

## **Final Progress Report**

Sustainability Science Program

September 1, 2007 – July 31, 2008

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Date: July 15, 2008  
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Dr. Eric Werker – Assistant Professor in the Business, Government, and the International Economy Unit at Harvard Business School

Dr. Jennifer Leaning - Professor of the Practice of International Health Department of Population and International Health, Harvard School of Public Health

### SSP Related Activity:

Title: *The Natural Face of Conflict: Resources and the Politics of Identity in Africa's New Wars*

During my tenure as a Giorgio Ruffolo Post-doctoral Fellow in Sustainability Science in the Sustainability Science Program at Harvard's Center for International Development, I initiated a major program of research on the relationship between violent conflict, environment, and local livelihoods in the context of three major and long-standing (and inter-related) conflicts in the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa. After having completed the first stage of fieldwork in Southern Sudan (January – April 2008), I presented my fieldwork through a series of public forums and am currently preparing the written analysis of my work for publication, including an already submitted policy paper on behalf of FAO. During my time in the field I was fortunate to connect with several scholars (i.e. University of California, Berkeley; Tufts University – Feinstein Center) as well as practitioners (i.e. FAO; WCS; PACT; working in the region for future collaborative work. Our aim is the formation of a collective team of scholars to work towards the common goals of peace, social and environmental justice, and sustainability within the Great Lakes Region, the African continent, and beyond.

### Abstract:

Violent conflicts in Africa are increasingly expressed in the decimation of the landscape, whether as a tool of oppression and subjugation or as a brutal pattern of resource extraction and predation. The level of dependence on natural resources experienced by most countries in Africa (such as oil, grazing land, or cattle in Sudan; or diamonds, gold, copper, and timber in the Democratic Republic of Congo) and the ongoing conflicts over the control of these resources, has directly impoverished both the environment and the rural people who

depend upon their surroundings for survival. The logic of violence as a struggle over natural resources is central to understanding the dynamics of Africa's 'new wars'. This is no more apparent than for the Great Lakes region of Africa, where the role of natural resources in generating, sustaining and strongly affecting the course and impact of armed conflict has been well-documented. Despite the rising importance of the ecological dimension in the prevailing spectrum of conflict, however, research carried out on 'resource wars' continues to focus on the role of natural resources as the cause or catalyst of conflict while any substantive examination of the various ways environmental violence reflects or masks other social struggles remains notably absent. My study promises to expand current understandings of 'violent environments' in which the linkages between the extraction of, access to, and control over natural resources through increasingly violent means are central to the overall deterioration of the environment and the obstruction of sustainable human development in the region. By reaffirming the centrality of nature, not only as a cause and catalyst of violence but as a key factor in an increasingly integrated social, political, economic, and ecological process of livelihood and landscape transformation, this research will yield further insights on so-called 'resource wars' and further prospects towards social and environmental justice.

#### Identification of the Problem:

Interpreting the use of violence in the control for, access to, and fight over ecological resources through disparate and distinct frameworks, limits our understanding of the ways various ecological issues, including the scarcity or abundance of natural resources, environmental change, production, marketing, and consumption of natural resources, and the sharing of benefits from natural resource exploitation, are ultimately rooted in local histories and complex webs of social relations. Comprehension of these 'new wars', necessitates a framework of research that considers not only the multi-faceted network of actors involved in and impacted by these 'war economies', but as I argue, research that engages with the multi-faceted role of natural resources in shaping the socio-political claims different actors make over those resources.

#### Argument:

I argue that networks of actors lay claim to and/or limit and deny access to natural resources through a politics of identity which informs how struggles over natural resources and the increasingly violent nature of those struggles are subsequently shaped and legitimized. In particular, I argue that natural resource conflicts result from and are representative of a continually shifting process of identity formation (and exclusion) and livelihood struggles.

#### Key questions:

This study broadly examines how the politics of identity and livelihoods merge within struggles over natural resources. In particular, I explore the following questions:

- How do claims over natural resources relate to 'conflictual' identities and livelihoods?
- What role may the intersection between identities, livelihoods, and natural resources play in shaping these conflicts?

- How do livelihoods and identities become (positively) transformed through the resolution of natural resource struggles and vice versa?

