

Notes UNHCR Monthly online Consultations with NGOs

Date	29 September 2021
Session Title	Climate Action: Disaster preparedness and response
Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Andrew Harper, Special Advisor on Climate Action, UNHCR • Robin Ellis, Deputy Director, Division of Emergency, Security and Supply, UNHCR • Ezekiel Simperingham, Global Lead, Migration and Displacement, IFRC • Benedetta Gualandi, Humanitarian Program Lead and Urban Resilience Advisor, Oxfam South Africa
Moderator	Stella Ogunlade , Chief of the NGOs, and Civil Society Section (UNHCR)
Participants	90+, mostly NGOs and UNHCR staff
Executive summary	
<p>With contributions from UNHCR, Oxfam South Africa and IFRC, this UNHCR-NGO consultation considered the connections between displacement, migration, and the climate crisis. The discussion was focused on operational response, oriented preparedness, and the enabling environment – particularly the policy framework for the protection and solutions of climate-induced displaced population. Objective 2.3 of UNHCR’s Strategic Framework for Climate Action and UNHCR’s role in disaster response as well as UNHCR’s emergency response to the Idai Cyclone were particularly highlighted. The discussion also covered the role of NGOs when working with governments in disaster risk reduction; anticipatory approaches in addressing disaster displacement, especially forecast-based anticipatory financing.</p>	
Major points arising from speakers	
<p>UNHCR – Andrew Harper</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are all involved in a climate emergency, and we must be much better prepared. There are concerns over the climate crisis and the international community’s inability to respond effectively and mitigate the impacts of climate change. • UNHCR is preparing templates to operationalize UNHCR’s Strategic Framework for Climate Action and support regional action plans, in line not only with UNHCR’s results-based management system but also with other international best practices and guidance including from the UN, NGOs and civil society. • The regional action plans action will reflect what makes sense on the ground, what is accountable and manageable. • UNHCR also noted many comments in the UNHCR-NGO regional consultations, which emphasized the need for collective outcomes, accountability, and clear responsibility-sharing. Organizations wishing to be part of strategic foresight, predictive analytics are encouraged to contact UNHCR. • UNHCR highlighted the need to be working through a much more collaborative manner and to make sure that needs are driven by communities. • The world will probably be divided between people who can adapt and who can move to safer places and populations who will not be able to move. UNHCR has the responsibility to ensure there are ways to take into consideration those who will end up being more vulnerable in the future due to impacts of climate change and other related trends (e.g., increased competition over resources; challenges with livelihoods). • Projections indicate we can expect a tripling of the numbers of disasters over the next 15-20 years, linked to a combination of the impact of climate change, extreme weather events as well as displacement patterns. • One of the challenges for UNHCR and other agencies is to identify the needs and ensure partnerships to implement and manage sustainable projects to make a real difference on the ground. • UNHCR is moving forward in developing a greening strategy, supporting the energy environment, renewable activities, resilience, and preparedness operations, and reducing its own global carbon footprint. • A virtual side event on “Stepping up on climate action: Progress, challenges, and opportunities” will be held on the margins of UNHCR 72nd Executive Committee on 6 October [<i>Side event recording is accessible here</i>]. <p>UNHCR – Robin Ellis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2019 during Idai Cyclone in Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe, UNHCR intervened and supported the coordination of the protection cluster, engaged with the shelter cluster, and provided an operational response. 	

