

# THE 2013 HUMANITARIAN AND MILITARY EXCHANGE ON GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICE IN FIELD OPERATIONS

## SUMMARY REPORT<sup>1</sup>

### An Exchange of Information and Experiences between Military, Humanitarian and Environmental Communities on Integrating Environmental Considerations into Field Operations

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#### Executive Summary

This report summarizes the results of two meetings, held in Washington, D.C., USA and Geneva, Switzerland in late 2013, that brought together humanitarian, military and environmental communities to exchange policy, practice and experience in managing environment-related impacts during field operations. Key findings of the meetings included:

- The environment plays a significant role in the success of field operations despite the fact that it is rarely the focus of humanitarian and military actors.
- The humanitarian community should consider analyzing the benefits of approaches that reduce environmental impacts of field operations, as is done in military operations. Such analysis provides the evidence to drive adoption of environmentally responsible policies and practices.
- The military, humanitarian and environment communities should establish a formal exchange of policy, practice, lessons, and successes.
- Cooperative research and collaboration should focus on:
  - Overall environmental footprint
  - Waste and debris management
  - Camp management
  - Operating in urban environments
  - Water consumption and wastewater management
  - Energy efficiency
  - Use of energy-efficient certification tools for field operations
- The approaches to environmental management used by each of the three communities should be reviewed and compared to establish commonalities and areas where contrasting views need to be understood.

#### Introduction

This report summarizes the results of two meetings held in late 2013 on sharing environment-related information and experiences between the military, humanitarian and environmental communities. The report highlights commonalities between the two meetings and identifies next steps to improve the effectiveness in addressing environmental considerations during field operations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This report does not necessarily represent the views of any specific organization or any specific participant in the two meetings.

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<sup>3</sup> The term “field operations” is used to avoid differences in the understanding of the meaning of the term “humanitarian operations”.

Overall, the meetings indicated that environmental considerations have gained salience in the humanitarian and military communities.

For humanitarians, the focus on the environment comes from concerns that

- Humanitarian assistance worsens pre-disaster environmental conditions, increasing harm to the affected population and others, and,
- Pre-disaster environmental conditions contribute to disasters.

For the military, a focus on the environment comes from

- Recognition that damage to the environment can lead to perceived or real health impacts for deployed personnel, or conflict with neighboring communities,
- A need to comply with national laws, international regulations, and internal policies in order to, among other things, avoid political backlash and claims for damage, and
- Identification that efficient resource use (e.g., water, energy) reduces security demands and costs of operations.

Between these two communities, the environmental community often is concerned that

- Humanitarian and military operations deplete natural resources (which may be scarce, such as water in arid settings) and damage the environment, and
- Create situations that contribute to current and future conflicts over scarce natural resources.

Each community has developed an array of studies, policy, tools and procedures to manage negative environmental impacts. There are considerable overlaps between the types or location of humanitarian and military field operations but, to date, there have been limited efforts at sharing experience, tools, procedures and lessons between the communities. Earlier efforts in this area occurred in 2007 and 2008, when a Conflict & Disaster Areas: Environmental & Health Hazards Seminar<sup>4</sup> was organized in Stockholm with a follow-on NATO Partnership for Peace Workshop on Environmental Security Concerns in Peace Support and Crisis Management Operations, held in Umeå, Sweden.<sup>5</sup>

Following the 2007-8 meetings, informal discussions focused on creating a mechanism for a broader and more formal exchange of policy, practice and experience between the three communities. Included in these discussions were the Swedish Defence Research Agency, Environmental Law Institute, the OCHA/UNEP Joint Environment Unit, World Wildlife Fund/US, American University's School of International Studies, ProAct Network and members of International Association for Impact Assessment.<sup>6</sup>

Eventual agreement was reached to co-sponsor two exchange meetings, one in Washington and one in Geneva, to

- Begin exchanging policy, practice and experience,

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<sup>4</sup> Arranged by the Swedish Defence Research Agency in cooperation with the Folke Bernadotte Academy, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the Swedish Rescue Services Agency, 15-16 March, 2007, Stockholm, Sweden.

<sup>5</sup> Arranged by the Swedish Defence Research Agency; see <http://www.foi.se/rapport?rNo=FOI-R--2685--SE>.

