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## **Preparedness for and Recovery from Disasters and Conflicts: Environmental and Social Considerations of Sectoral Reform**

USAID helps host countries prepare for and quickly respond to natural and man made disasters with the aims of saving lives, reducing suffering and limiting the extent of economic damage. USAID also assists countries affected by complex emergencies and going through transition to manage and mitigate conflict and promote peace and democracy. Policies that require planning responses to extreme environmental events and that regulate access to natural resources efficiently and fairly play a key role in conflict prevention and disaster recovery. This is particularly important because the relationship between the two is close: natural disasters can spark large scale violent conflict and conversely, protracted conflict can lead to large scale and irrevocable damage to the environment.

### **How Environmental Policy Helps Host Countries Avert, Mitigate, and Recover from Disasters and Conflicts**

- *Disaster planning can help vulnerable countries avoid catastrophic consequences of extreme events.* Policies that require and strengthen capacity for emergency response planning to extreme environmental events like hurricanes, floods, drought, and wildfires can prepare people and communities, thereby avoiding catastrophic consequences.
- *Sound policy that fairly defines access to natural resources helps prevent conflict.* Natural resources represent an important source of wealth and power in developing countries. Competition between elites for control and management of critical resources such as land, water, timber, oil and valuable minerals can drive violent conflict.
- *Policies that foster efficient and equitable use of scarce resources help avert destabilizing population movements.* Resource scarcity sometimes leads to large-scale migrations that create or aggravate divisions along ethnic, racial, or religious lines, tax the ability of state institutions to address the needs of people, and drain away resources from sectors such as education and health. Sound policy can mitigate pressures by assuring that scarce resources are used optimally.
- *Post-conflict/disaster policies and management initiatives should assure equitable access to critical resources.* Where they do, the humanitarian dimension of the crisis and the likelihood of renewed conflict are both reduced. In turn, this shortens the recovery period.
- *A sound, inclusive policy process contributes to building national and local capacity and strengthening state institutions.* An environmental policy process that promotes dialogue and cooperation among key stakeholders, including civil society organizations, local governments, the private sector, etc., strengthens the capacity to prevent violent conflict and respond to disasters. Empowering local communities in resource management and preparedness both lessens the sense of grievance that contributes to conflict and increases social cohesion needed to avert it.

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