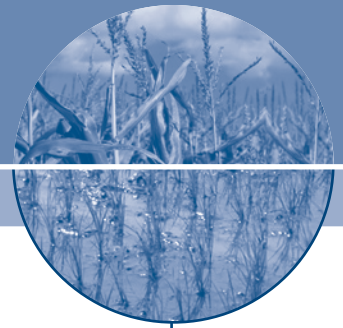


# NEW PUBLICATIONS



## Beyond Disasters: Creating Opportunities for Peace

By Michael Renner and Zoë Chafe

Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute, 2007. 56 pages.

Reviewed by NICHOLA D. MINOTT

*Beyond Disasters: Creating Opportunities for Peace* examines the impact of natural disasters on conflicts by analyzing the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir. Co-authors Michael Renner and Zoë Chafe focus on two main themes: the impact of disasters on ongoing conflicts, and how the responses to disasters can change the dynamics of these conflicts. These significant and timely questions can help us understand how post-disaster interventions could contribute to conflict resolution and facilitate cooperation among warring factions by helping address the deeper socio-economic and political barriers within the conflict itself.

The report analyzes three cases: Aceh (Indonesia), Sri Lanka, and Kashmir. All three regions were plagued by civil unrest and conflict, and all suffered a sudden and devastating environmental disaster that, for a time, pacified the conflicts. However, the post-disaster outcomes varied, ranging from a peace agreement to further violence and bloodshed. The authors provide important lessons and policy recommendations, demonstrating how governments, the military, disaster relief agencies, and civil society can play positive (and negative) roles in conflict resolution.

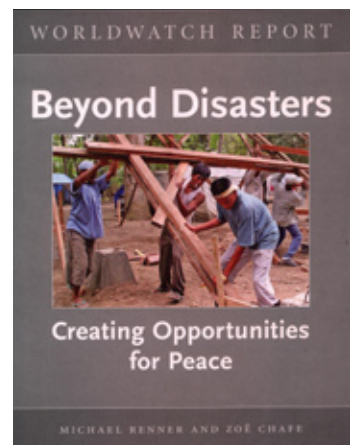
The first part of *Beyond Disasters* presents a general overview of natural disasters as they relate to “human impacts on the natural environment” (p. 7). Renner and Chafe observe

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that the severity of disasters is increasing as growing socio-economic inequalities push development and settlements into vulnerable areas, exposing more people to the full impact of these events. From the melting ice caps to Hurricane Katrina to the 2004 tsunami, the world has borne witness to the destructive power of environmental disasters.

Renner and Chafe describe how human population growth is forcing more people into fragile and vulnerable ecosystems, thus increasing the number of people likely to be affected by disasters. By 2008, “for the first time ever, more people will live in cities than rural areas” (p. 10). Despite advanced early warning systems—which have decreased fatalities—the number of people affected by disasters has risen 10 percent over the past two decades (p. 9).

Environmental degradation is contributing to the severity of the damage; for instance,





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short-sighted economic policies led Louisiana to lose more than a quarter of its wetlands, eliminating a natural buffer zone that could have minimized the devastation. In addition, the authors cite studies by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change indicating that Earth's temperature has increased over the past century, along with the severity of storms and other undesirable climate-related phenomena.

Yet what ultimately matters is the timeliness and adequacy of relief programs and the ability of the affected society to absorb the shock and rebound. Typically, the poor and disenfranchised bear the brunt of the disaster. For instance, the U.S. federal response to Hurricane Katrina was clearly lacking, and the poor of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast are still suffering the results years later.

Post-disaster relief and economic aid can be used as a political tool: Aid to the victims of disasters can distort the economy by increasing inflation, the cost of living, and competition for jobs, and by leading to unequal compensation and conflicts over resettlement. A disaster can weaken areas already in conflict, further depleting the country's economic resources and making it more difficult to recover from violence. For example, Pakistan's slow response to the 1970 floods in present-day Bangladesh eventually led to the region to push for independence in December 1971. Likewise, Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza's inefficient response to the devastating 1972 earthquake and embezzlement of international reconstruction aid weakened his support base and eventually led to his overthrow (p. 17).

