

# CPS partner organizations reflecting on a common definition of Environmental peacebuilding (EnvPB)

## Key elements and insights from the discussions:

During the CPS-exchange in Wittenberg, a first topic that came up in the group discussions was that there are several worldviews, and relations between humans and nature that should be part of the dialogue to elaborate a definition of environmental peacebuilding. Below we provide an insight into the different perspectives on the question of what environmental peacebuilding means to the participants of the CPS-exchange on Environmental peacebuilding in October 2024.

On the one hand, for some Indigenous People or local communities, for example, in Bolivia, Mexico, Honduras, Colombia, Cambodia, or Western Papua, natural elements are alive, they are beings with own agency, are ancestors or relatives, sacred with a very important spiritual and cultural role. This kind of communities can establish reciprocal relations with the natural world, which means, giving care to nature – receiving protection and well-being from nature.

*“The territory is a zone that we inhabit and defend, it is our house, it is everything. Here I was borne, here I grew up, here I’ll die”<sup>1</sup>. (Holmer Pérez - Ascamcat Colombia)*

On the other hand, in some parts of the western hemisphere, for example, in Germany, “most of

the forests are farmed by humans”, nature has been historically named as a resource to use, exploit, and manage to assure human necessities. While in Northern Uganda, Northern Kenya, and the Sahel region, for example, the critical impacts of extraction and climate change have exacerbated tribal conflicts among communities who are competing for accessing and using land, animals and natural elements to secure their livelihoods and survival. In those contexts, the natural world has been changing its status, even acting as a source of conflicts.

*“Communities have an ancestral connection to the lands, but many communities have lost their spiritual connection to land due to the ongoing material pressures and urgencies to survive that they have. Pastoralist communities have a strong cultural relationship with animals, particularly with cows. Cows don’t represent only money, for them is wealth. There is a big attachment to the livestock”<sup>2</sup>. (Hilary Bukuno – Kenya)*

*“People identify themselves through land. The ownership of land is transmitted from one generation to another. There is a very strong connection to land, which is a connection with the ancestors and the origin. For some communities there are also sacred forests, which communities want to protect them even in times of climate change”<sup>3</sup>. (Moctari Mahamane – GIZ Niger)*

The experience of EcoPeace Middle East in

<sup>1</sup> Interview conducted by Lisa Picott and Maria Ximena González with Holmer Pérez.

<sup>2</sup> Presentation of Hilary Bukuno in the Experts Exchange on EnvPB, 21 October 2024, Wittenberg – Germany.

<sup>3</sup> Interview conducted by Lisa Picott and Maria Ximena González with Moctari Mahamane,

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Palestine, Jordan and Israel, speaks about how nature can be a connector and a platform for dialogue and cooperation among a plurality of peoples that face severe social and political conflicts.

*“The Jordan river is holy for Muslims, Jews and Christians. They have a common cause to defend the river, and the religions speak together”<sup>4</sup>.*

*“We believe that Nature knows no borders”<sup>5</sup>.*  
(Rana Qaimeri – Eco-peace Middle East)

Due to these different approaches, in working groups was discussed how, from one side, EnvPB is a process that involves humans and non-humans, which could be conceptualized as a “harmony with nature and between people” or as the creation of conditions for a “good life for all alive”. From another perspective, some voices expressed that peace and conflicts are “human issues”, “humans are actors and nature a factor that can influence peace and conflicts”. Then, thinking in EnvPB could mean achieving sustainability.

Despite these differences, it was emphasized that finding a balance between a caring nature and taking from nature (livelihoods and economic activities) is crucial. One of the working groups put forth a “holistic approach” to peacebuilding, which would integrate the ecological, cultural, political, economic, and social factors. Furthermore, Zulma Martínez Vargas and Reiner Ort from ACLO Bolivia proposed discussing socio-environmental peacebuilding, rather than EnvPB.

