

Critical Reflection

following the KOFF Roundtable of September 4th 2012 on

Water and Land Management in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations

Andreas Graf, Program Officer, swisspeace

Sergio Gemperle, Intern, swisspeace

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Roundtable Setting

On September 4th 2012, KOFF launched its new Roundtable Series on Water and Land Management in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations. This topic is considered particularly relevant for a number of reasons. First, development organizations are increasingly engaged in regions fraught with weak government structures and social tensions. This requires a heightened awareness of the specific challenges to their work and urges development organizations to make use of their leverage in favor of peace promotion. Second, in many fragile and conflict affected situations, water and land are at the center of tensions – be they violent or not. Interference in ownership of and access to these oftentimes vital resources therefore directly or indirectly influences conflict structures and dynamics. If poorly designed and implemented, water and land management projects might well enhance existing or create new tensions. At the same time, experience has also shown that communally shared water and land management systems can facilitate social cohesion and constitute entry points to overcome tensions. And third, issues of water and land are in practice very closely intertwined. Access to land most often also means access to the water located on the land and inequitable distribution of land and

water tends to be the result of the same patterns of social and economic marginalization.

Objectives and Participants

With regards to content, the main objectives of this first Roundtable in the series were twofold: On the one hand we aimed to identify the challenges Swiss actors face when implementing water and land management projects in fragile and conflict affected situations. On the other hand, we wanted to start the discussion on strategies to address these challenges. The event was designed to allow us defining the focus of further roundtables of the series based on the participating organizations' needs.

Representatives of major Swiss NGOs in development cooperation (Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, Caritas, HEKS, Brot für Alle, Quaker UN Office) as well as officials from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Human Security Division (HSD) of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) attended the Roundtable. The three main inputs were given by Dr. Annabelle Houdret from the German Development Institute (DIE-GDI), Dr. Bishnu Upreti from the University of Kathmandu and Dr. Thomas Brey from the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) of the University of Bern.

Main Insights and Ensuing Questions

Four main insights, each leading to a new set of questions, became particularly apparent during the roundtable discussion:

1. **The general agreement among the participants on the usefulness of looking at water and land issues in an integrated way contrasts with the lack of awareness of how to achieve this integration.** It became clear that purely technical approaches in one domain tend to fail to take into consideration the effects they have on the other. While some approaches such as 'Integrated Water Resource Management'¹ integrate different perspectives, in practice there seems to be little explicit reflection on the nexus of water and land projects. This raises the question of how water and land management interrelate on the project level. To what extent are existing approaches capturing this challenge? What could be potential benefits of increased cooperation and coordination within and among organizations?
2. **The understanding of how to apply concepts and schemes of conflict-sensitivity in water and land management projects in fragile and conflict-affected situations remained rather diffuse and unspecified.** It seemed that exchange between the three communities – water, land and conflict sensitivity/peacebuilding – is still at a very early stage. The way in which water and land management are unique in fragile and conflict-affected situations has not become very clear in the discussion. How – if at all – do water and land management strategies have to be adapted when applied in fragile and conflict-affected situations? What are concrete entry points in water and land management that go beyond doing no harm and actively contribute

¹ See: Rahaman and Varis (2005), *Integrated Water Resources Management: Evolution, Prospects and Future Challenges, Sustainability: Science, Practice, & Policy*, 1 (1).

to peacebuilding efforts? Is there a need for a specific tool guiding organizations towards conflict-sensitive water and land management?

3. **The discussion confirmed that structural change in water and land management is very difficult to achieve.** Many states consider water and land issues to be fundamental components of their national sovereignty. Hence, Swiss state agencies that support the development of legal frameworks for the management of water and land at a regional or national level have often experienced difficulties entering into constructive engagement with governments. Moreover, lacking entry points at the national level hinder smaller NGOs to scale-up successful local projects on water and land to the regional or national level. This raises a number of questions: What are windows of opportunity where international expertise on water and land rights is welcomed by national governments? Which approaches are needed in this regard? To what extent are the newly developed Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)² a tool to improve water and land governance at different levels?
4. **Challenges to water and land management by large scale land investments, tensions between farmer and herders, the impact of mining projects as well as the identification of potentials for conflict prevention and peacebuilding through water or land are among the key concerns for development organizations.** First, the phenomenon of large-scale land investments (also known as 'land grabbing') creates new challenges for water and land management at

