

PRIORITIES AND NEXT STEPS FOR GREENING HUMANITARIAN ACTION IN TONGA

Contextualising the Framework for Greening Humanitarian Action in the Pacific



Acknowledgements

Research team: Jesse McCommon, Jess Lees (HAG); Emiline Siale Ilolahia, Akmal Ali (PIANGO); Drew Havea, and Sesimani Lokotui (CSFT)

Editor: Josie Flint

Copy editor: Campbell Aitken

Design: Jenny Moody, A&J Designs

Cover photo: Shutterstock

Suggested citation: HAG, PIANGO, and CFST (2024) *Priorities and next steps for greening humanitarian action in Tonga: Contextualising the Framework for Greening Humanitarian Action in the Pacific*. Humanitarian Horizons. Melbourne: HAG.

This publication was funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The views expressed in this publication are the authors' alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Government.

Humanitarian Horizons 2021–24

This report is part of the Greening the System stream of the Humanitarian Horizons 2021–24 research program. Humanitarian Horizons is a three-year research initiative that adds unique value to humanitarian action in the Indo-Pacific by generating evidence and creating conversations for change. It is supported by the Australian Government through DFAT.

The research program for 2021–24 builds on the achievements of the Humanitarian Horizons pilot phase (2017–18), the previous iteration of the program (2018–21) and Humanitarian Advisory Group's experience in supporting the sector for almost 10 years. The research is structured into three interlocking streams: 1) Power, People and Local Leadership, 2) Greening the System, and 3) Real-Time Analysis and Influence. It is underpinned by a fourth stream that considers governance, accountability, and monitoring, evaluation and learning processes.

About the partners

The **Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO)** functions as a regional secretariat to a network of umbrella organisations or platforms registered in 24 countries, territories and states across the Pacific region.

The **Civil Society Forum of Tonga (CSFT)** is the umbrella body for Tonga's non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations.

Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) was founded in 2012 to elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. Set up as a social enterprise, HAG provides a unique space for thinking, research, technical advice and training that contributes to excellence in humanitarian practice.

Certified



Humanitarian Advisory Group is BCorp certified. This little logo means we work hard to ensure that our business is a force for good. We have chosen to hold ourselves accountable to the highest social, environmental and ethical standards, setting ourselves apart from business as usual.



Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abbreviations	2
Introduction	3
Humanitarian greening priorities and actions in Tonga	7
1. Manage water use	7
2. Tackle waste	8
3. Protect habitats and their inhabitants	11
4. Chose clean energy solutions	12
5. Race towards Net Zero emissions	14
Conclusion and next steps	16

Abbreviations

ARC	Australian Red Cross
COP28	Conference of the Parties
CSFT	Civil Society Forum of Tonga
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CVA	Cash Voucher Assistance
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
HAG	Humanitarian Advisory Group
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex and other gender self-identifications
MEIDECC	Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications
NbS	Nature-Based Solutions
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NDRMO	National Disaster Risk Management Office
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PIANGO	Pacific Islands Association of NGOs
PIC	Pacific Island Country
TNYC	Tonga National Youth Congress
TRCS	Tonga Red Cross Society
UBD	Unsolicited Bilateral Donation
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Introduction

The importance of greening humanitarian action is gaining traction worldwide. This is evidenced by the increasing humanitarian presence at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP28) in Dubai, the widespread endorsement of the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations, and increasing commitments from some of the largest humanitarian organisations and donors to develop greening strategies and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.¹ Over the last

two years, the *Greening the System* stream, part of the Humanitarian Horizons Research Program, has leveraged this momentum and filled an identified gap in existing tools and resources by developing a contextualised operational framework tailored specifically for the Pacific region. The [Framework for Greening Humanitarian Action in the Pacific](#) was launched in December 2023, giving humanitarian actors operating in the Pacific a set of core priorities and key actions to progress 'greener' activities and operations (see Box 1).

Box 1: What is the Framework for Greening Humanitarian Action in the Pacific?

The Framework addresses five key priority areas that were identified in the [Vision for a Green Humanitarian Future](#) and provides the practical actions and tools to support the sector to strive towards five key goals or 'desired outcomes'. These are:



Manage water use: Humanitarian water and sanitation interventions centralise positive community practices and promote low-waste approaches



Tackle waste: Humanitarian action prioritises reduction and appropriate management of waste



Protect habitats and their inhabitants: Humanitarian action has a net positive impact on habitats and biodiversity through sustainable infrastructure and climate-smart agricultural practices



Choose clean energy solutions: Energy efficiency of humanitarian action is prioritised



Race towards Net Zero emissions: GHG emissions associated with humanitarian actions are reduced.

The Framework can be used by local, national, regional, and international humanitarian actors who are seeking to reduce the negative climate and environmental impact of humanitarian response, recovery, and preparedness activities. It was designed to be adaptable to meet the needs of actors at different levels and different stages of their greening journey. It provides a process to use as a guide, and tools to implement the process.

¹ OCHA (2023) [Humanitarian Hub at COP28](#); COP28 UAE (2023) [Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace](#); <https://www.climate-charter.org>; DG ECHO (2021) [DG ECHO's approach to reducing the environmental footprint of humanitarian aid](#); Salzenstein L, Pedersen K (2021) What is the aid sector's carbon footprint? The New Humanitarian, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/investigations/2021/10/27/aid-sector-carbon-footprint-environmental-impact>

About contextualising the Framework to the country level

The Framework was developed through a consultative process with Pacific climate specialists and Pacific stakeholders from governments, donors, humanitarian agencies, and civil society organisations (CSOs). It was designed to reflect priorities and actions based on Pacific needs and realities. It breaks down technical and complicated processes into accessible language and activities, and elevates the importance of understanding the context, established systems, and local and indigenous priorities and practices that influence the greening journey. The framework has been well received as one of the first tools of its kind to be adapted for the region. However, Pacific stakeholders involved in the development process emphasised that the Pacific is not a homogenous region, and stressed the importance of achieving the necessary buy-in at the national and local levels to progress priorities.

