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# ENVIRONMENT AND CONFLICT LINKAGES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Sub-Saharan Africa experiences a wide range of inter- and intra-state conflicts. According to a report by the Secretary General of the United Nations, “[since 1970, more than 30 wars have been fought in Africa.... In 1996 alone, 14 of the 53 countries of Africa were afflicted by armed conflicts, accounting for more than half of all war-related deaths worldwide and resulting in more than 8 million refugees, returnees and displaced persons.”<sup>1</sup> Thus Africa is referred to as “a continent at war with itself”<sup>2</sup>. As conflicts abound in Africa, the discernible trend in environmental resources is decline and deterioration. The deterioration of the environment has resulted in the vulnerability of the people in the region with increased exposure to environmental hazards and reduced capacity to cope with the hazards.<sup>3</sup> This is exacerbated by the high rate of population growth. The Great Lakes Region accounts for a substantial number of these conflicts. The causes of these conflicts are many, complex and inter-related. They include such external factors as superpower competition for political and ideological influence and competition for natural resources such as minerals and oil by western multinational corporations. The link between environmental resources (for instance, change and scarcity) and these conflicts has not been explored and articulated.

This raises the need to urgently consider the role of environmental resources on the conflict and ways in which environmental resources can be used to build peace. In this regard, there are attempts in research and policy-making to problematise the great disparities characteristic of natural resources’ control in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>4</sup> Studies looking at countries in violent conflicts and isolating environmental resources to the conflicts have been carried out in different parts of Africa recently. The African Centre for Technology Studies for instance, looked at the role that access to and control over natural resources are linked to the national conflict involving the governments of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi among others.<sup>5</sup> Land and natural resource use systems have been identified as central to the conflict in Rwanda and Burundi and coltan mining in the DRC.<sup>6</sup> In both cases, the role of external actors is highlighted.

This paper looks at the linkages between environment and conflict in the Great Lakes region. It briefly outlines the conceptual framework within which the discussion on conflict and environment has been cast and proceeds to link the conflicts in the Great Lakes Region to environmental factors and to broader issues that have implications for sustainable environmental management. The main finding here is that environmental factors, though a pivotal in most conflicts in the Great Lakes region, are rarely ever articulated as such. The centrality of environmental resources to the region and the convergence of conflicts with a deteriorating environment points to the need for clear articulation of environment-conflict linkages. The role of the United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Environment Programme in both mapping this linkage is underscored.

## II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The link between environment and conflict has been a subject of discussions for a while now. This link has been established in many contexts in the developed countries where natural resources' issues are a critical facet of the quest for political and economic stability and the pursuit of strategic goals around the world.<sup>7</sup> Within the African context too, there have been studies linking environmental factors to conflict. As noted by Dr. James Gasana, former Minister for Defence in the Rwandan government

*Environmental causes of major significance in this context [the Rwanda conflict] are natural resource linked and are due to population pressure, to decline of agricultural land per family land-holding..., to soil degradation and to shortage of firewood.*<sup>8</sup>

The fundamental basis of environment and conflict linkages, that environmental factors such as natural resources scarcity and environmental degradation can be significant sources of conflict, communicates a clear and common message to a wide variety of conflict specialists. Understandings of negative environmental change and worsening natural resource scarcities are arguments familiar to many. The environment, encapsulated in pessimistic notions of disturbance, collapse, and crisis, is a ready threat on which to hinge new conceptualisations of conflict. These new ways of explaining conflict, by drawing on an extensive field of research into the condition and functioning of the environment, and an even greater body of practice concerning methods for addressing environmental concerns, increase the number of pathways for managing conflict.<sup>9</sup>

Thomas Homer-Dixon, a Canadian political scientist, is the foremost academic advocate of environment and conflict linkages. As coordinator of a three-year project on 'Environmental Change and Acute Conflict', sponsored by the American Academy of the Arts and Sciences and the Peace and Conflict Studies Program at the University of Toronto, Homer-Dixon developed models to demonstrate the linkages between renewable resource scarcity and conflict.<sup>10</sup> These models of environmental scarcity leading to conflict have generated deep concern for the environmental underpinnings of conflict.

