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à propos

The KOFF
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Environment
and conflicts

1

focus

Systemic change to respond to environmental conflicts

2

reports

Disaster: the common enemy

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) on the climate-conflict nexus

El Salvador: When uncertainty exacerbates violence against women

Kenya – forming solidarity groups to protect livelihoods

Pacifism and ecology compared and associated

Sustainable natural resource management to mitigate conflicts

Providing information to the people of countries in crisis and facing the effects of climate change

Interview: An environmental scientist with a passion for peace

3

in depth

Environmental peacemaking – too good to be true?

5

calender

Portrait of a person: People in South Sudan are tired of the war

KOFF member organizations

swisspeace / KOFF

4

news

Upcoming events

editorial

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century and is becoming increasingly associated with conflicts. However, it would be wrong to assume that there are wars or conflicts that are caused by climate change alone. Climate change acts more so as a threat multiplier or a conflict driver – in other words, it adds more fuel to the fire. This is happening in various ways. For example, climate change is making resources scarce and therefore increasing competitive pressure. It is also destroying livelihoods, forcing people to migrate in certain circumstances. Alternatively, it is weakening state institutions by causing extreme weather events such as drought or flooding.

The authors of this magazine illustrate these problems but also explain how climate change could at the same time facilitate more cooperation: Nature is unimpressed by artificial borders and presents warring parties with a shared problem. In view of this “common enemy”, as one author so aptly puts it, opposing parties must work together. This will have a positive impact on peace efforts.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue.

Amélie Lustenberger, editor of KOFF Magazine

Systemic change to respond to environmental conflicts



Demonstration of the "Xinkas", who have worked to be seen as an indigenous people and thus also to have the rights of the indigenous people. Their banners say 'I am Xinka'. Picture: Calas

Speaking as an NGO focused on development policy, we are unfortunately forced to concede that, despite all the successes of program work on the ground, we are losing the battle against global poverty and injustice and that environmental conflicts are on the rise. This realization prompted Fastenopfer to open up to new strategic approaches that are intended to counter systemic crises with systemic approaches.

The IPCC's 1.5-degree report in 2018 reaffirmed to us that any global warming above 1.5 degrees Celsius will have fatal consequences. It also confirmed that the temperature target of 1.5-2 degrees set out in the Paris Agreement will not suffice. And then there is the real problem, which is this: Despite the binding nature of the Paris Agreement, we are not on track to meet the target of 2 degrees, let alone that of 1.5: "There are no signs of a reversal in this trend, which is driving long-term climate change, sea level rises, ocean acidification, and more extreme weather. According to the World Meteorological Organization, the concentration of CO₂ rose from 403.3 ppm in 2016 to 405.5 last year." For a long time now, scientists have warned against exceeding 350 ppm. The Earth's temperature has already increased by one degree. Even before the end of this century, nature and therefore the conditions in which humankind must live will undergo dramatic change as CO₂ emissions increase. Weather and extreme temperatures will make large parts of the Earth

uninhabitable and conflicts and migration will significantly increase. It is already clear that the Global South will be hit much harder by these effects than the North.

As well as pumping masses of CO₂ into the atmosphere, resources are also still being used up despite everyone's commitments to efficiency and circular economies. The raw materials strategies being pursued by the U.S., the EU, China, and Switzerland, are combining with the economic growth targets of the producing countries to escalate the situation. Social and violent conflicts are particularly apparent in relation to the overexploitation of natural resources and are claiming as their victims the local population and forces of civil society that are fighting against environmental and human rights violations. The number of people affected and under threat is on the rise, as is their resistance – and as is state and para-state violence. In Brazil, for example, burst dams have robbed hundreds of thousands of people of their land, access to water and health in recent years. The overexploitation of the Amazon region will continue under the new government.

Other areas such as agriculture or the global financial system are contributing similar factors amplifying systemic crises. In many cases, international companies, including more than a handful in Switzerland, are often playing an important role in this respect.

System-relevant approaches to change

We at Fastenopfer have been increasingly focusing on systemic approaches to finding solutions since 2017, adopting three priorities for our work on a transversal basis. 1. Transformation: Relevant at all levels at Fastenopfer, this work combines the development of approaches that support profound change from the bottom up, such as political commitment (e.g. corporate responsibility) or personal lifestyle changes (interior transition). 2. International programs that trigger transformative processes are a help and connect us with the relevant partner organizations on a political level so that we can then work together internationally too (e.g. within the framework of the UN negotiations in Geneva on the Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights). 3. The promotion of systemic alternatives such as aligning the economy with the common good, agroecology, renewable energy systems, and gender equality.

We believe that the following approaches are particularly relevant to the system and can help to overcome the current paradigm:

1) Acknowledging the presence of **systemic** causes of crises such as climate change. These include unequal use or pollution of the atmosphere as a common good as well as prosperity built on fossil fuels.