The Framework serves as an important starting point for any Pacific Island Country (PIC) government or humanitarian stakeholder interested in greening humanitarian operations. The contextualisation and prioritisation of the Framework areas at the country level is a critical process that should consider the myriad of contextual factors that influence the unique greening journey of each PIC. This process presents stakeholders with clear national and/or local priorities and feasible actions to inform the allocation of resources and design of future projects and programs to support greening initiatives in the humanitarian sector. This contextualisation process was piloted in Tonga and Fiji in 2024.

About this report

This report shares findings and learnings from the contextualisation process in Tonga that took place between March and July 2024. This process involved desk review, a participatory workshop, and key informant interviews, further outlined in the methodology section below. The report highlights local and national perspectives. It acknowledges the contextual factors that influence opportunities for greening in Tonga and centralises community perspectives, existing good practices, and local and national actors' leadership of humanitarian response. It is intended to provide a high-level overview of key greening priorities and actions to be progressed by humanitarian stakeholders in Tonga. It can be used to inform planning and program design and to advocate to government and donors for greener humanitarian action. This study represents a first step in the greening journey that will require continued and increased engagement to develop and implement an action plan based on agreed priorities.

The report has three sections. Following this introduction, the next section highlights humanitarian greening priorities and actions that can be progressed in Tonga. It provides a brief overview of contextual factors influencing each of the five priority areas and highlights activities that are feasible and have the highest potential for impact, as identified by stakeholders consulted for this research. The final section provides a conclusion and ways to use the report to guide next steps in the greening journey, along with a summary of actions presented in a clear and accessible format that any humanitarian stakeholder operating in Tonga can use to inform programming, policy and practice.

Photo: Pexels



Box 2: Why focus on Tonga?

Tonga has demonstrated existing momentum and interest in greening humanitarian response, particularly following the response to the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai eruption in January 2022.² The volcano and subsequent tsunami created widespread devastation and resulted in a sizeable international response. The international response also triggered increased public perception and awareness of the negative environmental impacts of humanitarian aid.³ Various examples of good practice in greening aid delivery were identified in Tonga after the volcano response, and these present opportunities for replication and scaling up. The Tongan government recognises and prioritises the urgent need to adapt to the climate crisis, as evidenced by the Tonga Strategic Development Framework (2015–25), Tonga Climate Change Policy (2016–35), Nationally Determined Contributions (2020), Joint National Action Plan II (2018–28), and the Low Emissions Development Strategy (2021–25). This research seeks to build on this momentum and present viable next steps to reduce the environmental impact of humanitarian response.

METHODOLOGY

This research was undertaken in partnership with the Pacific Islands Association of NGOs (PIANGO) and the Civil Society Forum of Tonga (CSFT). The contextualisation process utilised a mixed methods approach that was informed by both primary and secondary data. This included desk review, a participatory in-person stakeholder workshop, and key informant interviews to further explore workshop outcomes and proposed next steps (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Methodology



A stakeholder workshop was held on 5 March 2024, in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, with participants from government, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), local and national NGOs, Tonga Red Cross Society (TRCS), and CSOs. The workshop was opened by the CEO of the Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications (MEIDECC), demonstrating the government's interest and commitment to furthering this agenda. The objective of the workshop was to bring together stakeholders working across the humanitarian sector in Tonga to learn about the Framework, map existing progress and good practice, identify actions from the Framework that are a priority for Tonga, and propose actions to progress agreed priorities.

Following the workshop, 10 key informant interviews were conducted with key stakeholders from government, NGOs, TRCS and community groups. They included people who participated in the workshop and some who did not. They allowed the research team to dig deeper into workshop discussions and bring in new perspectives and ideas.

Data collected through desk review and in-country consultation was analysed to propose key greening priorities and potential actions to progress in Tonga. This includes actions highlighted directly from the Framework, some that have been adapted, and some new actions proposed by Tongan stakeholders.

² HAG, CSFT, MORDI (2022) *Treading gently: building on positive environmental practice in the Tonga volcano response*. Melbourne: HAG

³ Ibid.; Interviews 3, 7 & 8

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The contextualisation process faced several limitations, including:

- **Representativeness and availability of stakeholders:** Not all stakeholders were consulted during this process due to resourcing and time constraints. The workshop and consultations included a range of diverse actors and stakeholder groups, ranging from government officials to community members; however, data collection methods were unable to capture the full range of perspectives across the Tongan humanitarian landscape
- **Achieving agreement between all stakeholders:** Stakeholders hold differing perspectives on the recommended priority areas and actions in the Framework, because their needs and priorities differ based on focus and context. This research sought to capture the key emerging areas, recognising variability in perspectives
- **Limited timeframe and resourcing for next steps:** This research was conducted between March and July 2024. This allowed the research team to lay the groundwork for contextualising the Framework in Tonga and gather important input and feedback from Tongan stakeholders. However, developing an action plan and implementing this Framework will require continued engagement to build buy-in and allocation of resources to drive the next steps.

