

# Environmental Position Paper

## Executive Summary

Environmental stewardship and sustainable practices providing high quality support, but doing so while operating in a socially responsible manner and without jeopardising the environment.

Stewardship is an ethic that embodies responsible planning and management of resources. Through an environmental stewardship ethic, Medair is committed to proactively plan, develop, and adopt operations and programmes that can and will adapt to the effects of climate change and increasing demands on natural resources. Medair recognises the critical need to ensure healthy ecosystems, social equity, and good organisational governance. As such, its performance in relation to the societies in which it operates and to its impact on the environment has become a critical part of measuring overall performance and ability to operate effectively. Medair's belief reflects this stewardship ethic that God calls men and women to be guardians of His creation.

This commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainability will optimise Medair's ability to fulfil its mission to relieve human suffering in some of the world's most remote and devastated places. Environmental degradation and climate change increase the vulnerability and undermine the resilience of people living in poverty. Failure to address environmental risks, such as climate change, and insufficient inclusion of environmental considerations in relief operations can undermine the relief process, causing additional loss of life, displacement, aid dependency, and increased vulnerability. Environmental consideration from the start obviously improves the ability of a humanitarian response to better support communities' transition from a relief phase to a recovery situation.

This paper sets out Medair's approach to managing and mitigating its impacts to the environment as well as tools and principles for Medair to mainstream environmental best practices throughout all of its operations (Affiliate, HQ and Field).

## Context and Environmental Perspective: Climate Change

It is widely accepted that the world's climate has been increasingly changing; effects are observed throughout the planet, to the extent that some experts label it as 'climate chaos'. For years, climate change has been studied by scientists and there is sufficient evidence to suggest that humanity's actions play a significant role in the increase of greenhouse gases in the ozone layer which is causing overall temperatures on earth to sway from historical averages.

The results of too much emission of carbon dioxide can be felt by all citizens of the world: heat waves, higher precipitation, droughts, rising sea levels, countless tropical storms, and shrinking glaciers are some of the consequences of humans contributing to the world's climate change. It is not so much climate change as it is climate chaos; and this phenomenon affects the poorest people of the world the most. This is of vital interest to Medair as it impacts our programming and strategic decisions.

## Links between the Environment and Humanitarian Action

Environmental issues can both affect and be affected by humanitarian action. Medair is committed to improving awareness and understanding of environmental issues and to seeking out tools and best practices that will help us address issues that can negatively impact beneficiaries’ lives, health, livelihood, and security. The following are key environmental issues that can be caused by humanitarian action<sup>1</sup>:

| Cluster                                 | Humanitarian activities that can cause new environmental impacts   |
|---|--|
| <b>Health</b>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improper management of health care waste and expired medicines</li> <li>• Improper management of chemicals required for health protection (e.g., water treatment)</li> <li>• Improper management of waste, debris, and dead material.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over-pumping of groundwater aquifers</li> <li>• Improper rehabilitation and decommissioning of wells</li> <li>• Water contamination from sewage disposal</li> <li>• Inappropriate / energy-intensive WASH systems (e.g., septic tanks, desalination plants)</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Shelter</b>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsustainable supply of shelter construction materials</li> <li>• Inappropriate design for a specific need, site, community, or culture, leading to misuse or non-use</li> <li>• Unsustainable use of timber and fuel wood in shelter construction</li> <li>• Deforestation and soil erosion</li> <li>• Inadequate disposal of construction and packaging waste</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Camp Coordination and Management</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land degradation and biodiversity loss</li> <li>• Improper management and decommissioning of pit latrines</li> <li>• Unsustainable use of natural resources (e.g., timber, fuel wood)</li> <li>• Contamination by fuel spills and disposal of chemicals</li> <li>• Improper decommissioning of camps</li> <li>• Inadequate disposal of construction and packaging waste</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Logistics</b>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improper management and disposal of fuel, waste oil, and tires</li> <li>• Chemicals and waste from base operations</li> <li>• Procurement of goods produced through unsustainable practices</li> <li>• Waste disposal</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Early Recovery</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsustainable use of natural resources for reconstruction and livelihoods</li> <li>• Improper land use and urban planning</li> <li>• Failure to conduct strategic environmental assessments and environmental impact assessments</li> <li>• Inappropriate building designs or choices of reconstruction materials</li> <li>• Unequal access to natural resources</li> <li>• Development of unsustainable livelihoods</li> </ul> |

<sup>1</sup> The table is taken largely from *Humanitarian Action and the Environment*, UNEP, [http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/IASC\\_leaflet.pdf](http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/IASC_leaflet.pdf).

## Available Standards, Guidance, and Tools

Medair's counterpart, sister and partner agencies, donors and UN agencies have been aware of and vocal about the environment and the linkage between the environment and humanitarian action for many years. Several standards, guidelines, and tools have been developed to help humanitarian actors to integrate protection of the environment into response actions. There remains, however, many opportunities for the humanitarian sector, as a whole, and Medair, specifically, to improve awareness and understanding of environmental issues and to develop tools and best practices that address the environment. A few of the available standards, guidelines, and tools are briefly described in Appendix A.