2) The global trends have similarities and the crises **intensify one another**. As early as at the 1992 UN Earth Summit on sustainable development in Rio de Janeiro, attendees were already calling for politicians to focus on the interdependence of ecological, economic, and social problems.

3) **Holistic solutions are needed**. Many of today's so-called solutions are flawed and have rebound effects. These include biofuels, energy-saving cars that are making people switch from trains to cars, and mega dams in the Amazon to generate renewable energy. Agenda

2030 can play an important role here with its approach that links social and environmental issues. Their belief that all countries are developing countries and that a profound transformation is therefore needed in both the South and the North is also an expedient one – even if Agenda 2030 remains stuck in the industrial growth model.

4) **Sufficiency:** The resource-driven pressure on the Earth as a system needs to be eased significantly to prevent other ecological systems from collapsing too. Up until now, we have succeeded in producing every franc of GDP with greater environmental efficiency by means of eco-economic decoupling. Although energy efficiency in Europe increased by 50% between 1990 and 2015, the economic growth generated in this period has already negated these successes. Compulsory consumption limits would present a decisive factor. “The combination of increased environmental efficiency and changed consumer behavior would allow for what is known as double decoupling. This method aims to make it possible for all 10 billion people expected to be on Earth at the midpoint of the century to live a good life within the planet’s borders.”

5) Voluntary codes of conduct and corporate social responsibility are completely inadequate in the face of the global crises. Furthermore, treaties and laws relating to sustainability and human rights are increasingly being undermined by agreements to protect trade and investment. Approaches like those offered by the corporate responsibility initiative are what are required: **making the protection of resources obligatory.**

6) **Finally, existing alternatives and alternative approaches must be given the necessary focus in social discourse.** There is no “one-size-fits-all” model and this is not a question of socialism versus capitalism, but rather perhaps one of a different type of capitalism, or of a combination of concepts, as the internationally renowned activist Pablo Solón sees it. In a project supported by Fastenopfer, Solón compared systemic alternatives to global capitalism: Buen vivir, degrowth, the commons movement, ecofeminism, the Rights of Mother Earth, and deglobalization. “We are experiencing a systemic crisis that can only be tackled in a satisfactory way if diverse perspectives are brought together and further developed. The answer to the systemic crises calls for alternatives to capitalism, productivism, extractivism, plutocracy, patriarchy, and anthropocentrism.”

With this “work in progress,” Fastenopfer is contributing to the social discourse on transformation, armed not least with the hope that the transformation we face will be seen as something positive, as an opportunity. The current situation, which has not yet seen any horror climate scenarios at all, is already intolerable on a moral level. Nevertheless, pockets of change are emerging in both the South and the North. Prioritizing them is an opportunity that we should not miss before climatic and social tipping points close the door to human coexistence and perhaps even human survival.

[Fastenopfer](#)

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[links](#)

- [IPCC](#)
- [WMO](#)

- [Secretary-General's remarks on Climate Change](#)
- [Democracy in action: Protecting civil society space](#)
- [Schweizer Konzerne verletzen regelmässig Menschenrechte \(in German\)](#)
- [Die Große Transformation: Eine Einführung in die Kunst gesellschaftlichen Wandels \(in German\)](#)
- [Book by Pablo Solón, Systemwandel \(in German\)](#)

reports

Disaster: the common enemy



Member of the filmmaking team, during filming. Picture: Conciliation Resources.

Conciliation Resources, alongside their partners, supported the production of a short film, which shows how disaster management can be a tool for cooperation between divided people.

Over the past 40 years, South Asia has experienced more than 1,300 natural disasters – these have been particularly severe in the Himalayan region of Jammu and Kashmir. An earthquake in 2005 left four million homeless, and floods in September 2014 were some of the worst to hit the region in over 100 years.

Jammu and Kashmir has been a hub of violent conflict since 1947, divided by a highly militarised Line of Control (LoC). Despite not being able to meet in the region, a team of four filmmakers from both sides of the LoC, supported by Conciliation Resources, have produced the film “Disaster: The common enemy” to raise awareness of the importance of working across the divide to improve disaster management.

As well as making disaster management more effective, and therefore potentially saving thousands of lives, a shared response could help build confidence between different groups and support long-term peacebuilding efforts in the region. Atia Anwer Zoon, a peace and conflict resolution expert from the Pakistan-administered side of Kashmir, appears in the film and explains:

“Disasters know no geographical boundaries, and therefore create a special opportunity for collaboration in conflict sensitive regions.”

Conciliation Resources has begun exploring this area of work alongside Kashmiri partners, including Shafat Ahmed – a Kashmiri from the Indian side of Kashmir. He has produced a briefing paper which presents practical ideas to improve disaster preparedness and response in the region, and also consulted on this film:

“A more effective response to disasters could save lives in this region. It is in the interests of both of sides to share joint research and data to help prepare for, and respond to, disasters. I also think that working collaboratively will build trust and confidence between people on either side of the divide.”

