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STEPPING UP

The role of the Shelter and Settlements Sector in minimizing climate and environmental impacts

Suggested citation: **InterAction (2024), Stepping up: The role of the Shelter and Settlements Sector in minimizing climate and environmental impacts.**

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This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development/Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA). The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of, nor are they necessarily endorsed by, the United States Agency for International Development/Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA).

InterAction would like to thank its Member and partner organizations, Shelter and Settlements working Group, Climate Advocacy Working Group, Global Shelter Cluster, Regional Shelter and Settlements Forum participants, Shelter Center, and InterAction's Humanitarian Policy and Practice and Communication Team.

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The series of publications on the impact of Climate Change and Environmental Degradation on Humanitarian Operations summarizes the consultation and research conducted by InterAction, independent principal consultants, and Country Consultants. Regional consultations primarily took place in Amman, Bogota, Dhaka, Dakar, and Geneva, as well as country consultations in Bangladesh, Colombia, and Pakistan. Reports are published in several parts. Please see www.interaction.org for more details.

STEPPING UP

The role of the Shelter and Settlements Sector in minimizing climate and environmental impacts

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This report looks at the potential for the Shelter and Settlements Sector to lead and manage environmental issues during a humanitarian response. It identifies a number of issues of concern and highlights that substantive change is required.

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- **Coherence in humanitarian policy and practice on climate and environmental impacts is yet to emerge**
- **Addressing climate change and environmental impacts lies primarily with governments and development stakeholders.**
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2 BACKGROUND

This initiative to understand the current landscape of climate and environmental impact on humanitarian operations, specifically on shelter and settlements assistance, was generously funded by USAID/BHA.

InterAction's Shelter and Settlements (S&S) team primarily used qualitative methods through individual and group consultations with humanitarian practitioners.

Specific shelter and settlements consultations included four Regional Shelter and Settlements Forums, Shelter Meeting 2023, the Global Shelter Cluster annual meeting, and special sessions at InterAction's Shelter and Settlements Working Group meetings.

On broader humanitarian climate and environmental issues, InterAction hosted or consulted practitioners in 13 different sessions, including webinars, climate advocacy working groups, shelter and settlements working groups, disaster risk reduction (DRR) working groups, regional forums, and field visits.

The team also conducted a literature review and interviewed several Cluster partners. A detailed study of environmental issues in Pakistan's flood response and another on environmental management in the Rohingya response in Cox's Bazar were also conducted.

Over 300 people participated in group and individual consultations and surveys, including two dozen interviews with InterAction Members, UN Agencies, and independent experts.

This report looks specifically at the Shelter and Settlements Sector, its role, and the potential of the Sector to lead and manage environmental issues in collaboration with other sectors and stakeholders during a humanitarian response. The research identified a range of excellent knowledge bases and guidance on specific programmatic and technical measures for practitioners developed by NGOs, the UN, and global and country Clusters.

This paper does not provide step-by-step technical guidance for humanitarian S&S actors. Climate and environmental challenges and solutions are specific to disaster contexts, pre-existing vulnerabilities, and the type, scale, and timing of the hazard faced. Therefore, S&S efforts to address climate and environmental hazards should consider other risk factors and parallel interventions.

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This report is one of three exploring climate and environmental impacts and initiatives within humanitarian operations. While this report looks at a specific sector – Shelter and Settlements, the second looks at collaborative or coordinated efforts in response. The third report is a compilation of outcomes from a series of regional consultations, webinars, workshops, and interviews.

3 WE IDENTIFIED SOME CONCERNING TRENDS

A significant number of humanitarian organizations are taking initiatives to address, mitigate, or adapt to climate and environmental impacts in their operations or responses.

At the global level, initiatives from the Global Shelter Cluster, UN agencies, and NGOs have produced a range of useful guidance, primarily sector-focused and on programmatic and technical measures. At the response level, country Clusters have started to promote good practices and sector-specific guidance and tools. Donors have developed policies, minimum environmental requirements, and guidance. Environmental reporting requirements are focused on individual projects, often on individual sectors.

During the consultation, one of the first observations was the interchangeable use of climate, environmental, and disaster risk reduction terminology. Organizations and sectoral experts used different terminology to refer to similar issues. For example, 'greening' is often a catch-all term for any prevention, mitigation, and adaptation measures. 'Green Team' and 'Greening the Response' are prevalent.

