

The Environmental Pact

Médecins Sans Frontières recognises the medical and humanitarian consequences of climate change and environmental degradation, and our contribution towards it. As the climate crisis accelerates, so too does the urgency of our collective engagement as a movement.

All corners of the movement have collectively expressed our determination to align health and environmental considerations. Associative motions, statements from the International Board and other bodies, Operational Centers' strategic plans, and numerous executive and individual initiatives all recognize the climate crisis as a humanitarian crisis. The evidence of the health and humanitarian consequences of climate and global environmental change¹ is extensive, the technology and tools for a sustainable future are available, and now we also have the commitment from leaders throughout MSF. These favorable set of circumstances set the stage for us to galvanize our talents, energies, and ambitions towards addressing the issue of implementation towards effective solutions.

A pact is distinct from a motion or a recommendation. The authorship and ownership are shared between associative and executive and it represents a higher level of consensus and commitment, offering specific guidance to inspire accountability. This Environmental Pact aims to build on the momentum, consolidate our commitment and provide a vision to accelerate MSF activities related to climate, enabling scaled solutions for community-focused, climate-smart humanitarian responses that have a lower environmental impact.

While MSF has been consistently active in environmental health, there is now an evident move toward integrating the broader considerations of climate change and health, under the umbrella of planetary health, with patients at the center. COVID-19 draws attention to humanity's interdependence and fragility and the potential for transformational change when faced with an existential threat. MSF's operational relevance depends on the recognition that health is not defined by the absence of disease and infirmity alone, nor shaped solely through political, economic, and social determinants of health, but also through environmental determinants.

In our medical-operational analysis, we acknowledge that planetary health influences the type, scale, severity, and dynamics of humanitarian crises. Through this pact, we take up the call for all those working to deliver health care at every level to support the transformational change required to prevent the devastation that sustained carbon emissions will bring. Particularly to the populations, we serve where, in most cases, pre-existing vulnerabilities and inequities may be exacerbated. Through this pact, we uphold the medical ethical principles to provide care without causing harm to individuals or groups.

¹ GEC: Large-scale and global environmental hazards to human health include climate change, stratospheric ozone depletion, changes in ecosystems due to loss of biodiversity, changes in hydrological systems and the supplies of freshwater, land degradation, urbanization, and stresses on food-producing systems (WHO, 2020).

Whilst recognizing our limitations, and the potential additional investment, we must also remain relevant to our supporters, employees, and patients in a changing world. We recognise the need for MSF to provide medical humanitarian assistance without creating additional humanitarian needs in the future, nor compromising future humanitarian action.

In 2020, MSF strategic plans affirm the movement-wide commitment to pursue innovative solutions to global environmental change, to share learnings, and scale up effective strategies, bringing climate and environmental issues into our operational mindset as a new norm. MSF has witnessed and will continue to witness the effects of global environmental changes on populations.

As humanitarians, our systems and structures must be well designed to manage the unavoidable consequences of the climate crisis. MSF is well equipped to respond to escalating needs in the context of climate change given we are needs-based, routinely perform in the context of uncertainty and rapid change, and are capable of accessing the most vulnerable populations in the most challenging contexts. We must build flexibility into our systems and avoid allowing differences of opinion to hamper mitigation² and adaptation³, or to excuse inaction. We can achieve the vision of this pact together, as a unified organization empowered by our reputation, strengthened by our collective experience, and guided by our principles.

We urge all entities to hold ourselves accountable to the following commitments, through our associative governance mechanisms. This includes reviewing the ambitions of this pact every other year and reporting progress annually at the International General Assembly;

Measure, report, and set targets to minimise the carbon and waste footprint of every entity and MSF project, optimizing outputs through mutualisation. Identify the best levers to reduce carbon emissions and enable sustainable resource use with the greatest efficiency gains, health, and financial co-benefits, whilst maintaining and continually improving quality care for patients.

Adapt our responses to continue to deliver high-quality care and improved public health while also minimizing ecological damage and conserving finite natural resources.

Engage and collaborate with communities, local actors, and organizations. Develop partnerships to share medical-operational data to contribute to knowledge generation and translation. **Research** should prioritize questions that improve our understanding of the humanitarian and health impacts of climate and environmental change to strengthen operations and inform and support our advocacy objectives.

Bear witness to people experiencing the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, paying attention to disproportionate impacts felt by vulnerable groups. Align diverse experiences with our humanitarian operational and advocacy goals.

Hold ourselves accountable through our associative governance mechanisms to ensure that MSF upholds these commitments and takes proactive measures to mitigate risk and the negative impact of the climate crisis on health.

This pact was unanimously endorsed by the International General Assembly (5 November 2020), the Full ExCom (13 October 2020), and the International Board (5 October 2020).

² **Mitigation (of climate change)** A human intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases (IPCC Glossary, 2012).

³ **Adaptation:** In human systems, the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects, in order to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities (IPCC Glossary, 2012).