

Environmental Security in Latin America: Case Study for Colombia

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Abstract

Violence and conflict are not connections that are immediately considered in the discussion of security. While natural resources can play a role in triggering conflict, the environment often takes the role of the silent victim in times of unrest. This research studies the linkage of the environment and conflict in humanitarian impact, with a case study in the southeast region of Colombia. Here the national government relinquished the selected rural region as a demilitarized zone at the beginning of the country's long-standing conflict, these areas have become protected by the world as a UNESCO world heritage site. In the country's history of the war, rural regions contained little to no state power and became converted into guerilla dominated areas for illegal mining, landmines, and coca production. These activities have become engrained into the environment to create long-lasting implications for natural resources and people. Colombia is experiencing great national distress from the war, resulting in an estimated 13 million internally displaced peoples (IDPs). This project investigates the history of the struggle for land and power, focusing on those who experienced forced displacement due to habitat loss – which has prolonged security issues, all while working within a flawed system protecting migrants. The case study of Colombia is studied using the interdisciplinary paradigm of environmental security, which highlights the relationship between war, nature, and security systems towards most vulnerable populations.

Keywords: internally displaced peoples, Colombia, environmental security

1. Introduction

International wars are decreasing in regularity, and civil wars are increasing.^{1,2} This directs attention away from war casualties of soldiers or trained fighters, and instead, the victims are civilians. The occurrence of war also involves restoration to the mutilation that occurs to nature during conflict. This connection existing between nature and conflict has rarely been studied in larger circles of science and policy, though there is much work from scholars who focus on studying conflict, and some organizations that are tracking environmental changes. 'Environmental security' is the field that bridges the two, as security, a human-focused field, adds social science perspective to the discussion of the natural sciences. This study is becoming increasingly important, as it is agreed upon by the United Nations that the degradation of natural resources as an outcome of war spurs migration – this then constitutes environmental migrants.³ This phenomenon is significant to mitigate, as now standing Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) are limited by the protection they are promised, and under international institutions, environmental migrants will not be regarded as a valid claim for refugee status and therefore will not be protected.

Unlivable lands are an outcome of war and a significant reason for migration. These security issues can be directly influenced collectively and individually - consideration of the environment is a focus relevant to consider when working towards security measures for all peoples. Colombia was selected as the case study to focus on environmental security structure because the country highlights the contextual circumstances of both environmental and war-related causes for displacement. In Colombia, the biologist Isis Alvarez cites it is "impossible to talk about the natural

environment without referencing the war."⁴ Further, the country is an outlier case in the region of Latin America, as the people have experienced a significant prevalence of internal displacement, and here unstable living conditions can be observed more effectively than if in a diaspora. In this scenario, it is more achievable to study the source of displacement.

1.1. Scope of Examination

The systems of security and the different parties of the study significant for this case are not ignored - those who were displaced and the perpetrators of the displacement. From this conflict there results environmental migration and unlivable land conditions; the environment is focused upon as a key factor to accentuate the role it plays for the cause of insecurity, most specifically of IDPs. Conflict literature reveals that IDPs' origin is either conflict-based or environmental-based; these current examinations do not consider all drivers of the insecurity, as the environment is a major lever in all conflict. The focal of this research relies on the consideration of the environment being involved in all stages of security.

2. Literature Review

In this interdisciplinary study, the combination of natural and social scientific knowledge is used to address security issues. Initial research for the connection between violent conflict and the environment illuminated how war has been ignored as the main actor in habitat destruction, they are instead written as divided phenomena.

2.1. Environmental Security

Consideration of the environment has been considered a "soft power;" sustainability is rarely paid attention in political systems. In contrast to military and defense, being highly regarded as a "hard power" topic. The field of environmental security is a forthcoming school of thought that states there is a connection between security and the environment, and the literature of this field concentrates on the protection of the natural world and human lives against security threats. Environmental security originated when international attention turned fearful of the environment, and the threats it created for people; from the likes of ozone depletion and global warming.⁵ Eventually, the theory shifted, and scholars consider the necessary language needed to argue that the environment should be considered into nations' robust security decisions.^{6,7} Today, researchers using the theory, have also noted the various consequences and costs of the war, not all being negative.

