



Climate Action
Accelerator



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Humanitarian
Research Group



LONDON CLIMATE ACTION WEEK

Leading by example: how the humanitarian sector is advancing climate action

Understanding progress and gaps in reducing the sector's environmental and climate footprint

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The **climate crisis** is an absolute emergency, affecting communities worldwide and fuelling humanitarian crisis. Over the past 10 years, the humanitarian sector has been adapting its practices to both respond to the climate crisis and to contribute to global efforts to reduce emissions worldwide. Nevertheless, the current financial crisis affecting the humanitarian is weakening these efforts while the gravity of the crisis **calls for more ambitious action and pathways**.



Photo credit: Oxfam East Africa



In the face of the climate emergency, a principled approach in line with scientific recommendations is critical

Several organisations are already leading the way by adopting science-based emissions reduction targets and by **measuring and monitoring emissions in a principled manner** (ex: covering all scopes, and excluding carbon offsets from calculations). Beyond aspirational commitments, **more ambitious pathways are needed**.

In the context of shrinking resources, prioritisation of efforts is essential

Transforming practices can be challenging and organisations need to focus on implementing solutions that are high impact, cost-neutral and aligned with existing internal workplans. **Understanding the overall footprint** of organisations helps **identify the main emissions hotspots** and therefore target efforts towards measures with the highest potential.

The critical role of donors

While humanitarian organisations are leading their own transformation, donors need to support these efforts by **funding dedicated human resources or specific investments**. Their role is also critical in leading by example and reducing their own footprint, by setting requirements (i.e. DEC requires members to become signatories of the climate charter) and by adjusting funding and reporting processes **to allow for climate smart programming**. Some (ex: SIDA) are already providing seed funding for their partners' transition or allocating specific grants (ex: solarisation).

While funding is needed, savings can be achieved and costs can be embedded into core budgets

The funding crisis has severely affected the capacity of humanitarian organisation to deliver their environment and climate ambitions as well as monitor those efforts. Organisations can nevertheless **mainstream some of the costs linked to the environment and climate transformation**. It should be noted that many **measures can generate savings** (in the short or medium term) particularly with regards to air travel, freight (ex: switching from air to maritime) and energy. While low carbon product can be more expensive it is not systematic, a specific analysis by item is needed.



Top management of organisations needs to be involved

Most humanitarian organisations have taken strong commitments to reduce their environmental and climate footprints. Yet, with the funding crisis many have downsized their environmental and climate functions, in some occasions hindering further progress. While technical teams are often the ones leading the environmental and climate work, there is a disconnect between how these issues are being considered internally. Top management of organisations **needs to be (re) engaged** in this process **to allow for sustainable change to happen**. Holding top management accountable for the delivery of their commitments (including supply chain management) is essential.

A climate smart response is one that is more efficient and that reinforces the quality of the service provided to populations

There are obvious **co-benefits to a greener and low carbon response**: better quality programmes, cost savings (i.e.: even more significant now with rising inflation and the rise of fuel prices); operational resilience (e.g.; solar energy allows for continuity of services), localisation, acceptance by local communities, etc. More evidence-based information is nevertheless needed to further unpack and quantify these benefits, so that they can serve as an **advocacy tool with donors or within organisations**.

Building these considerations into organisations' processes rather than considering them as ad hoc measures or pilot projects

for long lasting impact and internal buy-in, changes need to be **embedded into existing processes**. There is a need to adjust internal policies (such as Human resources and travel policies) to allow for climate smart decisions and practices to take place. Similarly, mainstreaming environmental and climate considerations into each department/team's workplan is a key success factor, as it allows for **everyone to take ownership of this transition**.

The critical role of supply chains

Humanitarian **supply chains represent the bulk of carbon emissions** in the sector and organisations have various levers at hand. These include identifying with suppliers what adjustments can be made, selecting suppliers that are using renewable energy, including green specifications in the process when this is appropriate, etc. Focusing on a limited number of key items and suppliers that make up most of organisations' procurement makes the process less overwhelming. Exploring what **carbon reduction is possible per top item is an efficient and effective strategy**.



KEY FIGURES

British Red Cross has reached **60 to 70%** reduction in electricity consumption from switching to LED lighting in all its premises. The investment was paid back in 9 months.

Action Against Hunger has reached a 3-to-4-year pay back period for its solarisation investments across different missions.

60 to 70% of **Save the Children and International Rescue Committee's** emissions are related to supply chains.

Climate Action Accelerator estimates that the net cost for organisations to deliver climate and environmental roadmaps is approximately **1%** of their overall annual budgets, over a multi-year period ([see here](#)).

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