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Report: "Greening Humanitarian Assistance: Donor Priorities and Practical Guidance"

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Executive Summary

On 26th June 2025, a webinar entitled **"Greening Humanitarian Assistance: Donor Priorities and Practical Guidance"** (recording here) took place, co-organised by the Donor Greening Working Group[1] Facilitation Team and the Secretariat for the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations.

During this webinar, a group of humanitarian donors launched the Common Donor Priority Actions for Greening Humanitarian Assistance. These Priority Actions are designed to deliver meaningful climate and environmental impact. They include both practical, easily implementable steps and more ambitious initiatives that can help drive transformative change across the humanitarian sector.

In parallel, the Charter Secretariat has been developing clear, practical guidance to support Charter signatories in their greening efforts. During the webinar, the Secretariat launched a new set of dedicated Environmental Sustainability Guidance Pages —closely aligned with the Priority Actions. These resources aim to demystify complex greening themes, centralise useful tools and references, and support organisations in fulfilling their Charter commitments while effectively implementing the Priority Actions.

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[1] Since April 2024, the following donors have been meeting as the Donor Greening Working Group (DGG), to operationalise Commitments 3 and 4 of the Humanitarian aid donors' declaration on climate and environment: AECID; CDCS DG ECHO: GAC; GFFO and SDC. **The DGG focuses on greening (the climate & environmental footprint of humantiairan aid) but all members have signed the Donor Declration of which commitments 1 & 2 refer to to prepardeness, anticipation, DRR and climate change adaptation** (see pgs. 9-17 of the 3rd Progress Report of the Donor Declaration, 2025 on donors' actions inthis respect)

Overview of Webinar Participation

There were 110 participants[2] of which:

- 21 indicated[3] that they were from donor agencies
- 11 different donor agencies were represented[4]
- 77 indicated that they were from humanitarian organisations. Of these organisations
    - 17 were members of the International Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement
    - 10 were from UN agencies
    - 3 were working on greening initiatives linked to or led by UN agencies
    - 40 were from INGOs
    - 5 were from national (or regional) NGOs

12 participants identified themselves as "other": these were representatives of private sector, research bodies, as well as specialists, projects, networks and organisations working on greening and decarbonisation (therefore not considering themselves humanitarian organisations).

Participants' Expectations

Drawn from registration forms, is a summary of what participants hoped to achieve by attending the webinar:

- Understanding how the priorities shape programming and funding decisions, donor expectations, commitments, and requirements, and the nuances in different donors' perspectives
- Learning from others' experiences, including case studies, tips, tools, and practical guidance for integrating sustainability.
- How to align with donor expectations and strategies and organisations should position themselves considering donors' commitments and priorities
- How to more effectively advocate internally for environmental integration.
- Exploring collaborative approaches, particularly in areas like logistics and transport.

Launch: Common Donor Greening Priority Actions

Working under the auspice of the Donor Greening Group (DGG), 5 humanitarian donors have endorsed a set of 10 Common Donor Priority Actions on Greening Humanitarian Assistance. These Priority Actions are designed to deliver meaningful climate and environmental impact. They include both practical, easily implementable steps and more ambitious initiatives that can help drive transformative change across the humanitarian sector. The Priority Actions (PA) aim to enhance donor coordination and to drive collective action on greening. They provide a unified message from donors to partners on greening, helping to coherence and avoids contradictions (e.g. different rules & requirements on greening). The PA should not be

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[2] Based on the zoom. This not truly reflect participation as not all those connecting attended the full duration of the webinar.

[3] Using pre-defined categories on the registration form.

[4] In attendance on 26th June were: **AECID** - Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation ; **CDCS** - French Crisis and Support Centre; **ECHO** - DG for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations ; **FCDO** - Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, UK; **GAC** - Global Affairs Canada; **GFFO** - German Federal Foreign Office; **MFA C**Z - Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of **Estonia**; Permanent Mission of the **Netherlands** to the UN in Geneva; **SDC** - Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation; **Sida** - Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

considered an exhaustive list of priorities, but rather they reflect consensus among donors on where humanitarian organisations should prioritise efforts.

