Environmental Assessment Working Group's user feedback on the NEAT+

Contents

1. Context

a. The REH

The **Réseau Environnement Humanitaire** (Humanitarian Environment Network) is a network of French-based NGOs working together to reduce the aid sector's environmental footprint. It holds 'Forums' where organisations gather to discuss emerging issues and share their experiences. To operationalize the network, it is composed of sub-groups (working groups) which have specific operational objectives to help the aid sector to reduce their footprint. If you wish to join this network, please reach out to assisturd@urd.org or ahubert@urd.org.

b. The Environmental Assessment Working Group

The **Environmental Assessment (EA) working group** is a sub-group of the REH which objective is to support its members to use appropriately EA tools, most notably NEAT+, though experience sharing. It is composed by representants from Action Against Hunger, French Red Cross, Solidarités International, Première Urgence Internationale, Oxfam, Humanity & Inclusion, Secours Islamique France, CARE and Groupe URD. If you have any additional questions with regards to this WG please reach out to assisturd@urd.org.

c. The users feedback session

In June 2022, the WG held a **user feedback session to gather feedback on the use of the NEAT+ tool** to provide recommendations to the members on how to best use the tool and how to train their teams in the field. The recommendations were then sent to the JEU (Joint Environmental Unit, in charge of the governance of the NEAT+ tool) and shared later with the DFS (Data Friendly Space, in charge of the tool development). This document presents this feedback and what we have gathered since.

2. Overall feedback

The tool is very interesting and not so hard to use. However, we found 3 main overall concerns:

1. There are still some small bugs in R-NEAT (especially using an old version of Excel) and **a significant number of technical challenges on U-NEAT which makes it hard to use.** (obligation to fill all the questions for ES and AM and sub-modules, certain questions/used terms are potentially misleading, etc.)

2. We are wondering about the **relevancy of having two separate NEAT tools** (one for rural & one for urban). **They could be merged or the rural version could be updated with the content from the urban version.**
   - Many questions are similar from one to another with more elaborated questions in the urban version.
   - We are wondering if there might be significant differences in the recommendations provided by the two versions[1].
   - If merged, we could potentially have an urban sub-module if needed (or specific urban questions in all context-related questions).
   - It should also be thought how the tool can be used for **development or nexus projects**.
   - The online version is more user-friendly than the Excel or Kobo toolbox versions.

3. Regarding the process, **some steps can take a long time and appropriate resources must be planned** which needs to be taken into account by the donors (Assessment duration for one project in one area: from 2 days to 1 month, as described below):

   - ✓ Introduction to environment mainstreaming and NEAT+ tool (1h to ½ day)
   - ✓ If needed, secondary/primary data collection (from 1 day to several weeks)
   - ✓ Filling the questionnaire of ES and AM modules (½ - 1 day)
   - ✓ Results' analysis & final report (from ½ day to several days)

   This last step on results analysis is critical. Without contextualization and technical discussions, the NEAT+ Assessment Analysis reports tend to not provide new insights but rather provide an evidenced summary of the context that may be known already and general mitigation solutions.

---

[1] Based on the comparison done between different rural and urban assessments. But we were not able to do a full comparison of all recommendations for all modules between the 2 versions

3. Environmental Sensitivity (ES) Module Feedback

Overall, **it is easy to fill up the Environmental Sensitivity module**. However, we have a few suggestions to use its full potential:

- It would be useful to know on **which geographical scale the tool is considered in some of the questions** (administrative, territorial scales? Not clear).
- To make it easier to use, it should be specified **which questions are mandatory** and which are not and be able to skip the non relevant questions
- It is not clear why there are questions about the **perceptions** of the inhabitants (e.g. about the climate) and how they are taken into account. This is important because perceptions may differ from reality.
- We also wondered if the mitigation advice is only related to issues of concern or if it is related to all issues. It seems as though it takes everything into account. **These links should be made clearer**.
- There should be no references to projects/actions in this module since it only deals with the environmental vulnerability of the territory, **independently of the planned action**.
- It would be interesting to have an ES module "independent" of the activity modules and by zone, **simply by clicking on a map**.
  - ➔ For example: See the interactive map of VCA (Vulnerability Community Assessment) on the Red Cross website: http://vcarepository.info/

