

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)—*Environmental Impact Toolkit*

<p>Tool at a glance</p>
<p>Title: Environmental Impact Toolkit</p>
<p>Addresses: Measures and mitigates negative environmental impacts</p>
<p>Pertains to greening: Operations, Policy, Communications and Programming</p>



Overview

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Canada is an independent medical humanitarian organization, part of a movement working in over 70 countries to provide needs-based assistance. MSF recognizes that human-induced climate change is well documented, acute, and linked to significant human health issues and humanitarian needs. The exacerbating indirect and direct effects of the climate crisis on health are already evident in several of the contexts where MSF provides medical care, from water and food insecurity to increasing climate sensitive disease outbreaks such as dengue and cholera.

A simple environment impact toolkit and guidance framework help MSF offices and operations systematically measure their major environmental impacts. The tool measures energy use, air and personnel transport as well as sea transport, train travel and commuting, and offers mitigation suggestions. The goal is not to benchmark activities but to gain insights into the key environmental impacts and to identify opportunities to mitigate them. In 2020 MSF added a waste management tool to the toolkit to measure office/project and household waste for staff residences in field projects.

Reducing negative environmental impacts: improving health and efficiency co-benefits

The problem

As a medico-humanitarian organization, MSF has a social and ethical responsibility to its patients, staff, and as a global citizen to understand, assess and minimize its environmental footprint. Yet, MSF found itself lacking an understanding and measure of its own environmental impact.

Moving towards a solution

While MSF had ad hoc initiatives to reduce the organization’s negative impacts from solar energy, Green Team local action, conducted travel efficiency studies over the years, it had no institutional policy or plan. With support of MSF’s [Transformational Investment Capacity](#), The Environmental Impact Toolkit Incubator project adapted an audit tool to measure and monitor MSF’s carbon footprint for field missions and MSF offices. The goal was to identify practical mitigation actions to reduce MSF’s footprint while still implementing its social mission and build a guidance framework for it to assist in ensuring ethical, efficient and sustainable practices. Now, the toolkit contains a carbon emissions and waste production measurement tool and related guidance that is customizable depending upon results and local context.

Environmental Impact Toolkit

The Environmental Impact Toolkit is a joint project of the Operational Centre Geneva (OCG) and MSF-Canada, started on the heels of the 2017 International General Assembly motion to “*debate and promote actions to develop concrete capacities and expertise around... MSF’s impact on the environment.*” Given the climate crisis’s impact on health, MSF committed to adapt its operations, to witness the realities of the patients it assists and to significantly reduce its environmental impact. Through the development of a simple and agile toolkit and guidance framework, MSF aimed to systematically measure its major environmental impacts as an institution

rather than on an ad hoc basis. By providing a tangible assessment of MSF's larger footprint impacts based on available data, it offers the organization the incentive to reduce consumption, gain efficiencies, change behaviour, and make a bold institutional commitment. The toolkit is a pragmatic element of transformation that was both needed and desired. The toolkit proposes best practical environmental options and urges a declarative statement and commitment from MSF for environmentally and socially responsible procurement and supply. It also notes potential for alternative financing that could help finance MSF's renewable energy transition.

The toolkit consists of a Microsoft Excel Workbook that collates necessary data and converts to emissions, based on common conversion factors; it was seen as an initial tool that has the benefit of being easy to use and modify/adapt for the next phase of MSF's work. The toolkit provides an excel tool for each Project/Office with spreadsheets to input data. Based on this input, the tool automatically calculates emissions across the range of scoped activities based on either standard reference or Project or Office-specific conversion factors. A summary spreadsheet collates emissions from the various sources, providing an estimate of total emissions at the Mission level.

Overall, this toolkit helps MSF mitigate its environmental footprint and contribution to local pollution and better respect the medical ethic of "do no harm." By practising environmentally responsible humanitarianism, MSF can do its part in a resource-limited world with increasing health impacts due to warming temperatures and more intense and frequent extreme weather events where vulnerable people are at increased risk of becoming even more vulnerable. Internal awareness also encourages leadership to make faster and bolder decisions, such as investing in solar energy now rather than later. More recently, MSF wrote a report summarizing [pilot tool audit results, created an illustration, an infographic](#) of results and a "Top 10" mitigation list and a web platform with the tool, materials and references.

Results

- 12 MSF entities, from a number of countries such as Pakistan and Germany, are using the toolkit and now have data to help drive mitigation enhancements and new lower-carbon actions.
- MSF Canada, one of the pilot toolkit users in 2019, was the first entity in MSF to set a data-driven target to reduce its carbon emissions and commit to reducing its carbon emissions by at least 5% per year from 2020 to 2023.
- The Toolkit project launched a series of webinars in October 2020, "Climate Smart MSF Digital Week" to showcase the carbon and waste tools, to provide tutorial videos, to share early findings on emissions of MSF's outbound supply chain and products, and to share best practices in and out MSF, culminating in a joint and ongoing conversation on "The Way Forward" to being a more climate-smart MSF, future-proofed organization.

Next Steps

- The toolkit will be updated and improved based on initial user feedback by November 2020; it is meant to be an evolving toolkit, with potential additional categories of impact added to measure and with a goal to automate it.
- Currently, the project is in Phase 2: the incubator is now looking more holistically at environmental impacts including scaling use of the Environmental Impact Toolkit, mapping the supply chain to increase sustainability, sharing and scaling best environmental options (such as solar and renewable energy use and travel reduction), and drafting a roadmap to decarbonization, with the goal to have a "Climate Smart MSF."

Insights and Lessons Learned

- **Diagnosing:** The toolkit is an encouraging means to “diagnose” big impacts to help with mitigation solutions and discussions. It functions with imperfect and incomplete data and as such, is flexible.
- **Experience sharing:** The tool has demonstrated that collaborating with other organizations is not only essential but effective in sharing practices, tools and improving advocacy for larger negative footprint reduction or more patient and planet-friendly procurement materials. The tool is best used when an experienced team member supports the tool user in the process and prompts discussion post-usage to share mitigation ideas, gaps and opportunities. Furthermore, while each office and entity in MSF will have different tool results and solutions have local contexts, joint results can drive positive organizational adaptation and resilience.
- **One of many means:** The project has demonstrated that it is important to conduct mitigation activities in parallel i.e., if projects cannot yet use the toolkit they should still work to avoid and reduce waste, avoid and reduce non-essential travel, etc.
- **Avoid, reduce and mitigate:** The project urges MSF focus first on measuring impacts to avoid and reduce them, including target-setting and monitoring results.
- **Equity Diversity and Inclusion:** studies show that people most vulnerable to environmental pollution and climate change are marginalized, racialized communities, women and girls, and indigenous peoples, for example.
- **Adaptation:** Despite the COVID-19 pandemic's harms globally, it also showed organizations such as MSF the weaknesses in its global supply chain and challenges of travel restrictions and supply disruption, but also how to rapidly adapt to low carbon operations. The lessons result in stricter travel policies and practical reflections of sustainable redesign of personal protective equipment and better waste practices.

Sources

- [Environmental Impact Toolkit](#)
- [Environmental Impact Toolkit Summary](#)