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The roles and values of the natural environment in Northern Uganda's peace process: a conceptual document analysis

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ABSTRACT. Over the past years, the natural environment has increasingly become instrumental in peace policies and the focus of study in peace and conflict research. Concurrently, there is mounting global recognition that nature contributes to peoples wellbeing in manifold ways and that incorporating diverse values of nature in policymaking is paramount for sustainable development. At the nexus of current debates on environmental peacebuilding and nature values and contributions to people, the aim of this study is to understand how peace narratives in Northern Uganda have integrated environmental considerations and accommodated diverse understandings and values of nature to reflect on prospects for sustainable peace. Even though the armed conflict between the Lord Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda in Northern Uganda was not a conflict for access and control over natural resources per se, twenty years of conflict have affected the natural environment as well as social-ecological relations between local peoples and nature. Informed by our theoretical approach from political ecology, we carry out a descriptive and conceptual document analysis using an analytical framework based on three types of values of nature: (a) instrumental, when nature is valued as an instrument or means to an end, (b) intrinsic, when nature is valued in itself, and (c) relational, when nature is valued as the social-ecological relations that it nurtures among people and people and nature. Our central argument is that for peace to be sustainable, understandings and values stemming from peoples directly affected by armed conflicts and dependent on their natural environment should permeate peace narratives and strategies. In particular, relational values of nature become central for nurturing relations, regulating conflict, and eventually assisting the possibilities for long-lasting peace.

Key Words: *environmental peacebuilding; Government of Uganda; Lord Resistance Army; natural environment; nature's contribution to peace; Northern Uganda; peace agreements; Peace, Reconstruction and Development Plan; sustainable peace; values of nature*

INTRODUCTION

Over the past years, the natural environment has increasingly become instrumental in peace policies and the focus of study in peace and conflict research. Growing literature and policy on environmental and climate change security or environmental peacebuilding has shown the relevance of incorporating environmental considerations into peace policy and research: nature has a central role to play either in conflict prevention or in post-conflict peacebuilding (Ide et al. 2023). Accordingly, whether an armed conflict is related or not to the natural environment, addressing environmental challenges and opportunities during peacemaking, peacebuilding, reconstruction, and development is essential to settle the ground for sustainable peace in the future.

Concurrently, there is mounting global recognition that nature contributes to people's well-being in manifold ways: regulating environmental processes, providing material resources, and offering non-material benefits that fulfill cultural, economic, social, or ecological needs, all essential for leading a healthy life (IPBES 2019). The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) has recently established the relevance of incorporating diverse values and valuations of nature in policymaking (IPBES 2022). Based on an extensive review of scientific studies, IPBES (2022) observes three distinctive values peoples give to nature: (a) instrumental, when nature is valued as an instrument or means to an end, (b) intrinsic, when nature is valued in itself, and (c) relational, when nature is valued as the social-ecological relations that it nurtures among people and people and nature.

At the nexus of current debates on environmental peacebuilding and nature values and contributions to people in policymaking, the aim of this study is to understand how peace narratives in Northern Uganda have integrated environmental consideration and accommodated diverse understandings and values of nature and prospects for sustainable peace. The armed conflict in Northern Uganda between the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) and the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF, later the Government of Uganda, GoU) between 1986 and 2007 was not a conflict for access and control over natural resources per se. However, twenty years of conflict have affected the natural environment in diverse ways. Internal displacement to camps, resource overexploitation, and the inaccessibility to certain ecosystems, resulted in environmental degradation and restoration at different scales (Nardi and Runnström 2024) as well as the transformation of social-ecological relations between local peoples and nature. It is ,therefore, expected that any peacebuilding narrative, strategy, or initiative would present considerations toward the natural environment (or nature) for the reconciliation, reconstruction, and development processes in the conflict-affected areas.

In this article, we seek to answer the following questions: (1) How has nature or the natural environment been represented in peace documents and related policy frameworks designed by the Government of Uganda (GoU) to target Northern Uganda and what roles were given to nature or the natural environment in these documents? (2) What diverse types of values are these representations and roles based on? and (3) What are the implications of such values for sustainable peace in the region? We answer these questions by carrying out a descriptive and conceptual document analysis of peace agreements and

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framework policies using an analytical framework based on three different types of values of nature proposed by IPBES (2022). Informed by our theoretical approach from political ecology we discuss such analysis in relation to natures' contribution to sustainable peace in Northern Uganda.

Our central argument is that for peace to be sustainable, understandings and values stemming from peoples directly affected by armed conflicts and dependent on their natural environment should permeate peace narratives and strategies. In particular, relational values of nature become central for nurturing relations among peoples and among peoples and their environment, regulating conflict, and eventually assisting the possibilities for long-lasting peace.

Our analysis focuses on (i) the 15 peace documents signed between the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda (GoU) between 1994 and 2008; and on (ii) the framework policies enacted by the GoU to promote peace and reconstruct and develop the conflict-affected region. Such framework policies are the Peace, Reconstruction and Development Plan (PRDP) in its three phases. In each of these selected documents we observe whether there are environmental considerations or references to "nature" and if so, we analyze how these are brought in relation to peace. Using the three different types of values from our analytical framework, we assess what types of values are predominant and when relational values are brought to the front, we look into how this was done.

Our document analysis shows that considerations toward nature (or environmental considerations) were incorporated in only one peace agreement - the one on "comprehensive solutions" - as well as in each of the three phases of the PRDP. In the peace agreement and the first two phases of the PRDP, because of its role as natural resources for economic development (as a proxy for peace) nature seems to be valued predominantly from an instrumental approach. In the third and final phase, nature is also valued from an instrumental approach, but this time not as a resource but as a possible driver of conflict (as natural disasters). Environmental considerations are brought here in relation to vulnerability to climate change. However, we see that relational values of nature surface in some documents, albeit to a lesser extent and in relation to one particular social group, pastoralists. We conclude that a narrow understanding of nature (as natural resources) and peace (as economic prosperity) permeates the narratives of the documents studied, and ultimately human-nature relations, limiting the possibilities for sustaining peace.

This article is structured as follows. In the next section, we introduce the peacemaking process between the LRA and GoU. We give an overview of the situation of the natural environment at the end of the conflict and current trends, and we show how some local communities and ethnic groups culturally relate to nature and the natural environment beyond material resources or services for livelihoods. In the following section, we contextualize our study in current debates about the role of nature in peacebuilding and present our theoretical approach focused on political ecology understandings of the nature-human divide and at the nexus between peace and nature contributions to people. We also present here our analytical framework based on the IPBES (2022) conceptualization of diverse valuations of nature. In the methodological section, we explain how we selected the eighteen documents for our analysis. We then summarize the results of our analysis, describing how nature or the natural environment is explicitly represented or brought to the fore in the selected documents, and indicate missing opportunities to incorporate environmental considerations. Based on this we interpret the roles given to nature or the natural environment in the peace process and critically interpret how these roles elicit particular values of nature based on our analytical framework. We do this first for the peace agreement documents and then for the policy frameworks. In the final remarks, we conclude by discussing possible implications of such types of values of nature for sustainable peace in Northern Uganda and stress the importance of embracing diverse contributions of nature in peacebuilding policy narratives as well as different understandings of peace.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

The peace process in the region

Since its independence in 1962 until the end of the first decade of 2000, Uganda has gone through political instability and armed conflict, characterized by internal opposition to the central government, tensions with neighboring countries and internal disputes between different communities/ethnic/religious groups. Throughout the last 60 years, the levels of violence varied, with a few ceasefires being attempted and peace agreements signed (Lucima 2002). We will not delve here into the history of the conflict between diverse parties in Northern Uganda, but for a historical understanding about different armed conflicts, particularly involving the LRA, for example Doom and Vlassenroot (1999), Lucima (2002), Dunn (2004), Finnström (2006), or Atkinson (2009).