Many organizations recognized the lack of in-house expertise to analyze, strategize, and develop internal climate or environmental policies and strategies, program guidance, and advocacy. Most environmental or climate portfolios are staffed by generalists, a sizable portion coming from disaster risk reduction practice.

Organizations also link their climate and environmental practices to their specific organizational missions and specific focus groups, such as women and children or people with disabilities. Others focus on specific sectors such as Shelter, WASH, or Livelihood while recognizing that disaster impacts are broad, affecting all sectors and all vulnerable groups.

Most ongoing efforts are focused primarily on reducing plastic use, saving energy or using renewable energy (cooking and lighting), local procurement and using local materials, and reducing, recycling, or reusing waste. By and large, these efforts are for mitigation.

There are very limited scalable or promising adaptation practices. Some organizations are conducting pilot programs for initiatives such as nature-based solutions, early warning, and early cash distribution. For many organizations, mitigation, adaptation, and anticipatory action are typically rooted in the decades-old practices of disaster risk reduction, although described in new terminology.

System-wide humanitarian priorities on climate and environmental action are yet to emerge. This is reflected in a range of actions and priorities set by individual agencies and country stakeholders. Even when policies and priorities emerge, they are not communicated well, especially outside international coordination mechanisms. There is still a large divide between local government environmental plans and the focus of the humanitarian community.

The S&S Sector programming is severely impacted by hazards exacerbated by climate change and environmental degradation. The Sector also has a large carbon footprint, given the use of large quantities of construction materials and Non-Food Items (NFIs) or essential household items. The absence of adequate shelter and safer settlements can impact communities' health, livelihood, protection, and education outcomes. The Sector also has an opportunity to define the resilient recovery of communities after a crisis.

Organizations are taking steps to reduce, mitigate, and adapt individually and are seeing positive results. These efforts should continue. However, unmanaged, uncoordinated humanitarian response can, in fact, result in maladaptation. Climate and environmental impacts are not sector specific. Therefore, our response should be collaborative, rooted in multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder efforts. Every response should have an environmental response management strategy. This should involve all sectors, agencies, donors, local stakeholders, and relevant government agencies. The focus should be on addressing the root causes of hazards and vulnerabilities at the broader settlement level. It may also mean that, in exceptional circumstances, stakeholders may prioritize humanitarian imperatives over certain individual environmental initiatives.

Disasters and conflicts we are familiar with are becoming more frequent, intense, and lasting longer, and they are often co-occurring

August 2022 floods in Pakistan submerged one third of the country, displaced eight million people, and damaged or destroyed over two million homes. Cyclone Idai and Tropical Cyclone Kenneth, some of the strongest in the region in recent memory, decimated homes and infrastructure. Communities also regularly deal with smaller and mid-size hazard events that go unreported. In addition, extreme temperature events, especially in settlements not designed and built to adequately protect inhabitants, have an additional toll on life, health, livelihoods, and general well-being.

Climate change is increasingly recognized as a significant driver of displacement and migration, as rising sea levels, extreme weather and temperature events, and other environmental factors threaten the safety and livelihoods of millions of people worldwide. However, data for 'climate migration' is still evolving.[1]

Coherence in humanitarian policy and practice on climate and environmental impacts is yet to emerge

The humanitarian system faces significant challenges in preparing and responding to the implications of these increasing needs and evolving contexts. In humanitarian response, individual agencies are left to incorporate environmental actions into their programmatic activities or to 'mainstream' them. Environmental issues in humanitarian responses are rarely measured, monitored, or evaluated systematically. While respective organizations may track (e.g., carbon footprint), system-wide efforts are yet to be formalized, with some recent exceptions.

Addressing climate change and environmental impacts lies primarily with governments and development stakeholders

Governments have the overarching responsibilities to enact policies and regulations and enforce regulations that can mitigate the effects and adopt and promote sustainable development. Nationwide disaster risk management responsibility also falls under the respective governments. Most governments have developed national frameworks and guidance; however, it is often not implemented at local and provincial levels. Communities and local civil societies are left out of decisions. Given the need for coherent national policies and regulations, capacity and resources required to address climate and environmental drives, and often much shorter time span of humanitarian action, there is a large gap in approaches and dialogue. Regardless, there is consensus among agencies that climate and environmental concerns and responsibilities should be shared.