Photo: Shutterstock



Humanitarian greening priorities and actions in Tonga

This section highlights the main priorities and potential actions for greening humanitarian response in Tonga emerging from the consultation process. Tongan stakeholders agreed that all five focus areas of the Framework are important for Tonga, while some areas carry higher urgency and priority than others. The priorities and actions proposed below have been adapted to the Tongan context, building upon the Framework.

1. MANAGE WATER USE

Tongan stakeholders consistently highlighted water resource management and provision as the highest priority. This issue was especially prominent among community members who shared their own lived experience of struggling to access clean water during disasters and how this affected their communities. Access to safe and clean water supplies in Tonga remains inadequate: many communities rely on rainwater tanks and fragile wells. Existing water infrastructure is highly vulnerable to disasters and climate change impacts and is often damaged or contaminated by disasters. Additionally, because of the remoteness and size of the outer islands, centralised water infrastructure is scarce, making it even more difficult to achieve water security. In December 2023, the Department of Climate Change launched a Guide to Safe Rainwater Harvesting in Tonga to help community members and village water committees install and maintain rainwater harvesting systems, and thereby widen access to safe drinking water.⁴ The government supplies water tanks in times of emergency, but several stakeholders highlighted that this is often done too late and not inclusive of all those in need. Stakeholders noted that lack of support for

maintenance and repair meant that frequent damage to water infrastructure reduced access to safe drinking water for long periods, and government and NGOs often failed to engage sufficiently with communities to understand their water needs during emergency response and recovery.⁵

“ The most important [resource] is always water. We still buy water from the shop to drink. Because we live near the coast, the sea is always coming into the tank, so the water is not drinkable. (Community member)⁶

Priority 1: Scale up investment in the resilience of community water infrastructure

Key actions and opportunities:

1. Prioritise funding for the provision and installation of resilient water systems and rainwater tanks
2. Prioritise funding to repair or upgrade existing water supply and sanitation systems
3. Support communities to develop and resource maintenance plans for water infrastructure.

4 A guide to safe rainwater harvesting in Tonga (2023), <https://climatechange.gov.to/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ESR-1056-Tonga-rainwater-harvesting-updated-logos-2023-English-3.50.pdf>

5 Workshop minutes, Interviews 2, 5 & 19; SPC Geoscience Division Water, Sanitation Program, Country information, Tonga, <https://www.pacificwater.org/pages.cfm/country-information/tonga.html>; Kiefer P (2022) How one major disaster can lead to another: A lack of clean drinking water, Popular Science, 31 January, <https://www.popsci.com/environment/tonga-volcano-contaminated-drinking-water/>; Matangi Tonga (2023) Village rainwater tanks often contaminated, study shows, 28 November, <https://matangitonga.to/tag/wash-project?page=1#:~:text=Domestic%20rainwater%20tanks%20are%20often,coli>.

6 Interview 2



Good practice example: The Tonga National Water Tank Project, launched in 2024 with support from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is currently working to improve Tonga's water tanks to increase resilience to disaster and climate shocks.⁷



Good practice example: The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) supported community-led projects on Eua Island to identify water needs, install new rainwater catchment tanks for 885 households, and build capacity to maintain the tanks.⁸



Priority 2: Prioritise low-waste alternatives to community/household level water provision (e.g. eliminating small plastic bottles)

Key actions and opportunities:

1. Use large containers, drums, jerry cans or desalination equipment (that can be carried safely) instead of small plastic bottles
2. Distribute emergency water tanks equally and inclusively to reduce need for small plastic bottles
3. Advocate to donors to limit use of small plastic bottles
4. Invest in effective and inclusive needs assessment to ensure all households receive emergency water tanks.



Good practice example: TRCS shared examples of using large jerry cans to distribute emergency water to communities, and representatives from MORDI shared examples of filling and distributing 5,000-litre water tanks to communities during disaster response to reduce use of small plastic bottles.⁹



Priority 3: Work in partnership with community groups to understand water needs

Key actions and opportunities:

1. Consult and work with community members to understand water needs and practices, including cultural and gender-responsive and inclusive practices for different groups, to inform the provision of water tanks and delivery of emergency water
2. Jointly develop water maintenance and sanitation trainings with community members
3. Create spaces for community members to share lessons learned and best practices from other communities on sustainable water resource management.



2. TACKLE WASTE

Tongan stakeholders, particularly representatives of NGOs and government, also prioritised waste management. This was largely attributed to the significant accumulation of waste following the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha’apai eruption and tsunami response in 2022. Tonga’s small size and geographical isolation impedes waste management and recycling, particularly given the scarcity of space for landfill. Recycling in Tonga is managed by the private sector, and is not available at scale or consistently across the islands. Due to lack of technology and facilities and the isolation of the islands, private sector recycling programs are often unsustainable and plastic ends up in landfill. Traditional practices of dumping and burning rubbish mean mindsets and behaviours must be changed. Modern waste such as plastics and foils have replaced traditional biodegradable materials, but disposal methods have not accommodated this change. Inappropriate unsolicited bilateral donations (UBDs) were also identified as a major contributor to waste during disaster response. Waste management is now a priority of the Tongan government, which is finalising a National Plastics Roadmap aimed at

7 UNDP Pacific Office (2024) Government of Tonga lead on strengthening coordination for enhanced water security, 21 March, <https://www.undp.org/pacific/press-releases/government-tonga-lead-strengthening-coordination-enhanced-water-security>

8 International Fund for Agricultural Development (2021) Community-driven change brings water security in Tonga, 23 August 2021, IFAD <https://www.ifad.org/en/web/latest/-/tonga-water-security>

9 Interviews 3 & 4

phasing out single-use plastics in the country, and is a focus of several locally led campaigns striving to tackle issues around disaster waste.¹⁰

“ Previously, we never thought that aid could be waste. It just became apparent during the volcano response, that we recognise the importance of waste management in terms of humanitarian aid. (Government representative)¹¹”

Priority 1: Reduce the amount of plastic imported to the country during disaster response

Key actions and opportunities:

1. Procure items locally when local markets can provide sustainable, quality products with minimal packaging
2. Work with communities (including women, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, youth, elderly, and LGBTQI+ people) to learn what relief supplies are locally available and culturally appropriate
3. Promote cash voucher assistance
4. Implement and/or advocate for environmental policies that reduce packaging as early in the supply chain as possible
5. Implement and/or advocate for the integration of environmental standards into tender and contract documentation.



