



First session

Agenda item
16 March 2024

**Synopsis for Improving the Efficiency of
Humanitarian Aid by Reducing its
Environmental Impact**

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Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the United Nations Environmental Programme the topic synopsis entitled “Improving the Efficiency of Humanitarian Aid by Reducing its Environmental Impact ” (UNEP/SYN/IIE/01.3).



Improving the Efficiency of Humanitarian Aid by Reducing its Environmental Impact

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Section I—Introduction

The United Nations Environmental Programme is the United Nation's primary body for matters regarding ecology, conservation, and environmental sustenance. It works to promote the widespread sustainable development of the environment.

Section II—Topic Background

Humanitarian aid is defined as assistance that provides relief and safety to affected individuals in emergencies. Natural disasters, agricultural crises, food shortages, sanitation problems, and water shortages are among the primary types of situations in which humanitarian aid is implemented. Shelter and medical care are often provided with immediacy in these emergencies, as well as funding and education in the longer term. In addition to the United Nations, there are many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other organizations that work to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need. These groups work to make sure all people have the right to receive humanitarian aid regardless of their ethnicity, gender, class, race, politics, or any other identifying factors. While humanitarian aid addresses an immediate crisis, often it is unsustainable environmentally.

According to statistics compiled by the European Union, in the last twenty years, climate has been the root of more than 80% of disasters where humanitarian aid has been provided. The humanitarian assistance provided can cause the environment to deteriorate even further, resulting in a vicious cycle of decline. Camps and shelters constructed amid disastrous circumstances are often built with an unsustainable supply of natural resources including timber and fuel wood. Groundwater aquifers are over-pumped to provide water and sanitation for the affected population. Even more, because of the harmful chemicals used in medical care, the environment is compromised.

These environmental concerns are not limited to one particular area of the globe. In Albania, despite a reduction in the number of Kosovo refugees arriving, the local waste-handling systems continued to be compromised due to the initial surge. A World Health Organization audit of the Kosovo relief effort found that 50% of the pharmaceuticals brought in were expired or unsuitable for the situation and needed to be disposed of. Concern was even expressed that pharmaceutical companies were using the relief effort as a means of ridding themselves of unwanted stockpiles rather than disposing of them properly. In the Darfur region of Sudan, the concentration of displaced populations has strained the already limited natural resources. This has led to deforestation, soil loss, and water quality degradation. As a result, there has been a decline in wildlife populations accompanied by a decline in harvests, causing food shortages across the region. Not only do these situations impact environmental conditions, but they also threaten the lives, health, livelihoods, and security of many vulnerable people. After the disastrous 2010 Haiti earthquake, a Cholera epidemic devastated the region as a result of improper sanitation practices by the relief workers.

With these circumstances in mind, now is the time to affect sustainable and environmentally conscious change in how humanitarian aid is applied.

Section III—UN Involvement

The United Nations strives to reduce the effects of humanitarian crises on the environment. Recognizing the impact of social hardships on maintaining a healthy community, UN groups and outside organizations have partnered to address this issue. The Joint Environment Unit (JEU) is a UNEP collaboration between multiple bodies that creates plans specific to particular countries, analyzes the specific progress, and raises awareness and spreads knowledge regarding the environmental risks in humanitarian emergencies. JEU also uses funding from the International Climate Initiative to assist humanitarian needs and governments of developing countries.

The United Nations also recognizes that sustainable development and the rising concerns of climate change are heavily intertwined. Not only does climate change lead to eventual humanitarian disaster, but humanitarian disaster is also a prevalent factor of climate change. The UN has been working endlessly to stop humanitarian emergencies at the root by fighting climate change. For example, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and UNEP worked together to initiate the EECentre, an online center that focuses on providing information about emergency preparedness and response in the context of environmental emergencies. In addition, there are several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that apply to the cancellation of these two issues. These goals are pivotal in changing the urgency of the future outlook by 2030. SDGs 1, 6, 8, and 13 are especially important regarding this topic by focusing on available resources and areas of benefit. However, every single SDG pertains to this issue by fixating on improving the lives of those less fortunate and making strides towards a sustainable future for all.

Section IV—Possible Solutions

To restore the environment while aiding people suffering in dire situations, it is necessary to create alternative humanitarian aid procedures that minimize negative environmental influence. Some different approaches to this issue that range in impact include using fuel-efficient stoves, providing necessities like food that do not require excessive fuel, employing sustainable sources to build shelters, as well as utilizing rainwater harvesting and eco sanitation to obtain a more enduring derivation of water. Recognizing that these alternatives require substantial amounts of labor, resources, and money, delegates will need to research and disclose viable sources of funding.

