THE EMG NEXUS DIALOGUES

NEXUS DIALOGUE THREE, 19 OCTOBER 2017

UNITED NATIONS
ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT GROUP EMG

The Environment-Humanitarian Nexus

Environment is a cross-cutting issue in humanitarian work. Environmental degradation, natural disasters and declining ecosystem services can lead to humanitarian deprivation, conflict and displacement. At the same time, humanitarian action can have severe impacts on the environment when short-term stability is achieved by steadily depleting local natural resources.

Broadening the focus from short term stability to long term resilience requires a deeper understanding and acknowledgement of the interdependencies between effective humanitarian action and addressing environmental issues. The third EMG Nexus Dialogue brought together UN and other stakeholders to strengthen awareness of the interlinkages and to discuss how the two sectors could work better together in a more systematic way.

The third EMG Nexus Dialogue brought together UN and other stakeholders to strengthen the interlinkages, to identify tradeoffs and to set targets for entry points in the environment-humanitarian nexus.

Nexus Dialogue Three: Strengthening partnerships between the environment and humanitarian sectors in the context of the humanitarian change agenda and the SDGs

Technical Segment Overview

The technical segment highlighted ongoing initiatives to integrate environmental sustainability into humanitarian action and identified various opportunities for more long-term and systematic approaches to this work. A mapping of actors and partnerships at the nexus of environment and humanitarian action was presented, and lessons learned in collaboration initiatives such as the Joint Initiative on Coordination of assessments for environment in humanitarian action and the work of the Rapid Environment and Climate Technical Assistance Facility (REACT) to green field operations were shared.

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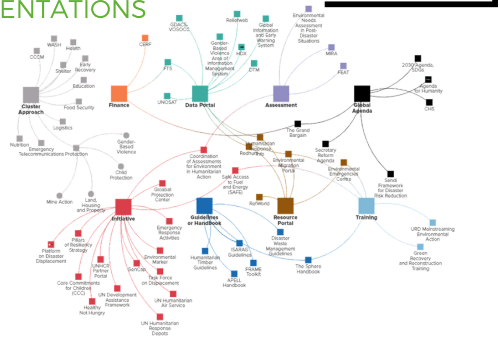
Humanitarian operations traditionally focus on relief and recovery in emergency situations. The urgency in these operations leaves less room for thorough preparation and oftentimes results in insufficient consideration of long-term sustainability and environmental aspects.

Presentations and interventions highlighted the consequences and costs of inadequate attention to environmental aspects of humanitarian action, prime examples being the deforestation that occurred as a result of brick production for humanitarian operations in Darfur and the cholera outbreak in Haiti as a result of failure to meet waste management standards.

The link between environmental management and reaching the goals of humanitarian operations is clear also in the context of delivering on the integrated SDGs. While this linkage has been recognized and considered in i.a. the Sphere Standards, training courses, energy/fuel initiatives like SAFE, individual projects and reviews on progress, there is a need for a more systematic push for coherent integration.

Ms. Emilia Wahlström, UN Environment/OCHA Joint Unit, noted that among other things, there is a lack of leadership and monitoring on this integration and that neither have been operationalized.
In the Stockholm Environment Institute's mapping tool, Ms. Amanda Kohn and Mr. Albert Salamanca showed the lack of documentation of "routine" or "unnamed" initiatives or partnerships that operate in the field.
Mr. Amare Gebre Egziabher from UNHCR highlighted that the number of displaced people is 63.5 million, which is 50 percent more than in 2012. Often this displacement is occurring in climate change hotspots.
Mr. Andrew Morton from the Rapid Environment and Climate Technical Assistance team, emphasized that to fund one blue helmet in the Sahara, it costs $12,000 – $15,000 just for energy costs.
Work by UNDP was then presented, by Mr. Tim Scott, on enhancing environmental and social sustainability in the UN programming and operations including humanitarian action through coherent safeguards.
Following this, Dr. Basilio Monteiro from St John's University, New York, provided a summary of the environment-humanitarian nexus e-discussion.

PRESENTATIONS



An interactive discussion delved into the challenges and experiences of integrating the environment into humanitarian action, including thoughts on what more could be done. It was noted that a change in mindset is needed, for example to view prevention as a humanitarian and conflict peacekeeping strategy and for donors to view themselves as investors.

