Background

Waste management is rapidly emerging as an urgent global development challenge. Countries receiving humanitarian assistance often have insufficient local waste management systems to handle plastics and packaging waste associated with the aid they receive. While humanitarian packaging is only one of the many contributing factors, the humanitarian assistance community is increasingly taking note—and action.

Uncontrolled waste management, Haiti, 2012 Credit: UN Environment

Taking advantage of this fertile ground for action and working directly with key stakeholders such as the UN Cluster system, USAID is facilitating a multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary scoping effort to inform a programmatic assessment of humanitarian packaging waste management. This assessment's objectives are to: 1) Evaluate existing humanitarian aid delivery systems and processes; and 2) Identify pragmatic, cost-effective approaches to reducing packaging waste without compromising humanitarian aid delivery.

These efforts, conducted under the *Joint Initiative*[1], capitalize on established processes, partners, and momentum. The initial scoping phase, which will define the parameters for the full assessment, is expected to run from June 2019 to February 2020. Drawing upon subject matter expertise, scientific literature, and extensive stakeholder engagement the scoping effort will seek to refine and define the technical scope and key issues of concern to be further evaluated in the full scale "programmatic assessment".

> Packaging should not be a hazard and humanitarian organisations have a responsibility to prevent the environment becoming littered with packaging from items distributed, or bought with cash or vouchers. Use minimal packaging (biodegradable where possible) and locally appropriate materials, if possible by promoting a partnership with the local government and packaging material manufacturers. Provide food receptacles that can be reused, recycled or re-appropriated. Dispose of waste packaging in a way that prevents environmental degradation."
>
> **Sphere Standards Food Assistance Standard 6.2**

Rationale

This scoping and assessment will seek to minimize the environmental impacts of humanitarian assistance packaging waste by:

⇒ Assessing the types and consequences of packaging in humanitarian relief
⇒ Designing subsequent interventions that minimize the damage caused by packaging to humans and the environment.

Limited time, resources, and environmental infrastructure often leads to poor management of waste in humanitarian settings. For example, in post-earthquake Haiti large volumes of plastic containers were brought in

---

[1] The Joint Initiative is a collaborative effort co-led by USAID and UN Environment/OCHA Joint Environment Unit bringing environmental and humanitarian actors together to positively impact the quality and accountability of humanitarian assistance. http://www.eecentre.org/assessments/

as part of relief goods without proper opportunities for recycling or disposal. Packaging waste, particularly plastic, is of critical environmental concern in humanitarian relief. Increasingly countries receiving humanitarian aid are saying no to disposable plastics – meaning that humanitarian relief organizations need to rethink the way they package, supply, and manage their aid.

Scope and stakeholders

The initial scoping phase will evaluate the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental and social impacts stemming from humanitarian assistance packaging and plastics. The scoping will:

⇒ Establish the extent of packaging (waste) by working with key humanitarian agencies
⇒ Review management options including, but not limited to: source reduction, sustainable procurement, standardisation, alternative practices, reuse, recycling, recovery, and disposal
⇒ Identify priority focus areas for the assessment (food aid, shelter, non-food items, others)
⇒ Examine the full supply chain
⇒ Engage with key humanitarian and environmental stakeholders and draw upon their experience
⇒ Determine those impacts of greatest concern and requiring further evaluation and the types of technical expertise required to complete a detailed assessment

The initiative is led by USAID's Offices of Food For Peace (FFP) and Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and will collaborate with institutional partners central to the distribution and management of humanitarian assistance including, but not limited to: the World Food Programme, UN Refugee Agency, UN Environment, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Global Logistics, Shelter and Food Security Clusters, International Organization for Migration, Red Cross Movement, and the Basel, Stockholm and Rotterdam Conventions Secretariat. An advisory panel comprised of key stakeholders with an interest and expertise in the topic will provide technical guidance throughout the scoping process.

Opportunities for collaboration

Interested organizations are encouraged to reach out to the contacts listed below to explore opportunities for collaboration and information sharing. In particular, organizations interested in consulting for the scoping and assessment process should reach out to Erika Clesceri, USAID's Bureau Environmental Officer for the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance. Through this scoping, and under the broader work of the Joint Initiative, opportunities for future collaboration across the humanitarian-environment space are being sought.

Contacts

⇒ USAID Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance: Erika Clesceri (eclesceri@usaid.gov). Please copy Mark Wagner when contacting.
⇒ WFP: Georgina Stickels (georgina.stickels@wfp.org) and Carole Manceau (carole.manceau@wfp.org)
⇒ UNHCR: Andrea Dekrout (dekrout@unhcr.org) and Anna Kaplina (kaplina@unhcr.org)
⇒ IOM: Eva Mach (emach@iom.int)
⇒ UN Environment/OCHA Joint Unit: Emilia Wahlstrom (ochaunep@un.org)
⇒ ECOS: Mark Wagner (Mark.Wagner@icf.com), Michael Minkoff (Michael.Minkoff@cadmusgroup.com), and Mandy George (george14@un.org)