperation and peacebuilding is an assumed outcome of bringing together different – and sometimes, previously opposing – stakeholders for the common purpose of managing biodiversity and protecting livelihoods. This may not always be the case, however, especially in conflict-prone settings where many TBPAs are being established. In addition to the PA and conflict issues described above, there are a set of other considerations unique to the transboundary context that have implications for the peace and conflict setting.

The most obvious of these considerations is the incorporation of international boundaries in TBPAs. While borders are areas with some of the world’s most biologically intact ecosystems, they are also where “inequities surface and conflicts erupt” (Katarere et al 2001). Including international boundaries can therefore add a “gratuitous layer of complexity”² to the dynamics of PA management. Borders are political constructs that function as mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. In many parts of the developing world, current international borders were arbitrarily drawn by colonial powers who paid little attention to the ensuing division of indigenous communities and “heritage territories”³. This has in some cases, particularly in Africa, resulted in ambiguities about citizenship and national loyalty among border communities, fostering suspicion and political marginalization by centralized authorities. Such conditions can promote anti-national or criminal activities, including the smuggling of goods and people across borders, which can in turn contribute to the creation or escalation of tension and conflict.⁴

¹ In his speech at a ceremony to celebrate the translocation of elephants from Kruger National Park to Mozambique, Nelson Mandela stated, “I know of no political movement, no philosophy, no ideology, which does not agree with the peace parks concept as we see it going into fruition today. It is a concept that can be embraced by all” (12/10/2001).

² Westing, Arthur H. 1998. Comment: Establishment and management of Transfrontier Reserves for Conflict Prevention and Confidence Building. *Environmental Conservation* 25(2): 91-94.

³ According to Singh (1999), “heritage territories are areas that have been established though well-established historical use, such as migratory patterns of indigenous peoples.”

⁴ Singh, 1999.

In addition to the unique group identity issues that characterize border regions, the relatively top-down decision-making structure of TBPAs may also contribute to the surrounding peace and conflict dynamic. Although a few notable exceptions do exist⁵, the establishment of transboundary protected areas is primarily driven by high-level, non-local forces such as government departments or national or international non-governmental conservation organizations. The heightened role of the state in TBPAs makes sense, given that transboundary arrangements involve issues of sovereignty and national security. But as the loci of control for planning projects moves further away from the physical location of the protected area to capital cities or even to foreign countries, the potential to exclude local communities in decision-making and benefit sharing increases. This may further marginalize and isolate border communities, creating tensions and instability.

In addition to exacerbating political inequalities between local community and state actors, TBPAs may also emphasize disparities between countries. Katarere et. al refer to this potential problem in their critique of transboundary natural resource management in Southern Africa⁶:

The problem of distribution and access to natural resources as well as access to finance, technology and skills is not limited to intra-state inequities. At the regional level inter-state inequities arise from differing resource endowments and the dominance of larger and economically powerful states like South Africa and to a lesser extent Zimbabwe. These differences tend to fuel economic resentment among the states in the region and conflict claims over natural resources. In some instances the inter-state inequities have fuelled xenophobic reactions towards citizens of poorer neighbours who try to seek better opportunities across their borders. (p. 21)

In fact, national sovereignty issues can play a major role in further complicating the process of TBPA establishment and management, especially if there are outside forces driving the agenda. Formal transboundary agreements can cause more inter-state disputes than they alleviate when there is reluctance on the part of security officials, immigration and other government representatives to cede authority. Opening up borders in remote areas can translate into increased levels of poaching and smuggling, although TBPA arrangements may allow for better monitoring and overall management presence to help curtail such activity. Because establishing TBPAs is a lengthy process, in some cases it does not make sense to formalize an agreement at a state level. Rather, the optimum level of agreement resides at the managerial level and is often informal rather than formalized. For example, this particular arrangement has worked well in the Virunga Volcano region in central Africa⁷ to protect mountain gorillas and their habitat due to poor relations between the countries in the region.