Therefore, to integrate these different glances, we could assert that nature is socially

constructed and situated, it can have different values, and characteristics shaped in each context, provoking a variety of dynamic interactions and relations between humans and non-humans. Thus, when we talk about EnvPB, it is not possible to state a unique and overall definition of nature (as was made by western regimes from colonial times), and then, the real issue is to consider the different human-nature conceptions, relations and practices that come from each local experience. The crucial thing to elaborate a CPS definition of EnvPB, is having an open process of dialogue in which the different voices, local experiences, and points of view on nature, the environment and peacebuilding can interact and dialogue.

### **Other key issues that were pointed out about a collective definition of EnvPB were:**

From the experiences shared by the colleagues Malumbe Mmangwa (FAP - DR Congo), Wesam al Mubarak (ForumZfd - Jordan), Neftali Reyes (Educa - Mexico), Manuel Mosquera (Pueblo Diferente - Bolivia), Francois Sangaré (Orfed - Mali), y Rosa María Matteus (Cajar- Colombia), was clear that to think about EnvPB **is essential to consider the historical roots of the conflicts, the legacies of colonialism, the epistemic, gender and cultural violence, the power relations among the actors involved, but also mapping the past and current interests in tension.**

From the experiences shared by the colleagues Moctari Mahamane (GIZ Niger), Adelina Vásquez (CDH – Honduras), Andrea Case (WfD Zimbabwe), and Sixto Angúlo (Fundación Bosque Chiquitano -Bolivia) we learned that **EnvPB is a process, not a set of linear actions. As a**

<sup>4</sup> Interview conducted by María Ximena González with Rana Qaimeri.

<sup>5</sup> Presentation of Rana Qaimeri in the Experts Exchange on EnvPB, 21 October 2024, Wittenberg – Germany

**process, EnvPB is dynamic, in motion, changeable, with ups and downs that is crucial to navigate. It requires planning, accountability, and continue evaluation, but also flexibility, a critical comprehension of the context and adaptation to uncertain circumstances.**

Then, the voices of Hilary Bukuno (Children Peace Initiative - Kenya), Rana Qaimari (EcoPeace Middle East- Palestine) and Hamza abu Husein (EcoPeace Middle East - Jordan), were crucial to pointed out how in these complex processes it is always important **to raise the awareness of communities but also of the external actors and institutions about the importance of nature, the environment and the causes and effects of the climate crisis.**

*“Conflict is not only when people are killing each other. We want that people get peace in their environment, and that means that people must appreciate the existence and the importance of the forest. Build a peaceful environment for their existence”<sup>6</sup>. (Boniface -Kenya)*

From the experiences shared by Yuli Velásquez (Fedepesan – Colombia), Darling Fernández (CASM Honduras), Sharon Auma (EPA - Uganda), Xavier Mudangwe (CCMT - Zimbabwe), and Saida Hussein (Bana group - Sudan), we learned that **local communities are crucial actors in decision-making processes on socio-environmental conflicts and peace solutions. The involvement and participation of children, youth, women, elders, indigenous and marginalized populations (as fishers, farmers or pastoralists), is fundamental in EnvPB**

**initiatives.** In one of the working groups was said, “give a megaphone to the marginalized indigenous and grassroots voices, make sure their voices are heard”.

The experiences shared by Holmer Pérez (Ascamcat - Colombia), Yunen Torres (Serapaz – Mexico), Star Lamalan and Bosh Amper (ForumZfd Philippines) highlighted **the importance of emphasizing the community's internal organization, strengthening their own governance structures, considering their mechanisms of conflict resolution, and giving value to local knowledge and strategies for conflict resolution in EnvPB approaches.** The experience from Congo was also remarkable that EnvPB approaches **should promote the economic empowerment opportunities for local communities, enhancing their autonomy.**

Finally, it was clear that the EnvPB initiatives from CPS partner organizations comprises different kinds of conflicts (extractive policies, climate change, competition over access to and use of natural resources, climate migration and forced displacements). In most of the cases, **these types of conflicts have mutual influences, they are connected, and should be understood from integrative and interdisciplinary approaches.** Then, over the days of the encounter was also clear that the dialogue and collaboration between CPS partner organizations working on peacebuilding solutions in different parts of the world could have a big and unique potential of co-learning, co-creation, and mutual fertilization of possibilities.

<sup>6</sup> Interview conducted by Lisa Picott and María Ximena González with Boniface Kaiga.