

## A path towards ecological international aid – inspirations from experiences in Burkina Faso, Lebanon and France

### Session at the HNPW, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2023

This HNPW session presented the video on “A path towards ecological international aid” and welcomed its main actors to gather around the table to discuss the complex links of a more sustainable international aid. The panellists were:

- **Charles Kelly**, Disaster Management Consultant
- **Thomas Grabbier**, co-founder of [La Voûte Nubienne](#)
- **Cyril Pierrot**, project coordinator of the [Fleet Forum](#)
- **Marjolaine Bert**, founder and director of [EKO!](#)

The panel was moderated by Aline Hubert from [Groupe URD](#) who coordinated the production of the video.

We started the meeting by watching the video, which can be found [here](#). In the video, concrete instances of sustainable aid in the sector are shown with the examples of:

- The Nubian Vault, which proposes architectural alternatives that are more adapted to the changing realities of climate and the environment. Based on ancient building techniques, these houses are better isolated and thus more sustainable to increasing temperatures, but also are made with mud and hay (not wood), making it more environmentally friendly to build. They have deployed this programme in 5 countries. They adopt a social entrepreneurial approach where sales and the market are the vector to promote the project.
- The Fleet Forum as a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to cleaner, safer and more effective humanitarian transport in developing nations. Based in Beirut, their strategy is about mainstreaming sustainability in fleet management towards more mobility management.
- EKO! Which is about providing low tech solutions for and with refugees. The project started in Lesbos as the number of refugees arriving in Greece was rising, and now in Briançon, the project uses low tech as environmentally sustainable ways to develop work opportunities for refugees and the community in which they are. Their work focuses on simple technologies, accessible to all and easily repairable, using current and locally available means including the reuse or recycling of objects and/or common materials.

Aline then asked the panellists, *to what extent they thought that the experiences shared in the video address the environmental issues that are raised in the beginning of the video*, meaning climate change and environmental degradation turning into humanitarian crises. Kelly underlined that we are at the **cusp of a change in the sector**, such that the environment is increasingly integrated in humanitarian operations. For him, the first important point from the video, is that it is **sharing experiences**. He underlined that within the humanitarian sector, there **are processes that have been done for a while but also new approaches**, such as the ‘humanitarian uber’ approach. Marjolaine also underlined the importance of traditional solutions, which they try to include in their work. To which Aline and Thomas highlighted that there really is **a diversity of solution, across the aid spectrum** (from emergency to development), that organisations can take to address their **own footprint** (fleet forum) or that of the **projects themselves** (voûte nubienne). Cyril also underlined how there are **many different levels of maturity** between all the projects, and that we should not wait for a solution to be failproof to start thinking about and taking up more ecological ways of delivering aid.

Panelists were then asked *what challenges they face within their projects*. Some of the panellists underlined that the aid sector is often **solutionist**, and that if another solution, less expensive and more comfortable already exists, there might be resistance to accept the new solution. This is especially the case with low-tech but also with the behaviour change that is needed for the work of the Fleet Forum for example. However, Marjolaine also underlined that when no solution exists, there is higher opt-in. As such, it really seems to be about **shifting mindsets**, and convince that organisations **cannot rely on technological but that behavioural change is needed**. You need to **sensitize staff** within organisations, and also you need to adapt your message depending on your audience (for example underlining the costs that you save when relevant).

Thomas also mentioned that in the humanitarian sector some people might use the fact that they are 'doing good' to avoid changing their practices that might be harmful for the environment, which creates a barrier to change. We also need to be vigilant in that all solutions that seem to be eco-friendly might not actually be, such as [the use of bio-sourced plastic](#). This underlines the fact that adopting more ecological practices is actually **quite complex and that holistic approaches** need to be used, changing the way we do things rather than the things we do (technological fixes). **Links need to be made between response and adaptation, mitigation and anticipation**, and humanitarians needs to think about how to integrate ecological practices within the **planning and funding cycles**. Indeed, many humanitarian programs are on a yearly basis and focused on immediate needs, while environmental approaches tend to take years to implement and produce results. As such, many of the challenges identified are due to the mindset of aid practitioners and potentially a lack of sensitization.

Participants also mentioned that there seems to be a **gap between humanitarian and environmental NGOs**, which needs to be addressed: organisations need to be working together across the non-profit sector! Simultaneously, this will help for humanitarians to see the multi-facet impacts of any assistance provided to people in the long run.

Finally, panellists were asked if they thought that *we are on the good path*. Kelly underlined that there are a lot of initiatives and projects that are taking place, and that there might some **duplications** in some cases. Kelly underlined that this might actually not always be a bad thing as it allows for innovation. But he really underlined **the need to act within the nexus**, to make links between humanitarian action and development, for practitioners to have a long-term reflexion within emergency response. Marjolaine highlighted that we **need to do more research on the impacts these initiatives** have.

For their *concluding remarks*, panellists underlined the importance of **engaging and taking up action** to start up the processes and change the mindsets, **accept that there are trade-offs**, whilst the importance of working with **community-based solutions** was highlighted.

#### Resources:

- Charles Kelly is developing environmental profiles with the Global Shelter Cluster that are covering 12 disaster or conflict-affected countries. For any additional information you can contact him at [havedisasatercallkelly@gmail.com](mailto:havedisasatercallkelly@gmail.com).
- The Fleet Forum released a life cycle assessment of the cost of using electric VS thermic vehicles available [here](#). They are currently based in Lebanon **but open to collaboration**, so you can reach put to them and read the [NGO Start up Guide](#) if you want to start a carpooling project within your operating region.
- The Voûte Nubienne organisation is selling carbon credits, which you find out more about [here](#).
- You can learn more about EKO!'s work [here](#).

**Thank you to all the 55 participants to have joined used for this session!**