Shelter and settlements are at the center of crises

When a house is destroyed, the family loses most of its assets, and protection vulnerabilities are increased. They often lose their livelihood, resulting in an increase in personal insecurity, depletion of children's education, and an increase in trauma and health risks. Similarly, when a community is displaced, residents are displaced from their homes, settlements, and villages, often for long periods and sometimes forever. Shelter is also connected to the land and the environment and linked to all basic essential services. Displaced families still need adequate shelter, access to essential services, and increased safety and protection. Host communities are similarly affected. Displacements and housing losses impact all humanitarian sectors, reverse development gains, and disrupt social cohesion. The S&S Sector should focus on more coordinated efforts to establish adaptation measures, noting that any S&S intervention must follow the do-no-harm principle and protect people from future risks.

The current capacity of the humanitarian S&S Sector is insufficient to address the scale of the challenge

Many crises we face due to climate-induced hazards and environmental degradation are not entirely new. Humanitarian S&S actors have dealt with similar disasters in the past. Many impacts are now compounded by or have links to ongoing conflicts, forced displacement, urbanization, and migration.

However, the capacity to prepare, warn, mitigate, and adapt to the new normal remains inadequate, given the global humanitarian capacity is already stretched to its limits. Recent trends show that only 8 to 25% of the people who needed S&S assistance received support. As climate and environmental change continue to intensify, the number of people needing humanitarian aid will likely increase further, putting a significant strain on the system.

We need to manage expectations and be transparent and accountable to affected populations

Arresting carbon emissions, sustainable development, adaptation, anticipatory actions, and meeting climate goals set by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and other global platforms remain the long-term solutions to intractable crises. Mitigation and adaptation programs take more time and resources and require specific expertise. The humanitarian response often meets a small percentage of the overall needs of the crisis-affected communities. They often engage with the community for a limited period.

It is unfair to say that climate and environmental impacts caught the sector unaware. Adequate warnings, predictions, data, and research have been made available. Still, the scale, timing, and occurrence have left the humanitarian system unprepared. The adage that humanitarian action is time-limited is increasingly becoming obsolete. Organizations are caught responding to different hazards and conflicts, often in the same region, year after year. While durable solutions are often discussed in humanitarian circles, much of the ongoing assistance is basic and provides only temporary relief.

The humanitarian system, particularly the S&S Sector, needs to reset, rethink, and strategize its path forward

Climate and environmental impacts have made this more urgent. We must act collaboratively, locally, and self-critically. This may mean the sector must admit its limits, be more focused, be accountable to affected communities, and advocate to other stakeholders, especially the governments and development actors, to be responsible. We must balance scale, coverage, quality, and the impact we seek.[2] Tough decisions must be made in consultation with the affected community, and expectations must be managed more transparently.

Many S&S-focused organizations, including the Global and Country Shelter Clusters,[3] have prioritized addressing many of these challenges, primarily focused on reducing carbon footprint and waste and developing country environmental profiles. However, cohesive and collective actions are not being taken or are slow to be operationalized, challenged by organizations' lack of expertise, resources, and changing priorities.

The S&S Sector has a vital role to play

The S&S sector has a range of relevant experience to demonstrate and inspire other stakeholders. That includes applying DRR, hazard, and risk analysis; using sustainable materials; building safer and healthier shelters; improving community infrastructure; providing secure tenure; understanding and enhancing urban dynamics and social cohesion; and most importantly engaging communities throughout the process. In addition, shelter and settlement assistance contributes to direct and indirect positive outcomes in protection, GBV, livelihoods, mental and physical health, and child well-being. It also provides affected people with some normalcy and sets them toward early and long-term recovery. Interventions in safe and adequate shelters and risk-tolerant settlements, along with community awareness and preparedness, can provide a foundation to build longer-term resilience to climate and environmental impacts.

We need to move from sectoral mainstreaming to multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder environmental management

Individual efforts by one organization, group, or sector to mitigate, adapt, and anticipate environmental impacts should be encouraged. However, despite good intentions, these efforts can result in maladaptation when not strategically managed. A coordinated effort by all sectors and stakeholders promises to provide the most optimized impacts, given limited resources and expanding needs.

Many of the communities affected by humanitarian crises are least responsible for the climate crisis. In many cases, saving lives and reducing suffering are immediate imperatives, and thus, the speed of response may take precedence. In addition, every humanitarian context is unique and poses its challenges. Indigenous knowledge, flexibility, iterative improvements, and collaborative decision-making are vital to achieving a collective impact.

