

# Levers for improving the way the environment is taken into account in humanitarian response

---

Network meeting: September 2015

## **Introduction/Issue at stake**

In contrast to previous meetings of the Environment Network, which dealt with technical subjects, the objective of this meeting was to explore levers for improving the way the environment is taken into account in humanitarian response. What are the latest developments in terms of donors taking the environment into account? How can the environment be integrated at different stages of the project cycle and in the functioning of our organisations? What training courses exist? What lessons can be learned from development NGOs who are often more equipped to deal with environmental issues? September's meeting was an opportunity to explore these different questions and to learn from each other's experiences.

### **1. Donor demands**

Several recent studies (JEU/Groupe URD<sup>1</sup>, LSE and Cabinet Donnadieu) show that progress has been made in terms of donors' attitude to the environment, both for humanitarian and development aid. The most committed and demanding donors are Ireland (Irish Aid), Sweden (SIDA), Canada (DFATD), the UK (DFID), and the USA (USAID). These countries have put in place criteria for selecting projects on the basis of environmental evaluations.

As for United Nations agencies: OCHA and UNEP created the environment marker<sup>2</sup> in 2014 in order to evaluate in advance what impact a project would have on the environment (based on a classification: Neutral/Medium/High). So far, this marker has only been used in the Clusters during the humanitarian response in Afghanistan and South Sudan. These two agencies also created the Joint Environment Unit<sup>3</sup> which advocates for the integration of environmental considerations in humanitarian action. The HCR, which is also mobilized on these issues, has produced a reference guide for operations in refugee camps, in partnership with CARE: see FRAME<sup>4</sup> - Framework for Assessing, Monitoring and Evaluating the environment in refugee-related operations.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.urd.org/IMG/pdf/EHA\\_Study\\_web\\_version1-1.pdf](http://www.urd.org/IMG/pdf/EHA_Study_web_version1-1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unep.org/disastersandconflicts/CountryOperations/Sudan/Environmentalmainstreaming/tabid/54245/Default.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/coordination-tools/environmental-emergencies> and <http://www.eecentre.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/4a97d1039.html>

For the other United Nations agencies, and for other donors such as ECHO and private donors (foundations), the environment does not yet figure clearly in their guidelines.

Whereas environmental criteria appear to be increasingly included in project selection processes (e.g. in proposals, NGOs are asked to show how they will mitigate negative environmental impacts), little is done as yet to check/monitor whether these commitments are put into practice in the field. This nevertheless encourages NGOs to question their practices and can act as a lever for change internally.

The members of the Humanitarian Environment Network also discussed the idea that NGOs could guide donors in defining criteria rather than waiting for the latter to impose constraints and standards that might be inappropriate and difficult to put into practice.

In parallel, beneficiaries of aid programmes are also concerned about the environmental impact of programmes. This is notably the case of operations in refugee camps where the host population are concerned about environmental problems which affect their livelihoods. This additional pressure could and should push the sector to take action.

See also the study by Cabinet Donnadiou & Associés on the integration of environmental considerations by humanitarian donors  
Eloise Dougère, Donnadiou et Associés : [eloisedougere@gmail.com](mailto:eloisedougere@gmail.com)

## **2. Developing a reference framework – the experience of the ICRC**

The ICRC, which has been developing a sustainable development approach for several years, underlined that an organisation needs to clarify its objectives and needs to have a strategy that is promoted by the top management and the board of the organization. The action plan developed by the ICRC's Sustainable Development department is based on three areas: water, waste and energy. It is predominantly focused on improving internal practices. It is easier to make changes to the functioning of operations and internal practices (e.g. offices, transport, purchasing) than on humanitarian programmes, as organisations do not always have control over all the parameters involved (e.g. partnerships with local institutions or associations).