The foremost finding of the 'Environmental Change and Acute Conflict' project is that the degradation or depletion of agriculture land, forests, water, and fish will make a greater contribution to 'social turmoil' in the coming decades than will climate change or ozone depletion.<sup>11</sup> The findings suggest that developing countries dependent on the export of raw renewable resources for a great proportion of their economic output, including recent or current conflict areas such as Rwanda, Liberia, Ethiopia, and Somalia, are most susceptible to the 'coming anarchy' inspired by environment loss. Homer-Dixon explains that as population increases and economic outputs grow, 'scarcities of renewable resources will increase sharply.'<sup>12</sup> Central to Homer-Dixon's analysis is a broadening of what he believes is the narrow focus of environment and conflict research. Homer-Dixon argues that environmental change is only one of three primary sources of renewable resources scarcity, the second major finding of his project. These sources include:

1. Supply induced scarcity, caused by degradation or depletion of resources.
2. Demand induced scarcity, caused by population growth or an increase in per capita consumption of resources.
3. Structural scarcity arising from the unequal distribution of resources.<sup>13</sup>

According to Homer-Dixon, these three sources of renewable resource scarcity often interact, the third substantial finding of his 'Environmental Change and Acute Conflict' Project.<sup>1</sup> Two interactions, one resource capture, and a second ecological marginalisation, are the most frequent. In the first interaction, resource capture, demand and supply induced scarcities interact to produce structural scarcities. As Homer-Dixon and Blitt explain, 'Powerful groups within society, anticipating future shortages due to increased population growth and a degradation of resources, shift resource distribution in their favour, which subjects the remaining population to scarcity.'<sup>2</sup> In the second interaction, demand induced and structural scarcities interact to produce supply-induced scarcities. Homer-Dixon and Blitt state, 'lack of access to resources caused by inequitable distribution forces population migration from regions where resources are scarce to regions that are ecologically fragile and extremely vulnerable to degradation.'<sup>14</sup>

Rarely is the relationship between ecology and conflict direct or 'raw'. Instead, linkages mediate the dimension and function of the ecological variable in conflict.<sup>15</sup> A multitude of contextual factors shape and guide both the ecological variable itself, as well as its linkage(s) to conflict. Linkages are a blend of ecological, economic, social, cultural and political influences. Three linkages, in particular, underpin the relation between ecology and conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa. These include commodity chains, land and natural resource use systems, and ecological structures and functions. Valuable ecological resources, including agricultural products, are linked to regional and international political economies through complex commodity chains.<sup>16</sup> Commodity chains consist of multiple value addition stages and involve a wide variety of actors from the level of the farm or range to transnational corporations and northern consumers. In Sub-Saharan Africa, these chains are marked by clear patterns of predation and exploitation that disadvantage primary producers, in most cases peasants and pastoralists. Primary producers at the lower end of commodity chains are poorly compensated for commodities they produce, including agricultural products such as tea, coffee, and meat, as well as minerals. In Burundi for instance, a predatory commodity chain links the production and marketing of coffee to the country's long running civil war.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, commodity chains intimately link coltan extraction to the Great Lakes conflict system. The primary extractors of coltan in the Kivu Provinces of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo are paid very low producer prices in comparison to the prices paid for coltan at the later ends of the coltan commodity chain.<sup>18</sup> Extraction of coltan in North and South Kivu Provinces involves an intricate network of individual extractors, rebel authorities, regional governments, regional and international air transporters, and transnational corporations. Coltan extracted in the Kivus is transported to Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and other East African countries, for international export. The main buyers of coltan are high technology firms at the forefront of the new economy in Asia, Europe and North America.<sup>19</sup>

With regard to land and natural resource use systems, competition for access, control and use of these resources presents an opportunity for conflict as amply demonstrated by Homer Dixon and other scholars. For example, land scarcity was an important dimension of the ecological variable in Rwanda's civil war.<sup>20</sup> Widespread deterioration of the land base resulting from drought in the early 1990s worsened the 'land problem'. Demand for well-watered and fertile land increased dramatically during the drought linking land scarcity was linked to civil war.