<sup>6</sup> The core planning team consisted of Rene Nijenhuis (OCHA/UNEP Joint Environment Unit), Annica Waleij (Swedish Defence Research Agency), Carl Bruch (Environment Law Institute), Anita Van Breda (WWF/US) and Charles Kelly (ProAct Network)

- Assess the value of an exchange and whether there was a need for a more formal exchange mechanism, and
- Identify further actions to improve the integration of environmental issues into operations

The Environment Law Institute provided facilities and staff for the Washington meeting and American University's School of International Studies provided rapporteurs for the same meeting. The OCHA/UNEP Joint Unit provided facilities, resources and staff for both meetings, the Swedish Defence Research Agency provided access to the military community and staff support for both meetings and ProAct Network provided staff, to support for the Geneva meeting as well as hosting a web site to support the exchange (<http://greenhumanitarians.com/>).

### **The Exchanges**

The first exchange meeting took place in Washington on 3 and 4 November 2013 at the Environment Law Institute. A total of 34 persons participated in-person as well as remotely. The meeting began with a set of thematic presentations on the military, humanitarian and environmental perspectives on environmental issues, followed by a number of case study presentations drawing heavily on field experiences. A moderated discussion was used to draw conclusions from the meeting. A report on the Washington meeting is available at <http://greenhumanitarians.com/2013/11/14/washington-green-exchange/>.

The Geneva Exchange took place on 5 and 6 December 2013 and was hosted by the UNEP/OCHA Joint Environment Unit. A total of 31 persons participated (in-person and remotely) in the meeting, which generally followed the format for the Washington meeting but with a greater emphasis on identifying specific actions which could be taken to improve the exchange of information and identify areas of possible collaboration to address common issues. A report on the meeting is available at <http://greenhumanitarians.com/2013/12/12/geneva-green-exchange/>.

A list of organizations represented at the meeting can be found at the end of this report.

### **The Results**

The two meetings produced separate but complimentary results. These results are summarized below with suggested next steps:

#### **1. Identify Common Challenges and Approaches**

The Exchange meetings noted that the environment is part of the context, but not often the direct focus of field operations. Field operations focus on specific issues arising from a crisis but usually not the underlying environmental issues, yet these underlying environmental issues can shape the nature and impact of an operation in significant ways.

In a similar vein, environmental considerations alone do not make for a field operation: there are very few instances where environmental conditions alone have been the most significant factors in triggering or defining an operation. But experience is making it clear that taking the environment into consideration in the early phases of a mission makes a field operation easier to manage, particularly the longer it goes on.

Further, there are strikingly similar environmental challenges faced by, and approaches adopted by, the humanitarian and military communities during field operations, for instance in camp management, supplying water, managing waste and reducing negative impacts on the local environment. Where these challenges are not properly managed, the consequences are of

significant concern to the success for all three communities. Earlier meetings organized by the Swedish Defence Research Agency (see above) indicated that the military and humanitarian communities can learn from each other, and from the environmental community to minimize the impact of field operations on the environment.

### 2. Demonstrate Benefits of Actively Integrating Environment into Field Policies

At the same time, the military has often done a better job at documenting and acting upon lessons from the impact of environmental considerations on operations when compared to the humanitarian community. This may explain why the military community has had comparatively greater success in incorporating the environment into doctrine and procedures, and indicates how the humanitarian and environmental communities need to focus efforts on demonstrating the benefits, in terms of lives and cost, of integrating environmental considerations in their policies and practices.

### 3. Establish a Formal Exchange

At a more practical level, both meetings noted the need to continue the exchange process on a more regular basis. This includes developing a web site, a repository of reports, lessons, tools and procedures, and a mechanism for professional backstopping between Exchange members on technical issues. In developing these resources, consideration needs to be paid to existing forums, such as the Environmental Emergencies Centre ([www.eecentre.org/](http://www.eecentre.org/)) and the Environmental Peacebuilding Knowledge Platform ([www.environmentalpeacebuilding.org](http://www.environmentalpeacebuilding.org)) and applicable future military forums such as engagement with host nation militaries through NATO and other structures.

