

**Environment, Conflict,  
and Cooperation:  
From Threat to  
Opportunity**

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Security Project

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International Center for  
Scholars



# **Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars**

## **Environmental Change and Security Project**

- **Nonpartisan, non-advocacy**
- **Facilitating dialogue between research and policy communities**
- **Lee H. Hamilton: Wilson Center President**



# Presentation Outline

- Environment and Conflict: A Range of Links
- Scarcity and Conflict
- Abundance and Conflict
- Environmental Pathways to Peace
- Key Challenges and Questions

# Environment and Conflict: A Range of Links

- Environmental damage from warfare
- Environment as tool of war
- Forests as base for combatants
- Combat zone as conservation zone



# Natural Resources and Conflict: The Scarcity Thesis

- Environmental degradation/depletion and violent conflict
  - Almost exclusive focus on developing countries
  - Focus on renewable resources and VIOLENT conflict
  - Lots of “small c” conflict: not well-integrated into analysis

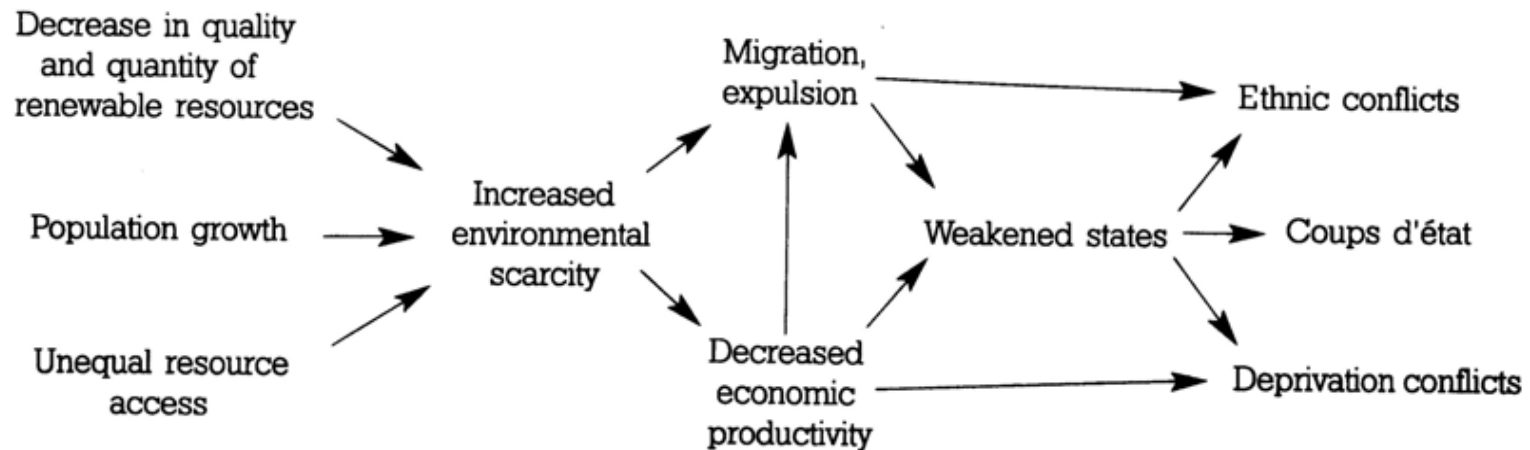
# Environmental Scarcity and Conflict

from Thomas F. Homer-Dixon (1999)

**Figure 2. Some Sources and Consequences of Environmental Scarcity.**

*Sources of environmental scarcity*

*Social Effects*



# The Environment and Conflict Thesis: Case Study Conclusions

- The environment is neither a necessary nor sufficient cause of violent conflict
- “Underlying, subnational, and diffuse” environmental contributions to violent conflict
- Indirect role in intrastate, rather than interstate, violent conflict
- Fisheries, arable land, water, and deforestation are the most salient renewable resources

# Environment and Conflict

## Conclusions (cont.)

- Environmental scarcity contributes to:
  - Migration (marginal lands, urban areas)
  - Undercutting economic activity
  - Resource capture by elites
  - Weakening of states
- If adaptation is not sufficient, these social effects in turn can exacerbate existing ethnic and/or income divisions, which are more proximate causes of conflict