² See: FAO (2012), *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forest in the Context of National Food Security*, FAO Committee on World Food Security, available at: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/016/i2801e/i2801e.pdf> (last downloaded on 19th of October 2012).

national and local levels. It threatens existing water and land management schemes and tends to lead to a growing alienation of national authorities from development actors. Second, conflicts between herders and farmers over ownership of and access to water and land threaten the effectiveness of many development projects. Third, natural resource extraction in many situations creates or fuels tensions over water and land. Finding ways to foster the rights of the local population is a major concern for many development actors. And fourth, the presentations and discussion showed that water and land management are in many cases most relevant entry points for local peace initiatives or higher-level peace negotiations. Key issues for development actors here are the questions of which strategies can be applied to draw on water and land as catalysts for conflict prevention and peace building and of how local initiatives can feed into processes at the national level.

These four insights highlight that cooperation between different project levels (local, national, international) and different project perspectives within development cooperation (water, land and conflict sensitivity/peacebuilding) are in their early stages. There is an apparent contradiction between this lesson and the widely recognized necessity to cooperate beyond single perspectives and levels in order to achieve better results. At the same time, the discussions have shown that there is no blueprint for conflict-sensitive water and land management. What works in some situations may not work in others and the potential of more integrative approaches needs to be assessed on a case-to-case basis.

Outline for Further Roundtables

Issues and Cases

The upcoming roundtables will each focus on one of the four issues of concern identified in the discussion (see point 4 above). For every setting, one or two emblematic cases where Swiss actors are particularly active will be chosen. This will allow us to break down the vast array of conflict-sensitive water and land management issues and emphasize specific challenges the actors face in these settings. According to the current state of planning, the settings and cases for the four roundtables are the following:

- Land grabbing: Ethiopia and Mekong Basin (November 2012)
- Herder/farmer conflicts: Sahel zone, focus on South Sudan, Kenya, Mali and Niger (February 2013)
- Water and land as entry points for peace initiatives: Israel and Palestine (April 2013)
- Natural resource extraction: Colombia and Peru (June 2013)

The first roundtable has shown that to allow for a structured discussion on this broad topic, in addition to focusing on specific issues and contexts, it may be helpful to position the projects and approaches of different actors within the broader field of conflict-sensitive water and land management. Future roundtables will therefore make use of a project matrix developed by KOFF/swisspeace (see Annex). The matrix allows us to categorize the different projects according to the levels they address (local, national, and/or international) and perspectives they include (water, land and and/or conflict sensitivity/peacebuilding).

ANNEX: Project Matrix

Figure 1 shows the Project Matrix. In the matrix, the different projects are positioned with respect to the levels at which they are implemented (vertical axis) and the perspectives they include (horizontal axis). This mapping shall allow us to (1) better understand how Swiss actors are engaged in the respective context and (2) to identify synergies and potentials for cooperation across project perspectives and levels.

