ENVIRONMENT AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Increasing Effectiveness, Sustainability and Accountability

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
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Executive Summary

Destruction of livelihoods and deforestation as a result of brick production for humanitarian operations in Darfur. Dried up wells due to over-drilling for water by humanitarian organisations in Afghanistan. Ruined livelihoods from an over-provision of fishing boats and consequent fishing stock depletion in post-Tsunami Sri Lanka. Failure to meet waste treatment standards leading to environmental contamination in Haiti and the largest outbreak of cholera in recent history. These examples illustrate how humanitarian or peacekeeping actors, by failing to take environmental issues into consideration, undermine their purpose: to save lives and preserve and restore livelihoods.

Ensuring that environmental considerations are taken into account at the earliest possible moment of humanitarian action can make a difference – for people and the environment.

Environmental stewardship during humanitarian action reduces conflict drivers and increases resilience. To be effective, however, what is needed is for the environment to be systematically integrated into humanitarian programmes and operations: this is a humanitarian responsibility, not a choice. Timely planning, identifying key needs and issues, together with cross-sectoral integration of environmental issues before and during humanitarian action can help make that difference.

This study, commissioned by the JEU, and with the financial support of the Government of Finland, is the first stage in a larger project that seeks to examine the current state of integration of environmental considerations into humanitarian operations and to recommend collective action to improve the effectiveness, accountability, and sustainability of humanitarian action. It examines some of the achievements to date and proposes—based on extensive consultations — how the future agenda might be defined.

This study comes at a time when questions are being asked about the effectiveness of humanitarian response, particularly in relation to sudden-onset emergencies. Emergencies are times when life-saving priorities come to the fore. However, the many links between this fundamental objective and the environment are all too often overlooked or postponed until emergency needs have first been addressed. Sometimes this can be too late: for example, damage done by people cutting trees to cook their food, or a lowered water table due to over-extraction has had serious implications on the very people the humanitarian response is designed to support.

Through this study, lessons and experiences of what has and has not worked to integrate environment into humanitarian operations are considered, building a case to support timely and consistent mainstreaming of environmental considerations during humanitarian action. Specific entry points are suggested, including within the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC), primarily in the preparedness and assessment phases. Failure to integrate at such times will have negative impacts, causing environmental degradation and destruction, and ultimately lessening the survival and recovery prospects for the victims of conflict and disasters.

Donors have a critical role to play if a change is to happen. As this study shows, attention to environmental mainstreaming in humanitarian strategies varies greatly between donors. Moreover, there is no correlation between the inclusion of environmental considerations in donor policies, the existence of environmental funding criteria, and effective mainstreaming of the environment in programmes which they fund. The environment is never used as a restrictive criterion for gaining access to funding, leaving vagueness in how this is addressed in relation to specific contexts and the level of emergency.

Based on a review of studies, evaluations and consultations with governments, donors, UN agency staff, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), field practitioners and technical specialists, the findings in this study represent a solid body of evidence for a need for change. A “business as usual” approach to planning and managing the environment in humanitarian action is no longer acceptable. Such change, however, needs to happen in a holistic manner, both at the systemic and policy level as well as on the ground. This requires learning from past experiences, firm commitments to affected communities and greater accountability.

Conclusions and recommendations are focused on the humanitarian system, including clusters and the donor community. Emphasis is placed on a number of the overarching initiatives of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), including the HPC. It is also emphasised that this level of decision-making is one of the main vehicles through which accountability can and should be pursued in humanitarian response.

There is a need to make humanitarian action fit for the future, anticipating risks and challenges such as increased vulnerability due to climate change. This requires a fundamental shift towards a model of humanitarian action that not only strengthens the response to crisis, but also learns and adapts in order to anticipate crisis, acts before they become crisis and prevents their recurrence. Better attention to environmental stewardship, with its multiple and inextricable linkages with human livelihoods, is central to this.