### **III. THE ROLE OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE CONFLICTS IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION**

The Great Lakes Region has a history of interdependence and strong regional dynamics. For the purposes of this study, the Great Lakes Region is defined to include Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The typology, causes and links with the environment of the conflicts are summarized with no attempt made to exhaustively delineate the nature of each conflict. Our purpose here is to draw the link between different conflicts and the environment and to catalyse a more exhaustive and focused debate on the issues to assist in the development of strategies for ingraining environmental factors in pre- and post- conflict situations.

#### **A. Typology of Conflicts in the Great Lakes Region**

As intimated above, the conflict dynamics in the GLR are complex and involve multiple and interlocking regional and international actors. They tend to expand geographically and their epicentre shifts from one locus to another. The categorisation of conflicts as inter- and intra- state is thus not helpful in the GLR context. One common feature is the high level of structural violence in all the countries in the region.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, ethnic divisions feature prominently in many of the conflicts in the region. The inability of the government of the day to manage multi-ethnic societies presents a ripe context for conflict as social and political elites play on the ethnic divisions and prevailing stereotypes. This must be seen within the context of state polities that have

been weakened by conflicts and whose ability to guarantee security of the life and property of its citizenry is diminished somewhat.<sup>22</sup>

The conflict in the DRC, for instance is a continental one involving seven foreign armies and a myriad of mercenaries and militias. Three dynamics have been linked to this conflict. In the first instance there is poverty and isolation of the rural areas linked closely to breakdown of societal legitimacy and attributable to the post 1998 war situation and the governance of the country over the years.<sup>23</sup> The internal east-west divide of the DRC is another dynamic to the conflict. The eastern part has very close historical links with neighbouring countries such as Uganda and Rwanda than with Kinshasa. The third dynamic is associated with sustainable development of the country. Mineral resources are critical here. The contestation for these by different parties to the conflict has implications for their management. In some instances, minerals act as conflict sustainers and in other situations they are the cause of the conflict.

In Burundi, the conflict has taken an ethnic dimension but is also linked to economic and political factors. This is evidenced by the marginalisation of the majority of the populace and their subjugation by a small elite historically. The conflict in Burundi also has regional dimension discernible from the military support to the parties to the conflict and the militarisation of societies in the region.

Rwanda which has no direct violence is not immune from the structural violence that characterises communities in the Great Lakes Region. This arises out of the tensions between different groups over scarce resources and lack of trust between people as a result of the genocide. The return of refugees also contributes to the tension. In Kenya and Uganda, the proximity to the Horn of Africa countries embroiled in conflict, namely Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan influences the internal dynamics as far as conflict is concerned. The two countries have been affected by the proliferation of small arms. In Kenya, the ethnic factor is very rife. The land clashes that happened in Kenya in 1992 and 1997 resulted in a big number of internally displaced persons. Indeed historical injustices over land allocation continue to be a source of tension between different ethnic and socio-economic groups in the country. Further, the tensions in the coalition government being experienced currently are allied to historical ethnic rivalry between different ethnic communities.

## **B. Causes of Conflict in the Great Lakes Region**

The nature of conflicts in the Great Lakes Region is multi-dimensional and compounded by diverse sources of conflict. Given the nature and manifestation of these conflicts, it is necessary to adopt a systems approach to analysing conflict if the environmental variable is to be isolated.<sup>24</sup> While most conflicts in the Great Lakes begin within the borders of countries, the actors within a particular conflict are rarely confined within state. Indeed conflicts tend to link diverse actors, interests and issues and these linkages broaden local, regional and international economies and political contexts. In the Great Lakes Region where people's existence is closely intertwined with the environment and where the environment variable is always present, there is the tendency to exclude the environment-conflict interface in the analysis of the causes of the conflict. This is despite the high visibility of the environmental dynamic and the marked impacts that conflict has on the environment. Indeed the root cause of the conflict on the Great Lakes region has been characterised as being an amalgamation of structural violence, extreme and increasing poverty and the exclusion or marginalisation of the majority from the economic, social, political, human rights and cultural rights and inequality.<sup>25</sup>

Borders are also a factor and feature in some of the conflicts in the region. Many border areas have marginal environments which encourage proliferation of armed groups and act as hideouts for such groups. Conflicts relating to borders in the Great lakes Region have a natural resource dimension typified by communal competition over these resources.<sup>26</sup>

### C. Environment and Conflict in the Great Lakes Region

The environment-conflict linkages in the region are multi-faceted with diverse actors, interests and levels. On the one hand, “opportunistic exploitation” of environmental resources in the context of social, political and economic uncertainties occasioned by transitions and economic decline, constitutes a real cause of armed conflicts and forced migration in the Great Lakes Region. The impacts of armed conflict on the environment on other hand make environmental resources both a source and a victim of conflict.