Despite the challenges and complexities highlighted above, TBPAs do represent a unique and exciting approach to promoting peace in regions with recent conflict histories. The main point to be made is that establishing and managing protected areas are politicized processes that influence and are influenced by prevailing social and political dynamics. For TBPAs, the stakes are even higher due to their expanded geographical scale, the involvement of border

5 The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park between South Africa and Botswana began as an informal agreement between protected area authorities across the borders

⁶ Katarere, Yemi, Ryan Hill and Sam Moyo (2001). A Critique of Transboundary Natural Resource Management in Southern Africa. Paper no. 1, IUCN-ROSA Series on Transboundary Natural Resource Management. Available at: <http://www.iucnrosa.org.zw/tbnrm/publications/book1.pdf>

⁷ This area lies at the juncture of the borders between Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The primary conservation NGO in the region is the International Gorilla Conservation Programme.

communities, the stronger role of the state, and the importance of inter-state relations. If designed and managed effectively, TBPAs may help to address some of the underlying causes of conflict such as poverty, environmental degradation, livelihood insecurity, institutional capacity, as well as inter- and intra-state relations. If not, they have the potential to exacerbate tensions and contribute to conflict, leaving ecosystems and human communities even more vulnerable and depleted.

3. OVERVIEW OF PCIAS

Recognizing this potential, there is a need to employ assessment tools and processes that will help to maximize the positive and minimize the negative impacts of establishing and managing TBPAs in conflict-prone areas. One possibility is the Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA), a tool that has been gaining currency in the development sector over the last ten years.

3.1 Background

In the mid-1990s, amid allegations that humanitarian and development assistance may generate or exacerbate violent conflicts, practitioners began developing and debating methods for anticipating and assessing the impacts of their activities in conflict zones. The impetus came from an increasing recognition and concern among NGO staff that their presence was feeding into – even prolonging – conflicts. According to Mary Anderson, this was achieved in two significant ways:

through the transfer of aid resources, ranging from theft of aid supplies by armies and militias, to perceived inequalities in their distribution, and

implicit ethical messages delivered via the agency's *modus operandi*, such as the use of armed guards to protect staff (legitimizing the use of arms to determine who gets access to aid), personal (mis)use of aid-related goods and services by agency staff (implying that those who control resources may use them for personal benefit without being held accountable) or evacuation policies that call for the removal of expatriate staff while leaving local staff behind (demonstrating that some lives are more valuable than others).⁸

In other words, aid can unexpectedly distort social relations, entrench socio-economic inequalities and allow elite and/or armed groups to benefit disproportionately from unrest.⁹

With this growing understanding of the potential negative effects of aid on the conflict environment, there was a move to evaluate and restructure aid programmes so at the very least, agencies could fulfill their mandates without simultaneously contributing to conflicts – i.e. institute “do no harm” approaches in the design and operation of their projects in conflict zones. At the most, these programmes would strive to help local people disengage from conflict and effectively address the underlying causes of tension. In response to this identified need, a number of approaches were developed for integrating the conflict perspective into the planning, monitoring and management of development projects. Among these was the Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA), an idea that emerged in the

⁸ Anderson, Mary. 1999. *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – Or War*. Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner.

⁹ Gaigals, Cynthia and Manuela Leonhardt. 2001. *Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Development: A Review of Practice*. London: International Alert, Saferworld and IDRC.

mid 1990s through the foundational work by Ken Bush¹⁰ and Luc Reychler¹¹. Although debates continue over the structure and practical application of these assessments, several northern development agencies (both governmental and non-governmental) have seized upon the idea, advocating their development and use in programme operations.

3.2 What are PCIAAs?

Peace and conflict impact assessments are planning and management tools¹² for evaluating how an intervention (project, policy, programme, etc) can or does affect peace and conflict dynamics in conflict-prone areas – i.e. do they increase or diminish the prospects for long-term peace? The aim in using these tools is to not only reduce the unintended negative consequences of a project, but identify and optimize opportunities for peacebuilding. In so doing, PCIAAs can lead to a discernable improvement in the quality of development and humanitarian assistance. The end result is not necessarily a change in the types of interventions, but a change in *how* they are implemented.

PCIAAs differ from traditional project/programme evaluations in that assessments are carried out using a specific conflict perspective. Whereas traditional evaluations assess: a) whether stated objectives were met and, b) the positive and negative side-effects of the intervention, PCIAAs consider these within the context of an ongoing or potential conflict. For specified conflict interventions, such as mediation or reconstruction efforts, traditional evaluations and PCIAAs can be one and the same. But for other types of interventions (projects in rural development, community health, civic education, community based natural resource management, etc.), PCIAAs cannot measure their overall effectiveness or success – only their peace-added (or peace-reducing) value.

3.3 PCIA Users and Methodologies

It is worth noting that PCIAAs are not necessarily recommended for screening, monitoring or evaluation of ALL programmes/projects, as they can be lengthy and resource-intensive exercises. Instead, they should be carried out in areas with latent or manifest conflict, i.e. where there has been a legacy of violent conflict or signs of tensions turning violent¹³. According to Bush (2003), this includes areas:

where the control over, or use of, territory or resources is disputed;
where the socio-economic gap between groups is increasing; or
where unemployment is rising while living standards and human security are declining.