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- It was one of the few times when UNHCR engaged in an emergency response related to climate change. In 2020, UNHCR commissioned an [Evaluation of UNHCR's L3 Emergency Response to Cyclone Idai](#), including an after-action review report with the Division of Emergency, Country Offices and UNHCR Regional Bureau for Southern Africa.
- The evaluation resulted in six recommendations:
 1. Develop clear guidance on UNHCR's engagement in disaster displacement.
 2. Develop regional/operational plans that include resourcing, M&E, and risk assessment.
 3. Reinforce UNHCR's participation in UN Country Team coordination and take an active role under the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.
 4. Strengthen partnerships in the field of DRR, preparedness, and durable solutions for IDPs.
 5. Reinforce training for disaster responses and strengthen engagement of national staff.
 6. Develop a consistent narrative to support fundraising and communication.
- UNHCR is in process of updating its Emergency Policy to better clarify its role. Once published by the end of the year, it will provide clearer guidance to Country Operations and Regional Bureaus about UNHCR's role, and it will ensure better communication with partners.
- UNHCR is also working to simplify its preparedness system, as it is a very sophisticated and complex, and its understanding and compliance is low.
- UNHCR stresses that the agency will never, by itself, respond to a disaster caused by climate change and will always be a member of a Humanitarian Country Team at the country level, working in concert with others, very much in support of national authorities and their disaster preparedness measures.
- UNHCR has a platform with a running horizon scan of all the potential possible emergencies in the world including refugee emergencies, displacement, or conflict scenarios, risks or hazards that are results of climate change.
- Humanitarian partners in countries are also tasked to work with UN Agencies, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinators, national authorities to identify hazards, list possible risks and collective agreement on preparedness phase (e.g. the volcano in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, which caused the displacement of thousands of people including 1400 who crossed the border into Rwanda, was already listed in advance as a hazard).

The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

- IFRC, a humanitarian network operational in 192 countries with the commitment of 14 million volunteers, reflected on the broader, complex, and multifaceted connections between the climate crisis, migration, and displacement.
- One of the possible connections is about people who are already displaced, including refugees, facing new climate impacts in the place where they are displaced (e.g., Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, one of the most climate-vulnerable places on earth where refugees are exposed to landslides, storms, cyclones, and heavy monsoon rain).
- Another connection is when climate change influences sudden-onset extreme weather events, leading to massive displacement mostly internal and sometimes cross-border (e.g., last year, over 30 million people were newly internally displaced).
- There are connections when climate is leading to primary impacts such as the loss of livestock, livelihoods and then as a secondary impact connected to those losses, when people choose or are forced to move from rural to urban areas (e.g. in Mongolia, due to successive extreme winter and drought, nomadic farmers-herders tend to lose their livestock, one of their main sources of livelihoods, pushing them to move to the city to find alternatives).
- Another possible connection between climate-migration-displacement is the role organizations and individuals play to reduce and mitigate environmental impacts and greenhouse gas emissions. The [new climate and environmental Charter](#) for humanitarian organizations covers these topics, including addressing their own environmental footprint.
- Climate change is often the main or one of the key drivers pushing people to choose or be forced to flee from their homes, lands, communities, countries. The connections between the climate crisis, migration, and displacement are multifaceted and different across regions, countries and even within countries.
- Sea level rises is an existential threat for countries with low-lying lands such as in Pacific islands.
- As an example of impacts of mega storms - Cyclone Idai in Mozambique damaged infrastructure, shelter, and housing and forced many people to flee and seek protection.
- Another example is Afghanistan, where a complicated intersection of climate insecurity and conflict is already and increasingly leading to patterns of displacement both within the country and across borders.