By implementing the PA, organisations can reduce emissions, waste and costs, and ensure sustainable and high-quality aid that leads to better health and protection outcomes. The PA can also enhance localisation goals, conserve livelihoods and build communities' resilience to withstand future crises and conflicts.

The Common Donor Priority Actions aim to concretise Commitments 3 and 4 of the Humanitarian aid donors' declaration on climate and environment (the Donor Declaration) and are aligned with Commitment 2 of the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations (the Charter). Furthermore, they reflect ECHO's Minimum Environmental Requirements and Recommendations for EU-funded Humanitarian Aid Operations.

Representatives of the **five donor agencies** who have endorsed the Priority Actions discussed why the Priority Actions (PA) are important. Key messages are:

- The PA formalise and **reinforce existing environmental and climate-related commitments** in the sector. Some donors are already integrating the PA into their responses. For humanitarian organisations, the PA align with initiatives such as ECHO's MER and the Charter, reflecting ongoing work.
- The PA provide a **shared framework and terminology**, helping donors harmonise policies, align strategies, reduce duplication, and avoid contradictory approaches.
- Collective endorsement signals **unity and shared ambition**. It demonstrates commitment to climate and environmental goals, even amid funding pressures and shifting priorities.
- The current "*Humanitarian Reset*" heightens pressure on resources, which could threaten greening efforts. However, **greening can be part of the solution** – enhancing resilience, cost-efficiency, and the quality of assistance.
- Donors will maintain a **strong narrative in favour of greening**, working with their partners to demonstrate its positive impact.
- Implementation of the PA and other greening measures may require up-front investments (e.g. infrastructure or technical experts). Donors are aware of this and are prepared to fund **additional costs** (e.g. for more sustainable relief items, for solarisation of boreholes etc.) **where this is justified**
- Although humanitarian funding is generally short-term, ECHO recognises the benefit of multiyear planning and funding and encourages partners to also submit **multiyear proposals** for environmental priorities. This is not yet the case for other donors, since some cannot influence funding cycles for humanitarian assistance- for example, when such cycles are determined by governments.

> **Priority Actions**
>
> 1. Conduct environmental assessments of planned interventions and integrate mitigation measures.
>
> 2. Prioritise products and services with a proven lower climate and environmental footprint.
>
> 3. Implement measures to significantly minimise greenhouse gas emissions from travel and transport.
>
> 4. Incorporate environmentally sustainable waste management.
>
> 5. Phase out single-use plastics except where this would compromise the delivery of humanitarian assistance.
>
> 6. Avoid overexploitation and pollution of water resources and support proper waste- water management.
>
> 7. Avoid water trucking except as a last resort. If used, include a strategy to phase it out.
>
> 8. Phase out the use of fossil fuel generators where possible, reduce energy consumption and transition to renewable energy.
>
> 9. Facilitate access to sustainable and clean cooking solutions and services.
>
> 10. Support access to sustainably produced food, preferably locally produced.

- Humanitarian organisations are encouraged to include greener initiatives in their proposals providing a **simple cost-benefit analysis or projected return on investment** for donors to consider, where relevant. Organisations should not fear being penalised for higher budgets where additional costs are linked to increased environmental sustainability.
- **Other donors are strongly encouraged to subscribe to this list of PA,** recognising the PA as a living statement that can evolve and be added to over time.

Launch: Environmental Sustainability Guidance Pages

The Charter Secretariat has been developing clear, practical [guidance](#) to support Charter signatories in their greening efforts and to achieve their commitments and goals under the Charter. A new set of dedicated [Environmental Sustainability Guidance Pages](#) - closely aligned with the PA - has been launched. These resources aim to unpack complex greening themes, centralise useful tools and references, and support organisations in fulfilling their Charter commitments while effectively implementing the PA.

There are 80 resources within the Environmental Sustainability Guidance Pages, available in several languages and targeting difference audiences, including humanitarian organisations who are beginning to integrate environmental sustainability into their work, and technical experts and those well advanced in their "greening journey". Resources include technical guidance, communities of practice, case studies, environmental screening tools and calculators. The guidance is grouped into the 12 following categories to help organisations navigate the webpages more easily

Getting Started	Considering Environmental Risk	Training, Webinars, and Courses
Technical Guides: Sustainable Supply Chains	**Technical Guides: Decarbonization and Clean Energy**	**Toolkits for adapting programs, policies, and operations**
Carbon Calculators	Engagement Opportunities and Partner Newsletters	Guidance on Carbon Offsetting
Case Studies: Sustainable Supply Chains and Waste Management	**Case Studies: Decarbonization and Clean Energy**	**Case Studies: Environmental Policies and Operations**

Unpacking the Priority Actions: what are organisations already doing, which tools good practices exist?