# Abundance Rather Than Scarcity



- Forests, diamonds, gold, coltan
- Fungible, portable, and lucrative
- Worth fighting over
  - DRC
  - Liberia
- Funding the fighting
  - Cambodia
  - Liberia

# Shortcomings of Environment and Conflict Work



Environment, Development, and Sustainable Peace  
Workshop, Costa Rica, 2002

- Scarcity vs. abundance: a false dichotomy
- Looking to levels beyond the state: small “c” livelihood conflict
- Putting poverty and development back in: the Southern perspective
- Intervening variables as key for barking dogs: governance
- Not just local affairs: consumption and international footprints
- Data limitations for large N
- Cooperation, not just conflict

# Turning the Environment and Conflict Thesis on its Head

- Propose proactively exploiting environmental problems strategically as part of broader peacemaking efforts

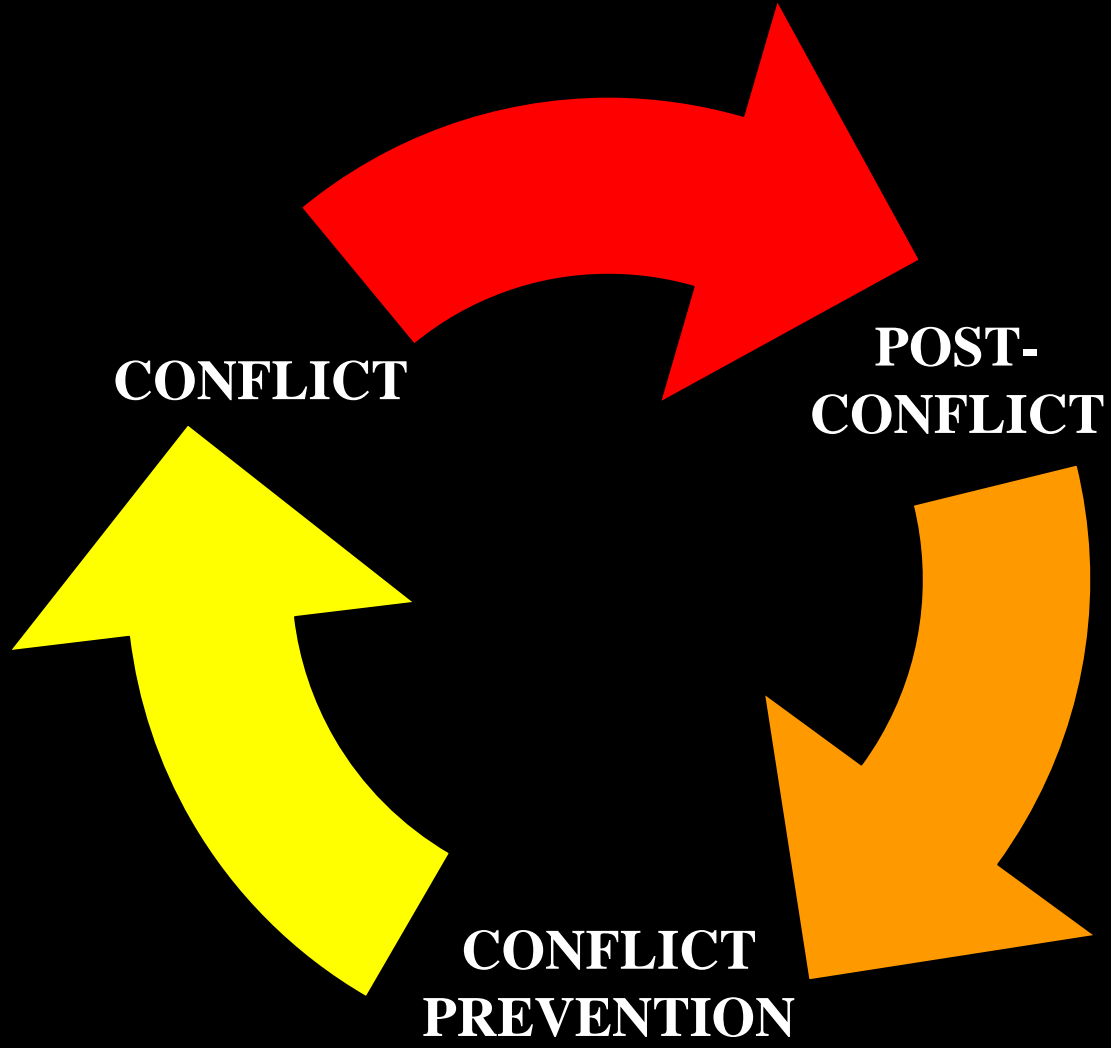


# Environmental Pathways to Peace

- Utilize the logic of environmental interdependence and the need for ongoing interactions to talk across lines of tension
  - State-to-state
  - Civil society-to-civil society
- Use cooperative efforts and dialogue to manage natural resources as a way to transform insecurities and create more peaceful relations between parties in dispute

# Exploring Environmental Pathways to Peace Along a Conflict Continuum





# Environmental Cooperation and Natural Resources Management as Conflict Prevention

# NILE RIVER BASIN

- SELECTED CITIES
- ★ NATIONAL CAPITALS
- MAJOR ROADS

*This map was produced by the Map Design Unit of the World Bank. The boundaries, colors, denominations and any other information shown on this map do not imply, on the part of the World Bank Group, any judgment on the legal status of any territory, or any endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries.*