It is sufficient to note here that the conflict with the LRA arose around 1986 due to perceived inequalities between the northern and southern regions of the country. These inequalities, it was argued, stemmed from the "underdevelopment" of the northern subregions, resulting from an uneven distribution of resources predominantly concentrated in the southern subregions. This distribution was further explained by an ethnic divide (ACCS 2013).

One of the first attempts to cease violence with the LRA was in 1993 when the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRA/M, in government) tried to establish talks. This led to the signing of a ceasefire agreement in 1994 ("Gulu Ceasefire," document #15 in Table 1) between the NRA and the LRA. In the years that followed, the LRA continued attacks in the north, especially in the Acholi subregion, causing massacres, burning villages, carrying out abductions, and planting landmines (Lucima 2002).

There were diverse "peace initiatives" - or attempts to cease violence through negotiations - involving directly or indirectly the LRA after the decade of 1990 (Lucima 2002). However, it was not until the "Juba Peace Talks," mediated by the Government of Southern Sudan from 2006 to 2008, that it was possible to see progress in the peace process. According to Schomerus (2012:3), these talks are "[w]idely considered the most promising peace effort in the history of a violent conflict that began in 1986" and the "first truly international" effort toward peace, involving the LRA, the GoU and other parties brought in as guarantors of

Table 1. Peace documents signed among conflictive parties in Northern Uganda between 1994 and 2008.

Nº	Document	Date
1	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army, Juba, Sudan (Addendum 6)	01/03/2008
2	Agreement on Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration, Juba, Sudan	29/02/2008
3	Agreement on Implementation and Monitoring Mechanisms	29/02/2008
4	Agreement on a Permanent Ceasefire	23/02/2008
5	Implementation Protocol to the Agreement on Comprehensive Solutions	22/02/2008
6	Annexure to the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation	19/02/2008
7	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the LRA/M (Addendum 5)	30/01/2008
8	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the LRA/M (Addendum 4)	03/11/2007
9	Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army/ Movement	29/06/2007
10	Agreement on Comprehensive Solutions between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the LRA/M	02/05/2007
11	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the LRA/M (Addendum 3)	14/04/2007
12	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the LRA/M (Addendum 2)	16/12/2006
13	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the LRA/M (Addendum 1)	01/11/2006
14	Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement (LRA/M)	26/08/2006
15	The Agreement between the Uganda Government and the Lord's Resistance Army ("Gulu Ceasefire")	02/02/1994

peace (Mwaniki et al. 2009). There is consensus that the Juba Talks were paramount for peace and political change in the country (Schomerus 2012) and since then the region has enjoyed "relative" peace when the LRA troops moved out of the country.

These talks are particularly relevant for the present study because it was during this period that most of the peace agreements between GoU and LRA were produced (documents #1-14 in Table 1). The parties signed six separate agreements accompanied by respective implementation protocols on a range of issues: (a) cessation of hostilities, (b) solutions to conflict, (c) accountability, justice, and reconciliation, (d) permanent ceasefire, (e) implementation and monitoring mechanisms, and (f) disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR).

Besides presenting many process-oriented provisions, concerning accountability, justice and reconciliation and DDR, the agreements also provide a few value-driven propositions, mainly found in the Agreement on Comprehensive Solutions, which relate to (a) participation in national politics and institutions, (b) return, resettlement, and rehabilitation of internally displaced persons, (c) economic and social development, and (d) transitional security arrangements.

The GoU has sought to implement its commitments established in the agreements under the framework of the Peace, Reconstruction and Development Plan (PRDP), which would assist stakeholders implementing their programs in the region GoU (2007). Despite being called a "plan," the PRDP (in its three phases), was shaped as a general framework defining guiding principles and strategic objectives to coherently direct the recovery interventions of the government and development partners.

The first phase of the PRDP (PRDP 1) was enacted in 2006/7 with the main purpose to "consolidate peace and security and lay the foundation for recovery and development" (GoU 2007:vii). The plan sets out four strategic objectives (SO): (1) consolidation of state authority, (2) rebuilding and empowering communities, (3) revitalization of economy, and (4) peacebuilding and reconciliation. These objectives were all seen as mutually reinforcing and leading to the development of the region, which was understood as crucial for maintaining sustainable peace. Full-scale implementation of the first phase of the PRDP started in July 2009, and it was programmed to run until June 2012, when an evaluation of the PRDP would be carried out "to look at the longer term development needs in the North" (GoU 2011:35).

Based on a review and consultation carried out by GoU in 2011, it was understood that not all the objectives of the PRDP had been met, so a second phase of the PRDP (PRDP 2) was launched with adjustments (GoU 2011). PRDP 2 also framed interventions in Northern Uganda within the same four strategic objectives (SOs) as PRDP 1 and fourteen program areas (GoU 2011). However, the focus and content of each SO were adjusted so that program areas relating to immediate post-conflict and emergency activities were replaced by "programmes focusing more specifically on promoting economic recovery and mitigating potential conflict drivers (enterprise development, land administration, community dispute resolution and reconciliation)" (GoU 2011:ii).

It was envisaged that once PRDP 2 was concluded in 2015, future programming for north Uganda would be integrated into the National Development Plan. Nonetheless, in 2015, the third phase of the plan (PRDP 3) was launched, with its main goal being rephrased as "to enhance sustainable socio-economic development for Northern Uganda" (GoU 2015:iv). According to the document, considering that previous interventions were based on resettling of IDP and infrastructural development, and that the region had reached peace, it was time to focus on improving livelihoods and household incomes. PRDP 3 had three strategic objectives: (1) consolidation of peace, (2) development of the economy, and (3) reduction of vulnerability (GoU 2015).

The natural environment in Northern Uganda

In 2005, a comprehensive study sponsored by USAID and the Wildlife Conservation Society examined the impact of armed conflict on the environment and natural resource management in Northern Uganda. The study (Nampindo et al. 2005) analyzed changes in woody cover between 1985 and 2002 and revealed the loss of woodland in towns and IDP camps. The report attributed

these changes to internal migration caused by the conflict, as well as the expanding human population and conversion of natural vegetation to farmland in the southern districts of the north region, particularly those hosting IDP.

Interestingly, the study also highlighted a paradoxical effect of the armed conflict on environmental protection, specifically in terms of vegetation preservation. It was observed that territories where the LRA rebels were based or had limited access by the local population experienced vegetation restoration (Nampindo et al. 2005). This restoration could be attributed to the conflict itself, leading to a higher level of environmental conservation in those areas. Various other factors could also explain vegetation change in the region, such as climate change, the study concluded.

Eight years later - in a comprehensive study on post-conflict drivers of conflict in Northern Uganda - it was found that one of the "four most serious threats to long-term peace" across the region related to the natural environment (such as competition over natural resource, exploitation and access to land including oil, grazing, forests and over reserves, but also environmental deterioration and natural disasters) and that such threats could "inevitably return to overt conflict" (ACCS 2013). ACCS (2013) also concluded that despite the ceasefire with the LRA and the improvements brought by the PRDP and other humanitarian and development initiatives, many communities in Northern Uganda appear to be in a state of latent conflict" (ACCS 2013:viii).

Currently, communities in Northern Uganda face numerous environmental challenges, some of them resulting from the armed conflict, such as soil deterioration, water pollution, vegetation degradation, and landscape transformation due to urbanization around IDPC (Branch and Martiniello 2018, Huxta 2018, Muhumuz 2019, NEMA 2019, Hughes et al. 2019, Ochola 2021, Kaguta 2022, among others).