The manifestations of environment and conflict linkages are in the form of triggers, sustainers or as sources of the conflict. In so far as triggering a conflict, competition over water resources among groups may act as the final straw in a situation where relations between groups are strained. It has been contended for instance that the conflict between the Hema and Lendu peoples in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo was triggered by the discovery of valuable gold and diamond reserves in Ituri Province. The groups historically contested control of farming and grazing lands. These contests were frequently non-violent, and negotiated through the establishment of delicate resource-sharing arrangements. However, the discovery of valuable minerals in the Orientale Province triggered violent conflict between the two groups. Opposing Congolese rebel movements support the Hema and Lendu in conflict in Ituri Province. These rebel movements are backed by the governments of Uganda and Rwanda and the Hema and Lendu have become proxies of the rebel movements and the Uganda and Rwanda governments in a violent struggle to control the Province’s rich natural resources.<sup>27</sup>

Conflict sustainers aggravate conflict and perpetuate existing levels of conflict and diminish opportunities for peace. This normally happens where natural resources are captured by conflict interest groups as leverage in a particular conflict. The continued extraction of coltan in the Kivu Province of the DR Congo, for instance is said to have made the Banyamulenge abandon peace initiatives between them and local Congolese communities. Revenue generated from coltan production and marketing enabled the Banyamulenge to acquire arms.<sup>28</sup>

As sources of conflict, environmental factors constitute root causes in the majority of cases. Environmental causes are cited among the “structural causes that often underlie the immediate symptoms of armed conflicts”. They are intertwined with the economic, political social institutions, practices and capacities including norms and rules, government structures, culture and policies that determine how a state is governed. Across the region, conflicts are centred on access to and control of valuable ecological resources, including minerals, oil, timber, and productive pastures and farming land. The delineation of access and use rights under both modern introduced and customary law can lead to conflict as well as assist in containing conflict. In instances where certain actors feel marginalised by the prevailing access and control regimes, tensions are likely to build up to full fledged conflict. Similarly, processes of alienation of productive land areas and exploitation of natural resource wealth can trigger, sustain or generate conflict. The widespread and grave alienation of productive land areas and exploitation of natural resource wealth during the colonial period sowed the seed for the link between environmental resources and conflict.

It is important to point out that environmental resources also provide a context for peace-building and conflict prevention. [[[Geoff’s work??]]] Well managed resources give context for subsistence and economic well-being which in turn encourage peaceful co-existence. In this context, peace parks between neighbouring countries have been used to build peace where there is a shared ecosystem.

## **IV. BROAD CONTEXT FOR EXPLORATION OF ENVIRONMENT-CONFLICT LINKAGES IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION**

As pointed out above, the link between environment and conflict is hardly ever raw. They are intertwined with other factors which might take on a more economic, political and social dynamic. It is therefore necessary to locate the environment dimension in diverse factors such as peace and security, democracy and good governance, economic development and regional integration and humanitarian and social issues.

### **A. Peace and Security**

Peace and security are critical to sustainable environmental management. Environmental resources are also critical to maintenance of peace and security. Constrained access to natural resources shifts the focus of the disadvantaged group to control over the state. In some instances, the competition for natural resource control is between the state and rebel groups or militias. At another level, conflict may be used to facilitate the plunder of natural resources. Similarly, increased demands on and for environmental resources such as land, water, firewood, economic resources and social services if not properly managed, can create a breeding ground for frustration and potential for mobilisation.

Well managed environmental resources can, on the other hand provide the context for building and maintaining peace. The availability of resources and equitable access to such resources provides a platform for peace initiatives. For instance, the availability of cheap and reliable sources of energy contributes to conflict prevention by creating conditions for rehabilitation, development and a feeling of being included in the modernisation process. This is also predicated on inclusion of rural and peripheral areas in the matrix.