Renner and Chafe delve deeper into the cases of Aceh, Sri Lanka, and Kashmir. When the tsunami hit the Indonesian province of Aceh on December 26, 2004, the province had been under martial law since the failure of official peace talks in May 2003. The tsunami forced the parties involved to shift their focus from fighting to working together to distribute relief to the population in need. Most importantly, it brought international attention to the conflict. While unofficial peace talks were already in progress prior to the disaster, the post-tsu-

nami involvement of the international community—specifically, the European Union-led Aceh Monitoring Mission—helped increase the commitment to peace. Yet Aceh's post-tsunami peace could be easily endangered by continued inequalities in resource distribution and aid.

Unlike Aceh, post-tsunami Sri Lanka descended into further violence. The unequal distribution of post-disaster aid helped increase tensions between government forces and the Tamil rebels. Other factors contributed to this particular outcome, including the Sinhala nationalists, who viewed any type of negotiated settlement as a ploy for a separate state. Peace was not politically expedient for the Sinhala-led government; studies showed that the majority-Sinhala population did not want to end the conflict. And the international community sided with the government by labeling the Tamils "terrorists."

Unlike the civil wars in Aceh and Sri Lanka, the third case study focuses on an interstate conflict. After a massive earthquake on October 8, 2005, India and Pakistan took tentative steps toward thawing relations, allowing some travel across the "Line of Control," which demarcates their respective geographical claims in the disputed territory of Kashmir. The two governments also agreed to facilitate cross-border relief efforts. Tensions decreased and trade increased; however, both sides remained cautious. While the earthquake mobilized civil society, biased aid distribution stirred discontent and conflict. The authors conclude that the nations missed an opportunity to build peace; neither side seemed ready to make the necessary commitments to truly engage in dialogue.

In the final chapter, "Creating Future Opportunities for Peace," the authors provide an excellent synthesis of the three cases. Their clear and concise summary of the key aspects of post-disaster engagement in each case provides steps the international community can take to help further peacebuilding in these fragile environments. They argue that donor nations should leverage aid to build peace; humanitarian groups should be more sensi-

tive to the realities of politics and conflict; and other actors responding to natural disasters should make a concerted effort to restore the environment (p. 42).

Though the analysis is compelling, the report's main weakness lies in its vague policy recommendations. It is hardly news that environmental restoration will minimize the damage caused by disasters, or that "building trust and reconciliation" is pivotal to increasing cooperation among disputants. Most of the recommendations are aspirational and do not address the hard realities on the ground. The real issue is the lack of political will on the part of governments, the international community, and powerful elites to make the sacrifices necessary to mitigate inequalities that are

further exacerbated by natural disasters. How does one create incentives for powerful groups to implement the policies needed to minimize the impact of future disasters? This specific recommendation is lacking—which is what the policy realm most needs.

Overall, I found the report a fascinating examination of how three regions addressed the devastating impact of a natural disaster and their divergent outcomes on conflict. Renner and Chafe conclude that the tsunami and earthquake created opportunities and challenges that warrant further study to determine why the effects on the conflicts were so varied. *Beyond Disasters* is a timely call for more in-depth research on disaster relief and its links to conflict mitigation.

## Bridges Over Water: Understanding Transboundary Water Conflict, Negotiation and Cooperation

By Ariel Dinar, Shlomi Dinar, Stephen McCaffrey, and Daene McKinney  
Singapore: World Scientific, 2007. 468 pages.

Reviewed by ANNIKA KRAMER

Two riparian states, A and B, share one transboundary aquifer. The countries' economies are based only on the aquifer's water: They pump water to sell it on the international market as bottled water. Assume, for simplicity's sake, that the capacity of the international market to consume water is limited, and the price per unit of water is a decreasing function of the quantity. Unfortunately, A and B decide how much water to pump without consulting the other. Each country then pumps as much water as possible and sells it on the market; however, this floods the international market and lowers the price for water. If the two countries instead communicated and cooperated, they could maintain high market prices for water and realize the highest joint payoff.

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With this transboundary groundwater version of the famous "prisoner's dilemma," the authors of *Bridges Over Water: Understanding Transboundary Water Conflict, Negotiation and Cooperation* demonstrate how a transboundary water situation could be expressed using game theory. Game theory is only one of the approaches employed by this textbook, which seeks to introduce the multidisciplinary facets of freshwater management by considering its

