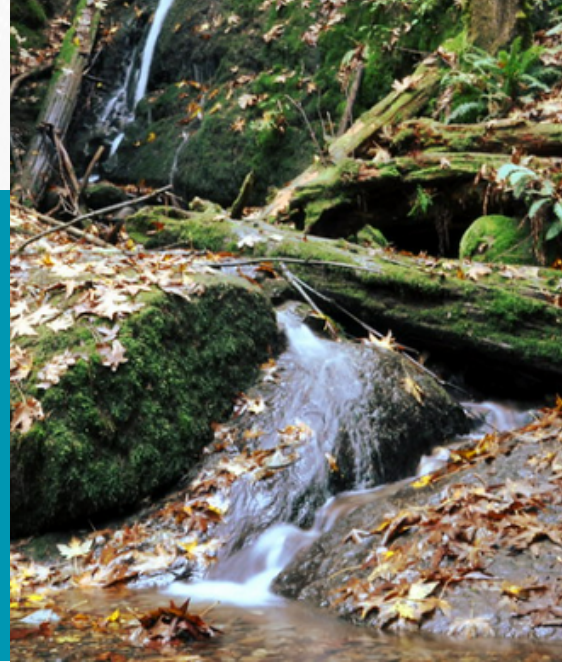


CASE STUDY ON ASSESSING THE POTENTIAL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PEACEBUILDING OVER SHARED WATERS THROUGH ECOPEACE MIDDLE EAST'S 25+ YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN ISRAEL, PALESTINE, AND JORDAN

ECOPEACE
MIDDLE EAST

This Case Study is from "Toolkit on Monitoring and Evaluation of Environmental Peacebuilding 2023"
m-and-environmentalpeacebuilding.org/toolkit



EcoPeace Middle East has fostered cooperation between Israelis, Palestinians, and Jordanians to conserve and restore their water resources for more than 25 years. Its work is frequently cited as an international model for how concerns and interests around shared environmental resources can be leveraged to catalyze cooperation and build peace between people in conflict. A team of researchers, led by Laura E.R. Peters and Jamon Van Den Hoek at Oregon State University and American University, and with support from a U.S. Institute of Peace grant on Environment, Conflict, and Peacebuilding, is undertaking an assessment of EcoPeace's on-the-ground engagement to evaluate (1) whether there is evidence of a virtuous cycle between environmental and peacebuilding gains (i.e., they are mutually supportive) and (2) whether gains in one domain depend on gains in the other (i.e., they are mutually dependent).

Theory of change. EcoPeace has taken a combined top-down and bottom-up approach to environmental peacebuilding, aimed at encouraging and supporting people and institutions to cooperate for mutual gains based on their own self-interest. EcoPeace complements its bottom-up strategies (including education and awareness campaigns) with top-down initiatives (including policies) to achieve the necessary changes for sustained and sustainable environmental and peacebuilding gains at local-to-national levels. This research interrogates that theory of change in light of more than 25 years of experience and evidence.

Developing a research methodology around the theory of change. The research was designed around a mixed methodology, including a literature review, archival analysis, and six in-depth case studies to tease out the interplay and impacts of EcoPeace's interventions. The team conducted 70+ in-depth semi-structured interviews with diverse respondents with different degrees of proximity to EcoPeace in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. Interview questions sought to understand the sustainability of programming and its impacts, such as the transfer effect (i.e., extending the benefits of programming aimed at cooperation over shared water resources to political peace) and spillover effect (i.e., extending the benefits of programming aimed at cooperation over shared water resources to people and sectors not directly involved).

Challenging assumptions of top-down and bottom-up approaches to change. The research called into question the artificial dichotomy between top-down and bottom-up approaches to peacebuilding, focused largely on either the state or community level, and which assumes a worldview framed around homogenous or flat social, political, and environmental stakeholder groups. For example, the assessment found that regimes beyond national governments affect outcomes, with actors wearing multiple institutional hats and holding multiple interests; accordingly, considerable influence is wielded outside standard channels within and across countries.

AT A GLANCE EVALUATION

- Theory of Change
- Challenges

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Challenging assumptions of discrete efforts leading to discrete impacts. The research also faced the challenge of establishing causal relationships between specific project outputs and desired environmental and peacebuilding outcomes. Project milestones were often found to be the result of combined interventions, each with their own set of relative successes and failures that sometimes change over time in regard to their influence on broader goals due to outside influences. Outputs and outcomes are often separated spatially and temporally and are rarely linear, and the results of evaluating potential causality is highly dependent on the start and end dates framing the analysis.

Overarching challenges to evaluation

The challenges around evaluating the potential for environmental peacebuilding through this research are accentuated by several underlying realities:



1. Evaluation methodologies for the field of environmental peacebuilding are challenging when the broader conflict is ongoing and may obscure or undermine gains.
2. Assessing changes in the environment associated with an intervention, such as changes in water quality or quantity, is challenging due to the subjective and dynamic nature of the environment and their connection with diverse material and cultural needs.
3. Progress across multiple nested conflicts and potentials for peace is uneven and nonlinear, and emphasizing a specific conflict in the analysis changes perspectives on results and what coalitions for peace may be needed.
4. Evaluation is challenging when there is not a single definition or experience of "peace." For some, peace may be construed as security and finding ways to coexist within the broader status quo, and for others it may be centered around questions of social justice and a redistribution of decision-making power.

Photos taken on the Palestinian (left) and Israeli (right) side of the same shared cultural and environmental landscape at the site of an environmental peacebuilding campaign by EcoPeace Middle East.

Source: Laura E.R. Peters

