

A Perfect Storm: Humanitarian Impacts of Climate Change

Climate change is not an abstract threat. The impacts are visible throughout the world and affects everyone. Numerous debates revolve around whether or not joining in the fight against climate change is part of the scope of humanitarian action. What has become clear is that it can no longer be ignored. Climate change is already triggering humanitarian crises or amplifying its consequences - a trend that has been scientifically proven to only get worse. From drought to famine to changes in disease vectors to more frequent extreme weather events, the impacts of climate change are being most acutely experienced by the world's most vulnerable. It is imperative that humanitarian actors work now to address climate change head on, for the benefit of people and planet.

The humanitarian consequences of climate change and environmental destruction are irreversible, complex and often not obvious. Rising temperatures threaten crops and livestock and make extreme weather events like drought or torrential rains more likely. These create ideal conditions for food insecurity, which in turn can cause or amplify famine, migration, urbanisation or conflict as people compete for limited resources. Likewise, temperature fluctuations affect disease vectors. For example, changes in the geographical spread and prevalence of malaria are already evident in countries like the Ethiopia or Colombia. Extreme weather can also lead to adverse health outcomes: coastal flooding for example can interrupt the supply of clean water and lead to cholera outbreaks.

The impacts of climate change are being felt disproportionately by the most vulnerable and marginalised. Affected countries often struggle to respond to the fast changing and challenging circumstances that climate change is creating. Local communities are already responding to these climate emergencies, often without help from international humanitarian actors. This is a particularly bitter pill, as those countries are bearing the brunt of the negative effects of climate change and are also among the lowest emitters of greenhouse gases. Climate change is the result of our current economic and industrial system. The humanitarian sector needs to catch up and share the responsibility of addressing climate change together with local communities. Responding to human health without the consideration of the health of the environment is no longer enough.

Environmental activists from around the world have been speaking up about this issue for decades. Just like humanitarian actors, environmental defenders have been subject to increasing scrutiny and criminalization. They have increasingly been labelled terrorists and their work has been more and more politicised by populist and political players. Just like humanitarian actors, they put their own lives at risk on a daily basis. It is therefore ever more important that humanitarians join forces with other actors to contribute to a stronger movement. As humanitarians, responding to climate change and environmental destruction is no longer an act of solidarity, but our shared responsibility.

This year's agenda will revolve around the humanitarian impacts of climate change. What are the links between climate change, health, migration and security? What do the consequences look like? Are humanitarian actors sufficiently responsive to the current and future health consequences of climate change and environmental degradation? Do we need to rethink and adapt our standard practices? Do we need to cooperate better with actors from other fields to combat climate change and its consequences? How can we help provide protection to the most vulnerable populations? What is the environmental impact of our own humanitarian activities and are we considering our own environmental footprint? How sustainable is our work - how much are we contributing to the problem?

Apart from our clear focus on the humanitarian impacts of climate change, we will also pick up the conversations from last year's Humanitarian Congress Berlin to address issues such as the changing power dynamics in the humanitarian sector, locally-led humanitarian responses and unconscious bias.

We are delighted to be joining forces with experts from Greenpeace this year.



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