SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT FACTSHEET – SOAP



This factsheet provides practical guidance for humanitarian procurement and programme teams to source soap more sustainably and from local production. It highlights key considerations throughout the product lifecycle:



Before buying | Choosing the right soap | During use | End of life | Alternatives

1. Before buying

Sustainable procurement starts with a clear assessment of needs. The following questions can guide procurement policies and decisions.

Do we buy the right quantities?	Can we buy local soap?	Can we buy sustainable?
• Order and distribute quantities based on household size and expected duration of assistance.	• Is there a local supplier able to meet the required quality, safety, environmental, and quantity specifications? • Are the soap bars manufactured locally or only distributed locally? *If no local supplier meets these criteria, consider regional suppliers for alternative sourcing options.*	• Are the raw materials responsibly sourced and traceable? • Does the supplier reduce environmental impacts through energy efficiency measures, low-carbon energy use or wastewater treatment? • Can we consider solid bar soap for personal hygiene, but also as shampoo, as dish soap? • Can we reduce or eliminate unnecessary packaging?

2. Choosing the right soap

These tables help integrate sustainability into your soap procurement. **Table 1** includes ready-to-use technical specifications for BOQs, and **Table 2** provides supplier evaluation criteria for procurement assessment. The "Impact" column reflects each criterion's importance to the environmental footprint (climate, water, waste).

Table 1. Criteria for sustainable soap procurement

Criteria	Impact	Sustainability guidance
Raw materials	High	100% vegetal oil depending on the context (avoid palm oil; if used, request traceability and environmental certification such as Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)).
Product format	Medium	Solid bar soap – 250 g / Minimal - recyclable or reusable packaging; bulk packaging option where feasible.
Local production	Low	Locally manufactured soap.
Natural ingredients	Low	Formulations based on natural ingredients without unnecessary synthetic additives (no parabens, sulphates, synthetic fragrances, or other hazardous substances).

Table 2. Supplier criteria

Criteria	Impact	Sustainability guidance
Water consumption	Medium	Water use is monitored, with measures in place to reduce consumption and treat wastewater.
Energy used in manufacturing	Low	Use of low-carbon energy. Ask for the share of electricity from low-carbon sources and the use of diesel generators and privilege suppliers with higher use of low-carbon energy.
Bulk procurement	Low	Consider bulk supply or reduced individual packaging where hygiene, handling and contamination requirements are allowed.
Social impact		Appropriate health & safety measures in place; local employment (with indicative %), payment of fair wage.

3. During use

- **Store soap in dry and appropriate conditions** to avoid deterioration and waste; apply a first-in, first-out (FIFO) stock rotation to limit losses.
- Ensure **appropriate handling and transport conditions** (avoid prolonged exposure to heat or humidity).
- **Avoid unnecessary secondary packaging** during distribution (especially single use plastic packaging).
- Provide users with simple information on appropriate use and storage.

4. End of life

For solid soap, end-of-life impacts are **mainly associated with packaging**, as the product itself is generally consumed during use, so:

- Avoid packaging if possible or minimise it by selecting solid bars and paper-based packaging whenever feasible.
- Communicate simple instructions on how packaging should be sorted, reused, or disposed of according to local waste management systems.
- Encourage collection and recycling of packaging where suitable waste management infrastructure exists.
- Avoid open burning or uncontrolled dumping of packaging waste, particularly in camp settings, due to associated health and environmental risks.

5. Alternatives: cost and environmental analysis

Table 3. All contexts: environmental benefits of recommended alternatives

Availability of these alternatives must be verified with local suppliers. The reductions in climate change impact were calculated by comparing the reference soap (100% palm oil) against alternatives sourced from local producers in Lebanon.

Alternatives	Reduction in climate impact	Key benefits
Best-option (combining all the options)	-54 %	Soap using locally sourced, lower-grade olive oils with no plastic packaging.
Soap using lower-grade olive oils	-48%	Valorises a by-product or materials unsuitable for food use and supports circularity.
Soap using olive oils	-45%	Olive oil has a lower climate impact than palm oil because existing olive groves sequester carbon, whereas palm oil production is a major driver of deforestation and soil carbon loss as land is cleared for new plantations.

Soap with reduced / no plastic packaging	-6%	Reduces plastic consumption and packaging waste.
Soap using locally sourced oils *	-3%	Reduces reliance on imported raw materials and comes with potentially lower upstream transport impacts.

*: This alternative is not always feasible.

Table 4. Lebanon: cost and environmental analysis of available alternatives

The cost of a locally manufactured and sustainable 250 g bar of soap made mostly from olive oil is **39% less expensive** or 48% to 146% more expensive, than a standard imported palm oil soap bar, whilst delivering **a 48% reduction** in climate change impact (cradle-to-grave).

Conventional technical specification	**Sustainable technical specification**
Material: From vegetal or animal fat, not containing pork fat **Quality:** Homogeneous product in colour and aspect, no impurities; fit for human use; sound, fair & marketable quality; without unpleasant smell **Format:** 250 g bar	**Material:** Mostly olive oil, with a mix of other oils (coconut oil): approximately 55% olive oil and 20% coconut oil, the remainder consisting of water and saponification agents (standard for solid soap) **Quality:** Meets the same core requirements as the conventional specification (fit for human use; sound, fair & marketable quality); free of parabens, sulphates, or synthetic fragrances **Format:** 250 g bar, available in bulk without individual packaging **Sourcing:** Uses olive oil unsuitable for human consumption / lower-grade olive oil sourced from other local producers as a major input **Environmental practices:** Produced by a supplier with a wastewater treatment plant and water-saving measures

6. References and resources

This factsheet is based on a project's market assessment in Lebanon, drawing on supplier questionnaire responses, technical observations from site visits, and available guidance on sustainable products and services relevant to the Lebanese context in 2026. For more information, as well as the methodology used for price comparison, total cost of ownership, and the simplified LCA, please refer to the following document: *Appendix 1 - Price comparison & environmental analysis methodologies.*