

JOINT INITIATIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE HUMANITARIAN PACKAGING WASTE MANAGEMENT

AUGUST 2020

BACKGROUND

Humanitarian assistance demands continue to rise in parallel with an increasingly urgent and underfunded global solid waste management crisis. This waste management crisis disproportionately affects countries that commonly receive humanitarian assistance, many of which often lack sufficient infrastructure or management systems to handle regularly produced solid waste, let alone the waste generated by assistance efforts. To combat these challenges the humanitarian community increasingly seeks to evaluate and refine procurement and supply chain delivery processes to look for increased speed, transparency, reliability, reduced cost and enhanced environmental sustainability.



Uncontrolled waste management, Haiti, 2012 Credit: UNEP

Addressing the issue of humanitarian packaging waste is a key part of this larger effort, particularly plastic packaging waste. While packaging serves essential functions in commodity delivery and protection, it also often becomes an unintended waste stream in the most fragile and strained operational contexts. Limited time, resources, and environmental infrastructure frequently lead to poor waste management in humanitarian settings. Increasingly, countries receiving assistance are saying no to disposable plastics, forcing relief organizations to rethink how they package, supply, and manage their assistance. **How can the humanitarian community both minimize the impact of packaging and turn it into opportunities for those we aim to assist?**

SCOPE

Taking advantage of this fertile ground for action, and building from a scoping effort finalized in August 2020,¹ USAID is facilitating the next phase of a multi-institutional multi-disciplinary effort to coordinate collective, impactful solutions to humanitarian packaging.

The next phase (from September 2020) will build from the scoping report's recommendations, starting with the primary recommendation **to strengthen coordination across stakeholders** by facilitating a **collaborative roadmapping process** with core stakeholders working in packaging waste management. This planning exercise will seek to identify priority areas of intervention and map a coordinated plan of action for collectively achieving improvements in humanitarian packaging. Following the roadmapping process, USAID and partners will work on **designing and implementing co-created projects** that minimize the damage caused by packaging to people and the environment while respecting the life-saving imperative of humanitarian assistance. These efforts will build on the recommendations of the scoping study, outlined in the table below.

TIMELINE

1. **Scoping:** The initial scoping phase (1) took place between May 2019 and August 2020.
2. **Assessing, Planning and Design:** This phase (2) from September 2020 - end of 2021 will consist of a collaborative roadmapping process and the design and piloting of specific initiatives.
3. **Implementation:** A roll out, learning and adaptation phase (3) will take place across 2021 - 2022. The exact timeline will be determined by the collaborative roadmapping exercise in phase 2.

¹ The final scoping report, *Sustainability in Humanitarian Supply Chains: A Preliminary Scoping of Improvements in Packaging Waste Management*, can be accessed here: <https://bit.ly/usaidpkg>

STAKEHOLDERS AND COLLABORATION

This effort, conducted under the Joint Initiative², capitalizes on established processes, partners, and momentum. It is led by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) in collaboration with institutional partners central to the distribution and management of humanitarian assistance including: the World Food Programme, UN Refugee Agency, UN Environment Programme and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Joint Environment Unit, the Global Logistics and Shelter Clusters, International Organization for Migration, International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. An advisory panel composed of key stakeholders with an interest and expertise in the topic provide technical guidance throughout the initiative.

Organisations interested are encouraged to reach out to the contacts listed below to **explore opportunities for collaboration and co-creation of packaging initiatives**. Through this work and under the broader work of the Joint Initiative, opportunities for future collaboration across any sustainable logistics and procurement topics are also being sought.

MIT Lincoln Lab - USAID Collaboration

USAID's partnership with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Lincoln Laboratory investigates solutions to track, manage, and reduce the environmental impact of humanitarian aid packaging waste. Research areas include innovative materials, reuse or recycling of existing packaging, and alternate distribution mechanisms. A **portable, solar powered recycling unit** – to be piloted between Oct 2020 and Sept 2021 – represents just one of the innovative, cost effective recycling solutions generated through this partnership that offers potential to minimize environmental impact and provide benefits to local communities.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS TO ENHANCE SUSTAINABILITY IN PACKAGING PILLAR (VIA SCOPING STUDY)

ACTION CATEGORIES	SPECIFIC ACTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS
Enhance Humanitarian Coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Collective road mapping as part of building a "Joint Initiative"• Establish new or expand on existing coordination mechanisms
Private Sector Engagement in Policy and Standard Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expand and formalize engagement with the private sector• Assessment to further identify relevant private sector actors across the supply chain
Detailed Assessments and Case Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compendium of best practice and learning points• Additional assessments (e.g., Commodity/material assessments; organizational assessments)
Production, procurement, distribution, usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Packaging related policy mapping• Harmonize procurement, distribution and usage Standards• Packaging research and development in coordination with academic and/or private sector partners
End of life management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research waste management infrastructure and capacity• Map regional solid waste management hubs to help humanitarian assistance organizations identify effective solid waste management facilities, infrastructure, and industry.
Develop a Solid Waste Management planning framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support/design a framework for humanitarian assistance stakeholders to evaluate impact of packaging waste• Assess the packaging waste generated by a single event or commodity to assist in the development of a solid waste management planning framework

CONTACTS

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² The Joint Initiative is a collaborative effort co-led by USAID and UN Environment/OCHA Joint Environment Unit bringing environmental and humanitarian actors together to positively impact the quality and accountability of humanitarian assistance. <http://www.eecentre.org/assessments/>