The most notable challenge "is deforestation of the native forest resources and massive afforestation aimed at averting the possible deforestation consequences" (Nyeko 2012:342) driven by expansion of plantation agriculture, oil exploration and exploitation, and urban growth. Also, increasing population in the region, including other parts of Uganda, is placing a significant demand on energy and food resources (e.g., charcoal production, wetland drainage, etc.). Consequently, this resulted in changes in land use and land cover, raising concerns regarding their environmental and social impact in terms of both the pattern and extent of these changes (Nardi and Runnström 2024).

The relevance of nature to local communities and ethnic groups in Northern Uganda

Deforestation or natural vegetation degradation does not only imply the degradation of the resource base or ecosystem services (e.g., destruction of building materials, temperature regulation, soil fertilization, or biodiversity and habitat loss). Deforestation might imply the disappearance of certain species central for cultural practices that are relevant for relations building peace (Nardi 2020) and the destruction of common spaces (e.g., local forests) collectively used for cultural reproduction.

For different local communities in Northern Uganda the natural environment plays a significant role in their cultural life, particularly for the ethnic groups known as Acholi (from Acholi subregion), Langi (from Lango subregion), Madi (from some parts of West Nile subregion), Iteso (from Teso subregion), or Karamojong (from Karamoja subregion).

When analyzing human-nature interconnections in Northern Uganda, Nardi (2024) identified at least three ways in which the natural environment might contribute to peacebuilding beyond its role as natural resources or ecosystem services. For example, nature might work as a semiotic system assisting peoples to navigate their landscape and territories, to demarcate their lands, their commons, or their districts (e.g., a tree at a side of a water string as boundary) particularly so in rural settings. Nature also might function as public space, used and valued for gathering, meeting with family or neighbors (e.g., under a big tree) or as place for spiritual connections and encounters (e.g., some sacred tree or sites in a forest). Finally, nature is also a conduit for reconciliation (e.g., a tree whose seeds or roots are used for a ritual) between antagonistic groups. These contributions of nature to peace are based on relational values, that is, the nurturing of social-ecological relations, relations between people and between people and nature.

Since most of the population of Northern Uganda were placed into IDPC, many natural features of the landscape which were used to demarcate lands were gone after twenty years of armed conflict. So, when people returned home, for many - particularly those who lived most of their life in camps - it was difficult to recognize, navigate their lands. This, according to OHCHR (2008) resulted in disputes and land conflicts between families, clans, tribes, and with the authorities.

Social-ecological relations permeate also the customary justice systems. The Acholi, Iteso, Langi, or Madi people have different traditional mechanisms to bring reconciliation, accountability, and reparation (e.g., *ailuc*, *culo kwor*, *kayo cuk*, *mato oput*, *tonu ci koka*). Some of these mechanisms are processes in which ceremonies and rituals are performed to reconcile parties formerly in conflict, after accountability or for reparation.

Taking a closer look, we notice that in all rituals and ceremonies, diverse elements of nature found in the local environment (e.g., particular plants, roots, seeds, and animals) are important (Harlacher 2009). In the Acholi culture, the *mapo oput* reconciliation process conducted after the killing of someone from a friendly clan, for instance, is named after a local tree whose roots are used in the ceremonial rituals (Nardi 2024). According to Moll-Rocek (2016) "there is perhaps no single tree more vital in the great work of healing from the brutal civil war that has raged throughout Acholiland for over twenty years." Many advocates of *mato oput* believe that this cultural traditional holds the potential to bring genuine healing, reconciliation, and reconstruction to Northern Uganda in ways that the international justice system cannot (Wasonga 2009).

In the peak of the *mato oput* ceremony, a process that might take many days, the disputed parties who are to be bound again, drink oput together, a bitter preparation done with smashed roots of the oput tree. It is considered that after consuming the beverage, bitterness between the groups is left behind. There is a special social-ecological relation between the Acholi people and the oput tree which is central for reconciliation and harmony but also justice, all connected to building peace (Wasonga 2009).

THEORETICAL APPROACH AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical approach

Political ecology scholars (Escobar 1998, Blaikie 1999) have successfully shown that ideas and values related to nature and human interactions with nature are not necessarily given but are socially constructed through narratives, discourses, and ideology (Robbins 2012). From different disciplines and interdisciplinary fields, scholars have explored the ways in which people perceive and interact with nature or the natural environment, emphasizing the situatedness of human-nature relationships (e.g., Ingold 2000) and the co-construction of social/natural realities (e.g., Latour 2005). Scholars have also shown the importance of considering people's diverse ontological understandings of nature as well as the relational values among peoples and nature for well-being, sustainability, or justice (Chan et al. 2016, Pascual et al. 2023). Some have also highlighted how the problem of climate change is socially constructed and resulting from interplays of power and knowledge (Pettenger 2007). It is from this critical understanding of the dynamic interplay of people/nature mutually co-constituting each other through social-ecological relations that we approach our analysis.

From this approach, we contextualize our analysis at the intersection of current debates in environmental peacebuilding and sustainable development - particularly nature contributions to peoples and values of nature. Following Richmond (2011), we understand sustainable peace as a state of enduring peace characterized by the absence of violent conflict, accompanied by a robust foundation of social justice, equitable development, and inclusive governance where local and contextual perspectives play a central role. Sustainable peace encompasses not only the cessation of overt hostilities but also the establishment of conditions that address the root causes of conflict, promote reconciliation, foster intergroup harmony, and ensure the well-being and security of all individuals and communities involved. In this understanding we see the natural environment and/or nature plays a central role for reconciliation, harmonious relations, justice, and development.

At the nexus between post-conflict peacebuilding and nature policy and research

Since 2009, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has been calling the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission and the international community in general to integrate natural resources and environmental issues and concerns into peacebuilding interventions and conflict prevention (UNEP 2009). UNEP argued back then that conventional approaches to peacebuilding were often less interested in the inclusion of environmental concerns during post-conflict and peacebuilding stages, developing recommendations to close this gap. Among the six recommendations, four are related to peace processes, namely: (a) addressing the natural environment in the peace process (peacemaking and peacekeeping), (b) integrating environmental issues in peacebuilding strategies, (c) employing natural resources for economic recovery, and (d) considering environmental cooperation for peace consolidation.

In the first recommendation, UNEP (2009) focuses on states' capacities to implement natural resource management and environmental governance, including natural resource distribution, mentioning mineral, timber, land, and water as natural resources that are key in peace mediation in most geographies. In the second recommendation, UNEP (2009) stresses that peacebuilding strategies should acknowledge the role that natural resources played during a conflict because this has repercussions in post-conflict interventions where the natural environment plays an important role, such as promoting economic development. UNEP (2009) also recognizes that local peoples' needs in relation to their natural environment may - in the long run - "complicate the task of fostering peace and even contribute to conflict relapse" (ibid). In the third recommendation, UNEP (2009) emphasizes the role of nature as "natural resources" for economic growth and development during the post-conflict period, calling for sustainable management in extraction processes, while in the fourth recommendation, UNEP (2009) also notes that environmental management can play an important role in building cooperation and catalyzing dialogue between antagonistic groups.