4. Feedback on Activity modules (AM)

a. For all modules

Rationale/content feedback:

- Overall, we found **the questions were often too specific** (which takes time) for quite broad recommendations.
  - We also found some **redundancy** between the ES and AM recommendations. It would be good to understand how they are linked in the algorithm, and whether the results are communicating with each other?
- **Materials** and **waste** are covered too succinctly. Are there prospects of creating a specific module? Recent update: the JEU is developing a waste module and mainstreaming packaging waste issues into the existing U-NEAT.
- We wondered if the **rebound effect** was considered? It seems that it is considered only once in U-NEAT: on the ES module, about education level, when it is explaining that the more educated you are, the more income you have and therefore the more you consume. For the rest, **it does not seem that the rebound effect is considered**, which seems problematic.
- The objective is to demonstrate through the report that if we consider the environment in the design of the project, we will thereby reduce environmental risks. However, the current version of the tool is not showing the impacts on environment of the mitigation measures once implemented by the project.

➔ An interesting solution would be for the user to be able to **select the planned mitigation measures and then see the new state of the environmental risk**.

Technical feedback:

- We found some **language issues**: in the translations but also in the terms used. This is important as very precise terms are used and could create confusion. It would also be very useful to have the tool in other languages, such as Arabic.
- It would be interesting to add **a comparison option** to highlight the differences between two modules of the same activity in the same territory.
  ➔ For example: if we have two shelters with different situations.
- It would be useful to have a **reporting template generated** in word by the tool (including introduction to NEAT+, results of the ES modules and activities, ideally with colour codes)
  ➔ This way, NGOs could then complete with their projects or areas, as well as with their own conclusions.

b. Food security and Livelihoods module

- We found that the U-NEAT version is much more comprehensive than the R-NEAT one (it includes institutional feeding system, food market, more questions on different livelihoods recovery, etc) and **we found the distinction between rural and urban versions not relevant**. We believe that it would be **relevant to use the same FSL module for both urban and rural tools** as agricultural and non-agricultural livelihoods can be found both in rural and urban contexts. Specific questions for densed populated urban areas could be added.
- Agricultural and livestock submodules should be separated. It is also missing questions related to fisheries and aquaculture.
- In the U-NEAT, there is a redundancy between the FS module and the Livelihood module, a lot of questions are similar. Maybe you should think of spliting questions between Food Assistance module and Livelihood module.
- It is not clear how **cash transfer modality** is taken into account in the FSL modules.

c. WASH module

- It seems that environmental considerations are missing on **construction materials** used (recycled materials?) and on **drilling construction sites** (water drainage, equipment, energy).
- Some **submodules on WASH need to be added** (e.g. desalination plants, wastewater treatment) or Food and Economic Security (e.g. on cash- and voucher-based programming)
- There are only two questions that seem to be solely about health. **They might be removable**.

d. Shelter module

- On the **NFI sub-module**: "buying locally", should be specified "locally produced" to avoid products bought locally but imported; and there should also be indication of what scale should be considered for "local".

e. U-NEAT specific feedback

The U-NEAT is seen as having significant technical issues. Mainly:

- **It is extremely time-consuming**. The fact that one must answer all questions (no option to skip non-relevant part) for the ES Module and all sub-sectors questions for each Activity module takes a lot of time (and is not appropriate for all projects and contexts). We are thus wondering which impact it could have on the results generated when we are obliged to provide answers to non-relevant questions.
- We believe the recommendations should be ranked by a colour code (to be done manually by the user: for example, "recommendation already taken into account in the project", "relevant recommendation that requires extra resources", etc.)
- It seems that some projects that are **open to the public are in fact not visible to everyone**.
- You cannot **have two surveys in progress;** is it possible to change this?[2]

5. Feedback for tool development

The WG believes that for the tool to be developed it needs a **sustainable governance structure**. This is to make clear different stakeholders' roles (such as where do we send our feedback on structural changes and on technical issues for example).
This WG would like to take part in this governance as it believes it can bring a lot in terms of user feedback. Indeed, as we are many different organisations who are using/piloting the use of the tool in many different countries and settings, we believe we can provide relevant recommendations to improve the content as well as the structure of the tool and contribute to its development and dissemination.

---

[2] You have to finalize a survey (and thus have answered all the questions) to save and be able to do another survey.