[1] Huckstep, S. & Dempster, H. (2023) The 'climate migration' narrative is inaccurate, harmful, and pervasive. We need an alternative. Blog. Center for Global Development. https://www.cgdev.org/blog/climate-migration-narrative-inaccurate-harmful-and-pervasive-we-need-alternative

[2] http://www.shelterprojects.org

[3] https://sheltercluster.org/community-practice/environment-community-practice

4 INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN BY HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATIONS

To understand current initiatives on climate and environment, InterAction consulted participants at Regional Shelter and Settlements Forums and Global Shelter Cluster annual meetings, as well as through expert panels and simulation exercises. Consultations covered a range of broad issues, including S&S and vulnerable settlements. Some observations from these discussions are described below.

Humanitarian responses often occur in contexts already pre-exposed to systemic social, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities. These conditions are far more likely to drive human tolls, displacements, and loss of livelihoods. Inadequate shelters and neglected settlements increase vulnerabilities after a crisis. Addressing such severe vulnerabilities within a humanitarian response timeframe, with limited funding and resources, on an ever-increasing scale continues to be challenging. The pressure brought on by climate and environmental hazards is just starting to get the attention of humanitarian organizations. However, a few organizations, who have long term presence in a country or multi-mandated have included some environmental mainstreaming activities or worked on disaster risk reduction programs.

Over 50 organizations were consulted. The diversity of sectors, focus areas, population groups, mandates, and missions vary among organizations.

The first and most obvious observation is that climate, environmental, and risk reduction terminologies are used interchangeably and loosely among organizations and practitioners. Terminologies and intended meanings varied between humanitarian and development organizations and between different sectoral experts. For example, 'greening' is used to capture anything from avoiding plastic packaging, reducing transport, reducing paper printing, using more environmentally sustainable materials for construction and NFIs, using solar panels in camps, and reducing electricity use in offices.

Below are some comments from representatives of various organizations regarding current environmental management initiatives. These efforts have just started and are evolving. Some of the organizations have multiple initiatives, so the statements do not fully capture organization-wide efforts.

- Greening is one of our strategic initiatives. The organization focused on establishing its carbon footprint at the operations level (HQ and regional offices) and greening humanitarian programs. No specific guidelines have been developed, and no programmatic changes have occurred.
- We [an organization working in humanitarian and development programs] focus on vulnerable people and participatory action, e.g., using early warning information and preparing for specific disaster risks. Adaptation measures piloted include nature-based solutions and climate-smart agriculture. We have not focused on greening or carbon footprints.
- Our organization uses climate and disaster risk analysis to inform the aid community. It will expand into evidence-based solutions and long-term environmental challenges like land degradation, deforestation, and desalination. We also plan to analyze internal displacement trends due to climate shocks.
- We are mainly working on the development side and focusing on off-grid power, sustainable agriculture, and fisheries. We have not progressed on the humanitarian side but want to collaborate on sharing lessons and working with others.
- We are currently analyzing how to manage environmental impacts throughout construction.
- We are focusing on greening operations through carbon footprint measurement and looking into understanding and establishing a legal framework for refugees and their displacement due to climate change impacts.
- Our focus is on risk reduction and adaptation in housing with an emphasis on resilience to climate change with nature-based solutions in humanitarian settings.
- We are establishing and reducing our carbon footprint, developing environmental and social screening procedures to determine if a particular program will have a negative environmental impact, and taking actions to mitigate risks.
- Our organization is working on early warning systems and resilient community infrastructures.
- Our organization is trying to broaden those opportunities within the intersection of climate disasters and humanitarian work.
- GSC is more focused on environmental issues than climate impacts, supporting country operations and coordination with logistical and technical support, including data, the CO2 footprint of plastics and building materials, and developing country environmental guides.

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The above feedback is a sample of many similar efforts undertaken by humanitarian and development organizations, and by and large, many focus on 'greening' or reducing carbon footprint, sometimes referred to as mitigation. Some efforts focus on operations and logistics, with minimal efforts in actual programming, especially within the humanitarian response. Early warning and cash distribution are used in evacuation, preparedness, and dampening the initial crisis impacts and needs, and it seems to have some positive outcomes.[4] Early warning, cash distribution, and preparedness are often captured under anticipatory action.