## Guiding Holistic Principles for Medair's Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability

With the above understanding of the linkages between Medair's activities and the environment, Medair is committed to the following principles:

1. **Compliance with Environmental Requirements** – Medair will comply with all applicable environmental laws, statutes, regulations, and other environmental requirements in all countries where Medair has a base / office. When environmental quality improvements are feasible, Medair will maintain standards that exceed existing laws and regulations.
2. **Reduce, Reuse, Repair, Recycle** – Medair will use the 4Rs to minimise waste produced in offices and project sites, recognising the environmental and economic benefits of doing so.
3. **Minimise Environmental Impacts from Travel** – Medair staff will be encouraged to minimise carbon-heavy travel as much as possible and prioritise modes of travel that have the least environmental impact.
4. **Conserve Energy, Water, and Other Resources**– Medair will reduce resource consumption by eliminating wasteful practices and promoting energy-efficient equipment, along with efficient use, recognising both the carbon and the cost benefits of doing so.
5. **Procuring Environmentally Sustainable Goods** – Medair aims to purchase goods that have the least negative impact on the environment by focusing on the sustainability of a product's production, transport, and waste disposal.
6. **Integrate Principles of Environmental Sustainability Within All Medair Operations and Programmes** – Medair aims to integrate environment-focused principles, tools, and guidelines in order to better mainstream environmental good practice into all operations and programmes.
7. **Environmental Education and Awareness** – Medair will provide ongoing education for all staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders concerning the importance of environmental stewardship and sustainability.

**APPENDIX A****Available Standards, Guidance, and Tools** (*Not Comprehensive*)**Standards**

- **Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (2011):** The Sphere project recognises the environment as a cross-cutting theme: “minimum standards address the need to prevent over-exploitation, pollution, and degradation of environmental conditions and aim to secure the life-supporting functions of the environment, reduce risk and vulnerability, and seek to introduce mechanisms that foster adaptability of natural systems for self-recovery.” The minimum standards are intended to provide baseline measures to minimise environmental impacts during operations. They should be applied, and are particularly useful, when no other more specific guidance is available. <http://www.sphereproject.org>

**Guidelines**

- **Environmental Guidelines for Refugee Operations (2005):** This guidance identifies and evaluates the most common environmental impacts in refugee or returnee situations, as well as opportunities to undertake positive environmental interventions. <http://www.unhcr.org/3b03b2a04.html>
- **Humanitarian Timber Guidelines (2009):** Guidelines to minimise impacts on forest resources through sustainable sourcing. <http://www.humanitarian-timber.org/files/timber-final-A5-23-03-09.pdf>
- **Sustainable Procurement Guidelines for Motor Vehicles (UNEP, 2008):** Details the procurement guidelines for vehicles for the UN system but could be of benefit for other NGOs. Provides information on issues such as: key environmental impacts, key social considerations, vehicle disposal, and sustainable use of vehicles. [http://postconflict.unep.ch/humanitarianaction/documents/02\\_08-04\\_05-01.pdf](http://postconflict.unep.ch/humanitarianaction/documents/02_08-04_05-01.pdf)
- **Environmental Guidelines (DFID, 2003):** Includes advice on environmental screening during the design of a DFID development intervention, which could inform early recovery planning. It provides checklists identifying key environmental opportunities and risks – covering a range of aid instruments, from projects and programmes to sectoral approaches. <http://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/0708/DOC12943.pdf>
- **Ecosystems, Livelihoods, and Disasters (IUCN, 2006):** Outlines linkages among ecosystem management, livelihoods, and disasters. The document provides recommendations for implementing an integrated (including the environment) approach to disaster management. [http://proactnetwork.org/proactwebsite/media/download/resources/Ecosystem-based-DRR/IUCN\\_ecosystems\\_livelihoods\\_disasters\\_2006.pdf](http://proactnetwork.org/proactwebsite/media/download/resources/Ecosystem-based-DRR/IUCN_ecosystems_livelihoods_disasters_2006.pdf)

**Tools**

- **Framework for Assessing, Monitoring, and Evaluating the Environment in Refugee-Related Operations (UNHCR & CARE International, 2009):** Toolkit to help assess, monitor, and evaluate

environmental circumstances, using mainly participatory approaches.  
<http://www.unhcr.org/4a97d1039.html>

- **Guidelines for Rapid Environmental Impact Assessment in Disasters (Benfield Hazard Research Centre and CARE International, 2005):** Guidelines and framework that provide a means to define and prioritise potential environmental impacts in disaster situations.  
[http://www.preventionweb.net/files/8267\\_bhrcgen30apr1.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/8267_bhrcgen30apr1.pdf)

**APPENDIX B**  
**Resources**

- Helpful Websites:

<https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/disasters-conflicts>

<http://postconflict.unep.ch/humanitarianaction/>

<http://proactnetwork.org/>

<http://www.urd.org/Environment-training-toolkit>