Some lessons learned:

- It is essential to carry out an initial assessment based on figures (e.g. tonnes of waste produced or amount of energy consumed), which allows changes over time to be analysed and the impact of certain forms of behaviour on these indicators to be understood.
- QUANTIS's life-cycle assessment <http://www.quantis-intl.com/en/offer/life-cycle-assessment/> helps to identify the most environmentally harmful areas and practices and evaluate where the most impact can be made.
- To calculate and monitor the energy consumed and the CO2 emissions produced by delegations, the ICRC uses software called *energostat* : <https://www.energostat.ch/>
- In order for an environmental strategy to be accepted and understood, internal awareness-raising campaigns are necessary (both at headquarters and in the field), as is the adoption of an approach that is understood by all.
- The (voluntary) mobilisation of a few focal points in field offices and at headquarters can make all the difference (the focal points of the 17 delegations spend one or two hours per month implementing and monitoring the Sustainable Development action plan)
- It is also important to remain prudent in your technical approach in order to avoid bad mistakes given that the right competencies are not always available internally. It is useful

to establish partnerships with experts/ universities / development NGOs for technical issues such as setting up a solar energy system, or a biogas system).

More information: Alain Oppliger ICRC: [aoppliger@icrc.org](mailto:aoppliger@icrc.org) See also: <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/report/sustainable-development-icrc-framework-2012.htm>

### 3. Current “Environmental Mainstreaming” training courses

Internal training and awareness-raising are essential levers for better understanding of the issues at stake and for changes in practices. Three training kits (one of which is general, and two of which are more technical) are available for free online.

Title of the course	Contents
<p><b>GRRT : Green Recovery Reconstruction Toolkit</b></p> <p>Technical modules designed by the WWF and the American Red Cross following the response to the Tsunami in 2004. Download modules: <a href="http://green-recovery.org/download">http://green-recovery.org/download</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Modules in English/ Spanish/ Indonesian on 8 themes</li> <li>- Training modules and Trainer Guide               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment and Programme Design and M&amp;E</li> <li>• Environmental Impact Assessments</li> <li>• Strategic Site Location and Development</li> <li>• Environmental Materials and Supply Chain</li> <li>• Water &amp; Sanitation</li> <li>• Livelihoods &amp; Environment</li> <li>• DRR</li> <li>• Greening Organisational Operations</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Additional information about the environment in specific countries (Haiti, Chile, Pakistan and Sri Lanka)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Integrating the Environment into Humanitarian Action</b></p> <p>Modules developed by Groupe URD/UNEP in 2012.</p> <p>See kit: <a href="http://www.urd.org/Environment-training-toolkit">http://www.urd.org/Environment-training-toolkit</a> (also available on CD)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training modules (+ trainer’s guide) in English/French               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humanitarian action and the environment</li> <li>• Sustainable water management and ecological sanitation</li> <li>• Waste management</li> <li>• Reduction of and alternatives to the use of firewood</li> <li>• Livelihoods and the environment in rural contexts</li> <li>• The environment and the project cycle</li> <li>• Adopting an environmental approach throughout an organisation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Environmental Emergency Center</b></p> <p>OCHA/PNUE <a href="http://www.eecentre.org/Online-Learning.aspx">http://www.eecentre.org/Online-Learning.aspx</a></p>	<p>1½ hour classes in English which briefly go over the links between humanitarian action and the environment, another course focuses on environmental emergencies.</p> <p>2 classes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disaster Waste Management : best tools and practices</li> <li>• Environment in Humanitarian Action</li> </ul>

## **Conclusion**

The humanitarian sector is gradually mobilising to integrate the environment more into its practices. Pressure is (and should be) exerted by donors and beneficiaries to push NGOs to implement programmes that are environmentally friendly. Obstacles remain in the form of resistance to change, the perception that this issue is not humanitarian organisations' "business", the absence of concrete solutions in the field and the lack of relevant technical skills.

In order to minimise the environmental impact of a humanitarian response, this needs to be anticipated before crises and programmes take place. Advocacy is needed vis-à-vis donors, UN agencies and logistics platforms. Development NGOs, who sometimes conduct operations in the same contexts as humanitarian NGOs, can bring know-how or expertise that can help to guide NGOs in the implementation of humanitarian programmes (notably on the use of renewable energy and the recycling of waste).

*For more information about the Humanitarian Environment Network, contact Samantha Brangeon [sbrangeon@urd.org](mailto:sbrangeon@urd.org)*