



Nature-based Solutions in Humanitarian Contexts

Key Messages

November 2021

These messages have been developed by the cross-network FEBA-PEDRR-EHAN working group on Nature-based Solutions in Humanitarian Contexts and released during UNFCCC COP26. These technical key messages emphasise the relevance of Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for the humanitarian sector, particularly in the context of strengthening climate and disaster resilience.

FEBA
Friends of Ecosystem-based Adaptation



PEDRR
Ecosystems for Disaster Risk Reduction
and Adaptation

The Friends of Ecosystem-based Adaptation (FEBA) network is made up of more than 90 government ministries and sub-agencies, UN bodies and conventions, NGOs, research centres and other institutions. The Partnership for Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction (PEDRR) is a global alliance of UN agencies, NGOs and specialist institutes. These key messages build on efforts and discussions within the cross-network working group and between partners of FEBA, PEDRR, and EHAN over time.

KEY MESSAGES

1

Degradation of ecosystems and their goods and services exacerbates exposure and vulnerability of people to natural hazards, climate change impacts and emergent novel zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19.

The environmental dimensions of emergencies and humanitarian operations themselves can damage the environment and contribute to ecosystem degradation, such as through deforestation and unsustainable use of water and land resources. This, in turn, can further increase risk and exacerbate the vulnerability of local people. This is also the case when humanitarian crises, Internally Displaced Persons (IDP), and refugee camps evolve into multi-generational communities that struggle with environmental degradation and exposure to related shocks and stresses.

2

Nature-based Solutions (NbS) can reduce vulnerability and increase the resilience of communities; reduce the likelihood and impact of natural hazards; and reduce exposure to natural hazard events. NbS can contribute to the humanitarian imperative of preventing and alleviating human suffering arising out of disasters and conflicts.

Building resilience: For example, agroecology (including rainwater harvesting) can provide food security, employment and income that help vulnerable communities survive and recover from the impacts of drought.

Hazard reduction: For example, preserving and restoring forests and watersheds can reduce the likelihood of landslides on slopes and in landscapes at altitude.

Exposure: For example, restoring mangroves in coastal zones can reduce the exposure of coastal communities to storm surges and saltwater intrusion.

Nature-based Solutions

are actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore natural and modified ecosystems in ways that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, to provide both human well-being and biodiversity benefits.

[IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions, 2020](#)

3

NbS can provide **multiple benefits** simultaneously that are particularly relevant for humanitarian contexts; in addition to **disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation**, NbS can help provide health benefits and food and water security, among others. These benefits are directly tied to the work of **key humanitarian clusters**, including **food security and nutrition; water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH)**; and **health**, as well as other cross-sectoral linkages.

NbS are therefore closely tied to key areas of humanitarian work and can help to enhance the effectiveness and accountability of humanitarian action by addressing social and environmental issues. However, further understanding is needed within the humanitarian sector on how best to apply NbS in practice beyond disaster risk reduction, specifically in humanitarian response and recovery operations.

4

A paradigm shift is needed **from short-term, small-scale humanitarian response operations towards long-term, landscape-scale responses** that integrate nature, risk reduction, and affected people into the response strategy.

Timeframe: Humanitarian response operations are often planned for the short-term, whereas building social and economic resilience and managing, protecting and restoring ecosystems often require longer periods of time. Going beyond traditional response operations, NbS are important throughout the disaster management cycle – before, during and after crises and disasters. Scientific climate projections can inform NbS actions and make them relevant in the context of short-, medium- and long-term climate impacts.

Scale: Humanitarian response operations are often targeted to small-scale, worst-hit crisis and disaster-stricken areas. However, increasing the resilience of communities and reducing risk in the medium- to long-term often requires broader scale solutions facilitated by appropriate plans, policies and laws. NbS are most effective when done at a landscape scale and applying an ecosystem approach that considers, for example, how upstream forest restoration can protect downstream communities from flooding.





5

NbS, as part of a broader set of solutions, reinforce and contribute to **humanitarian objectives** of addressing human suffering and protecting lives. NbS can also bring environmental and intergenerational equity to the **do no harm principle**.