Suggestions for ways to collaborate include sharing hydrological and seismological data to improve early warning and improving lines of communication and access across the LoC during humanitarian crises.

[Conciliation Resources](#)

Emily Deeming

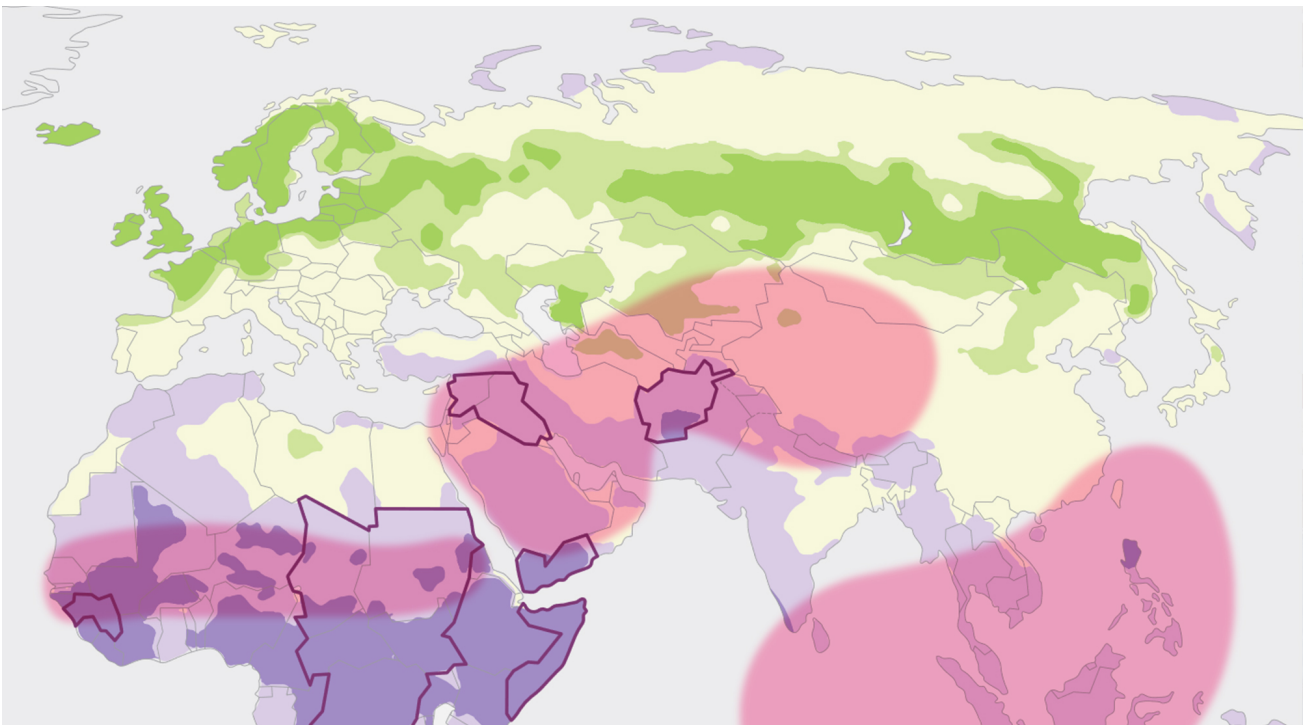
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[links](#)

- [Disaster: the common enemy](#)
- [Briefing Paper: Towards effective disaster preparedness and response in Kashmir](#)

reports

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) on the climate-conflict nexus



Nexus Brief Climate Change & Environment: Fragility and Conflict. Picture: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

Overall, climate change does not automatically cause violent conflict. However, there is no doubt that climate change acts as a threat multiplier, indirectly escalating the risk of conflict. In concrete, there is evidence that changing and severe weather patterns multiply the threat of conflict as the interruption of resource supply leads to greater resource scarcity. Furthermore, increased natural disaster risks may also trigger population displacement. Climate change is not a singular driver of conflict but a stressor that may lead to heightened risk of violence and conflict in an already fragile setting. Contexts with weak institutions, high levels of poverty and agricultural-based economies are particularly vulnerable to these conflict threat multipliers, and are at an increased risk of falling into the climate-conflict nexus.

The linkages between environment, fragility and conflict are being addressed in a number of Swiss interventions. Sound conflict analysis aims to guide SDC's contribution to the reduction of conflicts around natural resources. Common natural resource management

can increase confidence across borders, prevent conflicts and promote peace. Development cooperation should support such efforts through addressing the root causes of conflicts. For example, with the Blue Peace project, SDC contributes to building the foundations for the future cooperative management of the Orontes basin's water resources at local, national and transboundary level. The project is based on the assumption that if water can contribute to conflict, for instance in Syria, it can also be a source of reconciliation and that concerted water management can contribute to peacebuilding.