Something to consider: Stakeholders emphasised that while cash voucher assistance (CVA) can be helpful in reducing waste from imported supplies, it is important to consider opportunities to deliver CVA through goods and services such as cash for work or crops. Through flexible funding sources, CSFT assisted affected communities utilising such opportunities. The affected farmers of the village of Ha’atafu were able to quickly harvest inundated root crops. These harvests were delivered to affected communities in low-lying urban areas with poor access to farming land. These opportunities – characterised as cash for crops, cash for food or cash for work – benefited local communities directly, with minimal waste.



Good practice example: In March 2024, the Ministry of Environment held consultations on the National Plastics Roadmap seeking to inform guidelines on what types of plastics can be imported to the country.¹²

¹⁰ Workshop minutes, Interviews 3, 5, 7–9; SPREP (2024) Tonga on the path to phasing out single-use plastics, recognizes the importance of national actions in meeting future plastics treaty obligations, 20 April, <https://www.sprep.org/news/tonga-on-the-path-to-phasing-out-single-use-plastics-recognises-the-importance-of-national-actions-in-meeting-future-plastics-treaty-obligations>; PacWastePlus (2023) Tonga National Waste Audit Analysis Report, Apia: SPREP; Enoka TK (2022) 86,000 bottles of water on the wall: Tonga struggles with post-volcano waste problem, The Guardian, 17 April, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/18/86000-bottles-of-water-on-the-wall-tonga-struggles-with-post-volcano-waste-problem>

¹¹ Interview 8

¹² Interview 8

Photo: Shutterstock



Priority 2: Raise awareness and support behaviour change to ensure that plastic, solid, and health and medical waste in humanitarian action is reused, recycled, repurposed or managed appropriately

Key actions and opportunities:

1. Support community management of disaster waste through provision of waste disposal equipment
2. Establish locally led (including women and youth-led) waste awareness education programs teaching how to reuse, repurpose, recycle and dispose of waste
3. Integrate waste management activities into educational curriculums, starting from primary school.
4. Encourage donors sending relief supplies to take waste back, or plan for appropriate repurposing or disposal
5. Ensure waste is not burnt, does not enter waterways, and is disposed of safely
6. Support and/or advocate for the development of national regulations to reduce and manage e-waste (waste generated from electronics and equipment) and ensure e-waste from humanitarian operations is disposed appropriately.



Good practice example: The No Pelesitiki campaign is a volunteer-run initiative working to eliminate single-use plastics in Tonga. The Australian Government funded it to collect plastic waste following the volcano response. Volunteers and staff collected around 3,000 kg of plastic waste, which was then compacted by machines provided by DFAT and transported out of the country.¹³



Good practice example: LATA, a Tongan organisation for people with disabilities, conducts workshops with communities about how to manage waste, including how to recycle and reuse plastics. LATA has conducted training to teach people how to make new things out of recycled plastics, even jewellery.¹⁴



Priority 3: Regulate and reduce unsolicited bilateral donations

Key actions and opportunities:

1. Promote public messaging to intending donors that preferences cash donations over materials; highlight the problems UBDs create
2. Develop and/or advocate for the development of national regulations that cover UBDs.



Good practice example: The National Disaster Risk Management Office (NDRMO), as lead of the Non-Food Items Cluster, is currently working with TRCS to develop standardised guidance for relief items that can be shipped to the country. This is an ongoing process that has not yet received government endorsement.¹⁵



Something to consider: Stakeholders agreed that regulating UBDs should be a priority, but one respondent cautioned about the way this messaging is framed to the public.

“ The framing of regulating donations is challenging because of the public perception. The public will not like that, they do not want to stop donations. This would need to be explained really clearly or people may reject this. (Government representative)¹⁶ ”

¹³ HAG, CSFT, MORDI (2022) *Treading gently: building on positive environmental practice in the Tonga volcano response*

¹⁴ Interview 9

¹⁵ Interview 7

¹⁶ Interview 8



3. PROTECT HABITATS AND THEIR INHABITANTS

The protection of land and biodiversity was also highlighted as a key priority for the Framework, mostly by community members, environmental stakeholders and those working in the agriculture sector. Land is very important to Tongan society for economic, social, cultural and political development. Land and biodiversity are central to livelihoods, with agriculture being the largest economic sector. Biodiversity is increasingly threatened due to increased competition for land use, especially for commercial farming and expanding populations. Poor agricultural practices such as the overuse of pesticides and fertilisers, illegal harvesting, importation of invasive species, and the degradation of mangrove areas by reclamation and waste dumping present some of the biggest challenges for protecting Tongan biodiversity. Climate change and increasingly frequent and severe disasters are damaging Tongan land and agricultural practices. Extreme weather and natural hazards such as cyclones and tsunamis wipe out crops and erode shorelines, and prolonged droughts disrupt food production and threaten aquatic ecosystems. Stakeholders raised concerns about insufficient consideration of environmental protection in disaster response and lack of engagement with communities and traditional knowledge sources in planning response and recovery activities.¹⁷

“All our crops were destroyed from the tsunami, and we had to start completely over. We have been planting trees and mangroves in coastal areas where the tsunami damaged [...] the ocean was one of our biggest livelihood areas, but the tsunami destroyed everything. (Community member)¹⁸”



Priority 1: Prioritise the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity in humanitarian programming

Key actions and opportunities

1. Conduct environmental screening to identify positive and negative effects associated with humanitarian activities
2. Prioritise nature-based solutions (NbS) in programming
3. Protect ecosystems and habitats by avoiding introducing new species to areas, and protecting existing biodiversity, such as large trees
4. Work in partnership with conservation agencies to plan activities.