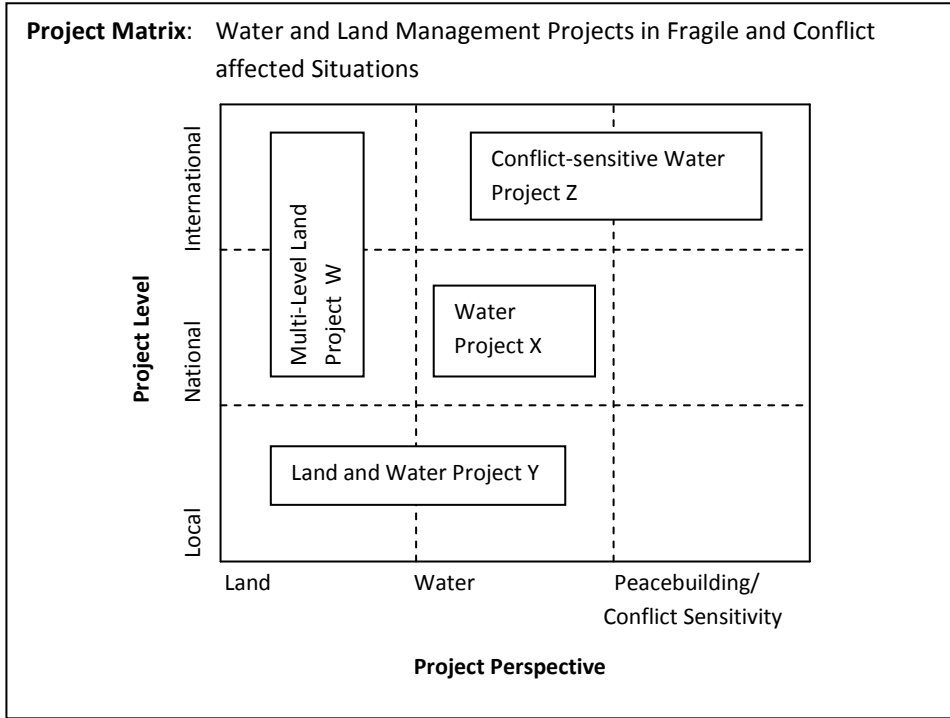
Horizontal Axis: Project Perspective

Water management activities may focus on such diverse aims as the provision of safe drinking water, support to the construction and management of locally owned irrigation systems, access to sanitation as well as transnational water management schemes. While some local projects narrowly focus on technical assistance, others encompass a broader perspective on issues such as community development (as the 'Integrated Water Resource Management' approach pursues).

In regard to **land** management a similar range of projects with different aims can be listed – from agricultural techniques of soil conservation and crop cultivation, community based forest management to policy advocacy related to land property rights. As with water projects the scope of land management projects varies greatly, where purely technical assistance is seen alongside multi-stakeholder land management projects that integrate conflict resolution mechanisms.

A third perspective focuses on conflict-related issues. **Conflict-sensitive project management** explicitly takes into account the fragile and conflict-affected context and aims to avoid exacerbating or creating tensions while maximizing positive effects on peace and stability. In other projects the perspective is different in the sense that the project's main goal is to contribute to **peacebuilding**, while land and/or water management are among the means to achieve this goal.

Figure 1



Source: Own Design

Vertical Axis: Project level

At the **local** level, development cooperation mainly focuses on project-oriented, rather small-scale interventions in water and land management. Projects may follow different approaches: working with farmers to improve techniques of water and land use, fostering inclusive local initiatives to regulate distribution and access to water and land in an equitable way, building capacity among local leaders to constructively deal with tensions related to water and land management, or supporting local civil society organizations active in conflict prevention and mediation.

At the **national** level, development cooperation tries to influence water and land management in a more structural way by shaping water and land policies and legislation of the national government. Where the government shows political will to cooperate with international actors, approaches include capacity building of state officials on water and land policy. In case the government is not in favor of external interventions, alternative approaches may include

political dialogue processes or the support of civil society organizations.

Water and land management at the **international** level encompass for instance cross-border water management projects (also called 'blue diplomacy') or initiatives that deal with phenomena such as climate change or large-scale land investments that are influencing land and water issues at the local level.

Interlinking Levels and Perspectives

Regarding the horizontal axis, projects ideally incorporate aspects of all three perspectives. Conflict sensitivity is relevant for all projects in fragile and conflict-affected situations, regardless of whether they deal with water or land. And water as well as land management projects need to at least reflect on the effect they have on the other resource. Similarly, trying to integrate different levels into water and land management projects and/or cooperate with other projects on a different level might be a promising strategy for effective and sustainable project implementation.

swisspeace

swisspeace is a practice-oriented peace research institute. It carries out research on violent conflicts and their peaceful transformation. The Foundation aims to build up Swiss and international organizations' civilian peacebuilding capacities by providing trainings, space for networking and exchange of experiences. It also shapes political and academic discourses on peace policy issues at the national and international level through publications, work-

shops and conferences. swisspeace therefore promotes knowledge transfer between researchers and practitioners. swisspeace was founded in 1988 as the Swiss Peace Foundation in order to promote independent peace research in Switzerland. Today the Foundation employs more than 40 staff members. Its most important donors are the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss National Science Foundation and the United Nations.

Center for Peacebuilding (KOFF)

The Center of Peacebuilding (KOFF) of the Swiss Peace Foundation swisspeace was founded in 2001 and is funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and 45 Swiss non-governmental organizations. The center's objective is to strengthen Swiss actors' capacities in civilian

peacebuilding by providing information, training and consultancy services. KOFF acts as a networking platform fostering policy dialogue and processes of common learning through roundtables and workshops.

Critical reflections

In its *critical reflection* publications, swisspeace and its guest speakers critically reflect on topics addressed at roundtables. They both make a note of

the arguments put forward during the roundtables and carry on the discussion in order to encourage further debates.