

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

ENVIRONMENT

This section covers:

- Background information on environmental concerns and humanitarian action
- An introduction to environmental concerns in displacement sites
- Tips for CCCM Cluster coordination teams

INTRODUCTION

The **human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment** was recognised by the UN in 2022, declaring that “everyone on the planet has a right to a healthy environment”¹.

Environmental issues can both lead to and worsen humanitarian crises – from climate change, disasters, conflicts, and pandemics – including through environmental degradation, deforestation, desertification, soil erosion and pollution. Environmental action links to disaster risk reduction and resilience building and has relevance to humanitarian responses, while at the same time contributing to sustainable development.²

Proactively addressing environmental issues can reduce risks and vulnerabilities at both a large- and small-scale, as well as improving dignity and safety for families living in displacement.

Environmental mainstreaming means moving away from standalone single projects to environmentally sustainable approaches and multi-sectoral collaborative interventions across the whole humanitarian response – starting in the early phase of a response.

Mainstreaming of environmental considerations also links to the humanitarian principle of ‘**do no harm**’ – which obliges humanitarian actors to prevent and mitigate negative impacts of action on affected communities.

CLUSTER RESPONSIBILITIES

As a Cluster coordination team, you should:

- ✓ Include environmental considerations and actions in camps and camp-like settings in CCCM Cluster strategic planning
- ✓ Promote mainstreaming of environmental considerations and actions throughout CCCM activities, including providing context and resources as needed for Cluster members
- ✓ Support (start, or collaborate on) initiatives addressing specific environmental issues, for example addressing loss of vegetation cover or pollution in displacement sites
- ✓ Work with other Clusters, specialist actors, and CCCM partners to develop technical guidance and standards as needed on environmental issues in displacement sites. For example, when setting up or decommissioning sites, or to address specific environmental concerns
- ✓ Understand donor requirements relating to CCCM and environmental action

¹ UN General Assembly (2022), Resolution A/76/L.75, The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3982508?ln=en>

² European Commission, DG-ECHO, *DG ECHO's approach to reducing the environmental footprint of humanitarian aid*, Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2795/074887>

- ✓ Communicate clearly that environmental action is a priority, and work with Cluster members to prioritize environmental actions that will have the most impact

The [Connectivity, Clean Energy and Sustainability Working Group](#) of the global CCCM Cluster is a forum to raise awareness of and link CCCM actors with initiatives to address sustainability and access to energy in humanitarian settings, and their tools and expertise.

ACTION IN DISPLACEMENT SITES

Every camp or camp-like setting will have environmental concerns. These should be addressed from the beginning of site selection through to decommissioning, and throughout implementation of CCCM support. As well as working with Cluster members to identify and address environmental issues, you will likely need to collaborate with other clusters and potentially specialist actors.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Some of the most common environmental issues include³:

- Loss of natural vegetation cover
- Soil erosion
- Groundwater pollution
- Sanitation management (waste, latrines, drainage)
- Soil contamination and wastewater treatment
- Unsustainable sources of energy

TIPS FOR ACTION

Top tips for environmental action in displacement sites include but are not limited to⁴:

- ✓ **Conduct a rapid environmental assessment** or screening to quickly understand the most important environmental concerns in the early stages of site selection. This can be followed up with a more in-depth assessment when the most pressing, lifesaving, needs have been addressed.
- ✓ **Build on local knowledge and community engagement** and agree on a community-based environmental action plan to manage the environment and surrounding areas. This identifies critical environmental and related livelihood and social issues.
- ✓ **Manage natural resources effectively** within the displacement site and surroundings, which will benefit both the displaced and host communities. Work with key stakeholders to identify ecosystems and specific natural resources, like forests or groundwater, that may be at risk and in need of protection.
- ✓ **Proactive approaches** to protection of the environment, natural resources and vegetation around the site are easier and cheaper, compared to restoring damage that has been done.
- ✓ **Involve host communities in decision making** related to local management and extraction of natural resources.

Contextually relevant approaches are always important. This requires contextual understanding and local knowledge. As with disaster risk reduction and resilience building, the localization approach is a guiding principle when addressing environmental concerns in displacement settings, meaning “as local as possible, as international as necessary”.

³ EHA Connect <https://ehaconnect.org/clusters/camp-coordination-and-camp-management-cccm/>

⁴ EHA Connect: <https://ehaconnect.org/clusters/camp-coordination-and-camp-management-cccm/>

COX'S BAZAR, BANGLADESH

The Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh are in a region prone to natural hazards, with risks exacerbated by deforestation that resulted from the construction of the camps and collection of wood for use as fuel, and from environmental degradation.