Use of sustainable local materials to build camp shelter, Democratic Republic of Congo
I. SYSTEM-WIDE ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

This study has shown that environment is still not systematically taken into account in humanitarian action, despite being critical for effective, sustainable and accountable humanitarian response. Humanitarian partners have to date failed to operationalise environment as a cross-cutting issue within the global humanitarian architecture and no agency has the mandate to enforce the principles of environmental mainstreaming. Central to this is the lack of leadership and accountability for environment during humanitarian action: the fact that environment is everybody’s responsibility, while at the same time no one is held accountable, has resulted in the “tragedy of the commons” of the humanitarian sector. The current lack of monitoring and accountability for environmental implications is a significant impediment to quality action delivery and learning. This should be urgently addressed and is the greatest requirement for change.

Recommendations:

1. The UN, IASC, OCHA, humanitarian organisations and donors should address the lack of leadership and accountability for environment during humanitarian action as part of the Transformative Agenda and ensure that environment is taken into consideration in a timely, consistent and routine manner in all operations and at all levels.
   1a. The Emergency Relief Coordinator, the IASC, and Humanitarian Coordinators should take responsibility for mainstreaming environment in humanitarian operations. This should be an explicit part of their terms of reference and included in performance evaluation.
   1b. Global Cluster Lead Agencies should agree on their roles and responsibilities in relation to the environment at field level and reflect this in policy and guidance.
   1c. OCHA’s responsibility for mainstreaming environment in humanitarian action should be formalised and the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit designated to take the lead in operationalising this within the IASC.

2. OCHA and UNEP, with support from donors, should increase the political commitment and human and financial resources dedicated to environment in humanitarian action. This is urgently required to leapfrog the years of neglect of environment as a cross-cutting issue.

II. MAINSTREAMING ENVIRONMENT AT SYSTEM AND FIELD LEVEL

Mainstreaming the environment is an approach that is critical for, and should contribute to, a long-term vision of effective, principled and sustainable humanitarian action. It needs to be translated into clearly defined actions to achieve this vision, both at the policy and field level. This study has highlighted the importance of a two-tier method to mainstreaming environment: at the systematic level, including into all phases of the HPC and, simultaneously, at the field level, providing country and context specific technical support at key stages to facilitate an understanding of the environmental context and propose practical solutions that benefit affected people and humanitarian programming. This approach should focus on integrating environment into existing systems, rather than creating additional tools and processes.

Recommendations:

3. Develop a detailed proposal for action including a full analysis of at least five priority countries that actively engages all concerned humanitarian partners.

Further analysis should be done of how best to mainstream environment in clusters and country action plans in collaboration with respective national authorities, NGOs and other humanitarian partners.

4. Existing mechanisms to promote environmental mainstreaming should be better analysed, their impacts documented, approaches adapted and strengthened and sustainability ensured.

These include, but should not be restricted to, technical deployments such as Environmental Field Advisor, the Environment Marker and Environment and Humanitarian Action Reference Groups.

5. Environment should be mainstreamed within every stage of the HPC.

This will require coordination with Humanitarian Country Teams, Cluster Coordinators and Inter-Cluster Coordinators, but first needs high-level endorsement and ownership in order to be effective. This should happen through:
   5a. Increasing the prominence of environment within IASC and HPC guidance across all clusters/sectors and strengthening the role of Inter-Cluster Coordinators who are responsible for supporting cross-cutting issues.
   5b. Humanitarian practitioners should be equipped with dedicated technical support to ensure environment is mainstreamed in all stages of humanitarian planning and response at the field level. This technical support should compliment bottom-up solutions and foster innovation.
**Recommendations for each stage of the HPC:**

**Preparedness:**

5c. Give greater emphasis to considering environment in preparedness and early planning and identify practical entry points where environment can be factored into emergency preparedness and contingency planning, including baseline assessments.

**Needs assessment and analysis:**

5d. Provide timely environmental technical support to identify key environmental issues and assist practitioners to integrate these into country/cluster/sector action plans at the initial stage of a response. The Joint OCHA/UNEP Environment Unit can coordinate such support through OCHA country offices.