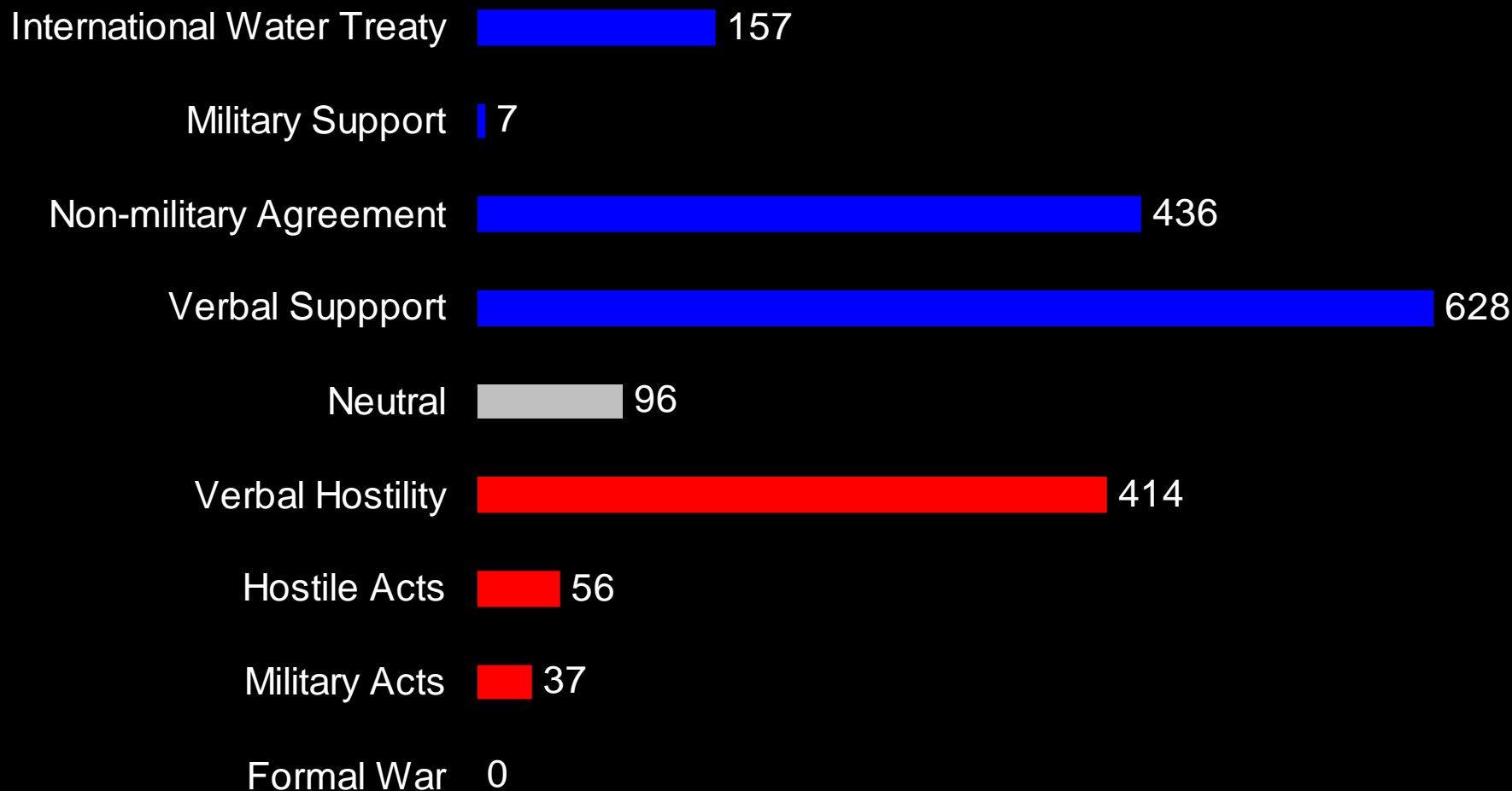




# Nile Basin Initiative



# 1,700 State-to-State Water Interactions in Transboundary Basins, 1946-1999



Source: Adapted from Wolf et al. 2003 in *Water Policy*



FOTO  
REGISTRO CIVIL

FOTO COREA

POLICIA