In addition to finding alternatives to current harmful practices, assessments of the surrounding environment and safe disposal of materials should be implemented. Coordinated evaluations of the environment can help to avoid building camps and shelters in disaster-prone areas. Additionally, biodegradable packaging for food and medicine can be used to ensure safe and sustainable disposal. A more prudent collection of healthcare items can be done by investing in centers and programs that specialize in this field. Furthermore, education on environmental issues and solutions will minimize humanitarian assistance's impact on the environment. Environmental awareness can be integrated into the school curriculum in refugee camps as well as education systems around the globe. In these educational programs, individuals should learn about deforestation and groundwater aquifers, water conservation, and which materials are sustainable. Both climate change and sufficient assistance for affected communities are closely connected and, therefore, should be carefully looked into so solutions can be crafted for the overlap of each issue.

Section V—Bloc Positions

African: In the African bloc, countries have dealt with extreme weather and drought due to climate change. The weather and violence have led to many refugees in other African countries, such as Uganda and Kenya. These countries host a high concentration of refugees in small areas, causing deforestation and major strain on local resources, especially long-term institutions such as education.

Asia and the Pacific: Asia and Pacific Island countries together make the world's most disaster-prone region, with 75% of people globally affected by disaster living in the region. More than 800 million people have been through a natural disaster and more than 50,000 people have been killed in the past seven years. Climate change and natural hazards are the main factors in these circumstances. As a result, humanitarian organizations have driven their funds towards life-saving assistance rather than unsustainable packaging of assistance.

Eastern European: Due to the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine, humanitarian aid has been supplied to approximately 1.9 million people affected each year. Humanitarian assistance in the Eastern European bloc currently focuses on saving lives and protecting the population, as well as ensuring their access to necessities. Organizations that have been assisting such as the Central Emergency Response Fund have been focusing on environmentally-friendly ways to supply Eastern European countries with humanitarian aid.

Latin American and Caribbean: The Latin American and Caribbean bloc is the world's second most disaster-prone region. Most humanitarian aid is supplied due to extreme weather conditions that have been occurring due to global warming, which is leading to high levels of food insecurity. Humanitarian organizations have also been focusing on fixing unequal vaccine access. To ensure that the healthcare and medical items for vaccinations are properly collected and disposed of, organizations have been establishing programs to keep the environment clean and safe.

Western European and Others: Western European and other countries tend to contribute the most to humanitarian assistance. For example, the United States is the largest donor to humanitarian aid, donating \$47.8 billion in 2021. However, many of these organizations often use unsustainable and harmful ways of aid that hurt the environment. These organizations have created statements about lowering their environmental footprint, such as lowering their carbon emissions and using sustainable materials in their humanitarian assistance programs.

Section V—Questions That Should Be Taken Into Consideration

What has disinclined humanitarian organizations from solving this issue themselves?

How does focusing on the environmental aspect of humanitarian assistance help contribute to aid effectiveness?

How has humanitarian aid impacted different parts of the environment?

In what ways does the impacted environment exacerbate the living conditions of those affected by emergencies?

What kind of programs can be implemented to create sustainable humanitarian assistance?

Section VI—Helpful Sites and Resources

Document—EECentre—Reducing Environmental Impact in Humanitarian Response
bit.ly/IIMUN2024-UNEP01 (Shortened URL from eecentre.org)

Article—EHA Connect—Guidance for Environmental Preparedness Planning
bit.ly/IIMUN2024-UNEP02 (Shortened URL from ehaconnect.org)

Article—European Union—Humanitarian Aid Donors’ Declaration on Climate and Environment
bit.ly/IIMUN2024-UNEP03 (Shortened URL from europa.eu)

Document—Global Disaster Preparedness Center—Environmental Footprint of Humanitarian Assistance
bit.ly/IIMUN2024-UNEP04 (Shortened URL from preparecenter.org)

Article—Overseas Development Institute—Including the Environment in Humanitarian Assistance
bit.ly/IIMUN2024-UNEP05 (Shortened URL from odihpn.org)

Database—United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs—Environmental Relief Procedures by location
bit.ly/IIMUN2024-UNEP06 (Shortened URL from reliefweb.int)

Potential Search Terms—negative effects of aid, environmental footprint, impact of climate, environmental emergency preparedness