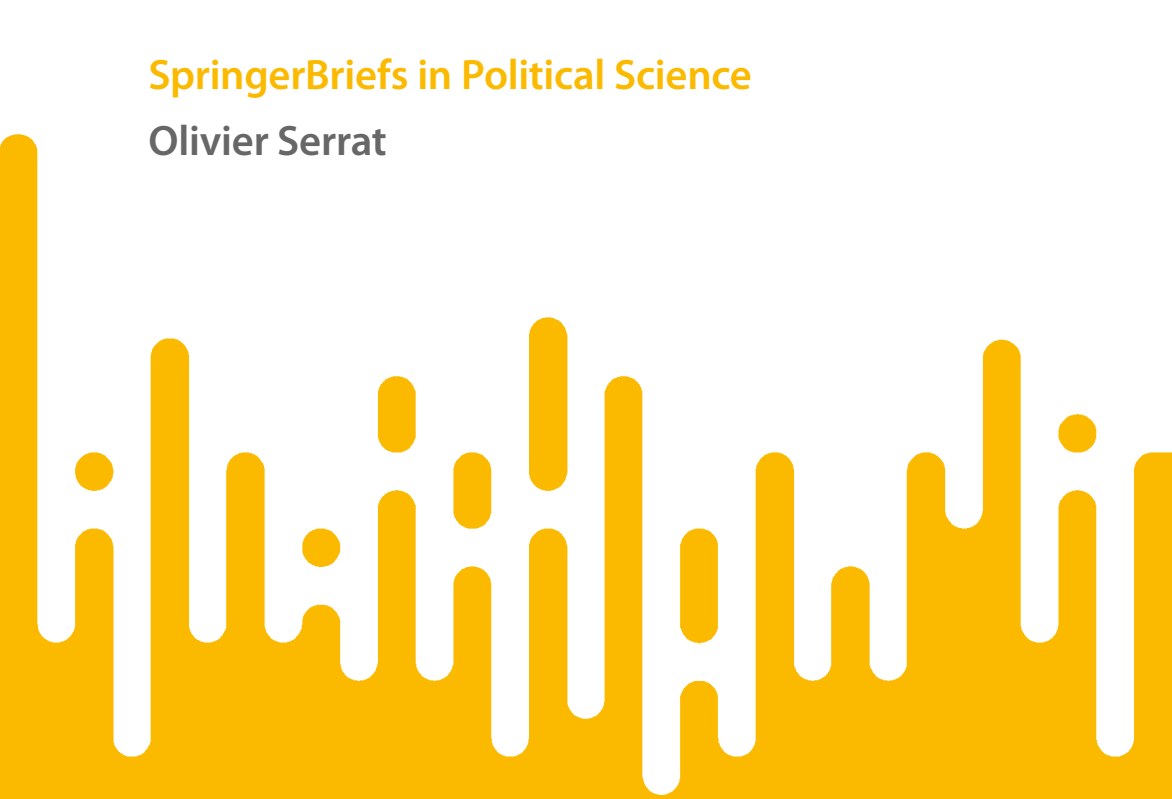


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Olivier Serrat



Advancing Environmental Peacebuilding

Pathways for Progress



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Preface

Throughout history, communities have developed practices that linked environmental stewardship with social stability. While these practices were often localized and implicit, they reflected a long-standing recognition of the interdependence between ecological conditions and social order. In the contemporary era, the scale and complexity of environmental disruption require that these relationships be more explicitly articulated and systematically addressed. As resource pressures intensify, ecosystems degrade, and climate change accelerates, environmental peacebuilding has gained prominence for its potential to illuminate how environmental factors shape the dynamics of peace and conflict. This growing attention underscores the need for approaches that engage directly with the interconnections between ecological systems and human security. Yet despite the field's expansion, its conceptual foundations remain dispersed across disciplines, and its evaluative tools are not fully equipped to address the socio-ecological complexity in which interventions occur.

This SpringerBrief responds to these challenges. It offers a concise, interdisciplinary introduction to environmental peacebuilding and positions evaluation as central to the field's continued development. It traces the historical emergence of environmental peacebuilding, synthesizes contributions from key disciplines, and proposes context-sensitive approaches for assessing interventions in conflict-affected or environmentally fragile settings. It argues that without evaluative frameworks capable of addressing complexity, uncertainty, and the hybrid nature of socio-ecological systems, the field risks falling short of its potential as a pathway to peace. Recent scholarship has highlighted the importance of such integrative approaches, particularly in relation to cooperative environmental governance and climate-linked risks (Serrat, 2025).