Good practice example: Tonga’s second Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), submitted to UNFCCC in 2020, set a goal to plant one million trees to raise awareness and combat climate change, land erosion, and flooding in Tonga. The tree planting scheme is implemented by the Department of Climate Change, in partnership with villages, schools, churches, and other government ministries. This goal has been met and exceeded, as trees continue to be planted. The scheme is working to revitalise native trees that were nearly extinct and promote sustainable forest management to limit land degradation.¹⁹

17 Heimuli Paletu’a (2023) Tongan Land Rights: Inheritance and inequality, *Intersections*, vol. 1, no. 1, <https://www.cbd.int/countries/profile?country=to>; <https://www.cbd.int/doc/world/to/to-nbsap-01-en.pdf>; <https://dt-global.com/blog/tonga-resilience-for-agriculture/>

18 Interview 10

19 Interviews 7 & 8; Pacific Tourism Organisation (2023) The challenge is to plant a million trees by the end of 2023, 13 August, <https://southpacificislands.travel/the-challenge-is-to-plant-a-million-trees-by-the-end-of-2023/>



Good practice example: The Tonga National Youth Congress (TNYC) Kiwa Initiative project is using NbS to protect Tonga's coastal environments and strengthen climate resilience. TNYC is planting mangroves to combat coastal erosion, establishing marine protected areas to preserve biodiversity, and promoting sustainable fishing practices to ensure long-term ecological balance. The Kiwa Initiative project also supports local youth groups to implement environmental activities, for example, conserving local flora and fauna and eliminating harmful species. The project strives to update Tonga's environmental laws to reduce the national contribution to climate change and support local communities to strengthen their relationship with the environment.²⁰



Good practice example: CSFT and civil society partners supported a 'cash for crops' initiative to support the sustainable recovery of Tonga's agriculture sector after the Hunga Tonga eruption. This program funded affected farmers to support traditional farming practices and facilitated crop distribution to affected families.²¹



Priority 2: Listen to and learn from communities in planning agriculture, infrastructure and livelihood activities

Key actions and opportunities

1. Incorporate traditional knowledge, custom and practices to conserve native species and biodiversity in agriculture and livelihood activities
2. Consult with community members (including women and girls, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, youth, elderly, LGBTQI+ people) to ensure that sites selected for construction or agriculture are suitable, protect land rights and conserve sacred or tabu sites
3. Increase the productivity, sustainability and resilience of community agri-food systems to reduce the impacts of disasters.



4. CHOSE CLEAN ENERGY SOLUTIONS

Several stakeholders highlighted the expansion of renewable energy as a key focus (most were from larger and more established organisations that had received funding to pilot these approaches). Shifting to clean energy is a high priority for the Tongan government. Currently, more than 90% of electricity used in Tonga is generated using imported diesel fuel.²² However, the country has set ambitious renewable energy targets, committing (in its NDC submitted to the UNFCCC in 2020) to produce 70% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030. Solar power has emerged as a particularly viable source of renewable energy in Tonga. The government has endorsed solar power development, and there has been much foreign investment in developing solar grids across the islands. Opportunities for wind, hydropower, and battery storage projects are also being explored.²³ However, renewable energy infrastructure is also vulnerable to disaster, and expensive and complicated maintenance plans can reduce feasibility and sustainability. Stakeholders raised concerns over the lack of infrastructure and access to clean energy, challenges with maintenance, and lack of awareness and understanding of clean energy solutions. Several

²⁰ International Union for Conservation of Nature (2024) TNYC enhances Tonga's coastal resilience with NbS, 19 April, <https://iucn.org/story/202404/t NYC-enhances-tongas-coastal-resilience-nbs>

²¹ Interview 6; HAG, CSFT, MORDI (2022) *Treading gently: building on positive environmental practice in the Tonga volcano response*.

²² UNFCCC (2023) Tonga Climate Change Trust Fund – Tonga, <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/momentum-for-change/activity-database/tonga-climate-change-trust-fund>

²³ Asian Development Bank (2023) Tonga Opens Renewable Grid to Deliver Clean, Affordable Energy to Niuatoputapu, 26 July, <https://www.adb.org/news/tonga-opens-renewable-grid-deliver-clean-affordable-energy-niuatoputapu#:~:text=It%20is%20building%20solar%20generating,'Eua%20and%20Vava'u>


community members highlighted renewable energy solutions as something they are keen to learn more about and implement in their communities.²⁴

“ It was good to learn about renewable energy at the workshop. People are mostly only talking about water and waste, but we also want to learn about alternate ways to reach our goals. There should be more trainings so that we can build our capacity and understanding. (Community member)²⁵”

Priority 1: Engage donors and experts in the energy sector to upgrade current energy systems

Key actions and opportunities


1. Conduct environmental screening to identify potential negative and positive effects of new and proposed energy systems
2. Advocate to donors to include funding for renewable energy systems and mechanisms in humanitarian programs
3. If the use of fossil fuels is unavoidable, prioritise energy-efficient methods and/or models.

