

What does the Green Humanitarian Approach look like in the ECT WASH Programme to realise climate-resilient WASH services?

The ECT WASH (Environmentally Sound, Climate Resilient Transformation of Humanitarian WASH) program is a global initiative aimed at strengthening climate-sensitive water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services in fragile and disaster-prone regions. Implemented across thirteen countries by a consortium of Arbeiter Samariter Bund, arche noVa, and German Toilet Organisation, together with local partners in each country, the ECT WASH integrates environmental risk assessments, nature-based solutions, and participatory approaches to

enhance community resilience. By incorporating environmental sustainability, understanding of climate sensitivity and disaster preparedness into WASH interventions, the program ensures that vulnerable communities can access safe water and sanitation while adapting to climate change. Through collaboration with local partners, governments, and humanitarian actors, the ECT WASH Program fosters long-term solutions that bridge humanitarian aid and sustainable development.

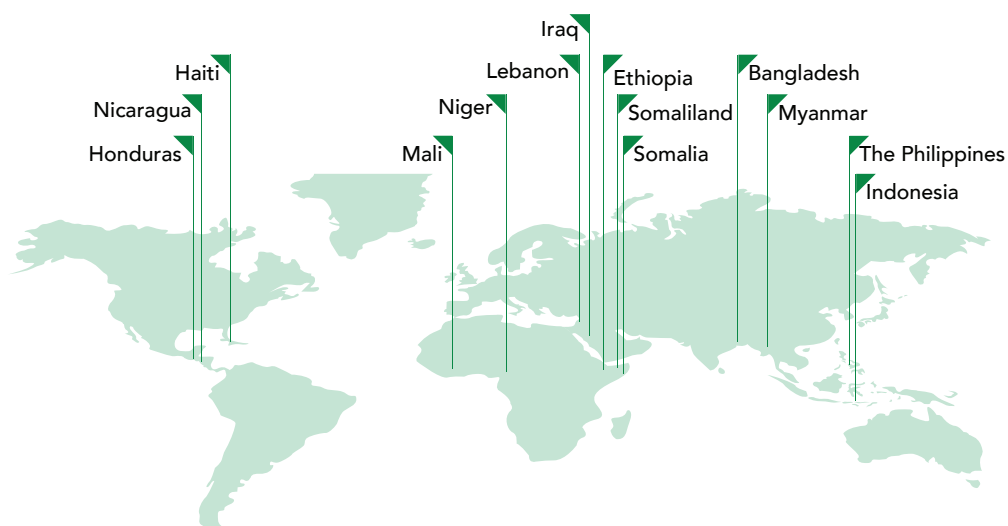


FIGURE 1.
Countries where ECT WASH works

Project Brief: Green Humanitarian Approach in the ECT WASH

The global climate crisis is intensifying the frequency, severity, and unpredictability of natural hazards such as droughts, floods, landslides, and cyclones. These events directly undermine water security, damage sanitation infrastructure, and disrupt hygiene practices, often leaving communities exposed to waterborne diseases and further vulnerabilities. At the same time, many of the areas targeted by the ECT WASH programme are also affected by conflict and insecurity, which compound existing WASH challenges. Armed conflict can destroy WASH infrastructure, restrict access to water points, displace populations into areas with limited resources, and increase contamination risks due to overcrowding and lack of proper sanitation.

In both climate- and conflict-affected contexts, WASH interventions are not only harder to deliver but also more likely to cause unintended harm if not designed with environmental and social safeguards. For example, over-extraction of water in displacement settings can deplete local aquifers, while deforestation for fuel or construction may further destabilise fragile ecosystems. In conflict zones, weakened governance systems may lack the capacity to regulate resource use or maintain infrastructure, increasing the risk of environmental degradation and public health crises.

To address this intersection risks, The ECT WASH programme integrates the green humanitarian approach, a framework designed

to improve the environmental sustainability and resilience of WASH intervention. In the context of the programme, this approach involves four key components:

1. **Strengthening local capacities** to plan, implement, and sustain environmentally responsible WASH services as well as in disaster risk reduction/preparedness;
2. **Screening for environmental risks** through tools such as the NEAT+ to inform context-appropriate decisions;
3. **Applying environmental and climate-sensitive measures**, including water-efficient practices, sustainable construction, and ecosystem-based solutions; and
4. **Reducing the programme's own carbon footprint** through conscious efforts in energy use, procurement, and logistics.

By integrating environmental considerations into humanitarian WASH programming, the ECT WASH programme seeks to minimise negative environmental impacts, reduce conflict over scarce natural resources, and ensure that life-saving WASH interventions are both sustainable and resilient. This approach not only supports immediate humanitarian needs but also contributes to long-term stability, environmental protection, and the resilience of crisis-affected communities.

