WREC Global Information Session on Waste Management, October 2023
(October 17 2023, 3-4.30 pm CEST)

Note for the record

Speakers: Anja Pirjevec (DG ECHO – European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations), Elise Bell (USAID – BHA Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance), Francesca Insabato (WREC, Information Management Officer), Katherine Ely (WREC, Project Manager), Marta Kucharski (WREC, Environmental Specialist Waste Management), Michela Balzino (WREC, Environmental Specialist Circular Economy), Pablo Bredt Torres (USAID – BHA Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance), Paola Robert (WREC, Environmental Specialist Green Procurement)

Number of participants: 55

Organizations: ACTED, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), DG ECHO, Danish Red Cross, Fondazione CESVI, Europe Social Network (ESN), Groupe URD, International Organization for Migration (IOM), IDA Foundation, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Joint Initiative for sustainable humanitarian assistance Packaging waste management, Malaria Consortium, Médecins sans frontières (MSF), Norwegian Refugee Council United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Réseau Environnement Humanitaire (REH), Ozyegin University, Premiere Urgence International, UN-HABITAT, United Nations Global Service Centre (UNGSC), USAID-BHA, World Food Programme (WFP), Yemen Family Care Association (YFCA)

Slide deck: SWM Info Session Presentation.pptx

Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Waste management in emergency operations (WREC)
3. Donor’s perspective on Waste Management in emergency operations (ECHO and BHA)
4. Group discussion: how to comply with environmental waste management standards (WREC)
5. Q&A and comments

1. Introduction

The Waste Management and Measuring, Reverse Logistics, Environmentally Sustainable Procurement and Transport, and Circular Economy (WREC) Project, led by the Global Logistics Cluster in coalition with other esteemed partners, including the Danish Refugee Council, IFRC, Save the Children, and WFP, aims to enhance awareness on environmental issues, their impact, and the importance of sustainable logistics practices to reduce waste volumes and Greenhouse Gas emissions. The primary goal of the WREC Project is to assist logistics practitioners in reducing their environmental footprint and, ultimately, to encourage the sustained adoption of best environmental practices across the humanitarian community. As a part of this commitment, the WREC Project coordinates various global information sessions, coordination groups, and forums. These platforms serve as spaces for sharing best practices, discussing challenges, and fostering collaboration among humanitarian stakeholders.

The purpose of this global information session on waste management is to share some insights with partners from the WREC project and donor representatives from USAID/BHA and DG ECHO, but also to ensure that you have the opportunity to provide feedback and share your challenges with the wider humanitarian community. As a result of this information session, we will use your feedback to guide the WREC prioritization of activities and guidance on waste management. Active participation from partners is encouraged and required for us to tailor support to meet the needs of the humanitarian logistics and supply chain community.

The WREC Project defines ‘Waste Management’ as ‘An instrument which defines a set of practices, processes, and policies aiming at measuring, reducing, reusing, recycling, or properly disposing of items which are no longer useful for an organization.’ (Source: the WREC Approaches, 2023).

2. Waste management in emergency operations (WREC)

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<th>Marta Kucharski (WREC) Environmental</th>
<th>Challenges related to waste management in humanitarian operations are associated with limited local recycling infrastructure and the lack of:</th>
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<td>• Infrastructure;</td>
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Specialist on Waste Management

- Funding and personnel;
- Awareness and capacity on waste segregation
- Lack of field level coordination among cluster/sectors to address solid waste issues

There are three key groups of minimum standards that humanitarian organizations should consider and refer to, when focusing on end-of-life disposal and recovery (for a full list, consult the WREC Global Digest of Waste Management, 2023):

- **Country-Specific Waste Management Regulations and Global Conventions:** Every country has its own laws governing waste collection, transportation, and disposal, particularly for hazardous waste like medical and chemical materials. Additionally, some countries are implementing bans on single-use plastics.

- **Donor-Specific Waste Management Standards:** Donor-specific environmental requirements targeting humanitarian supply chain operations.

- **Humanitarian Waste Management Standards and Guidelines:** These include principles such as "do no harm," which emphasizes the moral imperative for humanitarians of not harming local communities and the environment. The Sphere standards provide guidance on how to organize waste management systems during humanitarian responses, encompassing collection, transportation, disposal, and material recovery. Coordination among different sectors involved in solid waste is crucial, and numerous guidelines and documents have been developed by agencies for various waste streams in various countries.

