



# Disasters and conflicts

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United Nations Environment Programme



# An overview

Since the start of the new millennium, over 35 major conflicts and some 2,500 disasters have affected billions of people around the world. These crises destroy infrastructure, displace entire populations and threaten ecosystems and the people who rely on them to survive. Reducing the risk of disasters and conflicts, mitigating their impacts when they occur, and building resilient societies and economies is therefore at the top of the international agenda.

As a victim or a driver of crisis, the environment can play a pivotal role in human security and well-being. Degraded or poorly managed ecosystems can lead to conflict over dwindling water, food or fuel resources, or to increased exposure and vulnerability to natural hazards such as landslides or flash floods. Conversely, sustainable management of natural resources can help reduce disaster and conflict risk and provide a strong platform for recovery, development and lasting peace.

This sub-programme works to understand and reduce the impacts of environmental degradation from disasters and conflicts on human health, livelihoods and security. It also emphasizes the role of healthy ecosystems and sustainably managed resources in reducing the risk of disasters and conflicts.

From Kosovo to Afghanistan, and from Sudan to Haiti, UNEP has responded to crisis situations in over 40 countries since 1999, delivering high-quality environmental expertise to national governments and partners in the UN family.

## Our goals

The Disasters and Conflicts sub-programme focuses on helping States minimize the threats to human well-being from environmental causes and consequences of disasters and conflicts. It has four key goals:

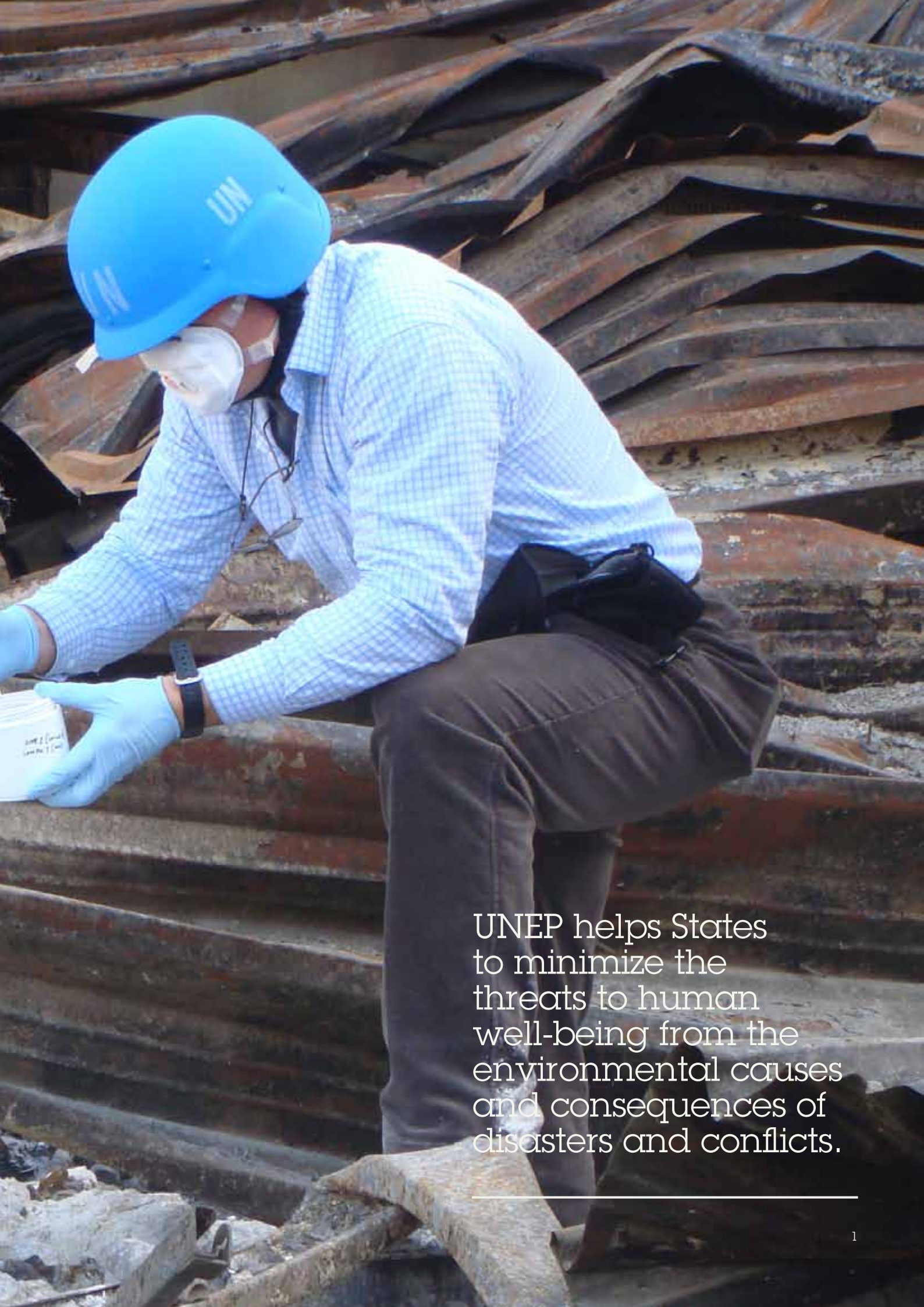
- **Disaster risk reduction:** UNEP works to prevent and reduce the impacts of natural hazards on vulnerable communities and countries through sustainable natural resource management.
- **Assessment:** To inform local populations, decision-makers and recovery efforts, UNEP conducts field-based scientific assessments to identify the environmental risks to human health, livelihoods and security following conflicts, disasters and industrial accidents.
- **Recovery:** In the aftermath of a crisis, UNEP implements environmental recovery programmes through field-based project offices to support long-term stability and sustainable development in conflict and disaster-affected countries.
- **Cooperation for peacebuilding:** UNEP aims to use environmental cooperation to transform the risks of conflict over resources into opportunities for peace in war-torn or fragile societies.