In the event of conflict, there is an opportunity for co-benefits, one being conflict zones deter development and create an opportunity for wild areas to flourish during these times of "altered human activity."⁸ However, overwhelmingly the combination of the force and nature, alongside the nexus of factors such as politics and socio-economics, has created incomprehensible consequences.^{9,8} The negative consequences include "land craters and polluted resources," high deforestation levels, and unsustainable land use.^{8,10,11,12} The environmental impacts have narrowed into through observation of conflict zones, some completed by Zwijnenburg and Bächler, who have noted outcomes of damage from the toxic residues from war, and people who are linked to this land then experiencing forced displacement.^{13,14} A briefing from Jensen and Lonergan demonstrates the great impact environmental security issues can have, such as the catastrophes of Agent Orange and the Gulf War, the first connections validated from the international community of how nature can be used as a catastrophic weapon resulting in long-lasting destructions and numerous casualties.¹⁵ Claims that rationalize that the environment has no significant international threat, that it is merely 'happenstance,' fail to address how nature can be used as a weapon against people, and this can then spur humanitarian disasters.

More observation worldwide, conducted by the World Wildlife Fund and Hanson, shows that countries with biodiversity hotspots experience strategic use and extraction of resources during times of war.^{16,17} This has been noted as possible due to government negligence in these rural regions which leads to the excellent access to revenue through increased hunting, mining, and that illegal groups can use these regions as concealment.¹⁷ When the overtaking of the biodiversity hotspots occur, this then results in the suspension of conservation activities from scientists, and the disruption of the livelihoods of those who depend on these regions. This can be considered alongside Le Billon, who states that "availability of nature of any resource is thus not in itself a predictive indicator of conflict."¹⁸ The presence of these biodiversity hotspots when combined with the pre-emptive decision of violence does present a complicated nexus for displacement – as there is disproportionated reliance on this land from populations that will receive the more

significant cross. Protected Areas (PAs) are the use of biodiversity hotspots, and these lands have a complex relationship to security, but can lead to benefits for nature and people according to Hammill.¹⁹ PAs are “inherently political areas,” driven by resource control and power.¹⁹ They involve significant players of security: governments, militaries, development agencies, and most notably conservations.¹⁹ Yet, according to a piece by Stevens, PA initiatives may well be considered “human rights violations and a form of colonization.”²⁰ The history of these areas has turned towards strict conservation, evicting reliant populations without return. The conflict that occurs within these areas is not abstract, it all relies on parties. Holley states that “humans are shaping the future of the environment in ways that are not yet fully understood,” most greatly, “our very security is determined by both our use of and enmeshment with the environment.”²¹ The management of biodiversity hotspots and natural areas are decisions at the local and national level when if ignored can lead to deep and embedded unrest and destruction.

2.3. Politics of Displacement

According to Hammill, “environmental mismanagement is a contributor to human insecurity.”¹⁹ Environmental migrants are a large concern requiring attention from all facets of society. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is leading the construction of these protections. The UNHCR has formatted handbooks and guides on how the international community can observe sovereignty and still abide by humanitarian law. The definition for IDPs derives from the Global Protection Cluster (GPC) and the UNHCR as

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.²²

It is noted that the leading causes considered for IDPs are comparable to those cited for refugees. Current refugee law considers the principles of refugee to be one who has crossed their country of origin’s boundaries.²³ Their status entitles an individual to “non-refoulement” protection, which translates to that the individual cannot be forced to return.²³ Those who eligible for refugee protection have experienced persecution of different factors that are highly regarded at the international level.²⁴ According to the GPC, protection is defined as “an objective; a legal responsibility; and an activity”.²² Therefore, those who are considered refugees can register as and receive international protection.

Due to the nature of internally displaced status, the UNHCR has experienced difficulties detecting and handling their protection. In 1998 “The Guiding Principles” were constituted under the United Nations, and these are the framework of the expectations and regulations for protecting IDPs. To date, there is no universal treaty that applies specifically to IDPs.²⁵ Unlike refugees, international protection is not granted for IDPs, as they remain under the responsibility of their state as citizens. Several countries have not adopted a process to support IDPs, which has led to discrepancies in protection. Despite the special recognition given to IDPs, they face worldwide discrimination as their displacement and application process to receive this recognition, produces insecurities which limit many of the resources promised to civilians. The most prominent data and knowledge of IDPs is the work that the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center provides to support the UNHRC, studying, and monitoring populations. The data for IDPs is recorded by country and separated into two groups, that under their considerations, are those experiencing displacement due to ‘disasters’ or ‘conflict and violence.’