Since UNEP's report was published, more than ten years ago, academic and policy debates have expanded, with growing interest in research and policy at the nexus of sustainable peace and environmental protection, as seen in the emerging field of environmental peacebuilding (Ide et al. 2023). From different disciplines and theoretical strands, the field of environmental peacebuilding brings to the fore the argument that nature or the natural environment plays a key role in consolidating and sustaining peace. It highlights how cooperation among parties for environmental protection and sustainable resource management can work as tools for conflict prevention and resolution, but also sustainable peace and development (for example, Conca and Dabelko 2002, Dam-de Jong 2013, Waisová 2015, Krampe 2017, Ogden 2018, Krampe et al. 2021, Brown and Nicolucci-Altman 2022).

Acknowledging the importance of placing the natural environment in the peace agenda by the international community as well as the conceptual advances done in the academic and policy field of environmental peacebuilding, we approach the role of nature in sustainable peace from a critical stance.

Analytical framework

In line with our critical approach, we argue that nature or the natural environment has many more different roles to play or contributions to make to sustainable peace than merely as natural resources to be exploited or biodiversity to be preserved, as advocated by UNEP (2009). In fact, as academic research has shown, people care about nature or their natural environment not only for instrumental reasons (e.g., nature is provider of resources and services) or its intrinsic value (e.g., nature is good in itself). Relational values are central to understanding why people engage in conservation or restoration of their natural environment (e.g., through nature we encounter each other). These kinds of values emerge not from the individual satisfaction that nature brings to people (as a resource or service for instance) nor from the value that nature has in itself independently of how it satisfies people's needs (Chan et al. 2016). Relational values of nature are those that emerge from relations among individuals and collectives and their natural environment. It is in those relations (social-

ecological relations) that it is possible to understand people's possibilities of well-being (e.g., reconciliation, harmony, justice, peace, development). Chan et al. (2016) advocate for engaging seriously with relational values in order to design and implement better environmental policies.

From this approach, the "local" or "localized" relations are important because it helps to understand how some worldviews and local knowledges rooted in cultural relations incentivize peoples to care for their natural environment and the social-ecological relations that co-constitute them (Chan et al. 2012, 2016). This is particularly relevant in policymaking as it might be the case that peacebuilding policies are designed elsewhere and later "consulted" with those directly affected by armed conflicts.

Developed from extensive research on empirical understandings of diverse human-nature relationships across different regions and social contexts, the IPBES (2022) typology incorporates the above discussion and highlights how different worldviews and knowledge systems influence the ways people interact with and value nature. According to IPBES (2022), judgments regarding nature's importance in particular situations can be grouped into the following three specific value categories:

- **Instrumental values** refer to the value of nature as a "means to an end." The natural world is valued as a resource, capital, asset to the benefit of people. An example of this kind of valorization is when we refer to nature as a natural resource or capital or an ecosystem service.
- **Intrinsic values** refer to the value of nature "in itself." The natural world is valued for its intrinsic value independently of people or the benefits that might bring to people. The valuation is still done by people, but there is no obvious reference to how nature might benefit people. An example of this type of value relates to species habitats or species that are worth protecting as ends in and of themselves.
- **Relational values** refer to the value of nature for the meaningfulness of people-nature interactions, as well as interactions among people (including across generations) through nature. An example of this kind of valorization would be that related to the importance of nature for personal or community identity (e.g., as farmers, fishers, gardeners) or the connection with spirituality and presence in this world (e.g., sense of belonging, place, reciprocity).

Following IPBES (2022), the combination of these specific values with peoples' different worldviews (ways through which people conceive and interact with the world), knowledge systems (bodies of knowledge, practices, and beliefs) and broad values (guiding principles and life goals) allows for multiple pathways toward sustainability. It is also the case that certain worldviews (for instance, anthropocentrism) will emphasize values of nature of a specific category (for instance, instrumental values of nature for humans in anthropocentrism).

Since people apply different valuation systems across time and space, trade-offs between scales should be considered when designing policies to promote sustainable peace and development. Diaz et al. (2015) suggest "a multi-scale and cross-scale perspective" to support compromises between policy sectors. This is relevant to consider when studying peacebuilding policies in low-income economies because trade-offs between economic growth, sociocultural well-being, nature preservation, political stability, and conflict prevention have to be made.

Methodology

The relevance of studying Northern Uganda

The internal armed conflict between the LRA and National Resistance Movement (NRM)/Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF, later GoU) was the longest in time in Uganda (Branch 2011). The conflict was characterized by mass displacement of people into camps (approx. 1.4 million) which resulted in an uneven geographical pattern of environmental degradation and conservation (OHCHR 2008). From an environmental approach, this is relevant because time is central to understanding certain ecological processes such as forest restoration or deterioration and the environment-related peace challenges and opportunities after the conflict.

Since the conflict took place mainly in the Acholi subregion (inhabited by the Acholi people), there are implications for peace and development policies that emanate from the GoU, which is administered by another ethnic group (for instance, due to resentment resulting from perceived unfair resource allocation). The increasingly unrecognized tribalism (Mukalazi 2021) goes against one of the governance guiding principles of the peace process. Therefore, it is relevant to look into peace documents (agreements and policies) that have been conceptualized from another region of the country, by GoU.

Methodological approach

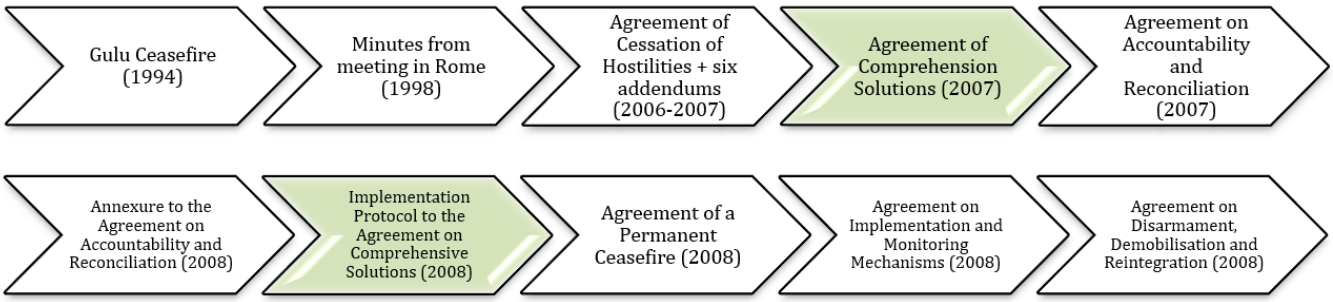
Our methodological approach is based on a conceptual analysis of selected key strategic documents developed by or with considerable contribution from the GoU aiming at laying the foundations for peacemaking and peacebuilding in Northern Uganda. Even though there are other relevant stakeholders designing (and implementing) peacebuilding policies and projects on the ground - such as those from the international community, financial organizations, or national and local NGOs, we have limited our analysis to documents formulated mainly by the GoU as this is one of the main actors in forging a peace narrative and developing strategic documents that shape interventions by other stakeholders in the conflict-affected region.

Data collection: selection of documents

For the selection of the documents to be analyzed, we performed an online search using Peace Agreement Access Tool PA-X (https://www.peaceagreements.org) which resulted in 17 agreements matching the criteria for country/entity "Uganda," with agreement/conflict level "intrastate/ intrastate conflict." Two documents that did not refer to the armed conflict between LRA and NRM/UPDF (GoU) were discarded. Table 1 shows the total number of peace agreements (15) analyzed, in chronological order from the most recent.

In addition to these agreements, we have also selected for the analysis the PRDP (in its three phases) since the PRDP is not only mentioned in the Comprehensive Solutions Agreement (2007, clause 10) as a key document for sustaining peace in Northern Uganda but was also developed as an overarching framework to guide all involved stakeholders when implementing their programs and initiatives in the region. As a result, 18 documents were analyzed.

