



INTRODUCTION

OCTOBER 2021

GREEN RESPONSE

The overall goal of Green Response is to improve the environmental sustainability of humanitarian response, and to “save lives and reduce suffering without risking damage to the environment or the livelihoods, assets, health and survival of affected people”.²

The environmental and climate crises threaten the survival of humanity now and in the future. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement must do our part to ensure that our humanitarian response and recovery operations do not harm the environment, and to minimise the contribution we make to further climate change.

While life-saving interventions remain the focus of any humanitarian response, Green Response extends the principle of ‘do no harm’ to the environment and ecosystems that communities rely on. This means taking action to protect these, recognising that a healthy environment strengthens the ability of communities to adapt to and recover from shocks. A response to a disaster must not leave an affected community more vulnerable to future crises by degrading the environment. Equally, we can harness the power of our network to achieve positive change.



Green Response is a way in which we can approach our work to improve the environmental outcomes of humanitarian assistance. It minimises harm caused to the local environment as well as reducing the global impact of the carbon emissions we generate. It can also adopt innovative solutions to have a positive impact on sustainability.

Green Response should be mainstreamed into preparedness work, assessment and planning, as well as the implementation of our humanitarian assistance. **Everyone has a role to play to green the response**, including management, technical sectors, logistics and supply chain, and administration.

1. Image: Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) is using solar power to provide water to the people who live in the camps in Cox's Bazar. Photo by: Ibrahim Mollik / IFRC, Cox Bazar's, Bangladesh. 30 December 2020.

2. IFRC Secretariat Environment Policy, July 2019. https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/20210813_IFRC-Environment-EN.pdf

Why adopt a Green Response approach?



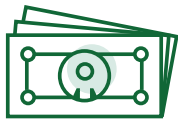
Because a community is dependant on its local environment, and a degraded environment will ultimately hinder the survival and recovery prospects for people affected by disasters, increase the risk of future shocks, and disrupt sustainable development.



Because as humanitarians, we are bound by the principle of Do No Harm. We are accountable first and foremost to the people we assist, and we must extend the principle of Do No Harm to the environment.



Because our own response and recovery interventions could indirectly cause environmental damage, by encouraging deforestation, overusing natural resources like water, or causing pollution.



Because it can be value for money. It doesn't necessarily cost more to be Green. Integrating environmental considerations can be more cost effective in the long-term. The payback period for solar powered water pumps compared to fossil-fuel generators is now relatively short. Waste management efforts which promote recycling can even generate income for communities.



Because response operations consist of major logistical efforts which come with an environmental cost. For example, the IFRC 2015 Nepal Earthquake operation produced 11,906 tons of CO₂ eq. emissions from logistics and relief items alone. Equivalent to the carbon emissions captured by 1,867 hectares of mangrove forest. 60-80% of a typical humanitarian organisations' carbon emissions come from their supply chain.



Because national standards, regulations and international commitments increasingly incorporate elements linked to more sustainable natural resource management, climate change action and waste management, which we must comply with to operate effectively.

Because of existing commitments, including:

- The **2021 Climate & Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations**, developed by ICRC and IFRC and adopted by organisations across the sector, which includes a commitment to “maximise the environmental sustainability of our work, and rapidly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions”.
- The **IFRC Strategy 2030**, which includes the climate and environmental crisis as Global Challenge One, noting that “we will strengthen the Red Cross and Red Crescent Green Response Framework and strive to reduce our own climate and environmental footprint.” The **IFRC Secretariat Plan and Budget 2021-2025** includes the following outcome: “The IFRC Secretariat and National Societies adopt environmentally sustainable practices and contribute to climate change mitigation” (Outcome 1.2)
- The **IFRC Secretariat Environmental Policy of 2019**, and similar Sustainability or Environmental Policies being put in place by many National Societies.
- The standards articulated in the **Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance**, the **Code of Conduct** for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (1995), and the **Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability**, all of which state that we must pay attention to environmental concerns, and minimise and address unintended negative effects of our work on the environment under the principle of ‘do no harm’.
- International agreements which include a focus on protection of the environment to which the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement has made statements of support, including the **2015 Paris Agreement** (for implementing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change); the **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030**; and the **UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development**.

Green Response Working Group

The RCRC Green Response Working Group (GRWG) was formed in 2014 by Swedish Red Cross to advance the concept of Green Response within the RCRC Movement. The GRWG objective is to *progress initiatives that improve environmental outcomes of humanitarian action, connected to the IFRC Secretariat and National Societies' knowledge, experience and mission, adhering to the Fundamental Principles, the principle of 'do no harm' and the concept of 'build back better'*.³

It functions as an informal network to share best practices and experience on greening, and promote good coordination on this topic both within and outside the Movement.

The GRWG is now led by IFRC and membership is growing. Anyone from across our network is welcome.

Green Response requires all of us to act

Integrating Green Response in our humanitarian work requires us to act on different levels, in:



- our own personal actions, to be more environmentally aware and responsible



- the design of the response and recovery interventions which make up an operation; and the preparedness actions which take place in advance



- raising awareness with colleagues and volunteers, improving the actions of our teams in the field and how we run our offices



- the strategic level, across our whole organisation, to advocate for institutional changes in policies and practices

Green Response in practice

Some of the common green response actions that are well recognised across the humanitarian sector are shown below. There are more and more examples of these being adopted by Red Cross & Red Crescent National Societies.

- Use of **clean energy in projects**, for example solar water pumps, or solar lighting for shelters; also solar energy for our own offices
- Ensuring access to **sustainable household energy sources** in displacement contexts, like cooking fuel and fuel efficient stoves, to avoid deforestation and charcoal production
- **Reduce packaging and eliminate single-use plastics** in relief items
- Promote **recycling and the concept of the circular economy**, rather than disposal, incineration or generating pollution. Better waste management can provide livelihoods opportunities
- **Sustainable fecal sludge treatment** in mass sanitation projects, instead of relying on pits or tanks. This can potentially create a valuable by-product like fertiliser or energy.
- Promote **sustainable construction**, using sustainable construction materials, reusing disaster debris, and designing structures to reduce energy requirements
- **Protect natural resources** like water, trees and fish stocks, by ensuring we don't design and implement activities in a way that could lead to environmental degradation
- **Reduce the impact of our supply chain**, by greening the specifications of essential items, and encouraging better environmental standards from suppliers.
- **Optimise management of fleet** to reduce fuel consumption, and consider using electric vehicles.
- **Procure locally produced products**, if analysis shows the quality and environmental impact of local production is acceptable; also using **cash** and **voucher assistance** if feasible.
- Rely on **local knowledge and expertise** where possible, rather than flying in external specialists.

3. IFRC Secretariat Environment Policy, July 2019. https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/20210813_IFRC-Environment-EN.pdf

Contact information

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