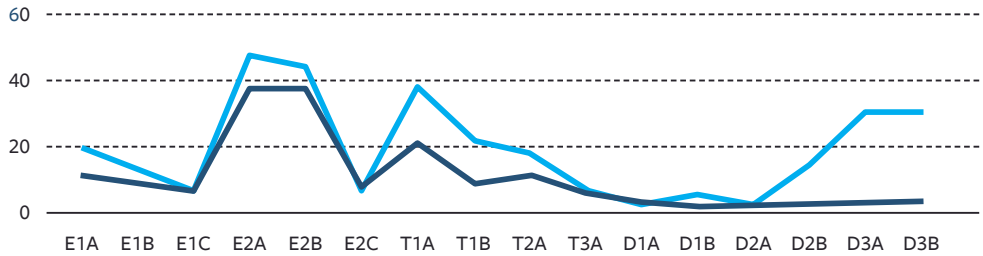
[4] https://b-ready.org/

5 CARBON EMISSIONS AND HABITABILITY

S&S assistance varies by context, resources available, legal frameworks, security and protection concerns, local topology, the scale of the damage, and the movement of people. It can include tarpaulin sheets, building repair kits, tents, temporary shelters, hosting, rental assistance, collective centers including camps and out-of-camp settlements, and, in rare cases, more durable shelters (one-room, incremental, and permanent construction).

Much of the guidance, studies, and recommendations cover more durable housing, although less so in humanitarian emergency contexts. It includes the Green Recovery and Reconstruction: Training Toolkit for Humanitarian Aid.[5] More recently, Global Shelter Cluster is producing some promising and valuable guidance and tools, such as country environmental profiles. The Sphere Association published an environmental addendum to the Sphere Handbook.[6]

On the environmental sustainability of emergency shelters, UNHCR's resource on Shelter and Sustainability[7] provide a good comparison of the CO2 footprint of various shelters, comparing their cost, life expectancy, and habitability. The following graphs and data from the guide highlight the need to weigh several factors and intended outcomes rather than a one-off carbon footprint reduction. Lifecycle analysis and habitability considerations are important, along with carbon footprint.



There were 6 types of Emergency shelters ***(E)****, 4 types of transitional shelters* ***(T)****, and 6 types of Durable shelters* ***(D)*** *tested. Graphs represent lifecycle CO2 emission, per year, per square foot, and lifecycle cost, per year, per square foot.*

: CO2 /Year/Sqft : $ /Year/Sqft

Note: It is essential to read the reasoning in the original report that explains the materials chosen, the type of shelter and habitability factors, local context, and market conditions. Often, the lowest one-time CO2 emission may not be the right solution when considering the lifespan of the shelter, habitability, hazard resilience, or lifecycle cost.

Many tools help practitioners to understand CO2 footprint, including the Shelter Methodology for the Assessment of Carbon (SMAC)[8] and NEAT+.[9] Some organizations have tried these tools in an actual response, but a system-wide uptake has not yet been realized.

Some of the shelter-specific adaptation measures, while not new to the sector, practiced in humanitarian S&S response include:

- Incorporating rainwater harvesting to guard against water shortages and droughts
- Elevated foundations, raised floors, and drainage channels to guard against flash floods
- Design elements such as bracing, stronger fasteners for joints, roofs, and connections, changed roofing shapes, roof straps, structural openings, etc., to withstand stronger winds and minor quakes
- Appropriate roofing materials for local climatic conditions for heat and cold
- Choosing appropriate and sustainable materials, including treated bamboo
- Appropriate shelter location to reduce risks such as landslides
- Training local community in safe construction techniques

Many of these designs, materials, or process interventions have been practiced in individual projects. They have been proven to withstand hazards, such as stronger storms, floods, and minor quakes. Such adaptation measures incorporated in shelter programs remain isolated and specific to a project. Response-wide data on measures contained is not collected, nor is its impact systematically measured, especially how these adaptation measures were proven.

Both mitigation (CO2 footprint, sustainable materials) and adaptation (shelters able to withstand future risks) measures applicable to the context must be taken simultaneously. Apart from the examples listed above, adaptation measures are still in their infancy and developing.

