



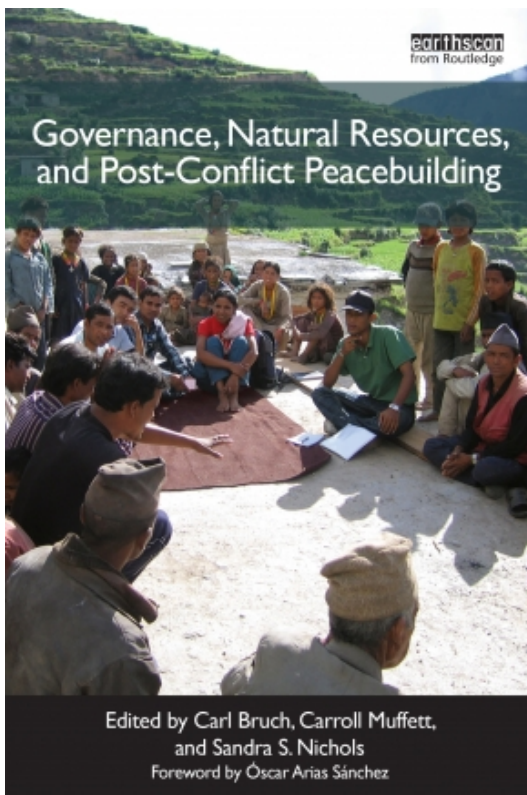
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Foreword

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Foreword

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If history is any guide, post-conflict peacebuilding and nation building are among the most challenging of all human endeavors. Restoring governments, institutions, and social capital after a conflict pushes human and natural resources to their limit. Moreover, the global interdependence brought about by technological advances, as well as the world's increased population, both help and hinder these efforts.

In a post-conflict situation, a country's or region's natural resource base can be both a liability and a tremendous asset. Those resources are a critical support system for a society in conflict, even when disputes over the resources are a cause of that conflict. In other words, while the desire to control natural resources has frequently fueled and prolonged wars, it is also nearly unthinkable that a country, particularly one in the developing world, can make a successful transition to a healthy and prosperous democracy without effective management and stewardship of its natural resource base. My experience in Central America demonstrates these challenges and shows the need for more attention to, and research on, these important issues—a need this book seeks to address.

Central America is one of the planet's richest and most diverse regions, home to many natural wonders including active volcanoes, mountains, beaches, and lush tropical forests. Indifferent to human borders, our natural resources and species share common ecosystems and are inextricably linked. However, our region is not rich in other resources. The Central American isthmus is very small, and is home to more than 40 million people, with a population density similar to that of Western Europe. Natural resource demands are high, arable land and water are limited, and our countries have relatively few mineral resources and virtually no fossil fuel reserves.

Unfortunately, our region has a violent history. From the early 1970s to the early 1990s, civil wars in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, and related tensions and spillover effects in Honduras and Costa Rica, effectively stopped the region's economic growth, and made improvements in quality of life and environmental protection extremely difficult. Though each of the conflicts had different causes, they were fueled by outside forces as proxy wars of the ongoing Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union.

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Each conflict had a profound effect on the region as a whole: economically, socially, and environmentally. The human costs were enormous. Hundreds of thousands were killed or maimed, and hundreds of thousands more were temporarily or permanently displaced. Many fled the conflict areas, increasing migration to cities and across borders. Massive waves of refugees left their countries for safe havens such as Costa Rica or the United States.

Insecurity in rural areas made farming too risky, leading many farmers to abandon their fields or convert them to cattle grazing. These shifts resulted in decreased agricultural capacity in many areas, which lowered food production. Governments lost effective control of territory, and many natural resources were abused or destroyed. For example, deforestation rates in all the countries of the region accelerated greatly during the 1980s and 1990s. Weak institutions and increased demands on natural resources—particularly for subsistence—led to the loss of forest and coastal ecosystems, with corresponding losses of biodiversity.

Perhaps the greatest and most lasting harm was the weakening of governments and institutions. Most countries strengthened their military and security apparatus at the expense of those institutions dedicated to health, education, and the environment. It quickly became clear to many Central American leaders not only that the region was doing significant damage to itself, but also that our limited natural resource base, dense population, grinding poverty, and lack of effective institutions were going to make post-conflict recovery a titanic challenge.