To provide insights into how humanitarian organisations can operationalise the PA in their work, three PA were selected and "unpacked": organisations were invited to share examples of how they are already integrating the PA into their work through specific projects, activities or changes in the way they work. Learnings, successes and challenges were explored, challenges were identified

PA 2: Prioritise products and services with a proven lower climate and environmental footprint

Key messages shared by experts regarding this PA
- Local procurement is not necessarily more sustainable unless products are both locally <u>and sustainably</u> produced.
- Supplier engagement is essential. Many humanitarian suppliers are unsure where to begin when it comes to environmental sustainability.

- To influence manufacturing processes effectively, we must better understand suppliers' knowledge and progress in environmental sustainability.
- Understanding the supplier landscape and the local market is crucial. Without this, green procurement risks becoming a mere **tick-box** exercise. Procurement officers may request greener products, but without market readiness, this will not lead to meaningful change.

> ### **Practical Example**
>
> In 2024, a pilot of WREC's Green Market Assessment Tool was conducted in collaboration with the IFRC and the Bangladesh Red Crescent. The aim was to assess market readiness and supplier knowledge on sustainability. The data collected revealed low awareness among suppliers regarding environmental sustainability. Common unsustainable practices - such as the use of non-recyclable materials and single-use plastics- were still widespread, and environmental considerations were not yet embedded in technical specifications.
>
> To address these challenges, an action plan was developed focusing on achievable steps to build momentum and demonstrate proof of concept: 1) Integrating sustainable procurement into the Bangladesh RC's Procurement Manual; 2) Training procurement staff and engaging suppliers; 3) Reducing the use of plastics in the supply chain and 4) Making eco regulations mandatory in all construction tenders
>
> **Learnings:**
> -There was a clear need for increased awareness-raising and resources on greening among suppliers
> - Coordination was lacking. For example, some organisations continued to procure items using outdated (non-greened) specifications. This inconsistency led to supplier resistance when the Bangladesh Red Crescent began requesting greener products and specifications.
> - Unless all actors consistently demand revised, greener specifications, suppliers will be reluctant to change.

PA 3: Implement measures to significantly minimise greenhouse gas emissions from travel and transport.

Key messages shared by experts:

- There are promising pooling initiatives across the humanitarian sector to reduce the emissions from t**he transport of goods.** Better planning, "right-sizing" procurement, and de-branding stock are also helping to facilitate pre-positioning of stock (using sea rather than air freight) as well as shared warehousing.
- Reducing air travel is considered a "low-hanging fruit," as organisations and donors have direct control over related policies and emissions. Encouraging online participation, limiting international travel to essential trips, and avoiding business and first-class flights can yield significant savings and environmental benefits. Greater reliance on local or regional teams (rather than international staff), also promotes localisation.

Practical example

Fleet Forum[5] developed the Environmental Self-Assessment Tool (ESAT), with HULO - funded by DG ECHO and CDCS. ESAT helps organisations assess their current practices and identify improvements across management and monitoring, planning and procurement, waste and maintenance, and people management. Originally designed to help organisations meet ECHO's MERs, ESAT also supports the implementation of PA 3. The tool, available in multiple languages, provides tailored recommendations.

Fleet Forum has also facilitated ride- and vehicle-sharing initiatives among NGOs, such as a shared bus on the Beirut-Zahlé route in Lebanon. These initiatives can reduce emissions and costs by coordinating transport for commonly travelled routes (e.g. airport runs, cluster meetings) thereby reducing the overall number of NGO vehicles in use.