The politics of displacement has long limited attention solely to adherence to broader refugee law but now must become optimized to regulate protection for discriminated displaced populations. This is becoming increasingly important, since the end of the second world war, civilian displacement around the world has been estimated at around 25 million people and the number of refugees at around 13 million.² As according to Ibañez, intercountry conflict perpetuates civilians facing dangers such as recruitment from rebel forces and even attacks instigated to seize assets.² Displacement has been observed deeper; as consideration for security can only be holistic when analyzing the independent variables of the victims’ situations. It is noted by Bradley that the relationship between conflict and displacement is complicated, but the event of violent threats to lives is understood from international attention to be a top cause of driving displacement from and within countries - “two equally violent conflicts do not always generate the same amount of displacement” as some conflict does generate forced displacement while other events allow for an opportunity to stay.²⁶ It is found that land ownership was noted to increase the likelihood of displacement due to being a rich asset for illegal groups to steal; whereas, social network presence, high education levels of the individuals, and access to essential services were all factors that reduced the likelihood of displacement.²⁶ This was found that the

variable of social networks is significant because these networks have created belongingness, which factors into the decision to leave; likewise, in the cases of forced displacement, these networks provide security.

As all interconnections are considered, it cannot be justified that people are not to be 'classified' from their predicament as purely environmental, or purely conflictual.²⁷ Literature from Warner, Bradley, Lawrence, and Hanson distinguish noted causes and circumstances of the environment on national security; these pieces excel by noting the victim experience as the primary variable studied.^{28,8,26,17} As further outlined through the case study of Colombia, the politics for verifying international protection is highly polarized and does not allow for considerations of varying causes of conflict. On an international level, we must question, as argued by Gleick, "whether traditional means and institutions for resolving international political conflicts are adequate to address them."²⁹ As the law now stands, the protection offered to environmental migrants is not internally recognized. This creates a significant gap from the protections provided to IDP and refugee protection, requiring national governments to effectively adapt their plans for protecting IDPs.

3. Case Study

3.1. Methodology

Habitat loss includes a variety of causes, yet studying the security causes related can directly impact propositions to reduce displaced peoples. This study requires a rethinking of a system, which is most successfully done by focusing on a specific case. A case study is research about a theory in a very individualized event and considers all the specific occurrences and details of that case – this is required to create an effective claim. Case studies define a concept. The qualitative data presented by the case study then create understanding for the rationale of a theory, where to, the research is directed towards quantitative data to strengthen its argument. In this way, a case study, can be most effective to answer the questions: what are the causes of environmental displacement? For Colombia, are environmental displacement and conflict displacement connected? Was displacement a war strategy to access land? Is Colombia undergoing internal displacement connected to an environmental crisis?

The case study is conducted through a standard integrating qualitative and quantitative data from the Internet and database access materials. These are combined with case literature of primary source and secondary source basis. Joining data collection methods is prevalently used in case studies research to create "triangulation," which strengthens the grounding constructs of the argument.³⁰ This model is presented by Eisenhardt to be utilized to formulate theory.³⁰ The process follows a rigorous and directed method of analysis for each step, to create a case study that includes the unique features of each case and avoids confirmation bias by directing the author to generate the hypothesis after five rounds of the process.³⁰ The final product is a tested and trialed theory, that conveys the specificities of the case study and can effectively be used to in consideration towards a larger analysis.

3.2. Background

The history of Colombia's conflict was thoroughly researched to uncover the original grievances starting the war were held by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN).^{31,2,32,33} These groups fought due to the reoccurring injustices of land displacement, and some of their original goals were equitable access to and use of Colombia's resource-rich land.³⁴ Tactics routinely used by the FARC and ELN included intimidation through hijackings and kidnappings, yet they began to direct their resources towards the drug trade through a course of pressure from the state. This shift in tactics was the groups' first step towards de-ideology and further degraded the legitimacy of the grievances held by the groups.³⁴ Throughout the war, the country's urban and rural regions have endured different effects; in the cities of Colombia, were the strongholds of the drug industry used by these militias.¹ In the rural regions, is were the guerilla groups held a significant presence as suppliers to this same market.³⁵ The region of Serranía de Chiribiquete is located in between the major blocs of the FARC and would have been a meeting ground for the group. This system of fronts and regional blocs was the way the FARC decentralized their power while still maintaining a heavy overlook to control these regions economically and politically.³⁶ Serranía de Chiribiquete, is also a biodiversity hotspot, located in the rainforest region of Colombia in the rural area of the country. It served as a crucible-controlled area for economic development where intensified internal displacement and conflict occurred. Yet today, Chiribiquete is the largest PA in Colombia, also serving as a World Heritage site; regarded as the "country's strategy for peace, to address climate change issues, and to buffer conflicts," according to

WWF.^{37, 38} The progression of this change in land-use is remarkable, the area serves as a crucial for displaying how natural areas carry the cost of their management.