The continuation of the exchanges can also include holding more topical meetings (e.g., on camp management, energy provision or waste management) to share more lessons and learning between the three communities. The value of having technical meetings in countries with on-going humanitarian and/or peacekeeping operations (both are usually associated) is to share hands-on experiences should also be considered. .

Development of a formal exchange mechanism should also target increasing participation of the humanitarian and environmental communities as well as the private sector.

### 4. Document Successes

The case studies in both meetings included a number of success stories. These need to be documented and made accessible to all three communities. At the Geneva meeting, UNEP PCDMB indicated it would develop a report on the environmental management efforts of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). The Swedish Defence Research Agency and UNMISS are also in the process of evaluating a pilot initiative to reduce energy consumption, water use and waste production. Similar examples should be identified in other UN Mission operations as well as in humanitarian operations, documented and disseminated.

### 5. Implement Collaborative Projects to Address Significant Environmental Issues

Both meetings identified a number of areas where collaboration between the military, humanitarian and environmental communities could address common environmental challenges. The focus areas identified for increased emphasis included:

- Overall environmental footprint
- Waste and debris management
- Camp management
- Operating in urban environments
- Water consumption and wastewater treatment
- Energy efficiency
- Use of energy efficient certification tools for field operations

Work on these issues should focus on better preparedness and planning as well as better response. From a humanitarian perspective, reducing the impact of a humanitarian crisis is as important as being able to respond effectively.

During the Geneva meeting the possibility of a project on planning for post disaster debris management was identified, reflecting that

- Debris management is often a major challenge during and after a disaster,
- National and foreign militaries are often involved in post-disaster debris management and,
- Some militaries have considerable expertise in this area.

The project would bring together the three communities to work with disaster prone countries to better plan for and manage debris following a disaster.

Other areas where the communities can work collaboratively include:

- Disposal of medical hazardous waste, particularly in sharing technologies and experiences.
- Planning and management of camps, particularly looking at environmentally-appropriate ways to provide water and energy and disposal of waste, particularly in the case of extended operations (e.g., refugee camps in Jordan, field camps in South Sudan).
- The sustainable extraction and use of water for human consumption and other uses.
- Collaborating on ways to provide energy efficiently, from cooking (an area of humanitarian experience) to lighting, to vehicle use and facilities operations (e.g., heating/cooling, office equipment) which applies to both humanitarian and military operations.
- Expansion of the concept of environmental intelligence to improve the planning and response to environmental issues following disasters and conflict as well as improved foresight mechanisms and increased insight regarding the environment-conflict nexus.
- Addressing the cumulative impacts of several actors operating in the same area at the same time or over time. A Swedish initiative, an exercise on strategic environmental assessments in a fictitious conflict area involving several humanitarian and military actors, is planned for early fall of 2014<sup>7</sup>.

An Exchange working group should be established to develop these ideas and other possible areas of collaboration.

## 6. Review Environmental Management Approaches

Each community has specific ways to frame and address operational environmental considerations. Simply taking experience from one community to another is not likely to result in easy success. Discussions should be held which document how each community considers environmental issues and defines approaches to addressing these mechanisms to enable the other communities to effectively share knowledge and experiences.

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<sup>7</sup> Information will be posted on <http://www.foi.se/en/Our-Services/Camp-solutions/>.

## Organizations Represented at the Two Meetings

- African Union Commission
- American University
- Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies, and Global Military Advisory Council on Climate Change
- COGINTA Community Safety
- Environment Law Institute
- Federal Emergency Management Agency, Department of Homeland Security
- German Federal Office of Defence Administration<sup>8</sup>
- globalplanetnetwork.info
- Global Development Research Center
- Global Int
- Integra LLC
- Medecins sans frontieres hollande
- North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- Norwegian Refugee Council
- Office of Congressman Sam Farr (CA-20)
- ProAct Network
- Swedish Defence Research Agency
- Save the Children
- Sustainable Development 360
- Swedish Defense Research Agency
- United Nations Department of Field Support
- United Nations Environment Program
- United Nations Environment Program/Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Joint Environment Unit
- United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
- UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
- United States Agency for International Development
- United States Africa Command
- United States Central Command
- United States Department of the Army
- World Wildlife Fund/US

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<sup>8</sup> During meetings on assignment to the US Department of Defence.