SDS's Climate Change & Environment Network together with the Conflict and Human Rights Network developed a "nexus brief" to sheds light on the nexus environment, climate change, fragility and conflict. This brief provides an overview on the various complex interlinkages that exist, with a focus on conflicts because of declining natural resources.

[Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation \(SDC\)](#)

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[links](#)

- [Nexus brief, Nr 5, July 2018](#)

reports

El Salvador: When uncertainty exacerbates violence against women



Ecofeminism UNES 2018. Picture: UNES

El Salvador is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change due to the current state of its natural resources. From 2009 to 2015, seven uninterrupted years of floods (3 years) and droughts (4 years) resulted in more than USD 1.6 billion worth of damage (USD 230 million a year or 1.3% of GDP). The drought has led to a drastic reduction in available water resources: In the east of the country, the volume has declined by more than 90%.

These crises affect men and women differently as the dominant patriarchal culture places responsibility on women to obtain natural resources such as water and energy for cooking, for example. This dynamic makes women dependent on the available natural resources and presents them with major challenges: Bringing, for example, ten liters of water into a community can take two hours because of the distance and waiting time.

Conflicts between communities and industries over the use and control of water have intensified over the past decade. Women report that they have been victims of bodily harm and rape when traveling to isolated places to look for water or wood for cooking. Furthermore, women who stand up for their right to water are subject to various forms of violence, discrimination, and criminalization. One example is Sonia Sanchez, leader of the

Saint Thomas community, who was sued for defamation by the Roble Group for condemning actions responsible for the drying out of several water sources.

April 2018 saw 135 femicides and environmental conflicts are on the rise. An improvement of the situation is not on the cards: Climate scenarios indicate a reduction in water in El Salvador by up to 40% in 2050 and 82% in 2100. This situation is likely to increase violence in the country and thus calls for a complete U-turn and for focus to be placed on sustainable environmental management. The State should particularly give priority to the most affected population groups and establish mechanisms to boost the participation and integration of women, who make up 53% of the population yet are not currently involved in decisions affecting both families and the country.

The organization UNES (Unidad Ecológica Salvadoreña) is supported by Eirene Suisse through qualified volunteers and helps communities to protect their natural resources. The gender dimension forms a key part of their work: The association trains community leaders to defend their rights, especially with regard to the issues above. Specifically, community members are trained in women's self-determination and positive masculinity in order to reduce violence against women.

UNES

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links

- [Juicio contra Sonia Sánchez \(in Spanish\)](#)
- [Activities of Eirene Suisse](#)
- [Activities of UNES, Eirene Suisse's partner in El Salvador \(in Spanish\)](#)

reports

Kenya – forming solidarity groups to protect livelihoods



Members of a solidarity group work together to implement what they have learned in a training session on planting vegetable gardens. Picture: Fastenopfer

In Kenya, the effects of climate change, excessive use of resources, historical injustice and inequality, endemic corruption, and poverty are increasingly at the root of violent conflicts, often along ethnic lines. These conflicts revolve around access to and control over natural resources such as land and water. There is a decline in traditional values such as solidarity, as they are displaced by a pitiless kind of materialism.

The fertile highlands are extremely densely populated. Alongside plantations owned by the elite, family farms are trying to survive, often on less than one hectare of land. And the plots get smaller with every generation. Families are torn apart by disputes over dividing inherited land and widows and daughters are often left empty-handed. Market-focused farming methods, with expensive hybrid seeds and artificial fertilizers, lead to widespread debt. In semi-arid regions, herder communities are also highly exposed to problems due to overgrazing and frequent droughts. Their herds are at once their basic livelihood and a status symbol. In especially hard times, they therefore allow their cattle to graze on farmers' fields, which all too often leads to violent conflicts.

The projects run by Fastenopfer's local partners have three strategic approaches:

- Agroecological methods are used to help the smallest family farms to be more resilient in the face of climate change. The forest and the vegetable gardens guarantee families a varied and cheap source of food.
- By working cooperatively and running their own savings banks, solidarity groups are able to cover their basic needs and find a longer-term escape from the debt trap.
- Local peace committees play a major role in resolving resource-based conflicts in non-violent ways. Local amateur lawyers raise people's awareness of land law and mediate in land-related conflicts.

In the longer term, these measures aim to enable grassroots solidarity groups to exercise their rights vis-à-vis the authorities and initiate transformation processes.

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links

- [Fastenopfer \(in German\)](#)
- [Fastenopfer in Kenia \(in German\)](#)

reports

Pacifism and ecology compared and associated



Postcard 1985. Picture: Harrel Graham / Earthspace.

