Climate Change Mitigation in Humanitarian Work: Tipsheet for Coordinators

WHAT IS CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION?

Climate change mitigation refers to **actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or increase natural carbon absorption**. Mitigation targets the underlying causes of climate change. In contrast, climate adaptation involves actions that reduce communities' vulnerability to climate impacts, such as building flood-resistant infrastructure or adopting drought-resistant agriculture. Humanitarian organisations often prioritise adaptation to meet immediate survival needs. However, integrating mitigation into humanitarian activities can enhance long-term sustainability and resilience without compromising these immediate objectives. (IFRC & ICRC, 2021).

Key climate change mitigation terms and examples

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions:

- Renewable energy – e.g., solar power, biogas
- Energy efficiency – e.g., fuel-efficient cooking stoves, improved insulation

Increasing natural carbon absorption (sequestration):

- Tree planting
- Reforestation
- Soil conservation and improvement

ROLE OF THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

Humanitarian coordinators play a vital part in incorporating climate change mitigation into humanitarian efforts by:

- Coordinating planning across sectors to include feasible mitigation measures.
- Facilitating information-sharing and promoting best practices.
- Identifying and addressing capacity gaps through training and support.
- Advocating for resources to enable climate-sensitive humanitarian responses.
- Monitoring and documenting successful mitigation practices.

SECTOR-SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION ACTIONS

Sector	Actions	What it mitigates?	Benefits
Child Protection	Use solar lighting in safe spaces and community areas.	Reduces greenhouse gas emissions from diesel generators or kerosene lamps, which contribute to climate change and air pollution.	Enhances safety by reducing risks associated with darkness and minimizes protection risks during fuel collection, particularly for children and women.

Education	Implement tree planting around schools and integrate environmental education.	Absorbs carbon dioxide (CO_2), mitigating climate change, and reduces soil erosion, which can degrade land.	Provides shade for better learning environments and supports hands-on environmental education, fostering lifelong sustainability skills.
Nutrition	Introduce fuel-efficient or solar stoves for cooking in humanitarian settings.	Reduces deforestation caused by firewood collection and lowers carbon emissions from traditional cooking methods, which contribute to climate change and ecosystem degradation.	Decreases respiratory illnesses from smoke, improves health, and enhances safety by reducing fuel collection needs.
WASH	Install biogas systems to convert organic waste into energy for water treatment or sanitation facilities.	Reduces methane emissions from untreated waste, a potent greenhouse gas driving climate change, and decreases reliance on fossil fuels.	Supports sustainable waste management, lowers operational costs, and ensures cleaner, safer sanitation services.

CROSS SECTORAL MITIGATION OPPORTUNITIES

Different mitigation measures simultaneously generate environmental benefits and practical advantages across multiple humanitarian sectors, as illustrated in the table below:

Mitigation measure	Primary climate change mitigation benefit	Humanitarian co-benefits (examples across sectors)
Solar lighting/power systems	Lowers emissions from diesel or kerosene fuelled lighting and generators.	**Child Protection**: Improves safety by reducing darkness-related risks. **Nutrition:** Supports safer food preparation and storage. **Education:** Enables evening studies and training opportunities. **WASH:** Reduces operational costs for water pumps and lighting of sanitation facilities.
Fuel-efficient/solar stoves	Reduces greenhouse gas emissions by	**Child Protection:** Reduces violence risks during fuel collection. **Education:** More time available for attending school.

	decreasing fuel-wood demand and deforestation.	**Nutrition:** Reduces respiratory illnesses, improves safe cooking. **WASH:** Reduces cooking-related waste.
Biogas systems	Converts organic waste into energy, reducing methane emissions.	**Child Protection:** Minimizes firewood collection risks. **Education:** Practical demonstration of sustainable waste management. **Nutrition:** Provides cleaner cooking fuel, reducing illnesses. **WASH:** Reduces waste disposal needs through recycling organic matter.
Local food sourcing	Decreases emissions associated with transporting food over long distances.	**Child Protection:** Enhances food security, reducing risks associated with food scarcity. **Education:** Provides practical lessons in agriculture and sustainability. **Nutrition:** Improves nutritional quality of locally available food. **WASH:** Reduces packaging and transportation waste.
Tree planting & gardening	Enhances carbon absorption (carbon sequestration), protects soils, and supports water retention.	**Child Protection:** Provides shaded and safer play environments. **Education:** Creates a comfortable learning environment; hands-on climate education **Nutrition:** Supplements nutrition through community food gardens. **WASH:** Enhances water quality by preventing soil erosion.

KEY MESSAGES FOR HUMANITARIAN COORDINATORS

- Mitigation complements adaptation without detracting from immediate humanitarian objectives.
- Small, incremental mitigation actions can collectively yield significant benefits over time.
- Mitigation activities can attract additional funding opportunities and strengthen partnerships between humanitarian and climate-focused organisations.
- Mitigation can often piggyback on existing activities. It might be as simple as choosing the solar option when you replace a generator or involving the community in a tree planting day around the clinic. Over time, these choices add up. They can even attract new funding or partners, as the climate and humanitarian worlds start to collaborate more.

RECOMMENDED SOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- Climate and Environment Charter for guidance on implementing Commitment 2: Maximize the environmental sustainability of our work and rapidly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions
- Global WASH Cluster Climate Toolbox
- Clean Cooking Alliance Resources
- Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)
- Environment and Humanitarian Action Connect (UNEP/OCHA)