Learnings
- Change management is vital: shifting from a vehicle-centric to a shared mobility mindset.
- Organisations should embrace collective action and overcome concerns around insurance, security, and administrative risks. Shared goals make vehicle and ride-sharing feasible, despite differing internal regulations.
- Donors should explicitly support vehicle and ridesharing, as NGOs often assume donor restrictions prevent participation.
- Donors should also promote the use of ESAT and encourage integrating its findings into project proposals.
- Electric vehicles are not a silver bullet—their benefits depend on context. For example, using EVs where the electricity grid is heavily polluting may undermine their environmental advantage.
- Behaviour change is crucial: Avoid unnecessary travel; shift to greener modes (e.g. walking, public transport) and improve remaining journeys (e.g. fuel-efficient vehicles, eco-driving, right-sized fleets).

PA 10: Support access to sustainably produced food, preferably locally produced.

Key messages shared by experts:
- Food security and agriculture are the largest sources of emissions in the sector[6], particularly during the production phase — e.g. fuel use for irrigation, powering tractors, intensive livestock production, or rice cultivation.
- Emissions can be reduced by sourcing certified food (e.g. sustainable rice platforms, certified palm oil), but these are not available in all markets. Therefore, working directly with farmers is key - supporting local livelihoods, reducing food waste, and encouraging sustainable practices.

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[5] Fleet Forum is a global non-profit supporting humanitarian, development, and commercial organisations in managing their vehicle fleets more efficiently and sustainably. Its members include INGOs, UN agencies, and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, as well as suppliers (e.g. fleet management system providers). Fleet Forum offers tools, training, and guidance to improve road safety, reduce environmental impact, and enhance transport operations.

[6] According to CAA's Towards Halving Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2030 in the Humanitarian Sector: a Sectoral Roadmap, in 2022 the most emissive clusters were food security and agriculture, health, nutrition, protection, WASH and emergency shelter and NFI.

Practical Example

ACTED has tracked its carbon footprint since 2017. Procurement is the highest-emitting category, with rice growing and cattle as major contributors. While ACTED explored replacing certain items that they distribute, they faced constraints from donor regulations and sector guidelines that define what can be included in food vouchers, food kits, or NFIs. It therefore trialled several approaches aligned with PA in Syria.

Alternative feed production: Meat and dairy in food kits contribute significantly to emissions, mostly due to animal feed. In the MENA region, feed is often imported or bought from shops. ACTED started to promote micro funds for alternative feed like *Azolla*, a fast-growing aquatic fern, as chicken feed — offering lower water use and reduced carbon emissions. It also trialled the use of hydroponic barley as sheep feed to reduce reliance on open grazing on degraded rangelands. This prevents further land degradation and emissions, while offering feed security during lean seasons when farmers might otherwise kill livestock or rely on imported feed.

Solarisation: ACTED solarised boreholes and pumping systems in Syria where there are problems of over-extraction from illegal boreholes and recurring droughts, leading some farmers to resort to water-trucking. This was combined with other measures such as harvesting rainwater from greenhouses.

Learnings:
- Local feed innovations have strong impact potential.
- Flexibility from donors is essential to funding the piloting and scaling up such approaches regarding more sustainable, local food production.
- This is particularly important as some changes cannot successfully achieved within the lifespan of a humanitarian response (6-12 months) but require longer time frames. Donors should therefore support approaches that transition from short humanitarian responses to longer term development

Conclusion

The webinar underscored a shared commitment to integrating environmental sustainability into humanitarian action through the launch of the PA and the accompanying Environmental Sustainability Guidance Pages. These tools represent a significant step towards operationalising the climate and environmental commitments laid out in the Donor Declaration and the Climate and Environment Charter.

For donors, the key takeaway is the importance of providing consistent, harmonised guidance and support to their partners. Donors must continue to reinforce the message that greening is not only a moral imperative for humanitarians, but also a means to enhance efficiency, resilience, and quality in humanitarian programming. They should ensure that the financial and administrative regulations they ask their partners to adhere to also facilitate – and do not hinder - greening.

For humanitarian organisations, the webinar highlighted that greening is achievable but requires a strategic and coordinated approach. Organisations are encouraged to align with the PA and use the available tools and guidance. Concrete examples showcased in the webinar demonstrate that even modest changes can yield measurable environmental benefits. To enhance collaboration and resource sharing, both donors and organisations must invest in collective action. This includes sharing tools, case studies and green market assessments, as well as promoting joint initiatives like shared fleet or transport.

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