The civil wars continued unabated through the mid-1980s. Damage to our region was mounting, even in Costa Rica, which had abolished its army in 1948. This state of affairs led me to propose a peace plan to my fellow Central American presidents in February 1987. In August of that year, after a difficult negotiation process and despite international interference, we all came together in Guatemala City to sign the Esquipulas II Accord, in which we agreed on economic cooperation and a framework for peaceful conflict resolution. With this plan as a guide, our region began to wind down its destructive wars. The process was frustratingly slow at times, but by the early 1990s all armed conflict had ceased, and major steps had been made toward democracy and development efforts to rebuild the region.

Cooperation around natural resources, and in general, was an important part of the rebuilding process. Cooperation around natural resources started with the establishment of the Central American Commission on Environment and Development in 1989, and the cooperation expanded substantially in 1991 with the creation of the Central American Integration System, which promotes peace, liberty, democracy, and development, and is based firmly on the respect of human rights and protection of natural resources.

When one compares the Central American experience to the endless conflicts in Africa, it seems that my region's scarcity of extractive resources and general vulnerability may have been a perverse blessing. How much longer would the Central American wars have continued if the region possessed the reserves of diamonds, gold, or oil that could have deepened and financed conflict? On the

other hand, our lack of an abundant extractive resource base also limited our ability to rebuild and refinance our devastated economies once peace arrived. We had no diamond or gold mines to excavate, no oil to extract, no massive forests to sell. Our only resource was our people: their mostly small farms and businesses, their culture of hard work, their strong desire to rebuild their societies, and their pride in our rich cultural and biological diversity.

With that resource alone, we had to find ways to establish or strengthen our democracies, provide basic services, stimulate investment, reactivate our economies, and protect or rehabilitate natural resources. All of these efforts required tremendous feats of institution building, broad-based political support, and significant coordination at the regional and international levels. Perhaps most difficult of all, all these challenges were interrelated. Without economic growth, investment in our public services would be impossible in the long term. Failure to protect the natural resource base would hurt our economies. And a breakdown in the political processes due to any of these other factors would create a risk of renewed violence. In addition, Central America faced a challenge that many developing countries encounter after a conflict: the reintegration of former combatants, who often return after a period of conflict to the fields and forests to try to regain their pre-war life and tranquility. In cases where natural resources have been substantially diminished by war, reintegration is difficult if not impossible. Delays in providing basic services and education to former combatants who have known nothing but war, and have been carrying a gun since their teenage years, can lead to social and environmental problems for generations to come.

Without a doubt, the challenges facing my region as it sought to rebuild its societies were tremendous. But just as we prepared to face them as best we could, the international community abandoned us. Nations that had watched us carefully while conflicts raged, or even participated in those conflicts, turned their eyes elsewhere once peace was achieved. Aid that had once been proffered to governments investing in weapons and war was denied to governments seeking to build a nonviolent future. It was then that Central America, and peaceful Costa Rica above all, saw firsthand how the international aid system punishes success. We saw how countries that make good decisions, choosing peace over war, are later deemed “too rich” for help or debt forgiveness, while countries that waste their resources on conflict are rewarded by additional international aid.

For that reason, I have proposed the Costa Rica Consensus, which would create mechanisms to forgive debts and use international financial resources to support developing nations that spend more on environmental protection, education, health care, and housing for their people, and less on arms and soldiers. It is a simple idea whose time has long since come. For how will the wounds of war-torn nations heal, if their governments are given money that they then directly or indirectly use to buy more grenades, helicopters, and AK-47s, perpetuating the poverty of their people?

My region learned a terrible lesson in the years that followed its conflicts. We received little help in facing the challenges of nation building. But this is a

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fate that other countries suffering from conflict today can avoid if the international community takes seriously the idea that peace is much more than a white flag or a treaty. Peace is a state of affairs that can only be sustained through strong institutions, through prosperity, and above all, through investment in education and human development. That is why I am so proud to add my remarks to a book that makes an excellent contribution to understanding these challenges and opportunities. May the discussion that takes place in the following pages be taken up by the organizations that shape our globe—and, still more importantly, may they be translated into positive action.