¹⁰ Bush, K. 1998. A Measure of Peace: Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) of Development Projects in Conflict Zones (Working Paper No. 1), The Peacebuilding and Reconstruction Programme Initiative and The Evaluation Unit, IDRC.

¹¹ Reychler, Luc. 1999. The Conflict Impact Assessment System (CIAS): A Method for Designing and Evaluating Development Policies and Projects. Ebenhausen: CPN

¹² According to Bush (2003) however, PCIA is not a tool but a process. This is an important distinction, as tools are used to 'fix' problems rather than challenge and fundamentally rethink how to approach problems.

¹³ The World Bank Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit (CPR) has developed indicators for identifying conflict-risk areas. Visit the CPR site for details:

<http://inweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/sdvext.nsf/67ByDocName/AboutUS>. Bush (1998) simply states that PCIAAs should be applied in "settings characterized by latent or manifest violent conflict" and "territory which is contested or politically and legally ambiguous" (pg. 4-5)

The risk of violence is highest in those areas where governance structures – especially legal and political systems – have become corrupt or broken down completely. Such areas are likely to require more complex and analytical PCIA methodologies.

In spite of calls to develop a universally applicable methodology, PCIA's continue to be open and flexible in their structure and use, customized to meet the needs/objectives of different users. They can draw from a range of information sources (project documents, media reports, stakeholder consultations, etc) and employ different analytical tools (indicators, qualitative issue-based inquiries, conflict analysis frameworks) to ascertain a project's impact on the peace and conflict environment, and vice versa. Moreover, they can be carried out by different development actors and at different stages of a project cycle, again depending on the purpose of the assessment. Examples of different users and purposes of PCIA's are presented in the table below:

User	Purpose of PCIA
International donor	Project screening/selection Funding decisions Programme monitoring
Implementing or operational agencies	Project design Project implementation In-project monitoring Post-project evaluation and training
Local communities	Assess utility and efficacy of a project Voice project-related concerns Suggest/jointly develop alternatives ¹⁴

Originally conceived of as an “organic, Southern-led learning process” that would engage “voices in the field – especially non-English ones outside the footprints of the international Development Industry,”¹⁵ the emphasis in PCIA's has shifted to Northern donors and NGOs. These donors and agencies – namely DFID, SIDA, the World Bank, CARE International, International Alert, FEWER and Saferworld – have devised their own PCIA approaches, each employing their own mix of assessment tools. These range from indicator-based approaches, which provide macro-level overviews of conflict risks in a given context to assist in designing national or regional programmes¹⁶, to participatory, in-depth analyses of experiences, attitudes and perceptions of and related to a specific project¹⁷.

Generally speaking, most PCIA's involve the following components or steps:

Conflict mapping or analysis: detailing an area's conflict risks – i.e. legacy of conflict and forces which (re)turns latent conflict into open conflict – through an analysis of root causes. DFID has provided a useful framework whereby the analysis is divided into 3 key areas¹⁸:

¹⁴ Bush, K. 1998. Op cit. p. 4

¹⁵ Bush, Ken. 2001. Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) Five Years On: The Commodification of an Idea (response paper). Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation. Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management. pg. 3.

¹⁶ See the European Commission's checklist for root-causes of conflict: http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/cpcm/cp/list.htm

¹⁷ See, for example, the Field Diplomacy Initiative's PCIA of a civic education project in central Bosnia-Herzegovina: <http://www.fielddiplomacy.be/Media/PCIA%20lfes%20Report.pdf>

¹⁸ UK Department for International Development (DFID). 2002. Conducting Conflict Assessments: Guidance Notes. London, UK: DFID.

DFID CONFLICT ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK		
(i) Structures	(ii) Actors	(iii) Dynamics
Analysis of long term factors underlying conflict: - Security - Political - Economic - Social	Analysis of actors who influence or are affected by conflict: - Interests - Relations - Capacities - Peace agendas - Incentives	Analysis of: - Longer term trends - Shorter term triggers - Capacities for mitigating conflict - Future scenarios

Project/programme mapping: overview of the background, actors, purpose, goals, activities, outputs and anticipated outcomes and impacts of the intervention;

Assessing impact of conflict on project: examining the interplay of 1 and 2 above, with a focus on how the conflict setting can or has affected the intervention, including impacts on the intervention’s resources, delivery, efficacy, sustainability and working relationships between different actors.

