

NGOs and Disaster Risk Reduction

Interviewers: [Ana Prados](#) – Senior Research Scientist, [University of Maryland, Baltimore County](#) (UMBC)

Interviewees: [Nishanie Jayamaha](#) and [Natasha Westheimer](#), [Climate Charter](#)

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Ana: Hello Nishanie and Natasha, thank you for making the time to talk with me about your work at the Climate Charter. Would you like to begin this interview with an overview of your background and how the Climate Charter came into being?

Nishania and Natasha – We are co-coordinators in the Secretariat for the Climate and Environment Charter, which currently has three permanent and three rotating board members: <https://www.climate-charter.org/secretariat/>

Natasha: Prior to joining the Secretariat my technical background was on water governance in fragile and conflict affected areas, and more recently on climate adaptation in these contexts. I joined the secretariat in May 2024.

Nishanie: I have 20 years' experience in disaster management and humanitarian worked in conflict and disaster context. Most of my hands on experience has been in Sri Lanka. I was climate lead of ICVA before joining the charter Secretariat. The charter itself was a brainchild of the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (ICRC) and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) during their 23rd International Conference. At that event, there was discussion of the need for a framework to consider climate change and environmental sustainability for the humanitarian sector. The International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and other NGO networks were approached, and so in developing the Charter, the humanitarian sector was consulted – it was developed by the sector for the sector. ICVA is currently the chair of the board, host, and administrator of the Secretariat. The ICRC and IFRC are part of the permanent board and CARE and the All India Disaster Management Institute (AIDMI) were voted-in by Signatories last year for two-year terms for the two rotating board positions.

Nishanie: The Charter provides a guidance for organizations in the humanitarian sector on how to take into consideration climate change and other environmental risks and mainstream them into humanitarian design planning. It also works on promoting this approach through advocacy, including the impacts of climate change on displacement. Our goal is to improve resilience and improve sustainability, and humanitarian programs don't always do that very well due to for example the short-term nature of programmes and funding cycles, even though we work in conflict areas for a long periods of time. In some of the contexts where we work the development sector may not be present, and there is also no infrastructure.

Our work is focused on raising awareness within humanitarian organizations on the hazards that are being exacerbated by climate change and the need to support communities through risk-informed early warning, preparedness, and DRR. In fragile contexts particularly, communities are widely unprepared, and humanitarian organizations lack the framework on how to respond to changing weather and other climatic patterns.

Natasha: *As organizations started to sign the Charter, they stated the need for guidance in translating the commitments into action and setting targets. There were gaps identified by the signatories, including building the capacity on what it means to work on climate resilience and how to gain access to resources and expertise, such as guidelines, training, or datasets that could help implement the commitments. So, the Charter is striving to meet this gap as a referral and knowledge sharing hub for the signatories, to help them meet the charter commitments. These activities include one on one support to help NGOs develop targets that build on their unique strategies and can be integrated into their work. There are currently over 460 signatories: local organisations, national, regional, and international NGOs, UN agencies. Therefore, everyone has different targets and unique needs for support.*

Ana: Thanks for outlining your background, and for providing some context on how the Climate Charter was formed and your recent and current work.

Does the Charter have Signatories from the government or private sector organizations?

Nishanie and Natasha: *the charter was not really designed for government agencies or donors, although thirteen state supporters have signed the declaration, including the EU. Most government supporters sign the Donor Declaration (spearheaded by France and the EU), which was built from the charter framework. There is quite a lot of dialogue between the Charter and Donor Declaration signatories and sharing of information on opportunities and resources.*

