

# Proposal to the IASC Working Group for the establishment of a Reference Group on Environment and Humanitarian Action

## Background Document

### Environment and 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.”<sup>1</sup>*

The environment is fundamental to humanitarian action for two reasons.

First, environmental issues are often underlying and contributing factors to humanitarian crises. Second, humanitarian crises can have negative effects on the environment and exacerbate risk and vulnerability if managed inadequately or addressed too late.

Proactively addressing environmental issues can therefore slow or even reverse trends that lead to deforestation, desertification, soil erosion and pollution, which can have significant impacts on community resilience, biodiversity, food security and economic development.

### Norwegian Refugee Council

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is an independent humanitarian organization helping people forced to flee and supporting them as they build a new future by promoting and defending displaced people’s rights and dignity in local communities, with national governments and in the international arena. NRC works in both new and protracted crises across 30 countries, where it provides food assistance, clean water, shelter, legal aid, and education.

NRC works to prevent disaster and climate displacement, and strengthen resilience among displaced communities. Its climate and disaster work on the ground falls within three pillars:

- Short- and long-term environmental impact assessments.
- Design and use of programmes that reduce negative environmental impact created by displaced populations and humanitarian aid.
- Community guidance on assessing environmental risks, adapting coping strategies and developing sustainable environmental practices.

### The Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit

The Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit (JEU) works to promote the inclusion of environmental issues as an integral part of all elements of humanitarian response, including across the humanitarian programme cycle. This means that environmental concerns are addressed and considered in needs assessment and analysis, strategic

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<sup>1</sup> Environment and Humanitarian Action: Increasing Effectiveness, Sustainability and Accountability, 2014: [http://www.urd.org/IMG/pdf/EHA\\_Study\\_web\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.urd.org/IMG/pdf/EHA_Study_web_FINAL.pdf): 37.

response planning, resource mobilisation, performance monitoring and evaluation. The JEU also works with partners to integrate the environment into global cluster guidance and at country levels to develop specific action plans in priority countries.

The Unit is located in the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Geneva, Switzerland. Engaging in over 15 different preparedness and response networks, the JEU liaises closely with member states and regional organizations, UN stakeholders, private sector, industry groups, academia and civil society. The Unit also enjoys strong in-kind and political support from member states through the Strategic Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies, which is the principal advisory group to OCHA and UNEP on environment and emergency topics.

The JEU together with its partners develops introductory and advanced trainings on a variety of environmental emergency preparedness and response topics. Five online courses are available on the [Environmental Emergencies Centre](#) (EEC) in multiple languages, one of them also focusing on the topic of [Environment in Humanitarian Action](#). This 1.5-hour e-learning module provides humanitarian actors with information on how to effectively integrate environmental issues into humanitarian response and early recovery strategies. The training highlights the key opportunities, misconceptions and challenges for mainstreaming environmental issues into humanitarian action.

### **Environment and Humanitarian Action Network**

Since 2013, the JEU coordinates the Environment and Humanitarian Action (EHA) Network.

This informal advocacy group jointly identifies key issues involved in integrating environment into humanitarian action and prioritizes joint actions for advocacy and capacity building on environmental emergencies. It is a growing network (recent additions include the Global WASH Cluster Coordinator and the Swedish Red Cross) which has recently moved from an “information sharing platform” to a platform for collaboration.

The network consists of a diverse set of members: Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, Food and Agriculture Organization, Francophone Research Centre on Sanitation, Waste and the Environment (CEFREPADE), Groupe URD, International Committee of the Red Cross, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Norwegian Refugee Council, OCHA, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Oxfam UK, ProAct Network, Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), Safe Access to Fuel and Energy Humanitarian Working Group, Swedish Defense Research Agency, Swedish Red Cross, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Development Programme/Early Recovery Network, UNEP, United States Agency for International Development and, World Food Programme and World Wide Fund-USA.

## Relevant publications

- Environment and Humanitarian Action: Increasing Effectiveness, Sustainability and Accountability, 2014: [http://www.urd.org/IMG/pdf/EHA\\_Study\\_web\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.urd.org/IMG/pdf/EHA_Study_web_FINAL.pdf)
- Country-specific studies on the integration of environmental issues into humanitarian decision-making and response:
  - Nepal:  
[http://www.eecentre.org/Modules/EECResources/UploadFile/Attachment/Nepal\\_EHA\\_Study-20160120.pdf](http://www.eecentre.org/Modules/EECResources/UploadFile/Attachment/Nepal_EHA_Study-20160120.pdf)
  - Haiti:  
[http://www.eecentre.org/Modules/EECResources/UploadFile/Attachment/Haiti\\_EHA\\_Study-20160120.pdf](http://www.eecentre.org/Modules/EECResources/UploadFile/Attachment/Haiti_EHA_Study-20160120.pdf)
  - Afghanistan:  
[http://www.eecentre.org/Modules/EECResources/UploadFile/Attachment/Afghanistan\\_EHA\\_Study-20160120.pdf](http://www.eecentre.org/Modules/EECResources/UploadFile/Attachment/Afghanistan_EHA_Study-20160120.pdf)