Assessing impact of project on conflict: examining the interplay of 1 and 2, but this time with a focus on how the intervention can or has affected peace and conflict dynamics of a specified setting. These impacts are generally examined under several thematic areas, such as security, governance/political institutions, economics/livelihoods, environment and natural resources and socio-cultural factors.¹⁹

Recommendations: based on the above, how can the intervention be modified to so that it meets its objectives while simultaneously strengthening the structures for peacebuilding?

Thus, PCIA offers a means for understanding how interventions interact with the factors that increase the chances for peace or conflict. For PCIA to be useful and effective, they must involve those individuals and groups living in conflict zones. This point cannot be emphasized enough. Peace and conflict analysis and interpretation is “too important to leave in the hands of the so-called ‘experts’”²⁰, and if conducted without the direct and substantial involvement of local actors they risk becoming yet another externally-driven process that disempowers communities.

3.4 Limitations and challenges faced by PCIA:

While PCIA and their various iterations have been welcomed by many as a much-needed tool and process for improving development assistance, they are not without their critics and problems. On a conceptual level, there are those who emphasize that conflict is not always bad or preventable. In fact, conflict may challenge unjust status quos and exploitive systems and ultimately lead to more equitable and sustainable outcomes. Sometimes the absence of conflict can be just as inimical as its presence, speaking to a structural oppression of dissent

¹⁹ Bush (1998) identifies ‘five areas of potential impact’: institutional capacity, military and human security, political structures and processes, economic structures and processes, social reconstruction and empowerment. Similarly, International Alert (2002) analyses stakeholder attitudes in 4 “cluster” areas: economic reality, government, security and social/cultural identity.

²⁰ Bush, K. (2003). Hands-on PCIA: A Handbook for Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA).

and change. Moreover, according to Bush, development interventions – including conservation and natural resource management projects – are inevitably conflictual, as they challenge “established economic, social or political power structures which inhibit individuals and groups from pursuing their full potential.”²¹

But the potential value and inevitability of conflict do not render PCIA's futile. It is important to distinguish between violent and nonviolent conflict. While there are instances when violence may be required to produce change, its use ultimately undermines the achievement of development and conservation objectives. Moreover, according to Bush, “violence is a particularly blunt instrument that: 1) is prone to generating unanticipated, unintended and uncontrollable consequences; and 2) risks legitimating the use of violent force as a means of conflict resolution.”²²

Apart from the different – and sometimes opposing – understandings of ‘conflict’, PCIA's are criticized on the issues of indicators and attribution. As a means of assessing an intervention's impact on peace and conflict dynamics, PCIA's obviously require a set of indicators to measure and articulate these impacts. But as a user-driven process, applicable at various stages of the project cycle, there is no concrete set of indicators appropriate for all circumstances and needs. Rather, the idea is to have PCIA users devise their own set of indicators according to their own criteria. Such an open and fluid process can be problematic, particularly for those who are accustomed to traditional project evaluation processes. But it is important to remember that PCIA's are an attempt to move away from these evaluations, which can be restrictive in their linear understanding of relationships between project inputs, activities and results. The call for a priori identification of PCIA indicators reflects the prevalence of traditional development actors in current PCIA debates, and the potential for them to appropriate the process from local actors.

The issue of attribution remains another point of contention among PCIA skeptics. This is understandable, given the complex and dynamic nature of peace and conflict. How can one determine if observable changes to the peace / conflict setting are the result of a particular intervention? How can we distinguish between all of the forces that shape conflict? As Leonhardt (2001) observes:

Conflicts change over time. General factors influencing the course of conflict include geopolitical dynamics, regional and global market forces, changing perceptions and priorities among the main conflict sponsors, pressure from inside the conflicting groups, economic and physical exhaustion among many others. The methodological challenge consists in [sic] establishing plausible linkages between particular changes in the conflict situation, general factors and particular third-party interventions. Then it is necessary to ascertain how far these interventions were decisive in the [sic] of other conditions that may have facilitated the change. A problem here is the lack of counterfactual: We do not know what would have happened without the intervention.²³

There are ways of addressing the issue of attribution, however, and a number of approaches have been identified including: sequential analysis, the matching method, emphasizing meanings and perceptions, and logical plausibility.²⁴

²¹ Bush, K. (1998). P. 23.

²² Bush, K. (1998). P. 24

²³ Leonhardt, M. (2001). “Towards a Unified Methodology: Reframing PCIA (response paper).” Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation, p. 9. Available at: <http://www.berghof-handbook.net/leonhardt/>

²⁴ Ibid.