Fig. 1. Peace documents between LRA and GoU analyzed. In color, those documents where environmental considerations have been incorporated.



Data analysis

Our analysis aimed at identifying, in each document, (a) whether environmental considerations were incorporated and if so, how nature was represented, and (b) the role assigned to nature or the natural environment in the peace process. As for "representation," we mean how considerations to nature or the natural environment were mentioned, defined, or put forward; and as "role" we mean the function nature or the natural environment was given in relation to peace (e.g., a tool, a resource, a service, a cultural asset, a relation, a means to an end, a driver for social change or justice, etc.).

We used considerations, representations, and roles to interpret the types of values of nature that were incorporated in the peace documents. Our purpose was not trying to explain why certain values of nature permeate peace agreements or peace policies in Northern Uganda. Such an attempt would require another methodological approach (for example, based on fieldwork producing qualitative primary data via interviews with stakeholders involved in the peace agreements and/or policies).

For the identification of considerations regarding "nature" or "the natural environment" in the documents, we read each of them through the lenses of our theoretical approach and within the analytical framework. We try to accommodate between our theoretical approach (society and nature are co-constituted) and an operative and contingent definition in which society and nature are divorced. We particularly paid attention to: (i) measures and initiatives related to the environment, such as environmental management and impacts (conservation, protection, restoration, degradation, deforestation, etc.); (ii) mentions to ecosystems or elements from the biophysical world, from climate to fauna, water (rivers, lakes, wetlands, etc.) and soil. We also consider (iii) processes that could involve social-ecological or human-environment relations, such as "urbanization," "infrastructure," "sanitation," "energy," etc. This is because we understand that such issues are conceptually related to the natural environment and, therefore, an opportunity to address environmental considerations. Nevertheless, we have not systematically looked into missing opportunities to incorporate environmental considerations (this was not a research question) but whenever possible - within space limits - we have done so.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS AND VALUES OF NATURE IN PEACE AGREEMENTS AND FRAMEWORK POLICIES

In this section, we address how nature/the natural environment has been represented in the selected documents. We start by describing the documents and identifying when and how environmental considerations are done (and could have been done), and then we analyze which roles and valuations of nature are present.

Peace agreements (1994–2008)

Incorporating nature/natural environment in peace agreements

From the fifteen agreements analyzed, two documents made considerations to nature/natural environment: the Agreement of Comprehension Solutions (2007) and its Implementation Protocol (2008). The remaining agreements and related documents (e.g., annexes, minutes, etc.) did not mention anything related to nature/the natural environment nor did they bring forth any environmental considerations (e.g., degradation, restoration, etc.). Figure 1 represents, in chronological order, the documents analyzed, highlighting those where references to nature/natural environment were made.

In the Agreement of Comprehension Solutions, signed in May 2007, the parties introduced for the first time an environmental concern in a peace document. In clause 14 ("Issues Relating to Land"), under section E (Economic and Social Development of North and Northeastern Uganda), the parties state that: "the conflict in north and northeastern Uganda has caused significant environmental degradation. In this regard, measures shall be taken to restore and manage the environment sustainably" (clause 14.6). Besides this very clear consideration to environmental degradation, there is also another nature-relevant clause in the same document that refers to livestock (clause 13), also under section E: "The parties recognize the substantial loss of livestock, in the north and northern parts of Uganda which loss has had severe social and economic implications" (clause 13.1).

Almost one year later, in the Implementation Protocol to the Comprehensive Solutions Agreement, signed in February 2008, under the section Economic and Social Development of north and northeastern Uganda, and the subtitle "Environment," the parties stated that "[t]he government shall promote policies and

Fig. 2. Considerations towards nature/natural environment in peace agreements between UPDF and LRA (2007–2008).

programmes to address and mitigate any adverse environmental impacts of the conflict" (clause 20). In clause 29, under the same title, the parties agreed that the "government shall implement the restocking programme under the supervision of the implementing agency identified in clause 11 of the principal agreement, and in accordance with clause 13 of the principal agreement."

Despite the brief reference to the environment in the Comprehensive Solutions Agreement and its Implementation Protocol, these documents raised the environment to the forefront of the peace process concerns and priorities in Northern Uganda. It is interesting to note, however, that even though other sections of the agreement referred to themes that could be related to nature or the natural environment (e.g., impacts of resettlement), environmental concerns were mentioned only under the section on economic development issues.

It is also interesting to note that the Comprehensive Solutions Agreement acknowledged only negative aspects related to the natural world (environmental deterioration and livestock decrease) resulting from the conflict. It did not acknowledge positive outcomes of the conflict on the natural environment such as vegetation preservation and/or restoration. Figure 2 presents a summary of the considerations towards nature/natural environment in peace agreements between UPDF and LRA (2007–2008).

Finally, we observe that environmental concerns could have been brought also in other peace documents, such as the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation (Table 1, document #9). The document clearly stated that the parties have engaged in negotiations "to promote reconciliation and restore harmony and tranquility within the affected communities and in Uganda generally" and that they are "driven by the need for adopting appropriate justice mechanisms, including customary processes of accountability, that would resolve the conflict while promoting reconciliation." As shown above, traditional justice mechanisms based on ritual and ceremonies rely deeply on the natural environment.

Roles and valuations of nature/natural environment in peace agreements

Lack of economic growth is portrayed as one of the main drivers of conflict (absence of peace). Therefore, spurring development and economic growth motorized by natural resource exploitation is considered to be central for peacebuilding and consolidation according to Comprehensive Solutions Agreement.

As economic development is understood as central for sustainable peace in Northern Uganda, the main environmental concern in this agreement and protocol is that the natural environment should be sustainably managed (and restored to a certain extent) so that economic and social development can take place in the affected region.

Nature is understood or conceptualized as "natural resources". Its role is to be exploited or put under production to restore local livelihoods (e.g., access to land, farming, fishing, etc.). We thus argue that in the Comprehensive Solutions Agreement, nature is valued in relation to "development" and not "peace" per se. Nature/environment is brought to the forefront of peace negotiations because of its instrumental values in relation to the economy: it has a relevant role to play in the economic and social development of the region, which is necessary for stability and peace.

Given the fact that for local communities - and particularly certain ethnic groups - the natural world is central for initiating processes of reconciliation and accountability, as shown previously, we argue here that environmental considerations or consideration toward nature could have been brought in this peace agreement in relation to justice. From this approach, nature is important because through the localized social-ecological relations, reconciliation, and accountability become possible. Such relations are central for justice and ultimately sustainable peace. Here there is a missing opportunity to bring relational values of nature for peacebuilding.

Unfortunately, since the Comprehensive Solutions Agreement settles the ground for understanding nature or the natural environment as highly connected to peace as economic growth/

development (and not justice and reconciliation), it is not surprising to see an instrumental valuation of nature reflected in the first PRDP, as we will show.

Peacebuilding, Reconstruction and Development Plan (PRDP) (2007–2021)

Incorporating nature/the natural environment in the PRDP

PRDP 1 (2007–2011). In the first phase of the PRDP (2007 to 2011), the natural environment was approached more explicitly within the Strategic Objective (SO) on Economic Revitalization (SO3), and more briefly within Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (SO4). In the other SOs, namely Consolidation of State Authority (SO1) and Rebuilding and Empowering Communities (SO2), environmental considerations are briefly or indirectly mentioned.

Under Economic Revitalization (SO3), the document stated that the PRDP "seeks to re-activate the productive sectors within the region, with particular focus on production and marketing, services and industry" (GoU 2007:viii). While the GoU appraised economic development as one of the main conditions for peace ("one of the major incentives for peace is to create the conditions for growth and prosperity," GoU 2007:76), it also pondered the fact that "revitalisation of the economy has both positive and negative influences on the environment, therefore, mechanisms for sound management of environment and natural resources will have to be reinforced" (GoU 2007:viii).