### **B. Democracy & Good Governance**

Democracy and good governance are critical to sustainable management of natural resources. The perception of most African countries' leadership is that they are only committed to the notion of democracy when bidding for leadership. They rarely establish a political environment devoid of distrust, extremism and violence.<sup>29</sup> In the Great Lakes region democracy and good governance are affected by the fragility of nation states arising from defective structures established during the colonial era and continued when the states became independent. Whilst the colonial rulers assumed that the ethnic divisions had been controlled through the use of force in the states they created, these continue to dog nation states in their quest to organise their affairs.

The majority of groups engaged in contemporary armed conflicts define themselves on the basis of identity, national, ethnic religious or cultural. Such identity is closely linked to environmental resources. With regard to states, the principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources (PSNR) underscores the centrality of natural resources to sovereignty and statehood. This centrality is replicated at lower levels within nation states where ethnic, religious and cultural entities perceive ownership and control of resources as integral to their identity as groups. Self-determination is thus linked to natural resource control.

The proliferation of conflicts weakens the state and can lead to disintegration. Laws and regulations for efficient and effective distribution of environmental goods and services among the citizenry are inoperative. Within such a context, governance structures are weakened including environmental governance structures. The breakdown of the rule of law, insufficient, deficient, destroyed infrastructure, breakdown of community institutions responsible for sustainable resource management and lack of favourable conditions for the implementation of environmental laws impacts on the efficacy of the state and its agencies to police sustainable management of environmental resources. There is consequently unchecked human encroachment into the protected areas such as forests and national parks with negative impacts on the ecosystem and the resources. Further the protected areas are used as sanctuaries by rebels with negative impacts on renewable and non-renewable resources.



In the Great Lakes Region, poaching is rampant as well as proliferation of bush meat trade. This impacts on the capacity of countries in the region to implement their environmental laws and to fulfil their international obligations. For instance, the increase of bush meat in the Kenyan market has been traced to the thriving bush meat market in the Great Lakes Region. Kenya's capacity to implement her obligations under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna is thus hampered as there are no established mechanisms of distinguishing meat coming from other countries and meat that has been got through illegal taking of wildlife.

The absence of democracy and good governance also limits the capacity of individuals to demand sustainable environmental management from their governments through procedural rights namely, access to justice, right to information and public participation in environmental decision-making. In Burundi for instance, sustainable development has been impeded by a series of conflicts fed by structural and political factors around ethnic and geographic stratification and control. Different social groups have jostled for control over natural resources to obtain livelihood support under very constrained structures.<sup>30</sup> Failed democratisation in 1993 provides a context for conflict as well.

### C. Economic Development & Regional Integration

The link between economic development and the environment has been well articulated in the principle of sustainable development. The most succinct exposition of the principle is to be found in the Rio Declaration's principles 3 and 4 which state:

*The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.*

*In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.*

The right to development implies a right of individual states to choose a development path and also to assure a minimum level of development for individuals.<sup>31</sup> Increasing poverty and crippled social services have increased the structural violence as the gap between the rich and poor widens and there is a ready pool of frustrated persons who can easily be co-opted to participate in violent activities.

Conflict impacts negatively on economic development and also constrains access to markets leading to economic stress where economies are dependent on export of agricultural products for economic wellbeing. In such situations, environmental resources are neglected as people struggle to eke out a subsistence and economic livelihood from available resources.

Regional integration provides a context for peace building but can also be a catalyst of conflict. This happens in situations where integration opens up national contexts and external actors in conjunction with national elites marginalise local elites. Access to international technology for resource extraction can, for instance sideline locals involved in resource exploitation. In an increasingly globalised and interconnected world, the drivers of resource exploitation are increasingly multinational companies.

Countries in the Great Lakes Region belong to different economic integration bodies. These include the East African Community (EAC), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the South African Development Community (SADC). Some of these bodies have protocols tailored specifically for environmental matters. However, these regional bodies overlap and it is not unusual for neighbouring countries to be members of different regional organisations. For instance, DRC, Tanzania and Zambia are members of SADC but Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda are not. Further, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya are members of EAC while DRC, Rwanda and Burundi are not. This mosaic does not provide a context for utilising the regional bodies to build peace. The anticipated accession of Rwanda and Burundi to the EAC treaty will provide a context for peacemaking through environmental matters as the EAC has a Protocol on the Environment.