This Brief is organized as a series of *précis*, each addressing a core dimension of the field. The chapters follow a grounded scholarly progression—moving from historical foundations to disciplinary perspectives, then to methodological development and applied illustration—to reflect both the field's current realities and its forward-looking possibilities. Chapter 1 outlines the historical evolution of environmental peacebuilding. Chapters 2 and 3 examine disciplinary contributions from

anthropology, economics, environmental science, history, international relations, and sociology. Chapter 4 introduces liberal studies as a means of bridging these domains and strengthening evaluative reasoning. Chapter 5 discusses how ideas develop into scholarly contributions, using the formulation of evaluative criteria as an illustrative case. Chapters 6 and 7 integrate these insights by proposing extensions to the evaluation framework of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee and presenting new, context-sensitive evaluative criteria for assessing environmental peacebuilding initiatives. Chapter 8 examines a formative effort—the Tonle Sap Initiative—that embodied environmental peacebuilding principles before the field was formally defined, illustrating how integrated environmental governance can serve as peace infrastructure. It offers a rare insight into the genesis of the initiative, back in 2001, providing a window into the formative thinking that anticipated many of the principles now central to environmental peacebuilding. Chapter 9 synthesizes this Brief's central themes and looks ahead to the field's future. It reflects on how environmental peacebuilding must adapt in the Anthropocene, emphasizing a shift from cooperation to co-creation, the need for adaptive and context-sensitive evaluation, and the ethical and intergenerational stakes that will shape emerging practice. In doing so, it positions environmental peacebuilding as essential architecture for building shared futures in an increasingly interdependent world.

This Brief is intended for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars seeking a clear and integrative overview of the field. It aims to support more rigorous analysis, more effective intervention design, and more context-attuned evaluation. Its concise format and interdisciplinary scope also make it suitable for upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses across development, environment, peace, and security studies.

Environmental peacebuilding encourages renewed consideration of how cooperation over shared environments can contribute to stability and the pursuit of lasting peace. By clarifying the field's foundations while pointing toward new evaluative and conceptual pathways, this Brief seeks to contribute to a field that is still taking shape—one whose promise depends on both analytical rigor and sustained imagination. In doing so, it aims to strengthen ongoing efforts to advance scholarship and, ideally, the practice that must continue to evolve.

Washington, DC, USA

Olivier Serrat

Reference

Serrat, O. (2025). *Anthropogenic solutions for climate change: Achieving environmental peace*. Springer.

Letter to the Reader

I did not set out to write this SpringerBrief with a specific theory in mind. It developed from a realization that had become clearer over time: the environment is not merely a backdrop to human conflict but frequently the first to absorb the consequences of our divisions and the extractive practices that both shape and result from them, with repercussions that return in ways we rarely anticipate.

That recognition—born less of insight than of accumulated unease—carried through years of engagement across Asia and the Pacific on the practical challenges of environmental management. The unease came from seeing how often well-intentioned interventions faltered for reasons that had little to do with ecology and everything to do with people. Whether working across grassland and wetland ecosystems, extensive livestock and rangeland systems, inland and marine fisheries, land resource evaluation, flood control and irrigation, watershed stewardship, basin-level planning, or the institutional arrangements meant to coordinate these sectors, I saw technical solutions falter—if they did not make matters worse—whenever interests were not shared and trust was thin. I grew dissatisfied with how ecological issues were typically framed as problems to be solved rather than as elements of living systems whose life-bearing interactions require sustained attention.

Everything shifted in 2001 during the effort that came to be called the Tonle Sap Initiative—a chapter revisited at the end of this Brief. In Cambodia, communities were navigating intertwined pressures: rapid population growth following the fall of the Khmer Rouge and the end of decades of civil conflict, ecological stress signals in the Tonle Sap lake–floodplain system, overlapping and still-rebuilding institutional mandates, and livelihood insecurity. The Initiative’s approach—grounded in participatory governance, multilevel coordination, and the balancing of conservation with human need—illustrated something fundamental. Cooperation does not arise from declarations or negotiations. It grows from joint engagement with shared environmental concerns and from the slow, patient rebuilding of ties across divides. The Initiative was never framed as “peacebuilding,” yet it demonstrated—quietly but unmistakably—how environmental collaboration can generate the conditions

for peace long before the term existed. “Everything has been thought of before, but the problem is to think of it again,” as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once observed apropos originality.

This Brief is rooted in those experiences. It is written for readers who recognize that restoring ecosystems and mending social bonds are closely connected tasks. It follows the thread of how environmental collaboration has shaped peace, and it proposes practical improvements for strengthening this work today. My hope is that these pages offer not only analysis, but also a reminder that peace is most reliably supported in the everyday practice of tending the places we share. If this work points toward anything, it is toward choosing care over depletion. Be for the glory, not the degradation. What can you contribute?

Washington, DC, USA

Olivier Serrat

Competing Interests The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this manuscript.

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