To meet waste management standards, humanitarian organizations should follow a waste management hierarchy, beginning with **waste reduction**. If reduction is not possible, they should focus on **reuse, repurposing, recycling**, and, as a last resort, **proper disposal of waste**.

- Waste reduction efforts should commence during the **procurement phase**, with the adoption of suitable criteria, technical specifications, and environmentally sustainable procurement policies to minimize packaging and simplify item composition.
- If waste cannot be reduced, organizations can explore the use of reusable packaging, repurposing, recycling, and even composting organic waste.
- Efforts have been made to **identify recycling companies** in various operational countries.
- Energy recovery options exist, such as biogas production from organic waste and gasification technologies, although opportunities for energy recovery and proper disposal treatments in humanitarian contexts are limited.
- In cases where other options are not feasible, waste should be disposed of in landfills equipped with measures to minimize environmental impact. It's essential to note that **hazardous waste requires specific treatment** to eliminate toxicity before disposal or recycling.
- However, a significant amount of waste falls outside these steps and ends up being dumped, burned, or collected by municipalities or private companies, ultimately destined for landfill disposal, which is not an environmentally sustainable approach.

[https://logcluster.org/wrec/green-logistics](https://logcluster.org/wrec/green-logistics)
When considering waste management along the humanitarian supply chain, various types of waste emerge, and responsibilities are distributed among different departments or units within the organization:

- Procurement and program teams play a pivotal role in defining technical specifications and introducing environmental criteria for relief items.
- The transportation department is responsible for managing hazardous waste generated during fleet operations.
- Warehouses and storage units handle packaging waste and also deal with expired, damaged, and no-longer-used stock.
- Distribution points need to address electronic and domestic waste, with administrative responsibility for this category.
- At the field level, programs are put in place to control the distribution of specific items, and after consumption, the management of packaging and other waste is handled either directly or indirectly.

Various constraints arise during humanitarian operations, varying depending on whether it's the initial stages of a crisis or the recovery phase. In both scenarios, humanitarian organizations have options for addressing waste management.

- During the acute crisis phase, waste can be collected and possibly stored for later management. This period also offers an opportunity for conducting rapid environmental assessments to understand existing infrastructure and practices, facilitating better planning for long-term or recovery phase interventions. If the organization already has established waste management policies and trained field staff, implementing these practices is more straightforward.
- In the recovery phase, the focus shifts towards establishing value chain initiatives for waste recovery, such as composting and recycling. Building safe disposal infrastructure and engaging with other stakeholders, including development organizations and government entities, with a long-term perspective, becomes essential.
- For a practical demonstration of effective waste management in the field, it is recommended to watch a video by the WASH sector showcasing waste management practices in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, which hosted approximately one million refugees during the Rohingya crisis.

3. Donor's perspective on Waste Management in emergency operations (ECHO and BHA)

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<tr>
<th>Anja Pirjevec (DG ECHO – European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations) Unit B.2. Prevention and Disaster Risk Management/Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa - Nairobi</th>
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<td>- There are a set of mandatory <a href="https://logcluster.org/wrec/green-logistics">minimum environmental requirements and recommendations</a> introduced by DG ECHO to tackle waste management to make the projects funded by the DG ECHO more environmentally sustainable, both upstream and downstream:</td>
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<td>- Establishing new or upgrading existing sustainable solid waste management systems that would integrate the waste produced in displacement settings. The set up of new systems isn't always the optimal solutions, sometimes mapping the existing capacity can avoid the duplication of efforts and amplify small solutions to generate positive impact.</td>
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<td>- Under the supply chain chapter, it is recommended to look into the current NFIs delivered to local communities to choose environmentally sustainable options over traditional items. Packaging and single use items (particularly plastics) should be reduced as much as possible. Waste prevention at the source helps reducing the volumes of waste that can end up in the field.</td>
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<td>- Waste valorisation initiatives (e.g. generation of useful organic chemicals or energy from organic waste): data and evidence on such initiatives is often limited, however DG ECHO believes in the value of local actions to adopt environmentally sustainable practices.</td>
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<td>- A set of requirements on medical and nutrition regulate the way medical waste should be treated – focusing on waste segregation and separation for upcycling and downcycling</td>
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activities for non-hazardous waste and the use of high quality incinerators for the hazardous waste
  o Waste to energy transformation: a few interesting projects are on-going in the field – e.g. a project with the Swedish Red Cross to pilot deployable gasification unit that would be possible to use in emergency contexts. A full Life Cycle Analysis (LCA) will be performed to test the effectiveness of this solutions versus other viable alternatives currently in use. More information following the development of the experiment will be shared as soon as available.
  - A few examples of environmentally sustainable projects currently funded by DG ECHO are listed below:
    - Kakuma (Kenya) - Waste segregation and collection centre, emphasizing recycling and reducing waste sent to landfills. Still in Kenya, another project promotes the use of organic waste to produce non-carbonized briquettes for cooking and heating, both from pure organic material and mixed with charcoal dust. All the briquettes are tested to support data-driven solutions.
    - Bangladesh - Upcycling centres for nutrition sachets, as well as biodegradable packaging for food and non-food items (upcycling nutrition packaging PPN on site, e.g. Plumpy/Nut).
    - Chad - Support the upcycling of used sachets in collaboration with Alima from nutrition programs into construction materials, addressing environmental concerns.
    - Burkina Faso – Pyrolysis transformation of plastic waste into LPG and diesel fuel, providing an alternative to traditional fuels. Also in collaboration with Alima.