## D. Humanitarian & Social Issues

Refugees are a dominant feature of the Great Lakes Region owing to crises of citizenship and constitutionalism. In the aftermath of conflict, forced migrations arising from armed conflicts wreaks havoc on the environment and damages the already weak resource base within the scene of violence and in the area (in case of internal displacement) or country (in case of external displacement) of asylum. This scenario complicates the post- conflict reconstruction process.

The environment is often an early victim of the conflict in the area of violence and the country of asylum. Unlike in the case of internal displacement, the case of external forced migration has environmental effects at the level of the home country and the country of asylum. The two countries whose environments were devastatingly affected by the Rwandese forced immigration in the early and mid 1990s are Tanzania and the DRC. Thus it may be hypothesized that environment is both a cause and a “victim” of armed conflicts and forced migration.

The Great Lakes Region is both one of the largest refugee holding and refugee hosting part of the world. The presence of refugees puts enormous pressure on already limited resources in the countries. Refugees impact negatively on the environment as groups of people are concentrated in one area. Environmental stress almost inexorably follows as the demand for land, water and firewood goes up. They also overburden the economic and social infrastructure. In many instances, the areas that refugees are settled in are already experiencing constrained access to environmental resources for the locals. Refugee presence increases competition for resources and may result in conflict. Systematic and collective stigmatisation of the displaced groups hampers the integration of refugees in receiving communities and their co-option to activities that would contribute to sustainable environmental management. The presence of large uprooted populations outside their countries of origin also provides opportunities for armed groups to use refugee camps as shields against military attacks.

The causal relationship between environmental problems, armed conflicts and forced migration has however, more often than not been inferred. A general hypothesis in this regard is that interactions between the physical environment and society, particularly in the context of the deepening ecological problems (such as drought, desertification) has often engendered conflicts among the inhabitants of the region(s) affected whose manifestation may take the character of mere riots, or full blown intra/ inter-state armed conflicts.

Armed conflicts and forced migration exacerbate ecological problems by causing destruction of the environment thus making it difficult to tackle the massive problems of post-conflict recovery, sustainable development, sustainable livelihoods and sustainable peace.

With regard to social issues, the use of child soldiers in conflict situations has an impact albeit indirect on the environment. The Great Lakes Region accounts for tens of thousands of child soldiers with figures in Burundi alone estimated to be between 3,000 to 9,000.<sup>32</sup> The forcible or voluntary recruitment of children into the armies removes the children from the community before they are ready to exist on their own. They lack proper education and are traumatised. This denies the countries future leaders with know-how on environmental matters from a community or formal education context. It also contributes to structural violence as these children are unlikely to be well adjusted members of the community at the end of the conflict. Having a long life ahead of them, unhealed traumas, guilt complexes and stigmatisation by victims of the conflict will prevent them from engaging in useful activities within their communities such as sustainable environmental management.

Another social issue related to conflict that has impacts on environmental management is the division of labour along gender lines and the subjugation and marginalisation of women. The inequities between men and women have implications for stability and conflict as they shape the roles, expectations and interventions.<sup>33</sup> Cultures that limit women’s access to resources and decision making power and which characterise women as inferior to men, treat women as property and accept domestic violence as a norm have, for instance been said to be more prone to repression and violent conflict in the public arena. Gender sensitive root causes of conflict include political equality, economic equality and social equality.<sup>34</sup> There is research suggesting that states with lower percentages of women in parliament are more likely to use military violence to settle disputes and that a 5 per cent decrease in the proportion of women in parliament renders a state nearly five (4.91) times as likely to resolve international disputes using military violence.<sup>35</sup> With regard to economic equality, the level of women’s

participation in the labour force impacts on a state's likelihood to use military force to resolve international conflict.<sup>36</sup>

Depriving women access to resources can result in conflict especially in contexts where women are key economic actors and require the resources to perform their daily chores. In such circumstances, the potential development of an individual or group is held back by the uneven distribution of power and resources. Armed conflict can result from such deprivation or be sustained by it as increases in inequality weaken the inhibitions against aggression. Given the role that women play in environmental management, their marginalisation has negative impacts on sustainable development.