 **Something to consider:** Some stakeholders suggested that it may be helpful to advocate for the Energy Department to become its own Ministry to coordinate energy-related work and upgrade systems.²⁶ The Energy Department currently sits within MEIDECC and is responsible for overseeing the Tonga Energy Road Map 2021–35.²⁷

Priority 2: Explore affordable options for clean energy and prioritise renewable energy solutions for new energy needs

Key actions and opportunities

1. Explore renewable technologies, such as circular economy biogas, wind power, and solar energy systems
2. Advocate to donors to include funding for renewable energy systems and mechanisms in humanitarian programs
3. Use low-emission cooking fuels (e.g. biogas, ethanol, solar power)
4. Use solar lanterns for street and household lighting
5. Install energy-conserving technologies (such as ceiling fans and window coverings) to reduce the use of fossil-fuelled appliances.

 **Something to consider:** There is sustained interest in circular economy and biogas projects in Tonga. However, many community-based projects have been piloted involving biogas are unsustainable due to expensive technology and processes. There are some cultural barriers to the use of methodologies for pig farming: domestic animals are traditionally free range, while the piloted biogas methodologies require constructed piggeries. This, the need to introduce new breeds of pigs that can meet the biogas demands, and the cost associated with piggeries designed for biogas, reduce the viability of the concept in Tonga.²⁸

²⁴ Workshop minutes; Interviews 2, 5, 6 & 10

²⁵ Interview 6

²⁶ Workshop minutes

²⁷ Tonga Energy Roadmap 2021–2025, <https://www.pcreee.org/sites/default/files/event/files/presentations/2%20TERMPLUS%20Update%20-%20TERMPLUS%20Workshop%2024-25-August-%2721.pdf>

²⁸ SPREP (2018) Tonga exploring cheaper and sustainable electricity through biogas generation, 25 September, <https://www.spc.int/updates/news/2018/09/tonga-exploring-cheaper-and-sustainable-electricity-through-biogas-generation>; Gee E (2016) Biogas agriculture could be Tonga's ticket to booming agro-economy, 16 July, Solomon Star, <https://www.solomonstarnews.com/biogas-agriculture-could-be-tonga-s-ticket-to-booming-agro-economy/>



Good practice example: Workshop participants shared examples of the NDRMO supporting the installation of solar panels in remote communities. Also, CSFT and TRCS have distributed solar lights to households on the outer islands that experience poor electricity supply and/or those affected by the volcanic eruption in 2022.²⁹



Priority 3: Prioritise education and capacity strengthening for locals to use and maintain renewable energy systems

Key actions and opportunities:

1. Strengthen the capacity of community members (including women and girls, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, youth, the elderly, LGBTQI+ people) to explore renewable energy projects
2. Support community members to install low-emissions technologies and retrofit existing appliances.



Good practice example: CSFT has provided training to women in communities on how to maintain solar lights through the Tonga CSO Humanitarian hub FALE.. These solar lights are part of kits distributed to affected communities in the aftermath of disasters. Implementation of low-emission technologies for local communities is progressing due to lessons learnt over years of rebuilding after disasters. A recently completed feasibility study endorsed the use of low-emission cookstoves in local communities; their uptake will help build resiliency and preparedness in times of disasters.³⁰



5. RACE TOWARDS NET ZERO EMISSIONS

Emissions reductions were acknowledged as important in mitigating the adverse effects of climate change, but generally were not prioritised by stakeholders consulted for this research. This can be attributed to the composition of stakeholders being predominantly local and national actors who do not feel that they have significant agency in reducing emissions. More consultation would be required to explore this further. Tonga, similar to other PICs, produces a negligible amount of global GHG emissions, and has committed to a 28% reduction by 2030 in its current NDC. Most conversations around emissions reductions in consultations were linked to renewable energy or efficient modes of transport and travel. Tonga's commitments to GHG emissions are primarily linked to the energy sector and shifts toward renewable energy. The Tonga Low Emission Development Strategy 2021–2025 highlights several key focus areas that align with the Framework for Greening Humanitarian Action in the Pacific, including energy efficiency, transportation, waste management, and agriculture practices.³¹ Key priorities identified by stakeholders to reduce emissions in humanitarian response mostly related to transport and supply chains, as opposed to set-up and management of humanitarian operations.³²

“ In terms of humanitarian aid, for example the Hunga Tonga response, it was the first time we have experienced that many military ships at our island and the transportation emissions. We don't have any data on this, in the future we need to monitor this type of emissions and pollution. (Government representative)³³

29 Workshop minutes

30 Workshop minutes

31 Tonga Low Emissions Development Strategy 2021-2050, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/TONGA_LTS_Nov2021.pdf

32 Workshop minutes; Interview 8

33 Interview 8



Priority 1: Procure and preposition items as locally as possible

Key actions and opportunities

1. Prioritise CVA if market assessments show local markets can provide sustainable, quality items
2. Ensure storage facilities for pre-positioned stock consider environmental sustainability
3. Coordinate and pool supplies with other agencies to reduce transport-related emissions.