Under the fifth priority action of SO3, which focused on reinforcing mechanisms for sound management of environment and natural resources, the PRDP foresaw the creation of an Environmental and Natural Resource Management Programme (ENRMP). With the introduction of the ENRMP, the PRDP emphasized the role that natural resources play in the national economy. The need to sustainably manage the environment derives from the fact that "the massive dependence on natural resource base for livelihood has resulted in deterioration of the productivity of the resource" and that "poor farming methods and the crude implements used in farming, overexploitation of resources and an increasing population has resulted in soil degradation, biodiversity loss, deforestation and water pollution/contamination" (GoU 2007:91).

The aim of the ENRMP was described as to support "communities" livelihoods and "promote sustainable use of the environment and natural resources" through: (1) the protection and development of forest areas on farms and within District and Central forest reserves, (2) the restoration of degraded ecosystems, and enhance sustainable conservation and management of wetlands, riverbanks, lakeshores, hilly and mountainous areas; and the development of local skills and capacity for environment planning and management" (GoU 2007:92). Fostering natural resource management and investment in "rehabilitation" of conservation areas is needed since "[a]s peace returns and populations move back to their original homes, there will be increasing demand for fuel wood and use of forest land for farming and other income generating activities" and this "will increase the pressure on local leaders to demand the degazettement of protected areas to provide land for agriculture and fuel needs" (GoU 2007:92).

Within SO4 (Peacebuilding and Reconciliation), the GoU explained that efforts would be made to enhance local reconciliation and conflict management mechanisms in the Northeastern subregion, focusing on addressing inter-ethnic disputes and improving natural resource management (GoU 2007:94). In this sense, PRDP 1 moved forward in its understanding of the role of nature in peacebuilding from the peace agreements by acknowledging its potential role as conflict driver.

According to the document, people living in IDP camps faced conflicts arising from the use of land and other resources that belonged to the hosting communities and conflicts would increase over natural resource management, particularly land and water, especially in areas of high return. Also, in northeastern Uganda, conflicts involving pastoralists resulted from "competition over scarce resources in a hostile environment, fueled by the proliferation of small arms" (GoU 2007:96-97). According to the PRDP 1, "pastoralists are forced to move in search of water and pasture for livestock within and outside the Karamoja subregion during droughts. Key contributing factors include reduced access to pastures and watering points due to land gazetting, cattle raids, availability of market for stolen cattle, and the socio-economic value attached to cattle" (GoU 2007:96-97).

Finally, in SO2 (Rebuilding and Empowering Communities), the GoU approached themes such as the provision of basic social services (education, health and water and sanitation) and livelihood support to conflict-affected populations, which present interconnections with nature/environment (as natural resource and service). The section on water and sanitation acknowledged that "provision of safe water supply and sanitation facilities and their proper management and utilization, are necessary conditions for health, economic development and vital for the welfare of society" (GoU 2007:65). It is noted that, the most prevalent diseases afflicting the population have direct links to poor water supply and environmental sanitation, therefore, education programs developed under SO2 were to include a component on environmental sanitation and health.

PRDP 2 (2012–2015). Launched in 2012, the second phase of the PRDP maintained the four strategic objectives of the first phase but saw different program areas adapted and developed to reflect the change in context since PRDP 1 was developed in 2007 (e.g., the abandonment of IDP camps). It is not our focus to explain why certain environmental considerations were kept or included throughout the different phases of the PRDPs - which would entail broad analysis of underlying political, economic, social and other contextual factors and another methodological approach - but it is worth mentioning that changes could also have been a result of the plan's own evaluation processes (GoU 2011).

Main considerations to nature were more explicitly made under the strategic objective on Economic Revitalization (SO3). "Natural Resource Management" - this time without mentioning "Environmental management" (as in PRDP 1) - was explicitly incorporated as one of the four program areas (PA12) of SO3. The program focused on "strengthening the capacity of District Environment Offices in two areas: community sensitization and monitoring and enforcement of environmental laws and, the planting of trees to reduce soil erosion" (GoU 2011:iii).

As in PRDP 1, the GoU acknowledged in the PRDP2 that "economic growth and prosperity are key to ensuring sustainable peace and recovery" (GoU 2011:27). When presenting the PA12 (Natural Resource Management), the GoU recognized that natural resource management "has received limited attention under the PRDP to date, despite the fact that the majority of districts in the PRDP region face serious problems related to deforestation, erosion and soil degradation" (GoU 2011:31).

Water received attention under SO3, as a new area of intervention, called "Water for Production" which was included under PA10 (Production and Marketing) and focused on construction and rehabilitation of valley tanks, valley dams, canals, drainage, and ponds. Water was also addressed in SO2 (Empowering Communities), where it was highlighted that provision of water was a key issue in the northern region.

PRDP3 (2015–2021). According to the GoU (2015) the third phase of the PRDP, was developed based on a wider consultation process, involving not only interviews with policymakers and development partners (as in PRDP 2) but also interviews with civil society organizations and representatives of the private sector and focus group discussions with representatives of vulnerable groups in Northern Uganda including people with disabilities, formerly abducted children and women affected by the conflict.

PRDP 3 was structured differently from previous phases. Its three strategic objectives (Consolidation of Peace, Development of the Economy, and Reduction of Vulnerability) were broken down into specific Thematic Areas (TA) and not into broad Program Areas (PA) as done in PRDP 1 and 2. The TAs were streamlined in "possible areas of intervention" focusing on most critical issues. They were qualified as "possible" because "the selection of these interventions will be based on an assessment of most critical gaps" (GoU 2015:ix).

In this new phase of the PRDP, the GoU brought in a new nature-relevant element to the narrative: climate change. Climate change was recognized as having an increasingly negative impact on people's lives, specifically arid and flood-prone areas. In connection with climate change, it is also highlighted that "over 90% of the population rely on biomass for their energy needs, and this has contributed to significant deforestation which impacts on agro-ecosystems" (GoU 2015:6).

Among the current challenges to peace and security in the Northern region, the GoU highlights the existence of disputes over land and natural resources (including oil, minerals, forest, and other reserves), emphasizing that disputes exist among different actors (between communities, state institutions and communities, investors, and communities, and along Uganda's borders). According to GoU (2015) most of the court cases in the region are land-related and "unresolved disputes will also deter investors" (GoU 2015:8).

The PRDP 3 also approached the worrying trends of urbanization in the north of the country, highlighting mostly its economic and social consequences (missing, therefore, an opportunity to approach its environmental consequences): "increasing numbers of people are moving to urban areas and this trend is likely to escalate. ... Urbanization could help to drive economic growth, but experience shows it can lead to greater inequality and put significant strain on urban planning capacity and access to services" (GoU 2015:6).

The GoU recognized that "growth needs to be sensitive to gender, conflict, and environmental considerations" and that in case "growth is not inclusive and broad-based - leading to sustainable improvements in employment and living standards for the population of Northern Uganda - then it will be fragile and risk exacerbating social and environmental pressures" (GoU 2015:10).

Most of the consideration to nature or the natural environment were done in PRDP 3 under the new strategic objective (SO3) which focused on the Reduction of Vulnerabilities. Among the nature-relevant "priority thematic areas" under SO3, there was only one (out of three) relevant for our analysis: Resilience to Climate Change. This TA identified possible areas of intervention: (a) "[p]rogramme to reduce charcoal usage by promoting alternative forms of energy and increasing access to energy-saving stoves" and (b) "[s]upporting environmental protection activities" (GoU 2015:21).

