

JOINT INITIATIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE PACKAGING WASTE MANAGEMENT

PACKAGING, PLASTICS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The [recent report](#) published by the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the March 2022 [resolution of the UN Environment Assembly \(UNEA\) on plastic pollution](#) have once again confirmed the urgency of taking action to reduce our carbon and environmental footprint.

The humanitarian sector has a lead role to play in these global efforts. Beyond supporting communities to prevent, mitigate and recover from climate-induced crises, humanitarian actors need to reduce their own emissions and mainstream environmental sustainability across the board. A key starting point for humanitarians is their procurement of food and relief items – including packaging – which can account for more than 50% of organizations' carbon footprint [in some cases](#).



Humanitarian packaging waste after the 2012 earthquake in Haiti. © UNEP

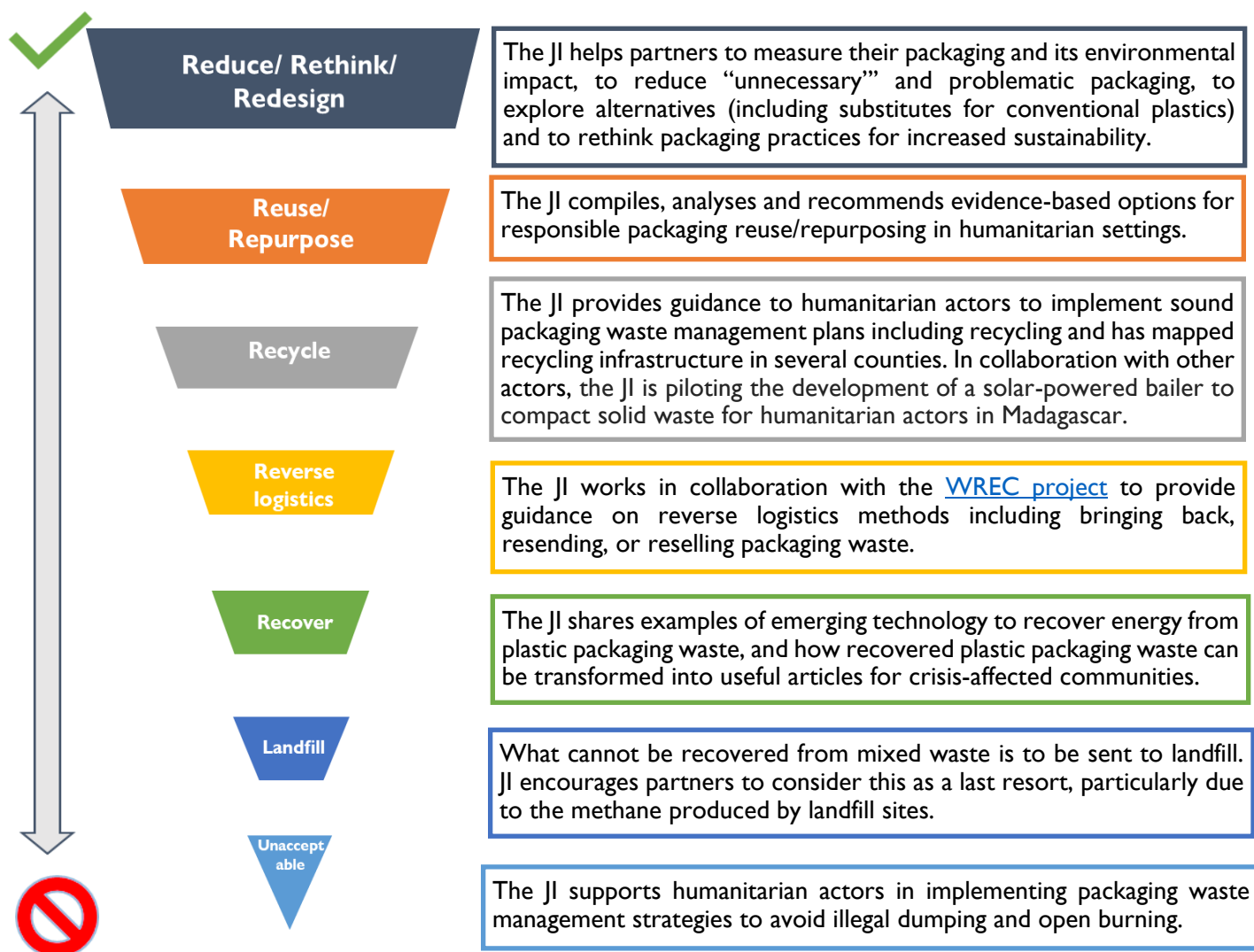
The [Joint Initiative](#) helps humanitarian organizations to identify and measure the types of packaging used in the delivery of food and relief items, and supports them in designing informed waste management strategies and to “green” their procurement looking, in particular, at packaging. Data gathered by project shows that plastic is the most prevalent type of primary packaging used by humanitarian actors (particularly plastic bags and polypropylene woven bags). It is also the most problematic type of packaging due to difficulties related to the collection and recycling of plastic, and its role in accelerating climate change due to the emission of greenhouse gases during production and incineration.

PLASTICS FUEL CLIMATE CHANGE: THIS IS HOW

- In 2019, plastics generated 1.8 billion tons of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions – 3.4% of global emissions – with 90% of these emissions coming from their production and conversion from fossil fuels ([OECD](#))
- GHG emissions from plastics lifecycle will more than double between 2019 and 2060 (ibid.)
- The 400 million tons of plastics produced yearly consume around 6% of the world's oil: 3% as raw materials and 3% as energy for their production, transportation, and incineration ([Center for International Environmental Law](#))
- GHG emissions from the plastic lifecycle currently threaten the ability of the global community to keep global temperature rise below 1.5°C. (ibid)
- By 2050, the cumulation of greenhouse gas emissions from plastic could reach over 56 gigatons i.e., 10-13 % of the entire remaining carbon budget (ibid.)
- Globally, 40 % of plastic produced is for packaging used just once and then discarded ([National Geographic](#))

“Plastic pollutes at every stage of its lifecycle from when the oil and gas is extracted to produce it, all the way to the end-of-life where plastic waste is littered, landfilled, downcycled, burned.”
([Plastic Atlas 2019, Heinrich Böll Foundation & Break Free From Plastic](#))

HOW IS THE JOINT INITIATIVE (JI) RESPONDING TO THIS?



JOINT INITIATIVE

FOR SUSTAINABLE
HUMANITARIAN
ASSISTANCE PACKAGING
WASTE MANAGEMENT

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