The needs to protect the environment and to advance peace appeared in the political debate at the beginning of the 20th century with, for example, the establishment of the first nature preservation zones or the Nobel Prize. Nonviolence takes shape in the inter-war period. Then the UN Charter prohibits war (§2.3-4, 33 and 51). The 70' marked a "militant" awakening and the entry of these fields into science and research: it's the beginning of their legitimacy. It is also the beginning of political ecology. Peace remains more discreet, but makes a brilliant return with non-violence during and after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Presently, to assure a sustainable and secure a future for humanity and forthcoming generations must be done by integrating peace in the process. Can we peacefully respond to climate change? The Sustainable Development Goals have the ambition of achieving this symbiosis and by leaving no one behind, to provide a happy and lasting destiny to each and all, to the planet and to our species.

Peace and ecology face the same challenge: the future of humanity. The contribution of peace, as a fundamental method, is essential. They share the principles of prevention and precaution. Peace knows how to manage conflicts without aggravating them and helps

create infrastructures respectful of the human person and of the planet. Peace is essential for the sustainability of human history, in dignity as one humanity as it is all of us together, through our participation that we will respond to climate change. This worldwide unity will also help us gather the funds needed for the energy transition.

APRED is currently working on the definition and promotion of the fundamental methods necessary for the realization of fundamental rights: education and prevention, precaution and universal peaceful management of the disputes, dealing with the past and lessons learned, progress and realization of peace in societal and legal values, in political and social infrastructures.

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links

- [APRED](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goals](#)

reports

Sustainable natural resource management to mitigate conflicts



Peace and Co-Existence Committee in a Sri Lankan village with Sin, Tamil and Muslim groups. Picture: Helvetas / Sarah Niemeyer

Natural resources such as land, water, forests or fisheries are the primary sources of livelihoods for a significant part of the population in developing countries. Typically, several users utilize such resources, sometimes in cooperation, but often also competing with one another. Drawing on project experience from more than 20 countries, Helvetas has learned that sustainable natural resources management requires clear and secure allocation of land and resource tenure rights to users and fair benefit sharing mechanisms and must address questions of power between different users.

We develop our projects based on a thorough analysis of the interests and needs of actors, their claims for rights on resources, the institutional basis of these claims and the power relations amongst stakeholders. Where appropriate, we facilitate participatory decision making amongst relevant actors using cooperation and dialogue platforms designed to convene people with different interests, identities as well as social and economic backgrounds. Experience from diverse contexts such as dry areas the Sahel and in Eastern Africa with farming and pastoral communities, fisheries on the coast of Myanmar or forest management in the Andes or the Himalayas shows that well-designed interventions have

the potential to prevent and mitigate conflicts.

In our project work, we promote conflict-sensitive programme management. We equip our staff to analyse and understand the local context, to recognize how our programmes interact with their environment, and to build or adapt our projects and programmes accordingly. Hereby, the manual and field guide '3 Steps for Working in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations (WFCS)' developed by Helvetas and KOFF provides useful guidance.

Further key activities to address conflicts include: capacity development in non-violent conflict transformation techniques for individuals and institutions, the promotion of good governance principles amongst relevant actors and building on existing conflict resolution structures and mechanisms in the communities concerned.

[HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation](#)

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links

- [The manual '3 Steps for Working in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations \(WFCS\)'](#)
- [The field guide '3 Steps for Working in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations \(WFCS\)'](#)
- [Topic sheet 'Natural Resources and Conflict'](#)
- [Conflict Sensitive Programme Management](#)
- [Natural Resources and Conflict](#)
- [Umwelt und Klima \(in German\)](#)

reports

Providing information to the people of countries in crisis and facing the effects of climate change



Malian journalist reporting during coverage by Fondation Hironnelle of the COP22 Summit in Marrakesh in 2016. Picture: Tristan Miquel/Fondation Hironnelle

Fondation Hironnelle has sent a team of African journalists to cover talks at COP24, the international summit on climate change, taking place from 3-14 December 2018 in Katowice, Poland. The aim is to provide information to the people of the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Niger and Guinea, and to give them a voice.

The 24th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will be held in Katowice in southern Poland towards the end of 2018. Since COP21 in Paris in 2015, Fondation Hironnelle has brought in journalists to cover these summits who are working for media organisations that it has set up (or is supporting) in a number of African countries facing multiple crises and the effects of climate change. The media hold the key to understanding these issues for the common people, enabling them to

develop adaptability and resilience, which is particularly vital in societies facing major security, political or social crises.

To cover COP24, Fondation Hirondelle is bringing to Katowice journalists from Mali, Niger, Guinea, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Throughout the summit, they will cover the political talks, especially the work of their countries' delegations, and civil society initiatives, as well as other innovative approaches to adapt to climate change in their countries. Through field reports made before the summit, they will also highlight the reality and challenges facing local populations that are directly affected. The journalists will be supervised and assisted during their stay by a Fondation Hirondelle editor-in-chief. Their radio and video productions will be broadcast in French and local languages by their country's media and will also be available on social media. All productions will also be made available in French on a special page of Fondation Hirondelle's website.