Access to land and agriculture productivity and value chains are TA under SO2 on economic development. These TA include (a) community empowerment interventions (e.g., restocking, animal traction), (b) supporting provision of water for production, and (c) land access program.

Despite these considerations, in PRDP 3 the GoU did not indicate a particular thematic area to approach environmental or natural resource management (as done in the previous phases) despite the worrying trends on natural vegetation depletion due to charcoal overproduction. Even though access to land and natural resources were identified as major drivers of conflict, the interventions regarding "access to land" focus on improving clarity of land titling aiming at removing barriers to the development of business and the need to develop processes that help build trust between local communities and potential investors.

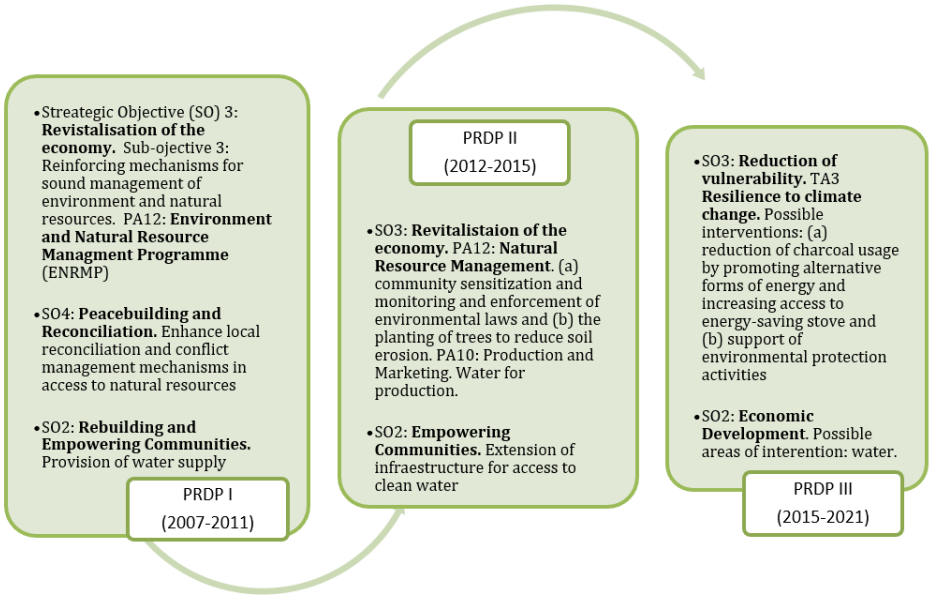
Figure 3 summarizes the main findings regarding how considerations about nature and the natural environment were made across the three phases of the PRDP.

Roles and valuations of nature/natural environment in the PRDP

We observe that the GoU incorporated different environmental considerations into its framework policy regarding peace, reconstruction, and development in Northern Uganda, expressing different roles that nature should play within the peace consolidation process in the region. In PRDP 1, we observe different roles assigned to "nature": (a) natural resources to be exploited for economic growth/development (e.g., soil, cattle) (b) essential resource for a healthy life (water), (c) object of conservation and sustainable management to be further restored (forests, cattle), (d) driver of conflict between local communities and peoples (common land, forests), and finally as (e) essential to the development of cultural practices of specific social groups (cattle for pastoralists).

In PRDP 2, concerns about the environmental impacts of returnees and the spatial expansion of agriculture as drivers of conflict are no longer present. Considerations about the role of nature for groups such as pastoralists are not mentioned either. The Environmental and Natural Resource Management Programme is kept and emphasized under SO3 (Revitalization of the economy), but the "Environmental" component is removed from the name of the program. It is telling that this term is left out of the narrative. One interpretation could be that since the

Fig. 3. Considerations towards the natural environment in the three Peace, Reconstruction, and Development plans (PRDP).



term "environment" usually refers to "surroundings" in which humans (and other-than-humans) live, we think that by eliminating the term, those people being "surrounded" (local communities) are in some way also eliminated from the narrative.

In this context, the main roles assigned to nature in peace consolidation in PRDP 2 are (a) as natural resources (soil, natural vegetation) to be exploited for revitalizing the economy, (b) as natural resources to be accessed and used for a healthy life (water), (c) as something to be protected and restored (e.g., through laws and regulations).

Finally, PRDP 3 differs from the previous ones for approaching the role of nature in peace consolidation through a different perspective. Instead of focusing on the role of nature in relation to its potential to economic growth as earlier, nature is understood as exacerbating local peoples' vulnerabilities and impacting livelihoods, health, and safety. Environmental considerations are done in relation to climate change and natural disasters affecting particular vulnerable groups (women, children, elderly) and particular communities (those in landslides and drought-prone areas). In this sense, proposed peace and development strategies become more localized and focused.

Even though environmental considerations were primarily made in connection to vulnerability, the relevance for the economy is still present. It permeates the notion that nature is to be exploited (instrumental value) and that nature (climate change) might be a driver of conflict between peoples. Emphasis is put on the private sector (e.g., sugarcane or oil companies) as a driver of local income generation to "untapping the potential" of the region to catch up with the rest of the country, while at the same time lessening the relevance of local livelihoods from most of the population, highly dependent on nature. All this is telling considering the context (conflicts over access to land, vegetation deterioration, charcoal overproduction, wetland destructions, etc.) as earlier mentioned.

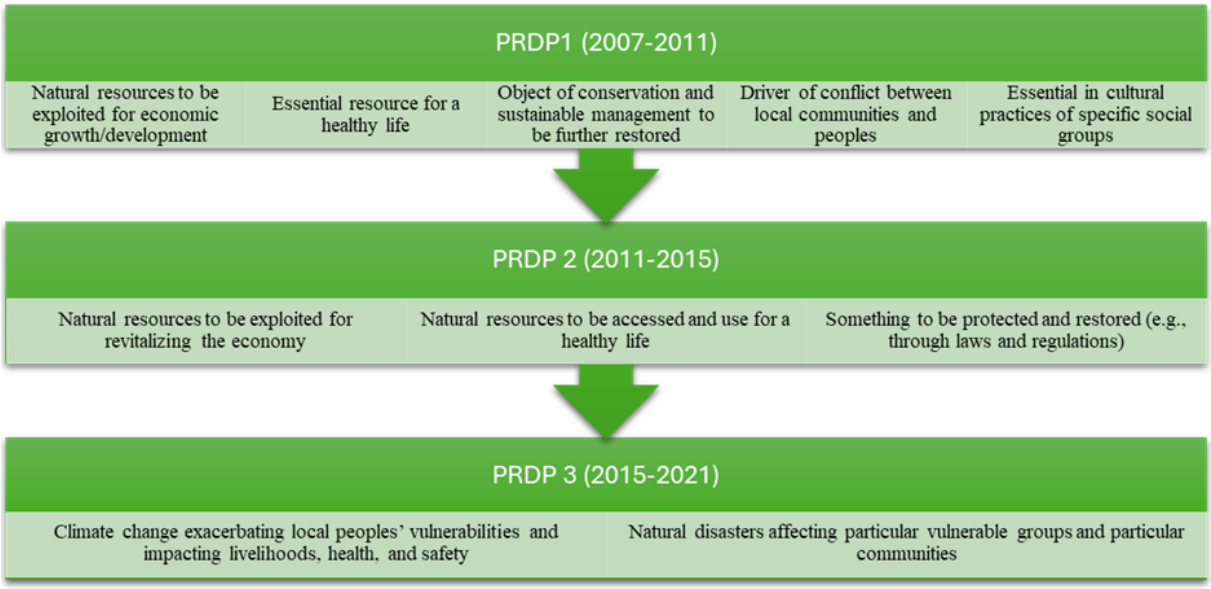
Reduction of vulnerabilities in the context of climate change is the focus; however, the document does not approach the underlying political, social, economic, and ecological conditions that allow or exacerbate vulnerabilities and the differentiated impacts of a changing climate on people. As pointed out by scholars approaching the problem of climate change as a social construct, the discursive frames matter for accountability. In documents where the "global" aspect of climate change is emphasized, there tends to be a blurring of the local elements that are driving adverse impacts and of local/regional stakeholders' responsibilities.