Good practice example: The TRCS, with the support of the Australian Red Cross (ARC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, has been working on environmental sustainability for pre-positioned stock. ARC has supported a pilot program with TRCS to promote NbS, including planting around pre-positioned stock warehouses to restore vegetation cover, protect stock and promote environmental resilience.³⁴



Priority 2: Invest in energy efficient vehicles and more sustainable transport approaches

Key actions and opportunities

1. Advocate for increased investment in electric vehicles and the associated infrastructure
2. Advocate for increased investment in public transportation and seek opportunities to utilise public transportation in programming approaches
3. Prioritise more sustainable transport approaches, such as shipping instead of air freight
4. Collaborate with National Meteorological and Hydrological Services for tailored climate prediction services when planning transport routes
5. Reduce international travel through decentralisation of leadership, decision-making and resources to local humanitarian actors.



Priority 3: Raise awareness of the importance of emissions reductions with humanitarian stakeholders

Key actions and opportunities

1. Design and organise workshops/trainings for humanitarian staff to raise awareness of the importance of greening strategies and actions
2. Recruit or identify staff interested in leading on organisational sustainability
3. Implement a staff engagement and awareness program to promote green actions. Ensure messaging around environmental awareness is culturally appropriate and accessible.

³⁴ Interview 3; HAG, CSFT, MORDI (2022) *Treading gently: building on positive environmental practice in the Tonga volcano response*

Photo: Shutterstock



Conclusion and next steps

This report provides a contextualised and streamlined version of the Framework for Greening Humanitarian Action in the Pacific that was adapted to reflect the priorities and needs of Tongan stakeholders. It demonstrates that the Framework is widely applicable in the Tongan context, with the highest priorities generally agreed to be sustainable management of water and waste. Priorities and actions were identified based on analysis of what good practice is already occurring and what areas require increased attention to progress towards greener action.

The contextualisation process in Tonga demonstrated that there is a strong appetite for greener practices among humanitarian actors. However, several contextual factors present obstacles to these ambitions, for example, poor access to clean water, low capacity for waste management and recycling, and inadequate infrastructure for clean energy and opportunities for emissions reductions. These challenges influence not only what is feasible in Tonga, but what is the highest priority with the highest potential for impact for Tongan communities. Examples of good practice in these areas – such as high levels of investment in strengthening resilience of community water systems and rainwater tanks, and sustained locally led campaigns to raise awareness and support effective waste management – show how these challenges can be overcome. Recent research highlights efforts to move towards more environmentally friendly humanitarian response in Tonga, but this has been largely ad hoc and at an organisational rather than systemic level.³⁵ This report provides an opportunity to utilise a shared tool to promote wider uptake and engagement with greener practices in Tonga.

PROPOSED NEXT STEPS

The next steps for greening humanitarian action in Tonga will rely heavily on the continued and sustained engagement of key stakeholders who were involved in the contextualisation process. This report,

and the quick guide attached below, can be used to progress the following four key areas.

➔ **Promoting wider discussion and advocacy.**

This report can provide a foundation for continued discussion and advocacy for greener humanitarian action in Tonga. Local, national, and international NGOs and key stakeholders can elevate identified priorities to government and donors to influence updated policies and decisions about resource allocations for humanitarian response, preparedness, and recovery.

➔ **Developing and implementing an action plan.**

This study highlights priorities and actions that can be progressed to achieve greener humanitarian action in Tonga. Sustained engagement will be required to develop and resource an action plan to implement change. Government actors and other decision-makers can use this report to inform that process.

➔ **Informing future programming.**



Government, NGOs and civil society actors can use this report to inform future planning and programming for humanitarian action, preparedness, and recovery activities. Actions identified in this report can be integrated into program design and communicated to donors to inform future funding opportunities.


➔ **Developing a baseline and tracking change over time.**


This study can be used to develop a baseline for progress on greening humanitarian action in Tonga. This can be achieved by adapting the Self-Assessment Scorecard provided in [Annex 2](#) of the Framework for Greening Humanitarian Action in the Pacific. This tool can be contextualised to reflect the actions proposed for Tonga and used to collect baseline data at an organisational or sector level in Tonga, which can be referenced to track progress over time.


35 HAG, CSFT, MORDI (2022) *Treading gently: building on positive environmental practice in the Tonga volcano response*

QUICK GUIDE: PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS AT A GLANCE

	PRIORITIES	WHO
 MANAGE WATER	1. Scale up investment in the resilience of community water infrastructure	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prioritise funding for the provision and installation of resilient water systems and rainwater tanks 	Government, donors
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prioritise funding to repair or upgrade existing water supply and sanitation systems 	Government, donors
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Support communities to develop and resource maintenance plans for water infrastructure 	NGOs, communities
	2. Prioritise low-waste options for community/household-level water provision (e.g. eliminating small plastic bottles)	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use large containers, drums, jerry cans or desalination equipment (that can be carried safely) instead of small plastic bottles 	Government, NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure equal and inclusive distribution of emergency water tanks to reduce need for small plastic bottles 	Government, NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Advocate to donors to limit donation of small plastic bottles 	Government, NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Invest in effective and inclusive needs assessment to ensure provision of emergency water tanks reaches all households 	Government, NGOs
	3. Work in partnership with community groups to understand water needs	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consult and work together with community members to understand water needs and practices, including cultural and gender-responsive and inclusive practices for different groups, to inform the provision of water tanks and delivery of emergency water 	NGOs, communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Jointly develop water maintenance and sanitation training with community members 	NGOs, communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Create spaces for community members to share lessons learned and best practices from other communities on sustainable water resource management 	NGOs, communities	
	PRIORITIES	WHO
 TACKLE WASTE	1. Reduce the amount of plastic imported to the country during disaster response	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Procure items locally when local markets can provide sustainable, quality products with minimal packaging 	NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Work with communities (including women, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, youth, elderly, and LGBTQI+ people) to learn what relief supplies are locally available and culturally appropriate 	NGOs