Pablo Bredt Torres
(Humanitarian Logistics Specialist USAID – BHA Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance)

- Only a few years ago, waste management and sustainability weren’t a significant part of BHA funding opportunities or supply chain considerations. However, gradual shifts in the narrative motivated BHA to develop specific supply chain guidelines for environmental sustainability.
- BHA is now increasingly incorporating these sustainability requirements into their applications and funding opportunities. This extends not only to their own funding programs but also to opportunities within the broader USAID framework. Both existing and new partners, including waste management companies, are encouraged to apply for funding opportunities related to sustainability practices.
- Moreover, BHA recognizes the importance of engaging with private sector entities in waste management. Their private sector engagement team plays a crucial role in ensuring internal buy-in and collaboration, as they work to integrate waste management and sustainability principles within BHA, aligning with their broader organizational objectives.
- BHA’s goal is to ensure that waste generated during humanitarian interventions is not improperly disposed of but instead processed responsibly. To achieve this, they intend to activate their staff in the region to verify the information collected during the desk study. The verified data will be shared within the WREC database, aiming to create a reliable waste management infrastructure mapping in the Caribbean. In the event of a disaster or humanitarian response, humanitarian logistics will have access to verified recycling facilities to responsibly manage the waste generated during their interventions, ensuring it doesn't end up in inadequate disposal sites. Given the challenges presented by the small geography and the inability of these islands to cope with the waste generated during humanitarian responses, BHA chose to analyze their impact in this region, focusing on materials that are more easily recyclable and tracking the fate of recycled materials.
- Working in collaboration with the WREC team, BHA developed a standardized questionnaire to collect information from private sector companies across the islands. After three months of extensive remote research, they obtained a comprehensive database of recycling facilities in several countries, with a primary focus on independent island nations.
- Notably, the Caribbean islands exhibited varying recycling capabilities, with some, like the Dominican Republic, having more advanced recycling facilities due to recent government initiatives. They had passed laws encouraging recycling and standardizing recycling processes,
4. Group discussion: how to comply with environmental waste management standards (WREC).

The participants were divided in breakout rooms to brainstorm on the following questions:

**Q1:** What tools of information do humanitarians need to reduce the negative impacts of waste created by their operations?  
Most popular response: Increase the level of awareness and capacity of organizations.

**Breakout Room 1 (8 voters)**

1st: Increase the level of awareness and capacity of organizations  
2nd: Establish strong coordination between partners/clusters at field level  
3rd: Keep reviewing the technical specifications of relief items  
4th: Develop further waste to energy and safe disposal options

**Breakout Room 2 (8 voters)**

1st: Increase the level of awareness and capacity of organizations  
2nd: Keep reviewing the technical specifications of relief items  
3rd: Establish strong coordination between partners/clusters at field level  
4th: Develop further waste to energy and safe disposal options

**Breakout room 3 (4 voters)**

1st: Increase the level of awareness and capacity of organizations  
2nd: Develop further waste to energy and safe disposal options  
3rd: Keep reviewing the technical specifications of relief items  
4th: Establish strong coordination between partners/clusters at field level

