



## Research Brief

# Peacebuilding Provides Opportunities for Progress — and for the Profession

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As I am writing this, I am sitting in a hotel overlooking old town Yangon, Myanmar, celebrating the first bold steps of an emerging environmental peacebuilding community of practice.

For seven years, ELI has — in partnership with the United Nations Environment Program, McGill University, and the University of Tokyo — coordinated a global initiative to take stock of experiences in post-conflict natural resource management, to identify lessons regarding how natural resource-related decisions affect peacebuilding, and to raise awareness of practitioners, researchers, and decisionmakers.

This started out as a modest project. We envisioned publication of an edited volume with 15-20 case studies. Quickly, it was apparent that we had tapped into an unmet need to exchange experiences, and the project grew. We are now finishing the process of publishing six books with 150 case studies by 225 authors examining experiences in 60 conflict-affected countries. On March 21, on the eve of World Water Day, we celebrated the launch of *Water and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding*, the fourth

book in the series.

March 21 also marked a new dynamic for the project. In addition to the live launch event held at ELI and the press release, which we posted both on the ELI home page and on the project web site ([www.environmentalpeacebuilding.org](http://www.environmentalpeacebuilding.org)), we activated a new social media plan, complete with factoids of note, possible tweets, recommended hashtags (#waterpeacebuilding and #WorldWaterDay), and we had people lined up to tweet.

The initiative has always been about more than research. We are seeking to change how people and institutions manage natural resources after conflict. We want to make peacebuilding more successful through effective natural resource management. And we want to improve the success of conservation endeavors in conflict-affected settings by making those efforts more conflict-sensitive.

Consequently, we have been using the books and the people we have brought together to launch a sustained dialogue, exchange of experience, and ongoing learning. Toward this end, we are developing and growing an Environmental

Peacebuilding Community of Practice. In November, we launched a new global knowledge platform for sharing information, and we have been adding functionality and content steadily.

Since January, we have been producing a biweekly *Environmental Peacebuilding Update* that goes out to a growing GoogleGroup (1,200 members, and counting). We established environmental peacebuilding communities on Twitter (@EnvtPeacebuild), Facebook (Environmental Peacebuilding), and LinkedIn (Environmental Peacebuilding).

To date, we have been generating most of the content, identifying current news articles, job opportunities, upcoming conferences, and other announcements relating to natural resources, conflict, and peace. There is a steady flow of information, which we post on the Environmental Peacebuilding Knowledge Platform. As we post the items, we also tweet about them, and post to the LinkedIn group and to the Facebook page. Every two weeks, we digest the various posts into the Environmental Peacebuilding Update that is sent out electronically and archived

on the website.

We are still developing the modalities for how to most effectively use social media, even as our following grows. It is exciting to see the community of practice take on a life of its own. Initially, the community of practice started with the contributing authors and partners; now, though, most of the new members are people with whom we have had no prior direct contact.

So how did the social media campaign do? The hashtag #waterpeacebuilding was tweeted more than 700 times and had a reach of 7,899,184. That is to say that the hashtag was delivered to timelines 7.9 million times, reaching hundreds of thousands of people. This far eclipses the number of people that we have traditionally been able to access using press releases and web posts.

As we continue to grow, the community of practice is helping to facilitate the birth of a new field of practice — environmental peacebuilding — which has the potential to sustain the exchange our partners started seven years ago. Growing and sustaining the community of practice will occupy us in the days to come.