#### Methodology:

An 'ethnographies of war' approach considers struggles over natural resources as a process and not just as a cause or catalyst in violent conflict. Through direct observation, key informant interviews, and extensive household-level interviews together with counter-mapping and secondary data, this study investigates three separate but increasingly interconnected case studies in the Great Lakes region of Africa experiencing prolonged periods of violent conflict that are variously tied to struggles over natural resources. Three stages of inquiry will take place over the next three years (2007 - 2010) in (1) Southern Sudan, (2) Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, and (3) Northern Uganda. Each cycle of research will consist of three month periods in the field during consecutive years, in accordance with fellowship requirements that prohibit more than three months of fieldwork per year. Fieldwork undertaken from late January to mid April 2008 in Southern Sudan represents the first stage of inquiry. Based on the empirical assessment of international and local NGOs and humanitarian agencies working in the area as well as respected scholars in the field, I explore the extent to which and the process through which rural Sudanese struggle to reclaim access to and control over natural resources existing prior to the conflict, such as land, irrigation, and wells. Returning from years of violent conflict, for example, many Madi populations have been displaced by other ethnic groups, such as the Dinka Bor, or find their land deeded to rebel leaders. That these populations must then adapt to altered environments, or in some cases, to areas ecologically distinct from their former region, is further heightening tensions over livelihood and food security. Research on Southern Sudan, then, examines the changed landscape upon which southern Sudanese residents returning from years of violent conflict must rebuild their livelihoods. Subsequent research scheduled in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (2008-2009) and Northern Uganda (2009-2010) will similarly reflect a needs-based approach based on the current realities for each region.

#### Principle Literature:

Anthropology of War; Political Ecology; Political Economy; Grassroots Studies; Livelihood Studies; Identity Politics; Critical Geo-politics

#### Geographical Region:

- (1) Southern Sudan
- (2) Northern Uganda
- (3) Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

#### Recommendations:

South Sudan is an area that has witnessed violent civil strife for most of the last fifty years since independence in 1956. Within that timeframe, the region has been subject to multiple and complex internal disputes between ethnic factions in addition to the wider known division between the North and the South. The extent to which natural resources have influenced these conflicts, while obvious in some respects, in many other respects, remains difficult to determine. The direct interest of outside organizations and

NGOs in the region, for example, has greatly influenced local valuation of various community resources. In order to tease out the discrepancies (i.e. historical grievance versus opportunistic economy) and provide a better understanding of natural resource conflict in the area, more nuanced research comparing various local sites within South Sudan needs to be undertaken and distinguished from regional/national resource interests i.e. local land rights versus state interests in oil (Unity State) or timber (Kasana).

#### Final Products:

The final outcome of my research program will be (1) the (continually growing) formation of a group of scholars working on issues of natural resources and violent conflict in the Great Lakes Region of Africa to discuss methodological and empirical ways forward, eventually sharing our knowledge with scholars from other areas of the world dealing with similar topical concerns (2) several published papers on my fieldwork including an article submitted to *Environment Magazine*; a paper submitted to the Annals of the *American Association of Geographers*; and an article for *PNAS*, in addition to a policy paper already submitted to FAO.

#### Additional Intellectual and Professional advancement activities:

- ✓ Accepted the following position:
  - Utah State – Assistant Professor of Human Geography
- ✓ Accepted for publication:
  - “The Encroaching Forest: Struggles over Land and Resources on the Boundary of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda” to *Society and Natural Resources*.
- ✓ Submitted the manuscript:
  - “Ecotourism: The Modern Predator? Implications of Gorilla Tourism Policies on Local Livelihoods in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda” to *Environment and Planning D*
- ✓ Contracted with Environment Magazine to publish an article on Sudan for the Winter 2008 Issue
  - “Violent Ecologies: Exploring the links between natural resources and violent conflicts in South Sudan” *Environment Magazine*
- ✓ Invited to submit my dissertation for publication as a book through VDM Verlag Dr. Müller Aktiengesellschaft & Co. (Currently preparing it for submission)
- ✓ Collaborating with fellow SSP colleagues to initiate an online and widely accessible SSP curriculum. Adam and I are currently working as the main editors on the project.

- ✓ Presented my fieldwork in Sudan
  - May 2<sup>nd</sup>  
Clark University – Department of Geography – Graduate Lecture Series
  - May 11<sup>th</sup>  
Harvard University – Program on Intrastate Conflict and Conflict Resolution at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs – Graduate Seminar Series

Collaborators and Contacts for Current Research Program in Southern Sudan:

Douglas Johnson (Advisor to the Gov't of South Sudan); Paul Elkan (WCS-Southern Sudan Program); Elizabeth Stites (Senior Researcher Feinstein International Center Tufts); Robert Rotberg (Director, Program on Intrastate Conflict and Conflict Resolution, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the Kennedy School of Government); Omer and Mohammed Ismail (National Democratic Institute); Alex De Waal (pre eminent scholar on Sudan currently at Harvard's Humanitarian Initiative); Dan Bernard (University of California, Berkeley); Tim Resch (USAID- Office of Sustainable Development/Africa – Washington D.C.); Walter Knausenberger (USAID-East Africa Mission- Nairobi); Diress Mengistu (NPA); Martina Santschi (University of Switzerland).

I also have maintained contacts with several additional NGO field staff (i.e. FAO; PHO; Oxfam; MSF; Save the Children; World Vision; UNMIS; UNHCR) and leading members of government agencies in Southern Sudan (South Sudan Land Commission; various ministries).

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