A snapshot of the green humanitarian approach in the ECT WASH program (data as of March 2025)

Sustainable WASH Technologies and Infrastructure



1,066 water filters distributed in Myanmar, Nicaragua, and Honduras



1,000 solar water disinfection (SODIS) devices distributed in Bangladesh



10 solar-powered water supply systems rehabilitated/constructed in 6 countries (Honduras, Ethiopia, Somaliland, Niger, Mali, and Bangladesh)



4 additional solar panels installed for water supply in Lebanon and Niger



15 rainwater harvesting systems constructed in the Philippines, Bangladesh and Indonesia



263 toilets built in households, schools, health facilities, and public spaces across 6 countries (Myanmar, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Mali, Ethiopia, Iraq, Somaliland, Honduras)



79 communal waste disposal units for collecting waste provided in Somaliland, Ethiopia, Iraq, and Haiti, including menstrual hygiene bins in public/communal toilets



42 waste management awareness activities conducted in the Philippines, Indonesia, Honduras, Niger and Haiti



4 waste management plans developed in Indonesia



Set up of waste management committees/groups in Niger & Mali including support for cleaning materials

Eco-Agriculture and Water-Efficient Irrigation



883 hectares of land supported with sustainable irrigation in Honduras, Iraq, and Lebanon



35 kitchen gardens using drip irrigation systems established in Honduras, Iraq, and Mali

Environmental Governance and Awareness



17 workshops have been conducted to raise awareness on the *Climate and Environmental Charter for Humanitarian Organisations*



27 NEAT+ training sessions held in 10 countries (Indonesia, the Philippines, Myanmar, Mali, Niger, Somalia, Somaliland, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Lebanon), involving 344 people, resulting in 15 villages conducting climate and environmental risk assessments

Advancing Sector-Wide Commitment



11 local implementing partners and 12 other organisations signed the *Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations* as part of the programme's advocacy efforts



A guideline on sustainable green practices in humanitarian offices was published and shared to support the implementation of environmental commitments within organisations' internal operations.

Reflection: What Does a Green Humanitarian Approach Mean in the ECT WASH Programme?

The integration of a green humanitarian approach in the ECT WASH programme represents a shift in mindset that challenges the traditional boundaries of emergency response by recognising that saving lives and protecting the environment are not competing priorities. In fact, they are deeply interconnected.

In humanitarian settings where resources are scarce and vulnerabilities are compounded by both climate risks and conflict, the consequences of ignoring environmental impacts can be profound. WASH services, by their very nature, interact directly with water sources, land use, ecosystems, and human health. If not planned carefully, these services can cause long-term harm: aquifers depleted, forests cleared, waste mismanaged. The green humanitarian approach serves as a corrective lens, ensuring that these unintended consequences are anticipated, mitigated, and, where possible, transformed into opportunities for resilience-building.

In practice, this approach in the ECT WASH programme has meant moving beyond short-term and reactive solutions. It has meant adopting solar-powered water systems where electricity is unreliable or emissions are high. It has meant equipping communities with water filters and solar disinfection devices instead of relying solely on bottled water or water trucking. It has meant promoting kitchen gardens and efficient water-saving for irrigation that reduces reliance on external food aid and strengthens household self-reliance. It has meant helping local partners carry out environmental risk assessments—many for the first time—and building their capacity to lead greener responses.

But this transformation is not just technical but also ethical. It reflects a commitment to dignity, to justice, and intergenerational responsibility. It is a response to the voices of communities who are not only suffering from climate shocks but who also often understand their environments deeply and want to protect them. It is a response to growing calls from local actors, donors, and frontline staff

to “do no harm” in a more holistic way, not just to people, but to the planet.

The journey has not been without its challenges. Integrating environmental thinking into fast-paced, high-pressure emergency settings requires new tools, new partnerships, and new ways of working. It means asking different questions at the start of a response: What are the environmental risks here? How might this intervention affect local ecosystems? What solutions already exist within the community? It also requires navigating trade-offs between urgency and sustainability, between cost and long-term value, and between scale and local adaptation.

What we have learned through the ECT WASH programme is that green humanitarian action is not an add-on but also an enabler. It enhances the quality, accountability, and sustainability of WASH interventions. It reduces the risks of doing harm and creates opportunities to leave positive, lasting change even in the most difficult contexts.

Moving forward, we need to keep deepening this approach: strengthening partner capacities, scaling up climate-smart technologies, and advocating for policies that support greener humanitarian action. Perhaps most importantly, we need to continue listening to communities, to local organisations, and to the environment itself. Because in the end, the green humanitarian approach is not only about how we respond in crisis, but also about how we choose to care for people and the environment, together.



FIGURE 2. Construction of latrine in Niger together with local communities

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