The groups' dependence on the drug trade sparked intervention from the United States of America, resulting in the FARC and ELN becoming labeled as registered terrorist organizations.^{33,39} Further international intervention led to more intensified action from the government.⁴⁰ The groups responded by continuing with the colonization of land towards the use of cocaine and other cash crops; the FARC intentionally targeted regions which created an overlap for drug pipelines between its members.² Further studies reveal that these areas where "illicit crops and drug trafficking" are also areas that cited forced displacement.² These guerilla-controlled regions were utilized for exploitation and transportation necessary for this demanding industry. These controlled-areas are also cited to be in the rural regions of the country, where a significant number of citizens are poor, work in agriculture, and are typically peoples of mestizo or mixed-race descent.³⁴ This is comparable to other parts that make up Colombia's "highly stratified society," the wealthy families of European-Spanish descent who are the wealthy landowners.³⁴ Throughout the civil conflict, these poor civilians, are the ones that encountered most of the affliction of the consequences and tactics of war.

3.3. Conflict Map

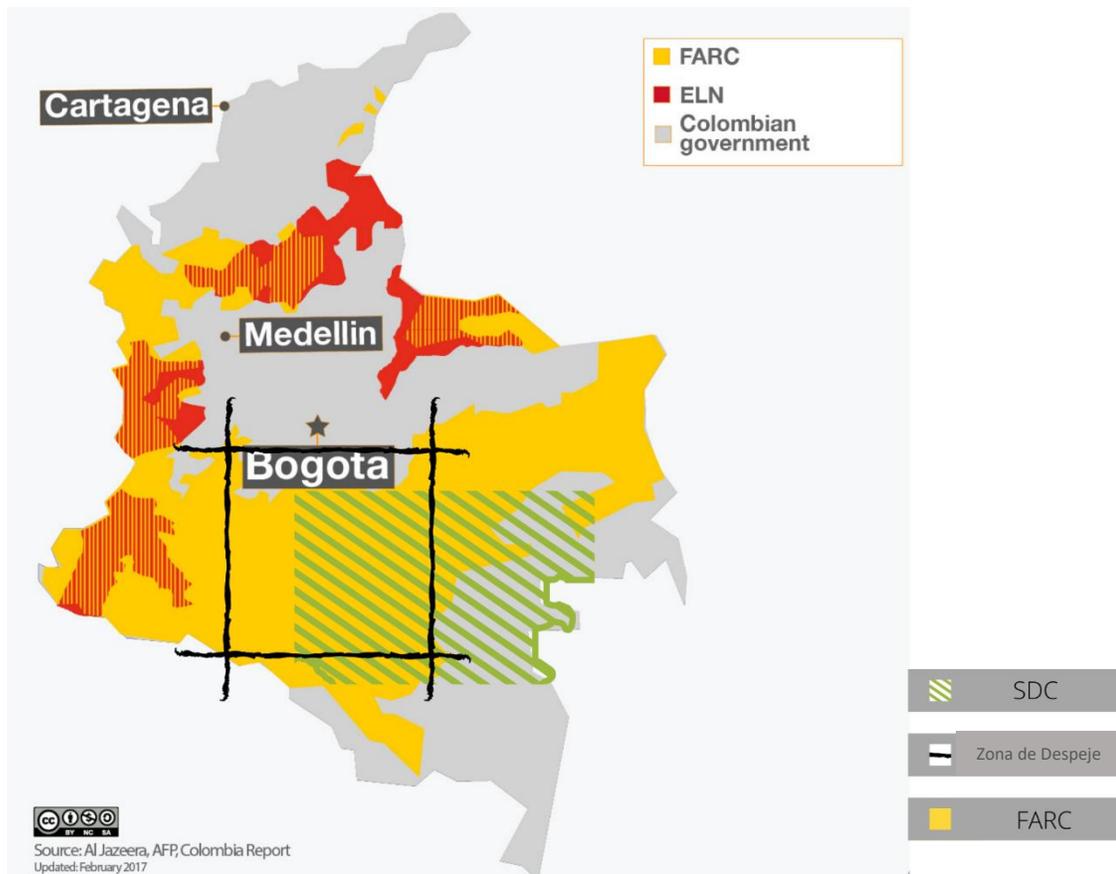


Figure 1. The map shows original data from Al Jazeera News reporting of the areas controlled by the main parties in the civil war in Colombia. The highlighted regions are the current grounds of the PA Serranía de Chiribiquete, and the negotiated "Zona de Despeje".

