

Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships 2024

ADVANCING NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION: A JOURNEY OF SCALING AND INTEGRATION



HNPW Geneva, 8th May 2024: This panel discussion explored strategies to scale up NbS in humanitarian action, featuring insights from leading experts in the field.

Panellists:

- Axel Schmidt, Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund
- Erika Clesceri, United States Agency for International Development – Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID-BHA)
- Marie Schellens, PAX for Peace
- Mana Farooghi, United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
- Verónica Ruiz, International Union for Conservation of Nature

Moderated by:

- Ninni Ikkala Nyman, The International Federation of Red Cross



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Opening remarks:

Ninni Ikkala Nyman opened the session by sharing an overview of the latest developments in Nature-based Solutions (NbS) in humanitarian contexts at the international policy level. The Joint Statement on Climate, Nature, and People at COP28 marked a significant milestone in international efforts to advance NbS in humanitarian actions. For the first time, a day was dedicated to relief, recovery, and health, showing a growing recognition of the need to integrate nature and climate considerations into various contexts, including humanitarian aid and armed conflicts.

A notable development in this context is the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations, which now holds over 400 signatories and a small secretariat. This charter aims at unifying the humanitarian sector and adopting a collective approach to climate action. The Humanitarian Aid Donors' Declaration further emphasises the shift from talking to actually taking tangible action, calling for more proactive measures.

The Sphere Handbook highlights the interdependence of the environment and people in humanitarian response. The rights-based approach of the Humanitarian Charter, over 25 years of Sphere's experience and all the evidence found in the Sphere Handbook underscore its utility as a common language and foundation in humanitarian work, emphasising that people are the solutions. Sphere's new NbS Unpacked Guide offers a comprehensive overview of sustainable practices in humanitarian response.

Panel discussion:

Axel Schmidt started the panel discussion by sharing the principle of “nothing about us, without us” and emphasised Sphere's long-standing support for NbS. In contrast to the technological and industrial advances often overshadowing local positive practices, Sphere's core belief states that communities remain at the heart of humanitarian action. Axel was joined online from Indonesia by humanitarian practitioner **Mas Anang**, who drew attention to the important role NbS plays in incorporating community skills and knowledge in humanitarian action, advocating for simple and local solutions as the most sustainable and feasible.

Erika Clesceri shared the focus of humanitarian and nature within the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) vision. USAID, the second donor to sign the Climate Charter, focuses on the inclusion of humanitarian perspectives in its Climate Strategy 2030, promoting equitable and ambitious actions. Emphasising that focusing solely on greenhouse gas emissions is insufficient, USAID advocates for a holistic approach that places people at the core of climate action, aiming for climate-positive humanitarian assistance and anticipatory action. USAID brought together donors on the greening of humanitarian assistance, admitting that concepts like NbS have historically been considered under the term of livelihoods programme.

Marie Schellens shared updates on an NbS information-sharing platform developed by PAX, an organisation focusing on peacebuilding. PAX has recently developed a Catalogue of Nature-based Solutions for Peace and Security, addressing the often-overlooked conflict situations. This catalogue, though still limited in practical cases, demonstrates that NbS can contribute to peace. However, many donors remain risk-averse, avoiding conflict regions, which are particularly vulnerable and in need of support.



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Mana Farooghi outlined the role of NbS in the work of the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). FCDO recognises NbS as an emerging, mostly country-led concept, particularly relevant where humanitarian assistance addresses chronic food insecurity linked to the loss of ecosystem health and natural capital. As humanitarian action increasingly responds to natural disasters that are linked to ecosystem degradation, the connection between nature, food, and human security becomes even clearer. FCDO has started to mainstream nature-positive outcomes in the FCDO portfolio of the Sahel zone, in particular in conflict prevention and peace-building, social protection as well as in humanitarian work. NbS, also as a hybrid implementation, are seen as a viable approach for building long-term resilience. The forthcoming Resilience and Adaptation Fund will focus on climate resilience in humanitarian contexts, with NbS at its core. An opportunity is also seen in the increase of humanitarian actors working in places where climate and nature are one of the driving factors behind displacement, conflict and food insecurity and are looking at ways to solve these issues. Furthermore, there is also an emerging community of practice, providing useful guides and tools, such as the Sphere guide.

Veronica Ruiz showcased efforts from The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) on NbS implementation. IUCN works on similar projects, but under the conservation lens focusing on sustainable land management, and ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction, among other multiple approaches. Admittedly, both sectors work towards the same goal, which is to safeguard livelihoods, social cohesion and empower the local communities, however, with a different origin. IUCN currently supports 18 projects aimed at climate adaptation and resilience, particularly for vulnerable communities in Sub-Saharan Africa through the Partnering for Climate (P4C), established by Global Affairs Canada. This initiative also emphasises advancing women's rights in climate adaptation and livelihoods, underscoring that NbS are fundamentally people-centred and contribute to informing global decision-making processes.

Closing Remarks:

Ninni Ikkala Nyman highlighted the challenge of scaling NbS while ensuring people's rights and sustainability. Upscaling effective NbS requires defining problems and needs - together with the key affected actors, in consultation with local governments, practitioners, etc. By focusing on areas with the greatest needs and ensuring robust community engagement, the humanitarian sector can effectively integrate NbS into its strategies, creating resilient and sustainable solutions that benefit both people and the planet.

Please note that you can watch a full recording of the event on Sphere's YouTube channel [here](#).

You can download all PowerPoint presentations [here](#).

You can read a report on the first part of the event (Technical Workshop) [here](#).