**The Issue of Environmental recovery in areas affected by conflict**

Environmental recovery is the process of restoring and rehabilitating ecosystems, natural resources, and communities that have been damaged by conflict. The UN has several laws covering the environment during conflict such as the Geneva conventions additional protocol 1977 article 35(3) which states “It is prohibited to use methods or means of warfare which are intended, or may be expected, to cause widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment.” Making it clear that intentional environmental damage is prohibited during conflict. However, damage can be done to ecosystems without targeting it and so armed conflicts often lead to environmental damage in several ways. One example is deforestation due to military operations, including the clearing of land for defensive purposed, weapons testing, and the use of landmines. Another is pollution caused by the use of chemical weapons as well as the burning of oil fields and industrial zones which can lead to significant air and water pollution. For example, during the Gulf War, retreating Iraqi forces set fire to hundreds of Kuwaiti oil wells, causing widespread environmental damage. These are examples of direct damage, but indirect environmental damage also occurs. Examples of indirect damage include displacement of communities as these refugees often place additional pressure on environments causing degradation of ecosystems.

Many things have been done in the past to recover areas affected by conflict UNEP (the UN environmental program) works with member states to strengthen the protection of the environment before, during, and after conflicts. Since 1999, UNEP has conducted over twenty-five post-conflict assessments using state-of-the-art science to determine the environmental impacts of war. For instance, from early 2018, the Iraqi government and UNEP partnered to build a cross-ministry team capable of tackling pollution from the conflict that was occurring.

One solution for this issue is encouraging environmental peace building. Environmental peace building is the process of using natural resources environmental management and ecosystem restoration to create peace. By intertwining peace practices with the environment, it could foster an environment in which peace is not seen as possible without factoring in the environment.

Another possible solution to reduce environmental damage is inclusive environmental governance. This encourages all members of the community are involved in restoration efforts. By doing this it could aid in reducing tensions and creating cohesion whilst also taking advantage of local knowledge which could help in individualising all recovery plan to each area thus possibly making them more sustainable as they may become more durable.

Although, there are challenges that can occur when trying to recover the environment in these areas of conflict. Such as a weak or collapsed government structure as was seen during the second Gulf war. This means that it may be difficult to communicate with those in power as a dramatic change has just occurred. Another reason could be aces to affected areas ongoing conflict can prevent environmental recovery teams from accessing affected areas. In regions where fighting continues, or where landmines and unexploded ordnance are still present, recovery efforts become even more challenging as recovery teams may not be able to enter due to safety concerns. However, the unexploded bombs themselves damage ecosystems by transferring toxic chemicals into there surroundings. This creates a double-edged problem which can be expensive to repair again causing further problems as areas involved in conflict often do not have substantial amounts of funds to dedicate to this as conflict is a great expense in itself.

Points to consider:

* What can be done to try and reduce the damage done to ecosystems during conflict?
* How can damage done to the environment during conflict be recovered?
* What does your country currently do to recover the environment in areas affected by conflict?
* Can any preexisting UN documents be improved to help in the recovery of ecosystems?
* What are potential issues that occur when recovering ecosystems?

Useful links

<https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/how-conflict-impacts-our-environment#:~:text=Armed%20conflicts%20use%20large%20quantities,human%20health%20and%20the%20environment.>

<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/rooting-environment-times-conflict-and-war#:~:text=However%2C%20despite%20these%20challenges%2C%20the,during%20and%20after%20armed%20conflict.>

<https://www.genevaenvironmentnetwork.org/resources/updates/protecting-the-environment-in-armed-conflict/>

<https://academic.oup.com/ia/article/97/1/1/6041492>