# Environment as Lifeline in Times of Conflict

# Environmental Dialogue as Lifeline in Times of Conflict and Tension



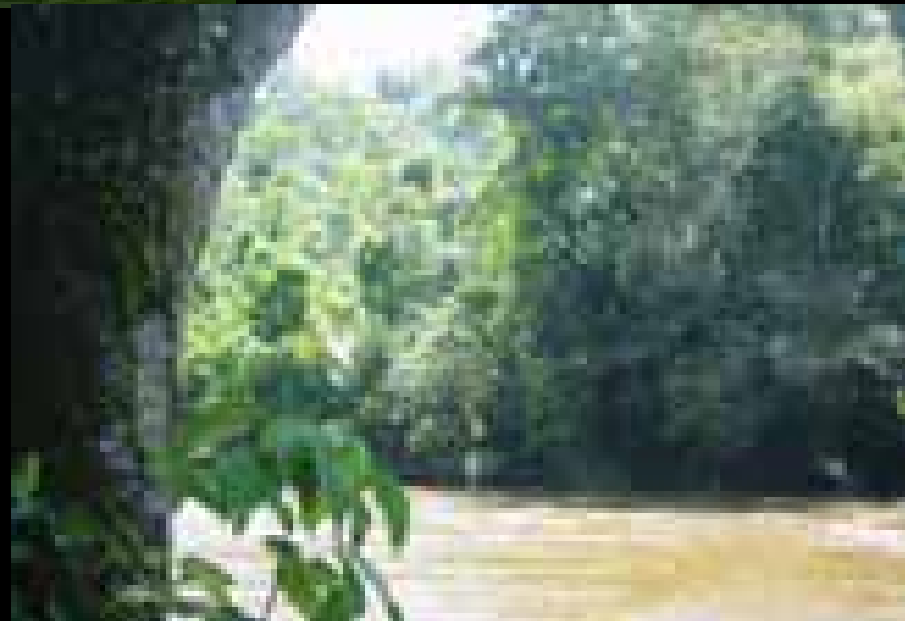
- “Picnic Table” talks
- Good Water Makes Good Neighbors
- U.S-Norway-Russia in Russian Northwest (AMEC)
- Indus Water Treaty