[5] World Wildlife Fund and American Red Cross (2010). Green recovery and reconstruction: Training toolkit for humanitarian aid. WWF and American Red Cross. https://files.worldwildlife.org/wwfcmsprod/files/Publication/file/6yv8ayzl1y_Combined_GRRT.pdf?_ga=2.56934498.976177458.1705925962-282249409.1705925962

[6] Sphere (2019). Thematic sheet #1: Reducing environmental impact in humanitarian response. https://www.spherestandards.org/resources/thematic-sheet-environmental-impact/

[7] https://sheltercluster.org/resources/documents/unhcr-shelter-and-sustainability

[8] The Global Shelter Cluster Environment Community of Practice, BRE Trust and WWF/US has developed this tool jointly. Information and guidance for using it are at https://sheltercluster.org/environment-community-practice/pages/shelter-methodology-assessment-carbon-smac

[9] An open-source assessment tool available at https://neatplus.org/

6 INDIVIDUAL VERSUS SYSTEM-WIDE EFFORTS

A resilient settlement needs an all-of-system approach. Most humanitarian crises take place due to decades of systemic vulnerabilities, neglect of the environment, and poor governance, among other factors. There needs to be a measured expectation of how much of these issues can be addressed by humanitarian actors and what responsibilities they can take.

Despite more awareness and some isolated good practices, the response has not changed at the settlement level. Settlement-level interventions are a central discussion point in the Shelter and Settlements Sector. However, there has been little discussion or awareness of the settlement-wide intervention or collaboration with other sectors.

Settlements, whether pre-crisis or post-crisis, do not operate or exist in isolation. Settlements are influenced and affected by spatial and physical design, the type of services they have access to, economic and livelihood opportunities, environmental conditions, and social and political influence.

'The national government and policymakers hold the most important responsibility and have the power to plan, influence, and implement changes necessary for vulnerability and disaster risk reduction.'[10] Most contexts in which humanitarian responses occur lack adequate national environmental and planning policies and guidance that are absent, weak, or not enforced. Philippines, Nepal, Indonesia, and Pakistan, where major disasters have occurred recently, developed policies and guidance specific to reconstruction processes, more so for more permanent housing construction. The Housing Recovery and Reconstruction Platform of Nepal is a good example of how the government, with the help of donors and the aid community, completed the reconstruction of permanent houses following the earthquake.[11] The same model is being followed in Pakistan.

While individual organizational and sectoral efforts are laudable, only collective multi-stakeholder and multi-sector efforts, closely linked to local stakeholders and national climate and environmental strategies, can make a significant impact.

Many camps are like informal settlements in urban areas, lacking vital services and basic infrastructure. Mass displacement settings are often where the interaction of multiple humanitarian sectors, local governments, and communities takes place. These settlements are also ideal places to collaborate around collective mitigation and adaptation interventions.

An example of a sector-wide effort to address environmental issues was undertaken in Cox's Bazaar camp (published in a separate report).[12] The Environment and Energy Technical Working Group (EETWG) developed a strategy to address issues around sustainable shelter materials, flood, landslide, cyclone risks, energy use, sludge and waste management, and restoration of adjoining forests.

Efforts in Cox's Bazaar involved a multi-sectoral and multiple stakeholder effort, including the local government departments, in consultation with both refugee and host communities in a defined settlement. This strategy or approach was highlighted in the Settlements Approach Guidance Note.[13]

Some examples of issues addressed by EETWG include:

Sector	Topics discussed or addressed
Shelter and Non-Food Items	• Alternative cooking fuel and energy-efficient stoves • Household-level solar lights • Roof gardening • Bamboo treatment and replanting
Site Management and Site Development (Shelter and CCCM)	• Solar street lighting • Sustainable site development • Sitewide solar projects • Management of wildlife corridors (elephant-human interaction)
Food Security	• Plantation aligned with site development. • Climate-smart agriculture practices in host communities
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)	• E-waste management solutions • Watershed management • Sanitation and safe disposal of excreta/solid waste • Safe drinking and domestic use water • Managing agricultural water use, including irrigation systems.
Livelihoods and Skills Development	• Community engagement and training • Maintenance of solar infrastructure

Table 1: *Examples of topics receiving EETWG support*

Many issues discussed above require a collaborative and holistic approach to managing environmental issues. Environmental risks and solutions are not limited to a specific sector and must be addressed holistically.

[10] Vahanvati, M. (2018). A novel framework for owner driven reconstruction projects to enhance disaster resilience in the long term. Disaster Prevention and Management, 27(4): p. 421-446. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/DPM-11-2017-0285

[11] More information is available at https://www.hrrpnepal.org/

[12] Effective humanitarian responses require collaborative environmental management, InterAction (2024).