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## Poverty alleviation

Disasters affect the most vulnerable sectors and population groups in society with the least capacity to cope, including the very poor, women, children and the elderly. The very poor often live and work in high-risk areas, rely on climate-dependent livelihoods (such as subsistence agriculture) and have few assets or resources to cope with and respond to disasters and recurring shocks. An environment-based approach to disaster risk reduction offers multiple benefits to help prevent these catastrophic situations, contributing to sustainable livelihoods development, poverty reduction and climate change adaptation.





UNEP helps States to minimize the threats to human well-being from the environmental causes and consequences of disasters and conflicts.

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# Our vision for 2010-2013

What if States could use and manage their resources more sustainably to prevent a crisis from occurring? What if the recovery process also focused on restoring vital ecosystem services, to support affected people and build resilience against future disaster risks? And what if, in the international community, environment and natural resources were recognized as a fundamental and valuable part of peacebuilding and disaster risk reduction strategies?



Sudan  
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UNEP's Disasters and Conflicts sub-programme is working to make each of these visions a reality during the 2010-13 period of UNEP's Medium-term Strategy, promoting sound environmental management as a means of reducing the risk of disasters and conflicts and driving sustainable development on a national and global scale.

UNEP's vision is based on delivering:

## More resilient communities

UNEP continues to pioneer innovative approaches to risk reduction, helping some of the most vulnerable countries to design and integrate environment-based risk reduction measures into their development planning. By building strategic partnerships, UNEP advocates for the use of environmental management as a tool to build community resilience to crises and influence policy-making at global, regional and national levels.

## Strong and sustainable recoveries

UNEP has developed robust methodologies for responding to crises, strengthening the capacity of countries affected by conflicts and disasters to manage their environmental resources more effectively and sustainably. UNEP will continue to act on new challenges, such as the earthquake in Haiti, and to implement existing programmes in Sudan, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and many other countries, using its expertise to build back stronger societies and economies.

