

POPULAR SCIENTIFIC SUMMARY

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Climate change, environmental degradation, and displacement increasingly converge, heightening tensions over land, water, and mobility. In many fragile and conflict-affected settings, these pressures interact with weak governance and institutions, contested authority, and long-standing grievances. Can community-based disaster risk reduction support conflict prevention and peacebuilding in such environments, or might it reinforce existing inequalities and conflict dynamics?

Using a qualitative multiple-case-study design combining case-specific document review and interviews to triangulate findings, the results show that community-based disaster risk reduction generated peace-positive outcomes, particularly regarding capabilities, substantial integration, and symbolic rapprochement. But these gains were not automatic and were consistently modest, uneven, and contingent. Cooperation around water, land, and seasonal mobility emerged not because interventions resolved structural problems, but because they created temporary spaces and meaningful opportunities within and between groups to negotiate shared risks, articulate grievances, and establish rules perceived as minimally fair. These processes helped stabilise relations and reduce the likelihood of conflict escalation, yet rarely altered the deeper political and economic structures that shape vulnerability and exclusion.

The thesis contributes context-sensitive evidence to environmental peacebuilding by showing how interventions operate within networks of authority—tribal, customary, bureaucratic, and political—that determine who participates and who benefits. At times, community-based disaster risk reduction broadened participation by creating inclusive dialogue platforms, committees, co-designed bylaws, or hybrid governance arrangements that strengthened local institutions for managing environmental issues and opened pathways for cooperation, trust-building, and dispute resolution. But it also sometimes reinforced existing power dynamics, especially when interventions relied on local gatekeepers or when civic space was constrained.

The study underscores that the peacebuilding potential of community-based disaster risk reduction and environmental interventions in fragile settings does not lie in technical fixes, but in the political, relational, and procedural processes embedded in uneven structures of authority and legitimacy. Displacement reshapes perceptions of fairness: interventions that did not explicitly address the differentiated vulnerabilities of internally displaced persons, hosts, returnees, women, and youth often intensified grievances. Evidence also shows stronger ownership, improved maintenance of shared resources, and greater prospects for sustained peace where women and youth had substantive representation, meaningful decision-making rights, livelihoods aligned with their priorities, and protection from political and security risks.

Taken together, the findings do not suggest that community-based disaster risk reduction can transform structural inequalities or resolve environmental insecurity, displacement, or conflict. Rather, under certain conditions, it can create the relational and procedural foundations for more durable forms of cooperation and collective action. These relational and procedural shifts are modest and shaped by political and institutional landscapes, yet they can reduce tensions and support cooperation in places where trust is low and displacement has reshaped social relations. Recognising both the potential and the limits of these processes, and the conditions under which they operate, is essential for designing interventions that contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding in fragile, displacement-affected settings.