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- The needs of the communities who fled climate-induced displacement are very different, as they may move across short or long distances, to temporary settlements, transitional settlements. They may stay with host communities, flee across borders, within their region. There is no one type of climate-related displacement and there is no one face of climate displaced person, so when framing the topic, there is a need to take an integrated approach to the issue. There is a need to harness Disaster Risk Reduction, resilience-building, climate change adaptation, humanitarian response, recovery support for durable solutions, all within an overarching legal and policy framework that protects the safety and dignity of all affected communities.
- IFRC's most visible way to address this issue is through humanitarian response. IFRC is active in emergency operations in 87 different countries across the globe and most operations are connected to weather and climate-related hazards.
- Although humanitarian response is critical and often the most visible aspect of actions, we have an important and critical opportunity to take action now and not wait for humanitarian situations to occur.
- Anticipatory action, i.e., the action taken in anticipation of a crisis, a hazard, or a disaster, before people are displaced is a major component. One specific aspect of anticipatory action is forecast-based action. Many hazards and particularly weather and climate-related hazards are seasonal and predictable (e.g., we knew that typhoons Yolanda & Haiyan were going to come and hit the Philippines).
- The critical question is what we can do to prepare the community in that window of time between the forecast of a specific hazard and the hazard hitting. Within that preparation, how can we take a displacement lens and how can we look specifically at communities needs and those who might be displaced.
- [IFRC forecast-based financing report](#) looks at the need to act before disasters hit and how to mobilize funds. IFRC has developed a system where funding is automatically allocated based on the forecast, so there is no need to ask donors for funding. It is automatically allocated to communities to take certain actions based on pre-existing comprehensive risk assessments, pre-existing identified activities with communities on what they think is mostly needed.
- Forecast-based financing is used to already release financing for activities such as reinforcing shelters and infrastructure before a hazard hits, protecting livelihoods including through early harvesting of mature crops, providing livelihoods alternatives for people who are out of work in that period of time and expected after the hazard hits, encouraging and facilitating safe evacuation for the most at risk, dignified evacuation including facilitating protection measures in displacement sites before people move to displacement sites.
- The report also provides adjustments of climate-related preparedness and response to match COVID-19 protocols.
- Finally, humanitarians need to build on the experiences and perspectives of displaced communities as a more central element to design programs and actions.

[Oxfam South Africa](#)

- Oxfam South Africa provides technical support to governments in Mozambique and Malawi, on policy and strategy but also on the operational side, on Disaster Risk Reduction with a focus on early warning systems and disaster displacement.
- Working with governments is about understand how the system works and how these different parts within the system work in terms of governance, decision-making, administrative and logistic processes.
- Governments understand there is the need to be prepared but some governance systems might be old fashion or not appropriate to climate change and disasters. There are also sometimes structural inefficiencies or gaps that make it difficult for a country to coordinate an emergency. The roles and the level of involvement at government level are sometimes not clear, with non-existent coordination and accountability mechanisms.
- The interlinkages between climate change, disasters, and resilience belong to the mandate of different departments and sometimes horizontal integration does not exist.
- One of the lessons learned is to talk the government's language, with NGOs being "critical friends". Using the language of the government ensures government ownership, which is very important when it comes to implementing operational guidelines. Some governments are also reluctant to address human mobility and disaster management. It can be a sensitive issue in South Africa but there are improvements due to Oxfam's work (e.g., the South African government has not signed the Kampala Convention but decided to develop disaster displacement guidelines).
- Oxfam works a lot at local level and has a number of initiatives with entry points with local governments, for example, creating a community emergency response team in different municipalities linked with early actions and response.

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- Coordination with governments must involve different departments to effectively implement disaster management programs and initiatives.
- Mandates between humanitarian agencies and governments differ but it should be underscored that a strong link between the two institutions is needed to effectively address the root cause of the problem. One of the values of NGOs in relationship with governments is the response on the ground and knowledge of community needs.