## Cooperation and peace

UNEP aims to make sound environmental management an integral part of UN peacebuilding strategies in war-torn and fragile societies. This will capitalize on UNEP's established role as a catalyst for dialogue and cooperation between States over natural resource management issues.



# Delivering our vision

UNEP's Disasters and Conflicts sub-programme provides four core services to countries all over the world:

## Disaster risk reduction

UNEP is internationally recognized as an expert in helping states address environmental degradation as an underlying risk factor. This work focuses on reducing exposure and vulnerability to natural hazards, and integrating environmental considerations into risk reduction policies and practices.

### • Risk assessments

UNEP conducts risk assessments to anticipate environmental threats to human health, livelihoods and security, providing decision-makers with key recommendations on long-term disaster prevention and mitigation.

### • Strategic planning

Based on the risks identified through these assessments, UNEP helps countries develop tailor-made environmental strategies for risk reduction, and implements pilot projects to showcase these innovative approaches to disaster risk reduction, including adaptation to climate change-related risks.

### • Sharing best practices

UNEP plays a leadership role on the global policy stage, producing policy guidelines and training modules based on cutting edge science and best practices. UNEP also builds partnerships with major environmental and disaster risk reduction actors at the global and regional levels to maximize knowledge and coordinate action.

## Post-crisis environmental assessments

In the aftermath of a crisis, critical natural resources entire communities depend on are often degraded, damaged or destroyed. Assessments to gauge the risks posed by these environmental impacts are the foundation of UNEP's conflict and disaster response.

### • Field-based assessments

Using sound science and state-of-the-art technology, UNEP teams conduct in-depth field work to identify environmental risks to human health, livelihoods and security. Each assessment is undertaken on an equally neutral basis, and adopts a tailor-made approach to the situation's particular geographical, political and security conditions.

### • Recovery planning

The findings and recommendations of each assessment feed into planning a recovery process that reduces underlying risk factors and builds the long-term health and stability of both ecosystems and vulnerable populations.

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## Post-crisis environmental recovery

UNEP uses the outcomes of environmental assessments to develop recovery programmes that address environmental needs and priorities. From helping local authorities develop effective laws and policies to coordinating clean-up efforts, the programmes are implemented through field-based project offices and as such provide an initial anchor for UNEP in crisis-affected countries.

### • Capacity development

To help countries manage their natural resources in a more effective and sustainable manner, UNEP provides national environmental authorities with a blend of institutional and legal support, staff training and mentoring, and basic office and field equipment, depending on the identified needs.

### • Pilot projects

As part of environmental recovery programmes, UNEP catalyses community-based ecosystem restoration and management projects in sites damaged by or vulnerable to conflicts and disasters.

### • The voice of environment

UNEP acts as the focal point for environmental issues within UN country teams, and works to integrate environmental needs into national recovery programmes and development plans.

## Delivering our vision continued

### Environmental cooperation for peacebuilding

Where resource exploitation has driven conflict or hindered peace, UNEP seeks to transform the risks of further conflict over natural resources into opportunities for lasting peace and development. UNEP provides technical support to the peacebuilding and peacekeeping communities, fostering environmental diplomacy and advocating for improved legal protection of the environment in times of war and armed conflict.

#### • Conflict analysis

In countries affected by conflict, UNEP analyses how natural resources may contribute to conflict relapse or serve as a platform for peace. Based on this analysis, UNEP advises UN peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations on risks and opportunities from natural resources and the environment, works to ensure that environmental considerations are included in peacebuilding strategies and policies, and develops best practices for environmental management that contributes to long-term stability and development.

#### • Environmental diplomacy

Through pioneering work in Sudan, between Iran and Afghanistan, as well as in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the South Caucasus, UNEP has become a recognised neutral facilitator that can promote dialogue and cooperation over shared resources or common environmental challenges.

Afghanistan  
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UNEP seeks to transform the risks of further conflict over natural resources into opportunities for lasting peace and development.

