



UNITED NATIONS

ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP

**EMG**

## Humanitarian-Environment Nexus Dialogue

The third Dialogue on the humanitarian-environment nexus was hosted by the Environment Management Group, on the 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2017, in Geneva. Discussions focused on strengthening partnerships between the environmental and humanitarian sectors in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. The following themes and actions are derived from the key points raised by participants, presenters and panelists. These outputs represent possible follow-up (action) areas for the humanitarian sector, in the context of integrating the environment into humanitarian action.

**Theme: There is momentum to mainstream the environment in humanitarian operations, but we need a coherent push.**

**Action: The Environment Management Group will form a new Issue Management Group on the humanitarian-environment nexus.**

The effort to integrate the environment into humanitarian aid and operations has been ongoing for decades. Many successful initiatives have been created to address this nexus like Safe Access to Fuel and Energy, the Coordination of Assessments for Environment in Humanitarian Action, the Environment Marker, and an IFRC pilot program to employ community resilience advisors. However, many of the initiatives have been ad hoc or project focused because of limited time and budget constraints. This has led to persistent challenges like system-wide accountability and policy mainstreaming. There is a need for a more systematic, coherent approach requiring a diverse set of actors and collaborations. Therefore, the EMG will use the outcomes from the third Nexus Dialogue to inform the direction of a new Issue Management Group on the integration of environmental sustainability into humanitarian action.

**Theme: There is a need to change perspectives and to create new narratives. Integrating the environment into humanitarian operations begins during the preparation stage and is a long-term commitment.**

**Action: A commitment from funders, technical staff, and high-level leadership to prioritize preparedness work in terms of developing environmental guidelines and coherent operational standards.**

The stereotype that humanitarian operations are always short-term should not be perpetuated. The perception is that displacement is temporary, however this is not always the case. For example, the average refugee camp is in operation for twenty-six years and the average peacekeeping mission lasts for sixteen years. The misalignment between perception and reality can impact our actions on the environment.

Consequently, the first shift in perspective would be to think long-term and to connect humanitarian relief and recovery to sustainable development. The environment can serve as a bridge to close the gap between the humanitarian and development sectors by developing guidelines and coherent operational standards to be used in both sectors. This aligns with the Agenda for Humanity and the Secretary General's Reform Agenda. An existing partnership between a UNFCCC Executive Committee and the Platform on Displacement is one example of a collaboration working in prevention. This collaboration aims to develop country-specific preventative measures to address slow-onset events and the associated economic losses.

Secondly, radical and innovative ideas like UN Electric, sustainable entrepreneurship, and creative reuse solutions should be encouraged and applied. During the High-Level segment of the Dialogue, multiple panelists recognized their agencies' ability to think of creative solutions. Unfortunately, the implementation of innovative ideas often falls short, which could be attributed to risk aversion. Moreover, there is a fear that failure will lead to a loss of funding. Alternatively, some UN agency representatives referred to the challenge of implementing creative solutions within their existing mandate.

To combat the issues mentioned above, it was suggested to bring more donors to the table to create financial schemes that encourage transformative operations, including planning for multi-year strategies. As one participant stated, "short-term financing leads to short-term thinking"; but multi-year funding, for example, could be structured to incentivize energy and water savings. Funding requirements can also drive demand for environmental and humanitarian assessments. Further research on how to achieve a better return on investment would benefit this aspiration. Overall, a narrative where donors are considered investors and recipients are considered agents of change, is needed.

**Theme: Incorporating the environment into humanitarian aid has global and local impacts.**

**Action: UN agencies can work "glocally" by engaging local expertise whilst striving for global gains.**

Collaboration across agencies, with governments, funders, private business and local stakeholders is imperative. Leadership engagement and buy-in at all scales can lead to stronger implementation. Engagement with local stakeholders, local technical assistance and local experts will provide more context to the existing local support structure and the local needs. Then, UN intervention and expertise can help fill the gaps after considering where environmental expertise and capacity building is required. This type of understanding takes time. Consequently, more needs to be done in the process of preparation and prevention to build relationships and make plans with local stakeholders. Working with local stakeholders also offers additional benefits like empowerment of individuals and the stability of having community champions.

The importance of environmental work in humanitarian aid has a global economic impact as documented by the World Economic Forum in its Global Risk Report. Participants mentioned it would be helpful to have resources on how to integrate the Sendai Framework, the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, it was mentioned to go a step further by considering how to apply an integrated strategy in the field. The more resources on strategy at the global level, the bigger the menu of options to tailor to specific scenarios and geographies. Lastly, it was mentioned that examples of successful solutions that work on the ground are more helpful than studies of challenges.

**Theme: Coordinated and data-driven evidence leads to better accountability and political motivation.**

**Action: Better communicate, both horizontally and vertically, what type of environmental data is needed, how it will be collected, and how it will be dispersed through sharing platforms across the humanitarian sector.**

Data increases accountability. For example, there will be more motivation to meet environmental standards if documentation is required. Coordinated/joint environmental assessments and updated information exchange platforms support consistent data collection and standardized datasets. It is imperative to ensure data collection is feasible and results are accessible for improved implementation. More documentation of “routine” or “unnamed” initiatives or partnerships that operate in the field would help target areas of humanitarian operations where environmental data collection could occur. In addition, it might support the development of a common language and understanding between humanitarians and environmentalist. Documentation of routine operations might also highlight areas where there is a need for environmental data and lead to the dispersion of information in formats that would be the most useful.

Data and research can help build effective narratives that increase leadership buy-in and shape policy. This will require translating expert analysis into practical terms.

**Theme: The Sustainable Development Goals are relevant to humanitarian work and need to be incorporated into humanitarian operations from the start.**

**Action: Adopt and develop tools across the humanitarian sector to map and understand the relevance of the Sustainable Development Goals.**

Collective delivery on the SDGs is needed to achieve humanitarian-environment nexus interests, specifically reducing exposure to disasters and conflicts, improving resilience and enabling sustainable recovery. Network mapping can be used to visualize how Sustainable Development Goal targets link humanitarian-environment interests. A non-comprehensive network mapping tool of the actors, resources, and targets linking humanitarian-environment interests is available at <https://tinyurl.com/ybuqqgqke>. Mapping tools such as this could be scaled-up as a platform to provide consistent links to guidelines, data and other resources. It may lead to more efficiency and coordination as agencies can view what other agencies are already working on and tap into the existing system.

**Theme: Sprawling urban centers are creating new challenges in addressing environmental issues.**

**Action: Engage businesses to support humanitarian operations and to offer long-term urban stability.**

Fast urban development leads to fragmented agglomerations with unique environmental and humanitarian challenges. The fourth EMG Nexus Dialogue on urban pollution, health and the environment will partially address this. One strategy to address this challenge is to involve the private sector. The private sector can complement public sector engagement. Establishing connections with top suppliers and sellers in urban centers may enable a broader outreach to people and places where humanitarian aid is needed. Private business can also offer long-term stability in terms of supply after humanitarian operations end. Care should, however, be taken to ensure the credibility, accountability, and integrity of private partners.