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Left to right: Mr. Jesper Lund, Chief - Emergency Services Branch and the Field Coordination Support Section (United Nations OCHA); Mr. Jagan Chapagain, Under Secretary General - Programmes and Operations (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies); Mr. Elliott Harris, Assistant Secretary General (UN Environment); Dr. Achim Wennmann [moderator], Senior Researcher at the Graduate Institute and Ex Coordinator of the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform; Ms. Clarissa Azkoul, Chief of Staff (International Organization for Migration); Dr. Hugo Slim, Head of Policy (International Committee of the Red Cross); Dr. Wenjian Zhang, Assistant Secretary General (World Meteorological Organization)

High Level Segment Overview

After the moderator introduced the panel, Ms. Clarissa Azkoul highlighted IOM's support for increased efforts to integrate environment into humanitarian operations, noting that IOM began working in this area in the early 1990s. Following on, Dr. Hugo Slim noted the impacts of climate change on conflict and the relevance of the SDGs and the nexus perspective to the work of the ICRC.

Dr. Achim Wennmann pin-pointed some of the connectors mentioned, stating that International Humanitarian Law sets a legal standard in humanitarian and environmental law. Another connector is the practical applications and integrated operations already occurring.

Dr. Wenjian Zhang of WMO stressed the need to consider the global landscapes as stated in the World Economic Forum's Global Risk Report. The environment has a global economic impact.

Mr. Jesper Lund of OCHA emphasised the need to incorporate SDGs into humanitarian operations from the start, and said that while the environment is considered to some extent in humanitarian action, it is still challenging to successfully promote environmental aspects before other needs related to governance, security, development and ensuring jobs are met.

In his opening remarks, Mr. Jagan Chapagain, IFRC, suggested the convergence of mandates as an important element in collaboration. The environment is intrinsically linked to humanitarian missions. Because humanitarians need to react quickly to a crisis situation, resilience building needs to be incorporated at a time when crisis isn't occurring to successfully include it in humanitarian response.

Mr. Elliott Harris agreed, saying that it is too late to start considering environmental action post conflict. Emphasis needs to be on prevention, while the ways in which environment leads to humanitarian operations or how humanitarian operations transmit to environmental degradation are closely examined. Dr. Wennmann noted that this links to the Secretary General's views on prevention and sustaining peace.

The audience engaged in the discussions, inquiring how to go beyond the environment being an add-on and whether there are other stakeholders beyond "the usual suspects" that should be engaged. The audience further queried how much organisations rely on governments for delivery on the ground and whether there is enough funding and operational support in place.

Mr. Harris noted that funding for humanitarian relief comes from different sources and has different political realms than environment/development funding, which can pose a challenge. While there are enough agencies and bodies in place, there is a need to understand where environmental expertise needs to be mobilised.

Dr. Slim welcomed input from the environmental sector on issues such as finding ways to reduce the carbon footprint of the organisation. ICRC encourages the integration of the environment into domestic law and national legislation, highlighting that accountability is more easily established when states and cities have environmental laws in place. Building on the discussion, Dr. Wennmann pointed out to the panel that the humanitarian community should not stereotype itself into a short-term timeline.

Dr. Zhang highlighted that WMO works to gather more accurate meteorological information to help its member businesses and countries. He informed the audience, that in China, government agencies must by law take into account disaster risk reduction and use weather predictions in their policy actions.

Ms. Azkoul raised the need for new collaborative platforms to break down the barriers of humanitarian and development models. Mr. Chapagain welcomed development actors, representative of the local level and the private sector to the table, highlighting that sustainable development reduces the risks that lead to humanitarian need.

Economic impacts are more easily seen at the local level, triggering the private sector's interest. Disaster law touches all branches of government, leaving space and need for both humanitarian and environmental law.

They see huge benefits from the private sector and development actors, especially when working in large urban environments. Mr. Lund pointed out that at OCHA, they are creative and innovative, but at the same time very risk averse. Often, humanitarian agencies are afraid to fail. That is partially linked to the need to continue to get funding. The audience asked whether we can rethink policy making to be preventative or even anticipatory? Others, from a donor perspective, noted that they have never been asked if an agency could share their funding for a partnership. They confirmed OCHA's concerns, sustaining that fear of not getting funding is always the case. Sections of the audience disagreed with the importance of the private sector, saying business actions can cause harm or human rights violation; in land grab cases.

Future Dialogues

Nexus Dialogue 4: Integrating environment and health in urban settings
Sunday, 3rd December 2017 in Nairobi

Environmental quality is increasingly linked to global causes of illness and death. In urbanized environments, environmental hazards include exposure to air, water and chemical pollution. The SDGs play an important role in this nexus, highlighting that isolated actions to improve health are unsustainable, and the environment must be an entry point into addressing global health.

Acknowledgments

UCL
St. John's University College of Professional Studies – Institute for International Communication
Université de Genève
SEI Stockholm Environment Institute
Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra
IISD International Institute for Sustainable Development

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