Environment as Essential  
Ingredient to Achieving Peace



**Peru – Ecuador  
border**

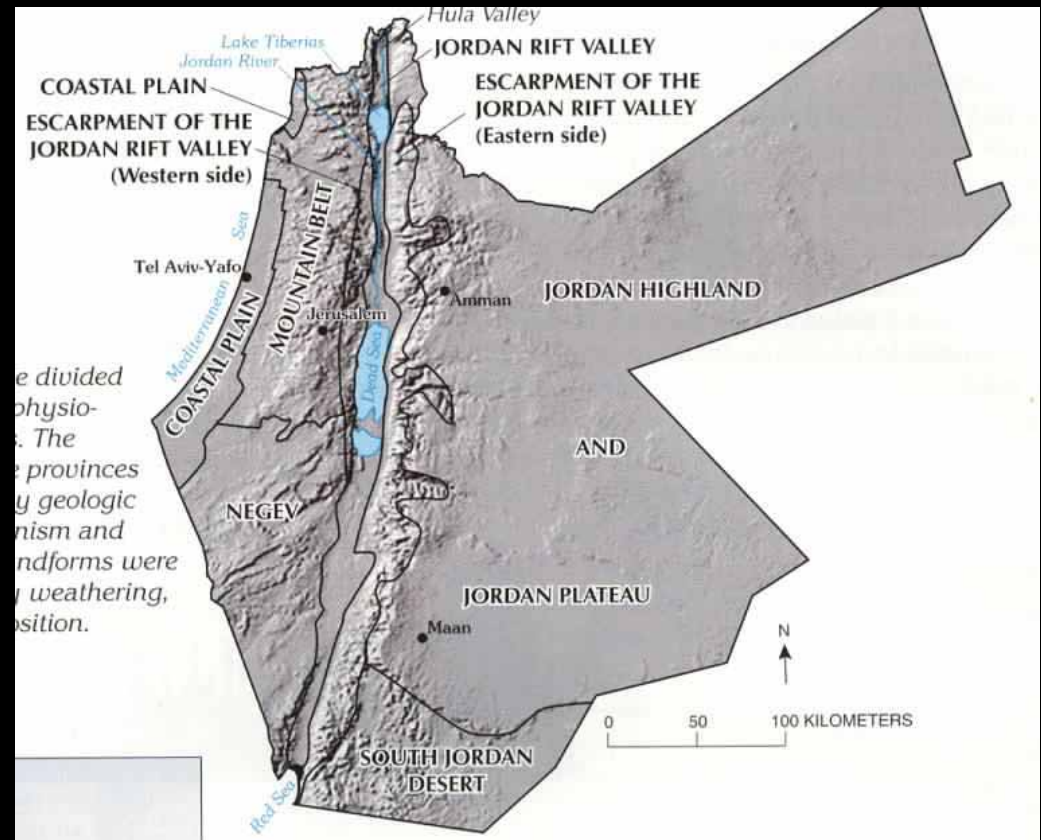
**Cordillera del  
Condor  
Transboundary  
Protected Area**





Water didn't get you into this mess,  
but...



