

GLOBAL NETWORK FOR JUSTICE

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Sustainable Development is a Prevention for Armed Conflict

In a recent report on the prevention of armed conflict, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan reported that the basic premise for preventing armed conflict is the primary responsibility of national governments and other local actors. Without a sense of national ownership in each case, prevention is unlikely to succeed. Preventing the emergence of armed conflict requires early action by national actors and, where appropriate, by the international community.

For early prevention to be effective, the multi-dimensional root causes of conflict need to be identified and addressed. The proximate cause of conflict may be an outbreak of public disorder or a protest over a particular incident, but the root cause may be socio-economic inequities and inequalities, systematic ethnic discrimination, denial of human rights, disputes over political participation or long-standing grievances over land and other resource allocation.

The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict described strategies for prevention as falling into 2 categories: 1) operational prevention, which refers to measures applicable in the face of immediate crisis, and 2) structural prevention, which consists of measures to ensure that crises do not arise in the first place or, if they do, that they do not recur.

The United Nations Security Council has stressed the importance of responding to the root causes of conflict and the need to pursue long-term effective preventive strategies. They noted that a coherent peace-building strategy, encompassing political, developmental, humanitarian and human rights programmes, can play a key role in conflict prevention. In this regard, there is a

clear distinction between regular developmental and humanitarian assistance programmes and those implemented as a preventive or peace-building response to problems that could lead to the outbreak or recurrence of violent conflict.

An investment in long-term structural prevention is ultimately an investment in sustainable development: first, because it is obvious that sustainable development cannot take place in the midst of actual or potential conflict, and second, because armed conflict destroys the achievements of national development. In some cases protracted conflicts have undermined the very existence of such States as Somalia and Afghanistan. Effective conflict prevention is a prerequisite for achieving and maintaining sustainable peace, which in turn is a prerequisite for sustainable development.

Funds currently spent on military action could instead be available for poverty reduction and equitable sustainable development, which would further reduce the risks of war. Conflict prevention and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing.

WAR CAUSES SEVERE EFFECTS ON THE LAND



BEFORE

AFTER

Refugees' tents dot the hillside that was once lush with vegetation. The valley floor is now barren and dry.

SATELLITE IMAGES, BURLAP BAGS, TIN CANS: PROJECTS THAT GROW AND NURTURE

In refugee camps in Sudan, Kenya, Honduras, Laos and Zambia to name a few, high-tech and low-tech projects are being used to help feed hungry refugees.

As hundreds of thousands of refugees return home many camps need extensive cleanup. Costs can be enormous. In Africa alone, it could cost \$150 million annually to rehabilitate existing sites. In the past such work was decided on an ad hoc basis with some areas rehabilitated, others abandoned and great uncertainty over who exactly was responsible. Governments and humanitarian agencies have become more sensitive to the issue in recent years. Particularly popular are small-scale, low-budget projects in which local organizations cleanup the landscape.

Environmental education may be the single most important policy in sensitizing refugees, local communities, government officials and humanitarian workers to environmental problems and solutions.

Trees: Millions of refugees need huge amounts of wood for cooking, heating and shelter and large concentrations of civilians can put a massive strain on local forests. During the 1990s uprooted peoples consumed 1,200 tons of firewood each day. Reforestation, tree planting and natural regeneration are cornerstones of the refugee agency's environmental program.

Gardening: Multi-story gardening projects are simple and extremely useful in overcrowded camps. They require very little space and equipment - burlap bags, old tin cans and waste water. Any deep tubular bag is filled with soil. A perforated funnel made from scrap tins and packed with stones is inserted down the middle of the bag. Waste water poured down the funnel is cleaned by the stones before seeping into the soil, watering a variety of vegetables growing at several levels. Ex-

perts are also exploring the effectiveness of a system used by Rwanda refugees who pack their waste into nearby termite mounds where it is broken down into a crude fertilizer which can be used on crops.

Stoves: Many refugee families cook their meal on wasteful open fires and one of the most effective ways to cut down on wood consumption is the introduction of fuel-efficient stoves. Refugees have rejected many types of more fuel-efficient stoves because they proved to be expensive, often needed repair or because of cultural taboos.

SMALL-SCALE PROJECTS CAN HELP STOP FAMINE



Satellites: High tech imagery and information from satellites and global positioning systems play an important role in environmental strategy. Space photos pinpoint the location and layout of camps and layered 3D images can help establish the most effective locations for the installation of telecommunications equipment for liaison with the outside world. Color-coded images pinpoint changes to the local environment and are particularly helpful in developing

projects to combat erosion. In before-and-after sequences, they help resolve political sensitive issues such as how much damage has been created.

The great majority of refugees flee the world's poorest regions, environmental degradation at home sometimes being the direct reason for their enforced departure. Their period in exile may be spent in equally difficult physical circumstances. Environmental experts say they have only just begun to 'scratch the surface' in preparing these people to return to what could once again be very demanding physical conditions.

For information on refugees contact: UNHCR, 1775 K Street, NW #300, Washington, DC 20006