**Breakout room 4 (6 voters)**

1st: Increase the level of awareness and capacity of organizations  
2nd: Establish strong coordination between partners/clusters  
3rd: Keep reviewing the specifications of items  
4th: Explore further waste to energy options

**Q2:** What other actions need to be taken to effectively address waste management issues in the field?

- Access dedicated funding;
- Support local, compliant initiatives and empower communities and the private sector;
- Increase recyclable packaging for relief items & upstream supply chain measures;
- Boost the collaboration between national stakeholders and donors on impact reduction;
- Introduce stronger donor constraints/requirements;

Note for the record

Elise Bell (Supply Chain Advisor – USAID - BHA Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance)

- The primary goal of BHA’s mapping efforts is to understand the involvement of the private sector in waste management. They aim to identify cases where private sector engagement is lacking and determine the factors preventing them from participating in our programs. These barriers could be economic, regulatory, or related to investment. As donors, they want to explore ways to facilitate private sector partnerships and establish meaningful connections.
- BHA worked with Catholic Relief Service (CRS) Madagascar to understand the constraints they were facing on the funding side and understand why they were not able to propose these types of waste management activities. As seen in the CRS Madagascar program, a simple supply chain intervention involving the introduction of the bailing unit and the collaboration with communities in establishing waste collection schemes made it more attractive for the private sector to operate in remote areas of the South. This suggests that supply chain interventions and collaborations can be effective solutions.
- BHA will continue its mapping efforts, building upon the work of the WREC team and other key stakeholders, and leveraging on private sector engagement team's expertise.

https://logcluster.org/wrec/green-logistics
Note for the record

- Identify measurement tools to track progress and KPIs on waste management;
- Hire green focal points/champions in the field;
- Introduce policy measures (e.g. incentives) for recycling activities in field locations;
- Invest in preparedness activities and education;
- Be mindful that sometimes assisted communities request single-use packaging for specific items due to food safety concerns. A balance must be found between environmental considerations and human well-being.

5. Participant Q&A and comments

Can anyone share positive examples of the use of cash and how this specific approach has helped reduce waste in humanitarian operations? Similarly, have there been any instances where attempts to utilize cash for this purpose were unsuccessful? (Anja Pirjevec)

- In Yemen and Iraq, procurement officers have taken measures to prevent an increase in waste and their operational footprint. In Yemen, when the World Food Programme (WFP) transitioned to providing cash and entitlements to beneficiaries, several positive outcomes emerged. This transition not only improved communication with beneficiaries but also preserved their dignity by offering them the choice to collect their entitlements as cash. In terms of waste management, this approach resulted in a significant reduction in waste generated by WFP operations.

Some beneficiaries prioritize cash assistance over specific relief items, such as food or hygiene kits. In essence, this approach is not just "cash for food" but a broader "cash-based transfer" mechanism that empowers beneficiaries to use their entitlements as they see fit. It not only benefits waste management but also aligns with the diverse needs and preferences of those receiving humanitarian assistance. (WFP)

- Cash assistance plays a crucial role in restoring dignity, trust, and choice to the individuals receiving aid. However, when dealing with suppliers, it's essential to consider the lack of plastic bans. Over the past five years, South Sudan has experienced significant environmental degradation, with plastic pollution becoming a pervasive issue. The challenge lies in finding ways to mitigate this pollution and generate a positive impact. For instance, the direct food delivery approach had its advantages, particularly in enabling us to exclude plastic from our call for tenders while providing cash assistance. (Premiere Urgence Internationale)

- While we've made strides in reducing waste within our supply chains, it's important to consider cases where refugees receive cash and vouchers to purchase goods from local vendors. In these scenarios, it's crucial to question whether we're effectively managing waste or simply shifting the responsibility elsewhere. For example, when a family purchases a bottle of oil, what happens to the secondary packaging it came in, and how is it managed? Are we genuinely reducing waste, or is it merely being transferred to another party?

This issue warrants a thorough examination to determine if we're achieving actual waste reduction or merely redistribution. (Catholic Relief Services)

- The Emergency Supply Pre-positioning Strategy (ESUP) Project has been investigating the impact of postponing the blending of relief packages. Our findings, which will soon be shared with practitioners, reveal that organizations sharing the same regional depot can benefit from such postponement, particularly in response to events like hurricanes. (Oszgyin University)