[13] Available at https://www.interaction.org/blog/the-settlements-approach-guidance-note/

7 THE SETTLEMENTS APPROACH – A MULTI-SECTOR, MULTI-STAKEHOLDER APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Settlements Approach Guidance Note provides clarity, knowledge, and methodologies on a holistic approach to support people living in settlements.

Environmental issues must be addressed in an integrated, multi-sectoral way, with all relevant stakeholders, including the population we serve. They must be addressed strategically and systematically in any response. Environmental issues and climate considerations must be addressed in strategies and plans such as the Humanitarian Response Plans and Humanitarian Needs Overview.

Environmental and climate risks must be addressed very early during humanitarian response plans, and throughout the program cycle, as well as funding, programming, coordination, and MEAL.

The Settlements Approach[14] conceptualizes whole of population in crisis, engaged through a collaborative multi-sector and multi-stakeholder approach. It emphasizes the holistic perspective of human habitation in space. A settlement is not just about physical structures, but also the intricate social economic, and environmental dynamics that shape people's lives within it. Similarly, a landscape or ecological approach conceptualizes natural elements, such as crops, livestock, soil, trees, and water sources, as integrally linked.

Both approaches overlap and are complementary in generating an understanding of structures and systems connecting all populations. For example, both approaches are intersectoral, both work with the community, identify risk, and interrogate the sociopolitical and sociocultural context of human habitation. Ultimately, humans and their settlements take place within, and not separate from, the natural environment.

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The **four key characteristics** of the Settlements Approach are that it:

1. **Defines settlements of high needs, by analyzing risks, damage, and need, and recognizing that cultural, economic, and environmental links may not match with administrative boundaries**
2. **Works multi-sectorally, as well as with existing and planned development strategies**
3. **Engages with all relevant stakeholders, recognizing limits of humanitarian impact and the need to better understand and connect with existing systems**
4. **Considers the whole population, understanding people in need include directly and indirectly affected, as well as those with capacity to contribute and leverage humanitarian assistance.**

[14] The Settlements Approach Guidance Note - InterAction

8 THE SECTOR NEEDS TO MAKE SEVERAL CHANGES

Overall, the consultations highlight the need for the S&S Sector to lead and manage environmental issues in collaboration with other sectors and stakeholders during a humanitarian response.

Participants suggested that there is currently a lack of scalable practices in adaptation, but they are evolving, which requires more attention. Some anticipatory action pilot programs are being deployed in disasters due to natural hazards; these often consist of early warnings, early cash, evacuations, and pre-positioning, all of which have been shown to have lessened the impacts.

Donors need to work toward harmonized donor reporting requirements to reduce the reporting burden on organizations. Further, a consistent application of policies and clear context-specific expectations must be set early. Offsetting any additional cost and resource requirements is not yet the norm among donors, with some exceptions.

Participants also recognized the central role of governments in setting policies, allocating resources, and strengthening locally led community-based disaster risk management. Collective advocacy must be undertaken toward the role and responsibilities of governments, development, and the private sector.

The consultation and research recognize that challenges and solutions are defined by disaster contexts and variables based on the communities' pre-existing vulnerabilities and the type, scale, and timing of the hazard faced. Time-limited and resource-constrained humanitarian efforts will have a limited impact. Humanitarian stakeholders must be transparent with affected communities and manage expectations.

Many of the country and regional consultations highlighted the lack of engagement with local and national stakeholders, including governmental, non-governmental, and private entities. Discussions in South Sudan and Colombia showed a large gap between the international humanitarian and local systems.

During consultations, it is commonly agreed that individual organizations and sectors working in silos is a hindrance to progress and can even be counterproductive. One sector's ability to address all or most risks is limited. There is a high demand for a joint effort – formal or informal – to set response-wide strategy on climate and environmental priorities. This will help many

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stakeholders directly or indirectly engage in a humanitarian response. Any such collaboration is currently ad-hoc, and many humanitarian organizations are seeking such guidance.

Monitoring of environmental initiatives is left to individual agencies. It would be beneficial to collaboratively assess and comprehend the intended impacts of any such initiatives, make necessary adjustments along the way, and learn from them. The time is now. We must also recognize that humanitarian imperatives, where needed, must take precedence, noting that many donors and governments have recognized humanitarian exemptions in catastrophic disasters and crises.