[Fondation Hirondelle](#)

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[links](#)

- [Fondation Hirondelle](#)

reports

Interview: An environmental scientist with a passion for peace



Simon Mason. Picture: Simon Mason

Dr. Simon J. A. Mason is head of the Mediation Support Team at the Center for Security Studies ETH Zurich, working in the Mediation Support Project (a joint initiative of the CSS ETH Zurich and swisspeace, funded by the Swiss FDFA). In this interview, he tells us more about how conflict and the environment relate to each other, and gives an assessment of the current situation for peacemakers.

You did your doctorate in environmental sciences, later you became a mediator. What made you connect those two fields?

This connection really started when I did my PhD on water sharing in the Nile basin area focusing on Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia. I realized that the water quantity and quality is important, but that the political use and management of the water is as important and in many ways much more difficult. During that time, my focus shifted more towards the political aspects of environmental disputes and how to bring people together for joint problem-solving. I find the interaction in environmental conflicts very interesting; if a problem is purely political, it can sometimes be hard to grasp, but if it is purely technical it may at times also be a bit boring.

In your work as a mediator, how did your background as an environmental scientist help you?

Environmental sciences the way I was taught at ETH Zurich is very much problem-oriented. We were not perfectly solid in one discipline, but had a bit of knowledge in many disciplines and tried to apply that to a problem, which is quite close to the logic of mediation. The other important thing in environmental sciences is the multi-perspective approach, which is also very similar to mediation. There is not just one truth but it depends very much from what perspective you are looking at the problem and you have to deal with all perspectives if you want to move ahead and find a solution.

Nevertheless, in the present context, the idea that everything is subjective is sometimes pushed too far. With sciences, you have actual facts and you can measure things, which is an important counterbalance. Especially in environmental conflicts, if you can get data and agree about its interpretation, it can help you find a solution.

When applying environmental sciences in mediation, the question is often, how to bring in technical knowledge in a way to depoliticize aspects of the conflict, being at the same time very aware that the political decisions still have to be made. Focusing on the technical aspects can often help to find common ground.

Do you think the awareness of the nexus between environment and conflict is rising?

The key challenge lies in the fact that the link between climate change and violent conflict is indirect, which however does not mean that it is irrelevant and that we can ignore it. I think people have been aware of climate change, but then there was maybe too much of a focus on a possible direct linkage between scarcity or change in environment and the outburst of violent conflict. Then there was research that showed this was not the case. It is difficult to label a conflict as “environmental”, because conflicts are hardly every purely environmental, but always multidimensional. In my opinion, that is what makes this nexus to conflict, especially violent conflict, quite tricky.

You are the co-author of a book with the title “Mediation and Governance in Fragile Contexts: Small Steps to Peace” that is going to be published in February 2019. What can you tell me about it?

I wrote it together with Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, a Kenyan-Somali mediator working among other things on the topic of land and conflict. She focused a lot on the local level and tried to make the mediation of a conflict more sustainable by linking it to the development of

local peace committees, which also aimed at longer-term policy changes at the central state level. She was a unique person working at the grassroots level, but at the same time involved at the national level to address the 2007/2008 election crisis in Kenya. She also had international experiences, and was gifted in reaching and bridging different worlds, – west, east, north, south -, and different cultures. Inspired by and rooted in Islam, she was open to engaging with and learning from other cultures.

How did the book come about?

We met at a workshop on insider mediators, so mediators working in their own conflict contexts, and then co-trained in numerous mediation workshops. I asked her if she would be open to such a book project. The motivation was to help her make her wisdom, reflections and insights from her experiences accessible for a wider international audience. I think they are very valuable for people working in fragile contexts, where the governance system may lack legitimacy or effectiveness. I think especially in our global context today that is very polarized and at times depressing, she really brought to life and manifested a very strong message of hope that you can achieve peace, if you do it in small steps and coordinate your efforts. This message of hope is even more convincing, since it grew despite huge challenges and a lot of suffering she experienced. She died in a car crash in 2011, and so the whole project became a bit more complicated. I worked with her family and colleagues, and we used a lot of direct interview material to keep her original voice in the book. We have also posted some of these audio clips online, so you can listen to her at our “Mediation and Gouvernance” site.

Did she inspire you with the hope for peace?

Absolutely, it might sound strange, but for me, peacemaking is a little bit like small hardworking mice, they can easily be hurt or killed, but if they are quick and versatile, they can also be very effective in making an elephant move. So I think absolutely, the book has a message of hope, but one that is modest, in not trying to solve everything. But, because you cannot solve everything, this does not mean that you should not try to solve and transform what you can.

What is your current assessment of peace in the world?