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#### • Tools and training

Together with other UN actors, UNEP develops knowledge products and conducts training programmes for UN Country Teams, peacekeeping operations and Members States on resolving conflict over natural resources.

A fifth area of work – **Environment, Humanitarian Action and Early Recovery** – is under development during the 2010-2011 biennium. Through tailor-made training programmes for humanitarian actors, in-country technical support and a global network of practitioners, UNEP is building capacity to integrate environmental considerations within humanitarian and early recovery operations. This work helps minimize potential environmental impacts and ensure that they do no harm with regard to longer-term vulnerability and development.



# Our key projects

Project title	Project brief	Geographic scope	Budget (2010-2011)
<b>Risk reduction</b>			
<b>Environmental Cooperation for Peace-building (Phase II)</b>	Providing technical assistance to Member States and the UN system to sustainably manage natural resources and the environment in ways that contribute to peacebuilding, conflict prevention and transboundary cooperation.	Global, regional	\$9.9 million
<b>Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC)</b>	An international partnership with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) that works with governments to reduce risks from natural hazards and human-made disasters.	Regional	\$5 million
<b>Environmental Management for Disaster Risk Reduction</b>	Working with vulnerable countries and communities to develop policies and targeted interventions that increase resilience and reduce the impacts of natural hazards through improved environmental management.	Global, regional	\$3.9 million
<b>Strengthening Capacity for Environmental Emergency Preparedness</b>	Implemented jointly between UNEP and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), using technical capacity-building and awareness-raising on environmental disasters to strengthen national preparedness and response.	Global	\$3.3 million
<b>Building Capacity for Industrial Risk Reduction – APELL</b>	Strengthening national and local capacity to reduce risks from industrial accidents, through legal frameworks, knowledge transfer and integrated emergency plans.	Regional	\$2.1 million
<b>Post-crisis assessment and recovery</b>			
<b>Capacity-Building and Institutional Development Programme for Environmental Management in Afghanistan (Phases III &amp; IV)</b>	Building a lasting foundation for sustainable development in Afghanistan by containing the degradation of its natural resource base and enhancing national environmental management capacity.	National	\$12.3 million
<b>UNEP Integrated Environment Programme in Sudan (Phase II)</b>	Building capacity for the sustainable and effective use of natural resources to increase community resilience, address poverty issues and support peacebuilding in Darfur, Northern and Southern Sudan.	National	\$19.9 million
<b>UNEP Country Programme for the Democratic Republic of Congo</b>	Contributing to peacebuilding, recovery and development of the DR Congo through responsible and equitable use of its renewable natural resources, and improved governance and awareness.	National	\$2.1 million
<b>UNEP Country Programme for Haiti</b>	Supporting the Government of Haiti to achieve sustainable recovery from the January 2010 earthquake as well as from its long-term legacy of environmental degradation.	National	\$4.8 million
<b>Environmental Assessment of Oil Impacted Sites in Ogoniland, Nigeria</b>	Undertaking an extensive environmental assessment of over 300 oil-impacted sites in the Ogoni region of the Niger Delta. UNEP will use the findings to make recommendations for appropriate remediation activities to facilitate environmental clean-up operations.	National	\$5 million
<b>Support to the Environmental Rehabilitation of the occupied Palestinian territory</b>	Improving the capacity of the Palestinian Environment Quality Authority (EQA) and other actors of the oPt by providing technical support, tools and techniques to address key environmental priorities.	National	\$2.4 million
<b>Environment, Humanitarian Action and Early Recovery</b>	Raising awareness of key environmental issues in emergency situations, providing technical support and building capacity to integrate environmental considerations within the UN humanitarian coordination system.	Global	\$2 million
<b>Sustainable Building and Construction in Disaster-affected Countries</b>	Assisting disaster-affected countries to “build back better” through the development, dissemination and pilot-testing of sustainable building reconstruction guidelines that integrate energy-efficient, low-consumption and climate mitigation measures.	Global	\$0.7 million

# Factsheets in this series

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## United Nations Environment Programme

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