

EMG Nexus Dialogue 3: Strengthening partnerships between the environmental and humanitarian sectors in the context of the 2030 Agenda

Geneva, 19 October, 2017

Concept Note

The EMG Dialogue Series contributes to a common understanding of the integrated goals and targets of the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the requirements and opportunities which these bring to UN agencies in supporting the implementation of the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda in a coherent and collaborative manner. The Dialogues provide an occasion for UN agencies and other stakeholders to identify areas of mutual interest and to better understand the transmission channels through which an action in one sector may impact the outcomes of another.

The third EMG Nexus Dialogue to be held in Geneva on 19th October 2017 will focus on the interlinkages between the environmental and humanitarian sectors. Environmental impacts affect humanitarian activities in many ways. Climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss can, for example, act as “threat multipliers” in exacerbating conflict, which may in turn lead to internal or cross-border movements. This makes the integration of environmental considerations and sustainable practices into humanitarian response planning directly relevant to ensuring peace and security globally. At the same time, humanitarian activities such as relief and recovery operations in disaster and conflict reciprocally impact the environment, for example in terms of unsustainable use of natural resources for reconstruction and livelihoods or unsustainable use of timber and fuel wood in shelter construction. Failure to address environmental risks can undermine the relief process, causing additional loss of life, displacement, aid dependency and increased vulnerability.

The Humanitarian Review of 2005 designated environment as one of the four major cross-cutting humanitarian issues, however, several evaluations by the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) have acknowledged that the environment is not sufficiently integrated into humanitarian response. The humanitarian and environment nexus has numerous tools, resources, and knowledge platforms working to address the complexity of this nexus. However, the number of resources becomes a challenge as a lack of cohesion and coordination between actors grows.

The first EMG Nexus Dialogue referred to the challenge that arises as a result of the disconnect between the focus on relief and recovery in humanitarian activities, while addressing the root cause to the crisis often remains less of a priority. Humanitarian activities also mainly imply responding to urgencies in the short-term, while environmental activities tend to be focusing on more long-term, incremental change. Mainstreaming and integrating the environment into the humanitarian sector goals may lead to reducing the environmental drivers of conflict, reducing disaster impacts through environmental management, increasing resilience and making human rehabilitation more sustainable. Successfully addressing the interlinkages between the humanitarian and environmental sectors is crucial from the point of view of implementing the SDGs in an effective and integrated way.

During the Nexus Dialogue, a technical segment will set the stage for the discussion by providing an overview of collaboration efforts between the humanitarian and environmental sectors so far, as well as a mapping of how the two sectors are linked in the frames of the 2030 Agenda through the lenses of the SDGs. A mapping of the stakeholders in the UN system active in these fields will be provided. Examples of inter-agency collaboration and case studies showcasing how the environment is currently being integrated into humanitarian response will be presented and their lessons learned discussed. Finally, the technical segment will discuss how the two sectors could work better together and identify entry points for this interaction in a more systematic way, providing food for thought to the high level segment that follows.

Informed of the outcomes of the technical segment, a subsequent high level segment will hear the views of a panel of senior officials on opportunities and needs to strengthening partnerships between the environmental and humanitarian sectors in the context of the 2030 Agenda.