- Palestine-Israel
- India-Pakistan



# Environment as Post-Conflict Confidence Builder

# Peace Parks or TFCAs

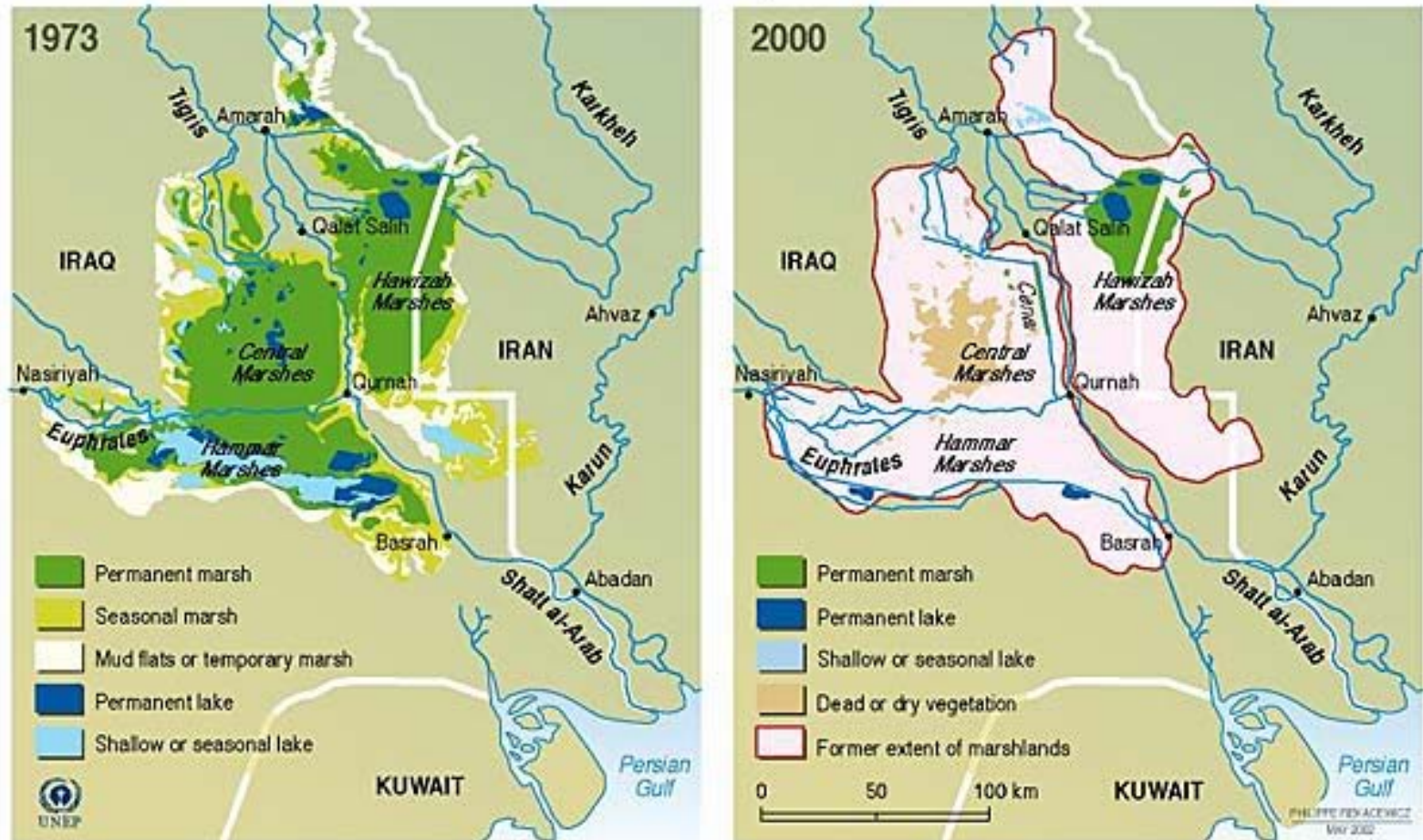
## Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs)

-  TFCAs supported by the Peace Parks Foundation
-  TFCFA development under consideration