## V. THE ROLE OF UNEP

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has the responsibility of ensuring the overall well-being of the environment. Given that many conflicts in the Great Lakes region have environment as a source, trigger and sustainer, UNEP must of essence take an active role where environmental resources is related to a conflict. Indeed the quest for sustainable development which is at the core of UNEP's mandate cannot be achieved in the context of conflict.

While the General assembly has explicitly signalled that UNEP should not be involved in conflict identification, prevention or resolution, the Secretary General's report A/55/985-S/2001/574 to the GA and Security Council (SC) points out that:

*Conflict prevention is one of the primary obligations of Member States set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, and United Nations efforts in conflict prevention must be in conformity with the purposes and principles of the Charter. Conflict prevention is also an activity best undertaken under Chapter VI of the Charter.*

A specific role is carved out for UNEP in the following terms:

*Preventive action should be initiated at the earliest possible stage of a conflict cycle in order to be most effective. One of the principal aims of preventive actions should be to address the deep-rooted socio-economic, cultural, environmental, institutional and other structural causes that often underlie the immediate political symptoms of conflicts.*

The discussion above on the causes of conflict in the Great Lakes region identifies environment as a structural and root cause of conflict. At another level, environmental resources present opportunities for peace building through redress of inequitable access to and control over a region's or individual country's environmental resources.

The UN Secretary General has affirmed that conflict prevention and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing. He points to the need to strengthen the UN "capacity to help coordinate international efforts of all actors, within their mandates, such as States, international financial institutions, regional organizations, NGO's and the private sector to carry out structural prevention strategies". He further recommends that "the governing bodies and other intergovernmental bodies of the UN funds and programmes and specialized agencies to consider how they could best integrate a conflict prevention perspective into their different mandated activities".

It is therefore clear that the need to link environment and conflict has the highest endorsement in the UN. It is imperative that this link be mapped and articulated to understand conflicts better as well as to comprehensively deal with causes and impacts of conflict in the Great Lakes Region. This is especially urgent in view of the deteriorating environment and the centrality of environmental resources to the region.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The recognition and addressing of the link between environment and conflict in the Great Lakes Region is critical to finding any lasting peace. The environment is all encompassing and impacts on and is impacted on by diverse factors such as peace and security, democracy and good governance, humanitarian and social issues, economic development and regional integration. A peace agenda must of essence include these factors.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> United Nations, 1998. *The Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa*. Report of the Secretary-General to the United Nations Security Council, United Nations, New York.
- <sup>2</sup> Adedeji A. ed., 1998, *Comprehending and Mastering African Conflicts: The Search for Sustainable Peace and Good Governance*, Zed Books, London, p. xvi
- <sup>3</sup> United Nations Environment Programme, 2004, *Africa Environment Outlook*, Nairobi, Kenya.
- <sup>4</sup> See Fairhead 2000, Le Billon 2001a, Le Billon 2001b, and Peluso and Watts 2001.
- <sup>5</sup> See generally Lind J., & Sturman K., eds., 2002, *Scarcity & Surfeit: The Ecology of Africa's conflicts*, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, South Africa.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> Excerpt from speech by Warren Christopher, former US Secretary of State under the Clinton Administration Quoted in Matthews, R. 2000. 'The environment as a national security issue.' *Journal of Policy History*, 12, 101-122.
- <sup>8</sup> Gasana, J. 2000
- <sup>9</sup> See Kameri-Mbote P & Lind J. 2001, 'Improving Tools and Techniques for Crisis Management: The Ecological Sources of Conflict: Experiences from Eastern Africa' *Romanian Journal of Political Science, Volume 1 No. 2*
- <sup>10</sup> Homer-Dixon, T., and Blitt, J. 1998. *Ecoviolence: Links Among Environment, Population, and Security*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield. Page 1
- <sup>11</sup> Homer-Dixon, T. 1999. 'Thresholds of turmoil: environmental scarcities and violent conflict.' *Contested Grounds: Security and Conflict in the New Environmental Politics*. Eds. Deudney, D. H., and Matthew, R. A. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 61.
- <sup>13</sup> Homer-Dixon and Blitt 1998, p. 6.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> Jeremy Lind, 'The Poverty and Wealth of Ecological Control: The Ecological Sources of Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa', 2002 (On File with the author)
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
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