Most of the forced displacement in the departments of Caquetá and Guaviare had occurred as a result of intimidation from the guerilla and paramilitary groups. Those who stayed served under illegal groups to the drug market and lived under the control of their control. Though the environmental degradation from the guerilla groups is significant, none could compare to the level of destruction initiated as an intervention against drug production, the government would go on to take action that would make the land unlivable. In 2002, the government had mandated parts of the Chiribiquete area as the "Zona de Despeje" or a demilitarized zone between the FARC guerilla group and the

government's military. This area was already under firm FARC control, and the group was granted control from the government to manage the area without state intervention.^{41,42} When the government concluded that the FARC was using this zone for the drug market, the Colombian government worked with the USA in "Plan Colombia." This collaboration between the two governments is where the USA pledged a \$4 billion investment plan to financially support the fight against drug trafficking and insurgents, mainly through the funding of military weapons, in contract 30 million USD of this was allocated to humanitarian aid.⁴⁰ "Plan Colombia" was the states' approach to inhibit this market – it included aerial fumigation, which targeted these illicit crop routes and fields.

The regions undergoing occupation from the guerilla groups and government fumigation, were the biodiversity hotspots of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, in the north, and Chiribiquete, in the southeast.⁴³ Several different chemicals were used for these fumigations: the chemical of paraquat in 1978, triclopyr in 1985, tebuthiuron in 1986, and to date, the chemical of glyphosate.⁴³ The broad-spectrum herbicide, glyphosate, is noted to be a particularly unsuitable tool "for use in areas set aside to protect species."⁴³ Yet these chemicals were approved to conduct these actions with the support of the USA government. The fumigations in the PA included under Resolution 0013 of the National Narcotics Council, established for eradication of illicit drug crops.⁴³ Though their legality, since 1998, these fumigations have been noted as "cause of an important migration wave" in the country.² Internal displacement occurred due to health concerns from these fumigations and the habitat destruction to civilians who farmed in these regions.

3.4. Security Dilemma

The IDPs of Colombia's protection are under the responsibility of the state, and under protocol, the declaration of displacement is required of each family; to approach government offices to declare the circumstances of their displacement.² The government must validate the accuracy of each claim for the family to be able to receive benefits. This process is hindered by the added fear of persecution for those disclaiming they are fleeing guerilla-controlled areas. This leads many to not register as IDPs, which generates an uncertain estimate in the country.⁴⁴ Numbers range between accounts of the Colombian government and CODHES, a Colombian non-profit sector created to address displacement.³² Beyond accounting for and verifying each claim, the Colombian state has struggled in accurately distinguishing the protections for IDPs from fumigation regions; justifying the events of displacement as economic non-opportunity, which the government has resolved as the first response for these victims is to "return to [their] home communities."⁴⁵ The forced displacement in these regions occurred during times of civil unrest; these events then caused environmental destructions which were unrelieved by state negligence.

The PA of Serranía de Chiribiquete population includes a high concentration of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. So, there is a special consideration for the IDPs of Afro-Colombian, and indigenous descent.⁴⁶ CODHES estimated that "Afro-Colombians are far more likely than other groups to suffer displacement," while according to government records "less than four percent of the national population" is Afro-Colombian; further, 12 percent of Colombia's IDPs are of indigenous descent while the indigenous makeup is "less than 2.5 percent of the national population."⁴⁵ Although the overwhelming majority of victims are accounted for as indigenous and mestizo people – it cannot be reasonably assumed that this is a deliberate attack against these populations.³¹ Biodiversity hotspots, rural region of little to no state presence, and impoverished identities are high on the list of those most likely to be displaced; "displacement is about the *acquisition of land*, not about vanquishing a foe."³¹ These actions do have grave impacts, as it is reported that "80 percent of the indigenous population has been displaced; and, between 2002 and 2010, more than 1,400 indigenous people were assassinated."⁴⁶ The data emphasizes how disproportionate environmental crises weigh; indigenous communities are at risk from guerilla and paramilitary groups intruding into their territories, their community leaders have been killed, and indigenous youths have been recruited into these violent forces.⁴⁷ These vulnerable populations are affected due to their connected in proximity to resource-rich areas and are also connected by cultural significance and their traditional knowledge-based systems of these environmental areas.