In the present context, there are many challenges. This polarization in many societies and between states, and a very strong focus on power politics. I think it is a context where it would be easy to disengage from peace work. I believe in such contexts it is even more important, that people, who are struggling and investing for peace, help each other. You can find such people working for peace in all societies all over the world. There is a real need for more solidarity, we are all under threat and we have to stand together to be effective. When you are under pressure, you can either crumble and compete with each other, or you can use it as an incentive to work better together. As Dekha put it: “If you join energies with others, you can move mountains”.

[swisspeace](#)

Interviewer: Dayana Hug

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[links](#)

- [Simon Mason ETH-Center for Security Studies](#)
- [Mediation and Governance in Fragile Contexts: Small Steps to Peace](#)
- [Stepping stones to peace? Natural resource provisions in peace agreements](#)

in depth

Environmental peacemaking – too good to be true?



The conflict over water in Israel/Palestine presents the perfect context for environmental peacemaking interventions. Picture: Creative Commons

Wars tend to have devastating effects on the environment. Vietnam's vast hills bereft of their leaves after the deployment of millions of liters of Agent Orange may be the best example. In recent decades it has become more and more evident that the opposite is true as well; environmental degradation plays an increasing role as cause and magnifier of violent conflicts. However, it was not long until people sought to address this by making positive use of the distinctive character of environmental problems.

Nature completely disregards man-made borders, – in other words, environmental problems not seldom affect multiple, and potentially hostile, communities. As a result, sufferers have the incentives to try to solve the problem together. The concept of environmental peacemaking was born. It expects groups divided by conflict to put aside their differences in the face of shared environmental challenges and to get together for dialogue and cooperation. As parties co-manage forests and river basins, the creation of joint institutions follows suit, and the environmental situation steadily improves. Along the way mistrust, suspicion and tensions ease, rendering the overall relationships between groups more peaceful. The positive effects do not end there. With growing interdependence

and new channels for communication, an escalation of conflict seems much less likely. In sum, environmental peacemaking entails a phenomenal promise, – to kill two birds with one stone: environmental problems and conflict.

As good as it sounds in theory, the reality is sobering. The conditions for these peace-making mechanisms to unfold are plentiful. If those affected perceive the gains to be unfairly distributed, transboundary cooperation may in fact aggravate a conflict. Despite the high expectations, environmental cooperation is extremely unlikely to result in wider forms of cooperation, with political dialog confined to environmental aspects. Even though environmental institutions provide functioning communication channels, decision makers seem not to make use of them in the face of looming military confrontation. And if tensions grow between communities, instead of soothing them, cooperation may simply break down. Even worse, transboundary protection initiatives may be misused by states to shadow conflicts over minerals and territory and to justify military actions. To conclude, even if there are also success stories, these examples advise keeping expectations realistic.

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links

- [“Yes to Peace”? Environmental peacemaking and transboundary conservation in Central America](#)
- [The Impact of Environmental Cooperation on Peacemaking: Definitions, Mechanisms, and Empirical Evidence](#)
- [Environmental Cooperation as a tool for crisis prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation](#)

news

Portrait of a person: People in South Sudan are tired of the war



Leben Moro. Picture: Leben Moro

Leben Moro grew up in a country marked by civil wars and has witnessed the conflict from its most cruel sides. His family and friends help him to deal with the traumatic experiences and this summer's peace agreement gives him hope. Nevertheless, he also remains skeptical.

South Sudan has been independent since 2011. It is the youngest state in Africa, and many say it is a hopeless case. The separation of the black African Christian South from the Arab-Muslim North was preceded by severe civil wars. After independence, the country sank again into a bloody conflict as early as 2013. It is difficult to keep track of who is fighting whom, because the country has over 60 tribes. Roughly speaking, one can say that the supporters of the current President Salva Kiir are fighting against the allies of his former deputy Riek Macher.

Dr. Prof Leben Moro grew up in today's South Sudan on the border to Uganda. He is currently working at the Institute of Peace, Development and Security Studies at the University of Juba, where he is fully dedicated to peacebuilding. "Conflicts are at the source of almost all the problems of this country," says Leben Moro. "Immediate aid in the form of

food, water and medicines, for example, is of course incredibly important, but if you want to make a lasting difference, you have to invest in peacebuilding,” he adds.

His interest in peacebuilding began during his studies in the late 80s and early 90s in Egypt. There he came into contact with a lot of South Sudanese refugees. At first he mainly dealt with humanitarian issues, but over time he wanted to learn more about the cause of the problem – the war in South Sudan. “People are fleeing from the ongoing violence. If we want the refugees no longer to suffer under the precarious conditions of the refugee camps, then we must create peace in South Sudan,” says Leben Moro.

For someone like him, who grew up in a violent place, war is not something abstract that can be defined by the number of deaths and injuries. Although he has to deal with the subject on a theoretical level in his profession, it is always something emotional that moves him personally. “It’s not violence that affects anyone somewhere far away, it’s about people who are your friends or your family,” says Leben Moro. In his work he is confronted with many terrible stories and he has also experienced for himself how people were shot or raped.