Overall, we observe there is a tendency throughout the three phases of the PRDP to approach nature/natural environment from an instrumental valuation. There are, however, nuances to this tendency. In PRDP 1, the GoU also recognized that nature is valued differently by local communities and its use and access is highly relevant for local harmonious relations (relational value).

Since in rural communities of Uganda, the social reproduction of livelihoods and everyday life depends directly on the natural environment, depleting common natural resources - such as forests - could create social conflicts between households, families, and clans which would eventually deteriorate the social fabric. To put it in other words, if a common natural resource is gone, the social relations attached to it may also disappear or enter into conflict, threatening sustainable peace. The same can be observed in relation to landscape transformation as earlier stated in connection to land conflicts. Even though this relational value of nature was implied once (in connection to conflict over common lands/forests), this narrative does not permeate the PRDP.

The only time that the PRDP recognizes the importance of relational values of nature for sustainable peace is when addressing the concerns about pastoralists and livestock. When GoU (2007) recognized "the socio-economic value attached to cattle," it indicates that there are social values attached to animal

Fig. 4. Roles of nature or the natural environment in the three phases of the Peace, Reconstruction, and Development plans (PRDP).



ranching beyond economic ones. This is relevant because husbandry is not just another natural asset for pastoralists but central for their identity construction as a distinct group in Uganda. Pastoralists use nature (land and water, animals, and vegetation) in a distinctive way if compared to settlers (e.g., farmers). If they are impeded to reproduce cattle ranching, they are impeded to reproduce their culture, their community and identity as such, nomadic Karamojong.

We consider that in these understandings about the role of nature (e.g., protected land/vegetation, or cattle ranching) GoU (2007) showed that nature can be valued differently than as mere natural resources or services (e.g., water) to be exploited or put under production for economic growth (instrumental value). GoU (2007) showed that local communities (farmers, pastoralists) might value nature differently and for more than one purpose (cultural, social, political) at the same time.

In conclusion, we see missing opportunities to bring environmental considerations and recognition of relational values of nature for sustainable peace in other issues or sections of the PRDP (e.g., peacebuilding and reconciliation, urbanization). Even though an instrumental valuation of nature highly connected to the economy (nature as natural resources or services for economic growth, job creation, income generation, etc.) seems to be predominant in the three phases of the PRDP, the case of pastoralists shows that relational values of nature are relevant and worth having into account when cultural reproduction (and not economic production) is in focus. Figure 4 summarizes the diverse roles of nature in peace, reconstruction, and development.

FINAL REMARKS

As highlighted by IPBES (2022), there is a tendency among policy makers in focusing on supporting economic growth, overlooking the non-market values associated with nature's contributions to people despite the diversity of nature's values, especially those of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. This focus on nature's contributions to economic growth for sustaining long-term peace permeated UNEP (2009) recommendations to include nature in peacebuilding as described earlier. Our study has shown that a limited view of both peace and nature (and its contribution to peace) is reflected in the documents analyzed concerning the peace process in Northern Uganda.

The underlying narrative in the analyzed documents emphasizes peace as non-violent conflict and "stabilization" so that economic growth can take place and allow the northern region to catch up with the rest of the country in terms of "development." However, local understandings of peace go beyond economic growth and development. Traditional understandings of justice permeate local narratives of peacebuilding (Wasonga 2009) as for local communities in Northern Uganda, without accountability, reconciliation, and justice there cannot be peace (Lajul 2017).

We have shown that there is a narrow understanding of nature and that instrumental values predominate when the natural environment is considered in peace agreements and policy frameworks. However, we demonstrated that relational values of nature are extremely relevant for the specific context of Northern Uganda due to the contribution nature can make to bring people together in a harmonious manner, to reconcile, to relate to each other through livelihoods, to find common grounds for collective identity construction, or to facilitate resolving conflicts and bring justice, for example.

From our critical theoretical approach, we understand that peace - justice relations are not only socially constructed but also social-ecological relations. We have shown how different elements of nature are involved in some traditional justice mechanisms, as in the case of *mato oput*. The depletion of local natural vegetation resulted in certain endemic species disappearing or rare to find. This has a direct impact on the possibilities to perform ceremonies

and rituals. If *mato oput* trees or any other element from nature are no longer present due to ecosystem degradation, ceremonies cannot be done as usual, or reconciliation might take longer to be achieved. Environmental considerations (restoration, conservation, preservation, mitigation, etc.), therefore, need to be linked to other aspects of peace (e.g., justice, conflict resolution), not only economic development (e.g., cultural reproduction).

Since the analyzed documents never acknowledged whose values of nature are present in the narrative (except for the particular case of pastoralists), it is assumed that all local communities and actors are stakeholders valuing nature similarly (e.g., from an instrumental approach) without considering that nature might be used and valued differently by different people (ethnic or age groups, genders, etc.) and communities. While some, for example, would use gazetted land to attract tourism and revenues (e.g., safari hunts from abroad) some others would probably use it as common land for cultural reproduction (e.g., hunting, gathering, pasture, spiritual recreation, etc.). This type of use of nature entails values that are not merely instrumental, but also intrinsic and relational and that may enter into conflict between those who promote one or another use of nature. This is why when developing environmental peacebuilding and sustainable development frameworks, policymakers should have a closer understanding of whose nature is being approached, how nature is valued by different affected peoples, and whose understandings of peace matters.

There are multiple opportunities for the peacebuilding community to incorporate nature's contributions to people and diverse values of nature in peace agreements and subsequent policy frameworks and narratives. This is particularly relevant in the case of climate change narratives (e.g., focused on impacts, vulnerabilities, securitization) which tend to overshadow local processes of environmental change ultimately increasing vulnerabilities (e.g., access to food, or water), and driving to changes in the climate.

A multi-scalar approach becomes central to understand whose values of nature matters for peace consolidation and how different voices, worldviews, and valuation systems emanating from different scales are incorporated in policy frameworks (despite efforts done to include them, as stated in most of the policies) or disregarded, left out.

Ultimately, those who have the means or power to shape policies, narratives and discourses are the ones who end up determining whose understandings of nature, peace, or development matter most. Further research is needed in different post armed conflict settings around the world to understand how peace policies incorporate local knowledges, how local worldviews define peace and nature, as well as the cultural contributions of nature to people, with particular interest in relational values.

In the case of Uganda, since the Comprehensive Solution Peace Agreement stipulates that the GoU should address ethnic and regional differences and strive for equal opportunities for the Northern subregions of the country to participate in state institutions, we consider that narratives focused on instrumental values of nature that do not entirely represents the diversity of local views of peace and nature, could be detrimental for sustainable peace in Uganda, and might explain current environmental conflicts in the region. More research is needed in Northern Uganda to understand how and why particular values of nature predominate current peacebuilding strategies and development policies and fully comprehend the drivers of current environmental conflicts and climate change in peacetimes.

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Data Availability:

Data/code sharing is not applicable to this article because no data and code were analyzed for this study.

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