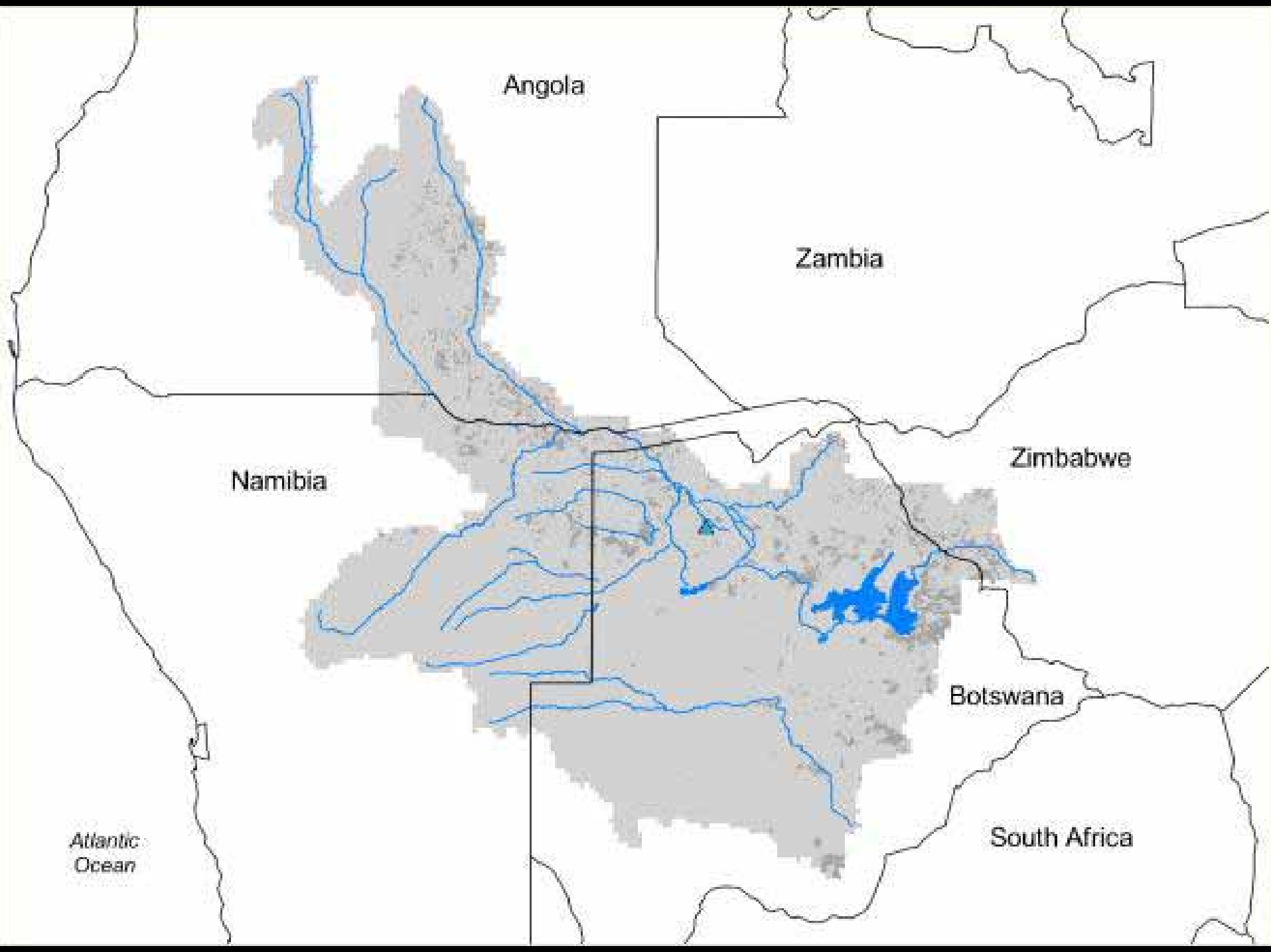
# UNEP Post-Conflict Assessment Unit

## From Wetlands to Dry Lands The Destruction of the Mesopotamian Marshlands



Note: These two maps are sourced from satellite images and maps originally created by Hassan Partow, GRID-Geneva.

Source: Hassan Partow, *The Mesopotamian Marshlands: Demise of an Ecosystem*, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Division of Early Warning and Assessment (DEWA), 2001.



Angola

Zambia

Zimbabwe

Namibia

Botswana

South Africa

Atlantic Ocean

# Key Challenges and Questions

- **Transparency and participation:** finding the right mix and the right time – what is the best mix of state and civil society?
- Doing environmental peacemaking without calling it environmental peacemaking or environmental security
- Variable chances of success along conflict continuum: are some times better than others for NRM's peacemaking qualities?
- Variable peacemaking potential among resources: is water better than land or forests better than minerals?

# Key Challenges and Questions

- Overcoming barriers to cooperation – playing well together across institutional and topical lines
  - UN, regional orgs, US, USAID, NGOs, academics
  - NRM, development, conflict, governance
- Shortage of diverse skill sets
- Improving donor coordination and duration of commitment
- **Staying behind the scenes:** U.S. can't always be out front
- How to demonstrate/measure success if success is something that didn't happen (null case)