An Energy and Environment Technical Working Group supports the Food Security, Site Management, Shelter/NFI, and WASH Sectors, providing technical advice and promoting environmental mainstreaming to promote climate change mitigation and environmental sustainability in Cox's Bazar – for both refugee and host communities.

Dedicated environmental assessment studies have been carried out to evaluate the impact of the camps, and to implement mitigation measures and reduce risks.

Initiatives from multiple organizations in Cox's Bazar have included planting activities (reforestation) and provision of Liquid Petroleum Gas to reduce use of firewood.

UGANDA – REFUGEE REFORESTATION PROJECT

In response to increasing environmental degradation in refugee-hosting areas of Uganda, the ReForest Project was designed to protect existing forests and promote tree seedling planting. ReForest is a long-term, sustainable project that incorporates forest monitoring, maintenance and protection. Through this project, both refugee and host communities are able to benefit from improved access to energy resources and increased socio-economic inclusion. Read more in [CCCM Case Studies 2020 – Chapter D Environment](#)

COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

Commitments on environmental action relevant to CCCM Cluster coordination work are various – including UN-wide commitments. More specific commitments that can be used to inform the work of the Cluster include:

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENT CHARTER

The [Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations](#) was⁵

1. Step up the response to growing humanitarian needs and **help people adapt** to the impacts of the climate and environmental crises
2. Maximize the **environmental sustainability of humanitarian work** and rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions
3. Embrace the leadership of **local actors and communities**
4. Increase the **capacity to understand climate and environmental risks** and develop evidence-based solutions within the humanitarian sector
5. **Work collaboratively** across the humanitarian sector and beyond to strengthen climate and environmental action
6. Use influence to **mobilize urgent and more ambitious climate action** and environmental protection
7. **Develop targets and measure progress** on the implementation of the commitments

DONOR COMMITMENTS

Donors are increasingly putting in place commitments and requirements to environmental action which will influence humanitarian responses.

ECHO's minimum environment requirements were introduced in 2023, for all proposals to have clear environmental considerations included. These require ECHO-funded CCCM programming to mainstream

⁵ The Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations, available at <https://www.climate-charter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/ClimateEnvironmentCharter-EN.pdf>

environmental considerations, address environmental challenges, and ensure a decommissioning plan is in place. They also recommend CCCM partners to develop community-based environmental management plans and support capacity-building activities on reducing environmental footprint and climate change. Read more [online](#).

MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR CAMP MANAGEMENT

The [Minimum Standards for Camp Management](#) guide CCCM actors to address environmental challenges.

- **Standard 3.1: A safe and secure environment** – All site residents and service providers live in a dignified environment that is safe and secure from harm or violence.
- **Standard 3.2: An appropriate environment** – All site residents have an environment that is physically, socially and culturally appropriate.

SUSTAINABILITY IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

In addition to addressing environmental issues for affected communities, there are increasing organizational and inter-organizational efforts to improve environmental sustainability and reduce negative environmental impacts of how humanitarian response is delivered.

Greening the Blue is a UNEP initiative to engage and support the UN system towards greater environmental sustainability in the management of its facilities and operations.

Watch [this video](#) to learn more about Greening the blue.

RELATED RESOURCES

CCCM Case Studies

- [CCCM Case Studies 2020 – Chapter D Environment](#)

References and further reading

- [Camp Management Toolkit](#) (2015) Chapter 6 Environment
- Global CCCM Cluster (2023) *Introduction to CCCM Training, Module 15 Environmental Action*
- [Minimum Standards for Camp Management](#) (2021)
- [EHA Connect](#) (Environment and Humanitarian Action)
- [The Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations](#) (2022)
- UN General Assembly, Resolution A/76/L.75, [The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment](#), 2022
- European Commission (2022) [DG ECHO's minimum environmental requirements and recommendations](#), 2022
- Ministry of Environment and Forests, UNDP Bangladesh, and UN WOMEN Bangladesh (2018) [Report on Environmental Impact of Rohingya Influx](#)
- [Global Shelter Cluster's Environment Community of Practice](#), including a tipsheet on integrating environmental considerations in HNO/HRP, and a checklist
- NRC & IKEA Foundation (2018) [Sustainable Settlements, Maximising the Social, Environmental and Economic Gains in Humanitarian Displacement Settings](#)