Major points arising from discussions

- **Prevention of gender-based violence.** [UNHCR Emergency Handbook](#) contains the standards and policies in emergency preparedness and response. It is publicly available, in multiple languages. UNHCR encourages its use.
- Ensuring security from violence, safety, and preventing exploitation is UNHCR's and partners' key priority focus. It includes refugee emergency situations and incidents reporting of disasters linked to climate change or other humanitarian crises.
- There is momentum towards protection, gender, and inclusion of affected people in different needs and the understanding that not everyone is impacted by a disaster in the same way. For example, the prevention of violence against women and girls is a major strategic commitment for IFRC for at least the next 10 years. Preparedness can be complicated if forecast-based action is overlooked. People are differently at risk and the broader context of Disaster Risk Reduction, of climate change adaptation must be looked at. For many women and girls, the risk of sexual and gender-based violence is connected to pre-existing vulnerabilities, structural marginalization, and discrimination. It can be complicated for humanitarians to address anticipatory action. The importance of safe spaces for women, girls and children during evacuation is a major element.
- **On the collaboration between humanitarian, governments, and other stakeholders to prepare and respond to climate change and disasters,** it was emphasized that humanitarian needs for people displaced due to violence, climate change and disasters can be sometimes very similar but the response, the roles, and responsibilities, especially on the government side, are very different.
- All actors have a role to take, and actions need to be part of a coherent government approach. As an example, IFRC way to support governments responses is through the approach of disaster law where governments are supported to develop disaster risk management law and policy and to integrate displacement, migration, and human mobility considerations into a comprehensive risk management approach. A second example is the Norwegian Refugee Council work in collaboration with governments and various organizations such as the Platform on Disaster Displacement, IGAD, UN Disaster Risk Reduction to respond to refugees' displacement and migration into concrete action and change in policy and practice at national and regional levels.
- There is often one Ministry or one cluster of government agencies working with climate change and displacement. It can be fragmented, and the way humanitarian organizations talk to and advise governments needs to be harmonious and ensure we are not giving fragmented advice.
- **Anticipatory action and forecast-based financing:** There are a need for accurate early warning messages, financial support, forecast best action, scientific evidence and sometimes it does not work properly. There are materials to develop scientific climate risk modeling and weather risk modeling based on specific intensity of the hazard and a specific timeline in the trajectory based on pre-existing community risk assessment. Anticipating impacts – both primary and secondary – and allocating the necessary amount of funding are necessary, but it is climate science, it is always unpredictable, and it is not perfect, it is something to continue to refine.
- Bringing the community together to develop a comprehensive risk assessment with humanitarian actors, funding actors, and government actors together will help in forecasting.
- The Foundation for Rural Development shared **innovative approaches in response to water scarcity** and engagement in climate-smart agriculture. The Foundation noted that in their area of intervention, there was a decline in underground water due to climate change in upstream that was also affecting water flow downstream. The Foundation was working with WFP on climate adaptation for persons affected by floods. In the past, the Foundation had worked with UNHCR on a project called "Refugees Affected in Hosting Areas Program".
- To conclude, UNHCR announced that its Strategic Directions for the next five years will include Climate Action and ensure that it is integrated into all the guidance procedural mechanisms and at country level. UNHCR is turning the Strategic Framework into a global strategic plan bridging the Framework, the global plan, the regional level plans.

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Follow-up/Action points

To UNHCR & NGOs:

- Bringing communities together to develop a comprehensive risk assessment with humanitarian actors, funding actors, and government actors will help in forecasting.
- Ensure coherence between internal policy and guidance with the operations at country level as well as at global level.
- Ensure common and unified approach to support governments responses to disasters and climate-induced displacement.
- Build from experiences and perspectives of displaced communities as a more central element to design programs and actions.

To UNHCR:

- Share with NGOs the updated Emergency Handbook; the regional plans of action arising from UNHCR's Strategic Framework for Climate Action, the Global Strategic Plan and Regional Level Plans.

Background documents/reports/guidance/websites

- UNHCR Emergency Handbook, [Emergency priorities and related indicators](#)
- UNHCR factsheet on [Gender, Displacement and Climate Change](#), July 2020
- UNHCR [Strategic Framework for Climate Action](#), 2021
- UNHCR & IOM, [Bridging the Divide in Approaches to Conflict and Disaster Displacement: Norms, Institutions and Coordination in Afghanistan, Colombia, the Niger, the Philippines and Somalia](#), July 2021
- [Evaluation of UNHCR's L3 Emergency Response to Cyclone Idai](#), February 2021
- [Cyclone Idai one year on: Southern Africa still devastated and vulnerable to climate shocks](#), NGO collective press release, March 2020
- [18 Months After Cyclones Idai and Kenneth](#), Anglican Overseas Aid, October 2020
- Norwegian Refugee Council. Platform on Disaster Displacement, UNDRR [e-learning on Disaster Displacement](#)
- Catholic Relief Services, [Moving Towards Resilience: A study of climate change, adaptation and migration](#), August 2021
- IFRC & RCCC, [Forecast-based financing and disaster displacement: acting early to reduce the humanitarian impacts of displacement](#), Issue Brief, August 2020
- UNHCR-NGO Monthly Consultations on [Operationalizing UNHCR's Strategic Framework on Climate Action](#), January 2021.