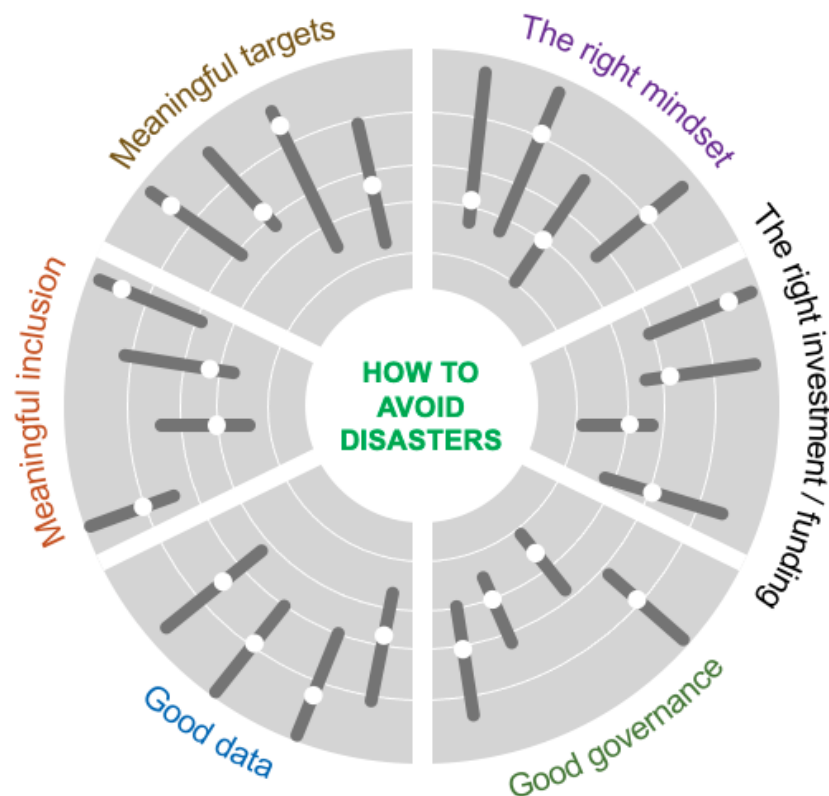
Ana: What kinds of knowledge sharing activities exist within the group of Signatories and between the signatories and outside experts?

Natasha: *Yes, we help members connect to experts, databases, and other tools. And we provide knowledge sharing mechanisms, like for example webinars on topics such as the identification of environmental risks, and mainstreaming of DRR (which is the theme for our first guidance note and the topic of our [next webinar](#)). We will be rolling out these thematic webinars and guidance pages on various elements of the charter's commitments over the year, showcasing case studies and related resources, and adapted to the needs of the signatories. We also get help from some of the signatures, who have been helping to organize and host workshops. Signatories are encouraged to share their expertise with the network. For example, [RedR UK](#) recently made some of their training materials available to charter signatories free of charge.*

Ana: I understand that Climate Charter works to both respond to the humanitarian consequences of events and reduce the environmental impact of those humanitarian actions. Could you tell me a little more about how you work to reduce (or promote the reduction of) the environmental impact of your actions within the context of the humanitarian work that you do?

Natasha: We believe that the humanitarian sector has a role to play in reducing emissions and improving the environmental sustainability of humanitarian operations by reducing waste and protecting resources, among others. For example, by applying the principle of do no harm to water or land where we are providing humanitarian services or establishing shelters.

Ana: We have developed a Disasters Avoided model through the Disasters Avoided initiative. I would be interested in any views you have on how any or all of [the six points in our model](#) are relevant to the work of Climate Charter.



[The Disasters Avoided model](#): G Byatt, I Kelman & A Prados

Nishanie: On the metrics, we are very interested in helping signatories develop these, as stated earlier. With respect to inclusion, we want to make sure that we are taking all risk factors into account in our planning and design, and including in that design vulnerable communities, displaced populations and marginalized people.

Ana: if you are interested, we would be happy to share case studies or success stories in the work that you do, on our website.

Natasha: *yes, we would love to be able to share examples about organizations who have been successful in mitigating the impacts of disasters, and we also find that it is also useful to look at cases where interventions did not work.*

Ana: Data is one of the factors in the DA model, such as for example Earth Observations. Do you promote or help disseminate access to EO and if not, what do you think are some of the barriers? Are your outside experts volunteers, e.g. scientists or others who can provide data to, for example, support commitment #4?

Nishanie: *In Sri Lanka, about two decades ago I worked with the Humanitarian Information Centre and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) that was set up during the response to the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. OCHA brokered an agreement between UNOSAT and the government of Sri Lanka to share satellite imagery and data to help inform evacuations, and to identify flooded or inaccessible areas, which were compared to the imagery before the flooding. Satellite data is also an important tool for preparedness. In terms of the barriers in the use of satellite data, people do feel a bit intimidated and often say that they don't have the capacity to work with it. But I believe the situation has improved a lot since we have more data sources and tools for accessing such information/imagery for use in planning than in the past.*

Natasha: *We also hear from signatories that one of the challenges is the spatial and temporal resolution of the satellite data, and limited availability of data at the community scale, or if it exists they are not aware of it or don't know how to access it. However, some signatories, such as Impact Initiatives, does work with localized data for climate resilience and response work.*

Ana: Thank you very much for your time, Nishanie and Natasha. We look forward to seeing how your work t Climate Charter continues to evolve.