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote cash voucher assistance 	Government, NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impose and/or advocate for environmental policies that reduce packaging as early in the supply chain as possible 	Government, NGOs, donors
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement and/or advocate for the integration of environmental standards into tender and contract documentation 	Government, NGOs, donors
	2. Raise awareness and support behaviour change to ensure that plastic, solid, and health and medical waste in humanitarian action is reused, recycled, repurposed or managed appropriately	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support community management of disaster waste through provision of waste disposal equipment 	Government, NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish locally led (including women and youth-led) waste awareness education programs teaching how to reuse, repurpose, recycle and dispose of waste 	NGOs, communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate waste management activities into educational curriculums, starting from primary school 	Government
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage donors sending relief supplies to take waste back, or plan for appropriate repurposing or disposal 	Government, donors
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure waste is not burnt, does not enter waterways, and is disposed of safely 	Government, NGOs, communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support and/or advocate for the development of national regulations to reduce and manage e-waste (waste generated from electronics and equipment) and ensure e-waste from humanitarian operations is disposed appropriately 	Government, NGOs
	3. Regulate and reduce unsolicited bilateral donations	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote public messaging to intending donors that preferences cash donations over materials; highlight the problems UBDs create 	Government, NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and/or advocate for the development of national regulations that cover UBDs 	Government, NGOs
PRIORITIES		WHO
 PROTECT HABITATS AND THEIR INHABITANTS	1. Prioritise the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity in humanitarian programming	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct environmental screening to identify positive and negative effects associated with humanitarian activities 	Government, NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritise nature-based solutions in programming 	NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect ecosystems and habitats by avoiding introducing new species to areas, and protecting existing biodiversity, such as large trees 	NGOs, communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work in partnership with conservation agencies to plan activities 	NGOs

	2. Listen to and learn from communities in planning agriculture, infrastructure and livelihood activities	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Incorporate traditional knowledge, custom and practices to conserve native species and biodiversity in agriculture and livelihood activities 	NGOs, communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Consult with community members (including women and girls, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, youth, elderly, LGBTQI+ people) to ensure that sites selected for construction or agriculture are suitable, protect land rights and conserve sacred or tabu sites 	NGOs, government, communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increase the productivity, sustainability and resilience of community agri-food systems to reduce the impacts of disasters 	NGOs, government, communities
PRIORITIES		WHO
 <p>CHOOSE CLEAN ENERGY SOLUTIONS</p>	1. Engage donors and experts in the energy sector to upgrade current energy systems	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Conduct environmental screening to identify potential negative and positive effects of new and proposed energy systems 	Government, NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Advocate to donors to include funding for renewable energy systems and mechanisms in humanitarian programs 	Government, NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ If the use of fossil fuels is unavoidable, prioritise energy-efficient methods and/or models 	Government, NGOs
	2. Explore affordable options for clean energy and prioritise renewable energy solutions for new energy needs	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Explore potential renewable technologies, such as circular economy biogas, wind power, and solar energy systems 	Government
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Advocate to donors to include funding for renewable energy systems and mechanisms in humanitarian programs 	Government, NGOs, donors
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use low-emission cooking fuels (e.g. biogas, ethanol, solar power) 	NGOs, communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Use solar lanterns for street and household lighting 	Government, NGOs, communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Install energy-conserving technologies (e.g. ceiling fans and window coverings) to reduce the use of fossil-fuelled appliances 	NGOs, communities
	3. Prioritise education and capacity strengthening for locals to use and maintain renewable energy systems	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Strengthen the capacity of community members (including women and girls, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, youth, the elderly, LGBTQI+ people) to explore renewable energy projects 	NGOs, communities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Support community members to install low-emissions technologies and retrofit existing appliances 	NGOs, communities

	PRIORITIES	WHO
 <p>RACE TOWARDS NET ZERO EMISSIONS</p>	1. Procure and preposition items as locally as possible	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prioritise CVA if market assessments show local markets can provide sustainable, quality items 	NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure storage facilities for pre-positioned stock are environmentally sustainable 	NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Coordinate and pool supplies with other agencies to reduce transport-related emissions 	NGOs
	2. Invest in energy-efficient vehicles and more sustainable transport approaches	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Advocate for increased investment in electric vehicles and associated infrastructure 	Government, NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Advocate for increased investment in public transportation and seek opportunities to utilise public transportation in programming approaches 	Government, NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prioritise more sustainable transport approaches, such as shipping instead of air freight 	Government, NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Collaborate with National Meteorological and Hydrological Services for tailored climate prediction services when planning transport routes 	Government, NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reduce international travel through decentralisation of leadership, decision-making and resources to local humanitarian actors 	NGOs
	3. Raise awareness of the importance of emissions reductions with humanitarian stakeholders	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Design and organise workshops/training for humanitarian staff to raise awareness of the importance of greening strategies and action 	NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recruit or identify staff interested in leading on organisation sustainability 	NGOs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Implement a staff engagement and awareness program to promote green actions. Ensure messaging around environmental awareness is culturally appropriate and accessible 	NGOs

For more information about the Framework for Greening Humanitarian Action in the Pacific and the contextualisation process, please view the framework and tools [here](#), and/or reach out the research team:



Jesse McCommon (HAG): jmcccommon@humanitarianadvisorygroup.org



Akmal Ali (PIANGO): akmal@piango.org



Sesimani Lokotui (CSFT): sesimanilokotui@gmail.com