The biodiversity hotspot of Chiribiquete has brought further attention to the country and the conflict, after worldwide recognition as a site of significant cultural importance.³⁸ The government has taken significant action to expand the land reach of this area to 4.3 million hectares.³⁸ These actions were taken after the peace resolutions between the Colombian government and the FARC. Within the country, it is been reported on quite differently, as according to a release by the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC) the expansion of the PA is stated to directly relate to the financed programs occurring between multiple international governments; these negotiations have occurred without the prior and informed consent of the groups from these territories.⁴⁸ These projects include mineral extractions from large corporations mining gold and hydropower conglomerates.³⁵ This briefing cites that the government has restarted fumigations in this region as well.⁴⁸ The government perpetuates the destruction against

nature and people in its failure to diagnose private sector activities and other commercial programs as a cause for displacement since these activities have been agreed upon and are protected by the state.

4. Conclusion

It can be better understood of “who” was displaced, by strategically studying the “where;” actions of violence are not random. These populations have been targeted due to the resources around them, along with the opportunity to appropriate these resources. “The needs and practices of war” have indeed interplayed on the patters of exploitation and the strategy of seizing resource hotspots.²⁶ These case areas where paramilitary and guerilla groups were pressured into after-struggling for territory are rural biodiversity hotspots that experienced no state control. The “roots of displacement lie in the dynamics of the Colombian conflict,” since by the nature of displacement, the duality of violence and intimidation has confounded into a seamless expansion into this biodiverse land – these events are an extension of the internal conflict.¹ If IDPs of Colombia are delegated under the protection of the government, there is very little the international community can do to ensure that due process is occurring to care for and protect these citizens, as law no stands. The repeated action of fumigation assaults combined with the continued threat of guerilla affiliates instills insecurity and unlivable land conditions. The security actors have demonstrated that they are unreliable in being able to recognize the citizen's needs and are misguided in protecting the citizens as to persist in these actions, which endangers vulnerable populations.

In the case of Colombia, forced displacement was a war tactic, and it must be noted as so, as the goal was to attain control of these regions to be able to exhaust this land for gain to win their war. It is uncertain if these people would be eligible to receive international protection under the circumstances of persecution for reasons of “race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion;”²⁴ nevertheless, the people of Colombia are experiencing a situation of great insecurity, along with all the conditions as outlined by an IDP. The current actors do not carry the interest in mind to redistribute the biodiverse hotspots to its native groups, or even to promote its protected status. These individuals require security from reliable actors. The country’s goals of a strategy for peace, to address climate change issues, and to buffer conflicts does include consideration for nature and security; yet as the country is still grappling with circumstances of IDPs, the legitimization of these claims is to consider environmental factors as valid as they are presented, no matter how sequentially conflict and environmental disasters are combined. The policies our nation's work within should be aimed to protect the best for each individual, using a framework that is grounded in justice and equity. These are decisions that countries should be drafting alongside their commitments towards sustainable development.

International protection is under the rhetoric that the reason for displacement therefore defines the mode of protection for these displaced peoples. Yet the current IDP distinctions pay too much mind to expellers and are solely focused on the event of displacement. The politics of displacement are not victim-centered and fail to note patterns by country structure or by the needs of the victim. The purpose of this case study was to highlight an intractable situation not cleanly diagnosed under the system of displacement due to the involvement of nature. In ways, the course from displaced to refuge is not linear. Therefore, it is also not comprehensible to constrict reasons for displacement to be solely environmentally based or conflict based. For the future of environmental security, perpetuations of unresolved conflict develop into negative peace, which threatens the nation's security and could further lead to the disbursement of these citizens into neighboring regions to seek solace and security. The displaced experience revolves around a plethora of interlocked issues, each considerable to look upon as levers to strengthen the protection of all. Yet, the preventative and active consideration of nature as a key player and as a victim, adds to security, it does not deter from it.

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