5e. Involve local communities in environmental assessments and programme design: community participation will more accurately define environmental needs and allow for the collective design of sustainable solutions.

**Strategic planning:**

5f. Integrate environmental issues identified in assessments into the Strategic Response Plan across clusters and support this integration with awareness raising of the rationale behind these environmental links across the humanitarian community. Follow-up action to environmental assessments is essential to provide solutions to problems identified. Organisations undertaking or commissioning assessments should be accountable for ensuring actions is taken and followed up on.

**Resource mobilisation:**

5g. Each sector/cluster should conduct a review of potential environmental impacts and opportunities, based on previous environmental assessments, to ensure that projects funded have considered the environmental implications of their activities.

**Implementation and monitoring:**

5h. Integrate environment into monitoring plans based on baseline information from assessments and train monitoring teams to identify links between programme activities and the environment, including those not immediately visible.

**Operational review and evaluation:**

5i. Integrate environmental considerations into evaluation practices. The environmental impacts of humanitarian programmes should be integrated into evaluation practices to ensure accountability. This will help raise awareness of the direct/indirect environmental impacts of humanitarian action and raise the question of responsibility for environmental damage caused by humanitarian programming.

**III. ADVOCACY AND EVIDENCE**

There is a need for more understanding and strong evidence within the humanitarian system of the benefits of mainstreaming environment in humanitarian action. The current lack of convincing evidence needs to be urgently addressed.

**Recommendations:**

6. **Document detailed case studies built on field and management perspectives to provide evidence of what has and has not worked effectively in addressing environmental issues in humanitarian response.**

Case studies should cover a range of environmental issues impacting on humanitarian action, describe how these have been addressed, extract best practices for adoption and adaptation elsewhere and provide practical suggestions on how lessons can be applied for ongoing and future planning and programming.

7. **Adopt and execute strong advocacy strategies targeted at humanitarian practitioners ensuring a broad-scale approach to, and understanding of, mainstreaming environment.**

Strategies should focus on health and livelihood impacts that support the life-saving imperative of humanitarian action.
IV. FUNDING ENVIRONMENT IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

This study has identified a chronic lack of funding for environment in humanitarian action. Good environmental donorship is, however, a required and fundamental component of future fit humanitarian action. There is a unique opportunity for donors to lead by example and ensure that the environment is an integral part of their decision-making processes in allocating humanitarian funding.

Recommendations:

8. **Donors should develop an environmental mainstreaming policy for humanitarian aid.**
   Integrating environmental issues in humanitarian donor policies is necessary to ensure institutional positioning, orientation and influence. The policy should be realistic, achievable and based on a participatory approach in order to raise awareness among actors involved. Efforts are also needed to ensure messages are well understood – including guidance on what respective donors are willing to fund, and under what conditions – and translated into practice.

9. **Donors should integrate environmental mainstreaming while analysing programme proposals.**
   All proposals should be analysed from an environmental perspective. Potential impacts and opportunities should be noted and recommendations made to the applying organisation similar to the process currently applied by DfID through CEAN. Programmes should only be funded when conditions have been met.

10. **Donors should make the consideration of environmental impacts explicit in their decisions, therefore driving practitioners to include these impact statements in funding proposals.**
    This has long been a standard practice for development projects, where environmental concerns are part of social responsibility, due diligence and liability considerations. These same considerations should also drive humanitarian funding.

11. **Donors should commit to longer-term funding.**
    A conscious shift is required from single, stand-alone, ad hoc environmental activities to longer term funding commitments. This will enable more robust programme implementation, monitoring and learning.

12. **Donors should strengthen knowledge of programme officers and operational partners at desk and country levels and establish a technical support helpdesk.**
    Tailored capacity building should be facilitated via training to ensure that programme officers and operational partners have more than a basic understanding of environmental issues and are able to implement their policies. Cooperation with other in-country organisations should also be strengthened. Technical support at headquarters will increase internal capacities and provide environmental feedback, for example while analysing programme submissions.
Water management in a camp, South Sudan