Lives and livelihoods depend on the material goods and non-material services provided by functioning ecosystems. Together with needs-based and gender-based approaches, localisation agendas and other participatory and collaborative approaches, NbS can help to create a healthy environment which is fundamental to human dignity and well-being.

Humanitarian action must not inflict further harm upon its recipients. Environmental responsibility in humanitarian operations helps to protect lives and livelihoods – including those of future generations – by reducing harmful environmental impacts and addressing environmental concerns as part of the response, while also contributing to addressing root causes of risks and vulnerabilities. NbS can contribute to the environmental responsibility of humanitarian action at multiple stages.

6

NbS provide an opportunity to **acknowledge, involve, and respond to the concerns of a variety of stakeholders and at-risk communities** involved in disaster risk reduction and humanitarian operations, including **children, youth, women and Indigenous Peoples**, in the protection, sustainable management and restoration of ecosystems.

Local actors and communities, including children, youth, women and Indigenous Peoples, are at the frontline of disasters and crises and as such they need to be meaningfully included in decision-making processes and activities around disaster risk reduction, response and recovery. With regards to NbS, many of these groups are in charge of natural resource management and their engagement makes them powerful actors for change that contribute to reducing risks and vulnerabilities to future shocks and stresses. Youth are also strong actors of change and have engaged in NbS in various ways.

NbS provide effective solutions that are easily replicable by communities that are exposed. These solutions can be led by communities who own and promote them.



7

There is a need for enhanced **collaboration** across sectors and **increased research, assessment, learning, awareness, capacity building, policy coherence, data and tools** that support environmental integrity and NbS in humanitarian contexts.

- Assessments are needed that integrate climate and environmental dimensions in the design and implementation of NbS in humanitarian contexts.
- Increased research and learning, including exchange of lessons learned, is needed on the effectiveness and application of NbS within humanitarian contexts – before, during and after disasters and crises. This should include learning on the application of NbS in different humanitarian contexts, including protracted crises, and in different humanitarian sectors such as water, sanitation and hygiene; shelter and settlement; and health.
- Awareness and capacity of environment and humanitarian stakeholders must be strengthened on the linkages between climate, environmental and humanitarian work at all scales.
- Enhanced tools that integrate climate, environmental and humanitarian data are needed to guide the planning and implementation of humanitarian actions that integrate NbS.
- Increased policy coherence between decision-makers in climate change, disaster management, environmental management and development is needed to integrate NbS into relevant plans, policies and laws for addressing climate and disaster risks.

8

Finance for NbS has traditionally come from national and international, public and private, sustainable development and environmental finance sources. Why and how **humanitarian and disaster finance can support NbS for humanitarian action** needs to be better understood and communicated.

There are some existing examples, for instance, of cash- or food-for-work programmes for reforestation as part of humanitarian response and recovery operations.

Challenges include the frequent allocation of humanitarian and disaster finance only once disaster strikes, or in anticipation but within relatively short time-frames (e.g. forecast-based finance).

In contrast, NbS usually requires longer-term thinking and investment beyond short-term emergency funds to carry out assessments, capacity building, implementation and monitoring to provide risk reduction in a given community and ecosystem.

KEY ASKS



Increase understanding on the role of NbS in the disaster response and management cycle – before, during and after disasters and crises – through increased research, capacity strengthening, policy coherence, data and tools on NbS in humanitarian contexts, with the active involvement of communities.



Pilot NbS approaches in humanitarian contexts and capture learning to support enhanced action and scaling up in the future.



Increase understanding of the relevance of **humanitarian and disaster finance for NbS** through stakeholder dialogues.



Increase finance for NbS in humanitarian contexts from various sources, including climate change, environmental and disaster finance from public and private sources.



Promote inclusive governance and policy coherence between decision-makers in climate change, disaster management, environmental management and development, breaking down silos to enable a shift towards long-term, landscape-scale responses to disasters and crises that integrate nature, risk reduction and affected peoples.

ENDORSEMENTS



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY
CRIS



Comparative Regional Integration Studies



Save the Children



GNDR
Global Network of Civil Society
Organisations for Disaster Reduction



MEDIO AMBIENTE
SECRETARÍA DE MEDIO AMBIENTE Y RECURSOS NATURALES



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