“To process such experiences and stories is never easy” emphasizes Leben Moro. In the western world there are offers to deal with such experiences: Professional psychologists, pharmaceuticals or also yoga, meditation and others, help people to cope with stressful situations. Something like this is completely missing in South Sudan. Nevertheless, on difficult days Moro finds support thanks to the people around him. Talking with his family and friends, laughing and exchanging ideas helps him through hard times. “I need people who think like me, whom I trust and who understand me. Sitting alone in a room, staring at a wall meditating would not work for me. I think I’d go mad,” says Leben Moro with a smile on his face.

At the moment there is also a glimmer of hope for the country, because a peace process is underway. This summer the parties signed a peace agreement. Since then the violence has decreased considerably and in the capital Juba there is even something like a tiny economic upswing. Leben Moro is pleased about this and wants to remain positive. At the same time, he observes the process with mixed feelings, because there have already been several peace agreements that have subsequently failed to be implemented. He will not believe in real peace until the rebel’s return to the country and form a government together with the current rulers. “The people are tired of the war. This gives me hope. They are tired of fighting, tired of social problems and tired of the destroyed economy.” he says. Maybe it will really work this time?

The situation in the refugee camps is not easy either, explains Leben Moro: “Imagine you are constantly dependent on external aid. The People in those camps cannot grow their own food or build something. All they can do is hope that the aid arrives. Some days they get food and goods and some days they don’t. They cannot influence this. These are unbearable conditions. People want to stand on their own feet.”

At this point Leben Moro would also like to express his great gratitude for all the help the people get. “Several governments, NGOs and many generous private donors support us”. He himself has a family in refugee camps and this help is vital for their survival. “We are in this situation because of all this violence. South Sudan is actually a resource-rich country.

If there were peace, we would not be dependent on help. The institute in which I work therefore focuses on education: young people should be given a new view of the world and violence. If they grow up with this new attitude, peace is possible” is Leben Moro’s conviction.

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Communications

news

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The sturdy SUV provided by miva enables the PCU team to negotiate the dire road conditions. Picture: miva

On the move for peace

Many people from Burundi are fleeing to eastern Congo to escape human rights abuses. The *Pax Christi Uvira* (PCU) organization is making peacebuilding efforts in the Lusenda refugee camp. A key element of this work is developing communication between people of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. Carrying out the projects requires a high level of mobility. miva supports this work by providing a sturdy SUV for weekly journeys to Lusenda.

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news

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Panel discussion on 22 November 2018 on the occasion of the launch of Switzerland's fourth action plan for the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace, Security). Picture: swisspeace

Women, Peace and Security: Civil Society's Critical Voice

On 22 November 2018, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) launched Switzerland's fourth National Action Plan to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security in Geneva. This is an important domestic and foreign policy instrument for Switzerland as it lays the foundation for a gender-sensitive peace policy. One focus is the role of women and gender in the prevention of violent extremism. Swiss civil society critically looks at the impact of this objective on women and gender roles in peacebuilding and violence prevention.

The adoption of the UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2000 was considered a milestone for women's rights. For the first time, the UN Security Council demanded that more women be involved in conflict prevention and peace processes worldwide, and that women be protected from violence in conflicts. In the implementation of the resolution, member states have traditionally focused on the participation of women and the protection against violence. Switzerland's fourth action plan sets new priorities

and defines the inclusion of women in the “prevention of violent extremism” as an important goal for effective conflict prevention.

Fifteen non-governmental organizations from Swiss civil society have committed themselves to taking a critical look at the implementation of the action plan and strengthening the relevance of the policy instrument for practice. They advocate a critical examination of the role of gender in peacebuilding and violence prevention. As part of the first phase in a four-year project, we are looking into following question:

- What roles do women play in the prevention of conflict and violence, both within and outside the framework of the “preventing violent extremism” agenda, which is strongly shaped by security sector approaches?
- How can feminist approaches to women’s roles in conflict, violence prevention and peacebuilding be reconciled with the security agenda?
- What does the promotion of women’s participation in efforts to “prevent violent extremism” look like in practice? What impact does this focus have on women and women’s civil society organizations?

The project is coordinated by three peacebuilding organizations: KOFF – the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding; cfd – the feminist peace organization and PeaceWomen Across the Globe

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- [HSD: Women, Peace & Security](#)
- [Civil Society alternative report on Women, Peace & Security:](#)

calendar

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You can register for the following swisspeace courses until mid/end of January:

- MEDIATION & PEACEMAKING
- GENDER CONFLICT & PEACEBUILDING

Information on the entire swisspeace course offering on peacebuilding and conflicts can be found on OUR WEBSITE.

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La plateforme suisse de promotion de la paix
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KOFF is a dialogue and exchange platform facilitated by swisspeace. It is jointly supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and the following Swiss NGOs which are members of the platform:

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