PCIAAs also present challenges on a practical level. Part of these can be attributed to the inherent complications of working in conflict zones. For example, it may be difficult – if not impossible – to conduct participatory research exercises in situations of open conflict. Apart from the logistical constraints posed by conflict settings, the prevailing political sensitivities may also limit the effectiveness of PCIAAs. The topic may be too delicate and actors or key informants too apprehensive to talk to outsiders about the conflict situation and its relationship to an external intervention.

Also, as mentioned above, the resource-intensive nature of PCIAAs may preclude their use, as many agencies simply do not have the time, staff capacity or access to information necessary for a comprehensive assessment. Time may be the biggest constraint in situations where interventions require immediate and/or humanitarian responses, such as in post-conflict or disaster settings.

PCIAAs are not, nor do they aspire to be, the ‘silver bullet’ for ensuring effective delivery and impact of development interventions in conflict zones. The process of assessing peace and conflict impacts of a project or program is unavoidably complex and involved, which can present challenges and shortcomings to different users. But these can be overcome, to a large extent, given enough time, flexibility and ‘outside of the box’ thinking.

4. Relevance of PCIAAs to Conservation Interventions

Although the discussion thus far has emphasized the applicability of PCIAAs to traditional development and humanitarian interventions, they are also relevant to conservation projects and programmes in conflict-prone areas. As the earlier discussion on the links between PA or TBPAs and conflict explain, conservation interventions are not apolitical. In fact, as Wilshusen et al. point out:

...[T]he conservation community “becomes a key player among a host of others since it contributes heavily to shifts in power dynamics in rural areas that are already highly politicized. This is a result of its relative wealth and influence compared to most local actors. In short, conservation practices are not benign. They alter the local playing field, sometimes drastically.”²⁵

Thus, it goes without saying that conservation interventions affect more than ecosystems – they have implications for economic livelihoods, community and cultural identities, political autonomy and control. The propensity for creating or exacerbating social or political tensions is greatest in areas where people rely most directly on access to natural resources for their survival and well-being. Many of these areas also happen to be in conflict zones, requiring a more sensitized approach to working with people and institutions for the achievement of specified goals.

5. Why conduct PCIAAs on TBPAs?

Accepting that Transboundary Protected Areas are a type of conservation intervention, why does their establishment or management warrant the use of PCIAAs? Apart from the aforementioned protected area-related conflicts that are also relevant to TBPAs, there are two additional reasons that suggest a need for conducting PCIAAs:

²⁵ Wilshusen, Peter R., Steven R. Brechin, Crystal L. Fortwangler, and Patrick C. West (2002). “Reinventing a Square Wheel: Critique of a Resurgent “Protection Paradigm” in International Biodiversity Conservation.” *Society and Natural Resources*, 15, p. 24.

Many TBPAs are established in conflict-prone areas: An obvious point, given their associated peacebuilding objectives, but an important one to emphasize. Unlike other conservation interventions and traditional protected areas, TBPAs are for the most part being targeted to regions with recent histories of conflict. These regions include Southern, Eastern and Central Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America.

Along the same line as the first point, many TBPAs are self-described peacebuilding projects, or at least claim to contribute to peace building. Intuitively, this makes sense. Getting previously opposing interests to come to the table to cooperate a mutually important priority – biodiversity conservation and economic development – could form the basis for building trust and friendly relations. But given some of the violent histories between some of these parties, this can be a dangerous assumption to make. According to Bush, the first step in evaluating ‘peacebuilding’ projects is a ‘refusal to accept them at their self-described face value’. There is a growing need to systematically evaluate them, and identify where gaps exist. Understanding how an intervention contributes to peacebuilding is as instructive as understanding how it contributes to violent conflict.

Given the recent proliferation and enthusiasm for TBPAs and the growing concern on the relationships between protected areas and conflict, it behooves the conservation and development community to follow the lead of the humanitarian community in making sure their contributions ‘do no harm.’

6. Conclusion

The context in which both conservation and development work is done is extraordinarily complex; consisting of multiple actors and multiple competing demands for resources. This level of complexity is exacerbated at international borders where protected areas meet and conflict (armed conflict and conflict over the use of natural resources) compounds and can also confound the understanding of these relationships.

New robust methods of analysis including assessment and evaluation tools for transboundary protected areas must continue to figure prominently in the work of conservation NGOs and protected area authorities, funders, etc. We argue in this paper that a more focused approach for assessment should be ground-tested where the goals and objectives of TBPAs go beyond simply conservation aims to peace and economic security. We will never know how successful these goals and objectives are without testing various methods of measurement. The Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment methodology is one such tool that warrants further study.