Environmental Assessment Working Group's user feedback on the U-NEAT (2023)

Contents

1. Context

a. The REH

The **Réseau Environnement Humanitaire (REH)** (Humanitarian Environment Network) is a network of francophone NGOs working together to reduce the aid sector's environmental footprint. It holds 'Forums' where organizations 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, you can do so here and if you have any questions please reach out to secretariat@environnementhumanitaire.org.

b. The Environmental Screening Working Group

The **Environmental Screening (ES) working group** is a sub-group of the REH, created beginning of 2021, which objective is to support its members to make the best use of ES tools, most notably NEAT+, though experience sharing. It is composed of representants from Action Against Hunger, French Red Cross, Solidarités International, Première Urgence Internationale, Oxfam, Humanity & Inclusion, Fondation Terre des Hommes, Netherlands Red Cross, CARE and Groupe URD. If you have any additional questions with regards to this WG please reach out to evalenv@environnementhumanitaire.org. **It has been a member of the NEAT+'s Steering Committee since its creation in May 2023.**

c. The U-NEAT

The NEAT+ exists in two versions: a rural one (the original) and an urban one:

	Rural (R-NEAT)	Urban (U-NEAT)
Date created	2018	2021
Specific geography	Camps and rural	Urban
Sectors available	ES, WASH, Shelter, Food Security	ES, WASH, Livelihoods and Food Security, Shelter

Platform	Excel and Kobo	Online

After receiving feedback, the JEU updated the U-NEAT in March 2023, notably by allowing the possibility to skip some sub-modules, and to have a shorter summary of recommendations.

d. The users feedback session

In September 2023, the WG held a **user feedback session to gather feedback on the new version of the U-NEAT which had been published in March 2023.** The recommendations that come out of this session are presented in this document and are shared with the JEU (Joint Environmental Unit, in charge of the governance and hosting of the NEAT+ tool) and the NEAT+ Steering Committee.

Back in June 2022, the WG had held a first 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 and shared later with the DFS (Data Friendly Space, in charge of the tool development). They were also presented during NRC's roundtable on the use of NEAT+.
Some of the feedback submitted has been taken into consideration by the JEU. Some of the feedback that was found then is still relevant and thus repeated here.

This document presents feedback only on the U-NEAT. Annex 1 presents technical feedback on the U-NEAT. Overall feedback on the NEAT+ and its rural version that is still relevant from the last session can be found in Annex 2.

2. Feedback on the U-NEAT

The U-NEAT has significant technical issues, which make it very difficult (if not impossible) to use. Mainly:

- **The summary reports seem to have big glitches:**
  - In the WASH module the main risk identified was 'indoor air pollution' and it was 'faecal sludge' in the Food Security module. **There were also inconsistencies in the prioritization of risks. To us it seemed like a glitch**.
  - Also in the WASH summary report, it was mentioned three times as a mitigation measure 'complete NEAT+ WASH module' which makes it very frustrating for the person filling in the tool.
- While it is more useful to have the reduced version of the summary report, it does not have the same structure as in the R-NEAT. Indeed, the new structure of the report for the modules follows the same logic as for the Environmental Sensitivity module instead of being organized by activities (as in the R-NEAT), which makes more sense for the Activity modules. It could also include the risk matrix (see photo below) which was a useful way of presenting the overview in the R-NEAT.

Operation and maintenance of water systems

Environmental Concerns	Environmental Sensitivity	Potential Activity Impact	Potential Environmental Risk
Key environmental concerns			
The water resources may have a low regenerative capacity. Water scarcity may be an issue.	Low	Low	Low
The water sources may be vulnerable to contamination. Water quality may be an issue.	Low	Medium	Low
Other environmental concerns			
There is low capacity to manage wastewater. Environmental sanitation and disease transmission may be an issue.	High	Medium	High
Natural resources may be scarce and in high demand. This can lead to social conflict.	High	Low	Medium
Mitigation Tips			
● Regular water testing should be utilized to ensure that water remains of a potable quality, or to identify early signs of possible contamination. Testing should occur at various points of the network as contamination can occur in different places. ● Water leakages wastes water, leads to erosion, increases risks of contamination and creates stagnant pools of water. Visual monitoring (particularly at taps, valves, connections, etc.) or pressure testing can be used to identify potential leakages. ● Chemicals, such as chlorine or diesel, if inappropriately stored or located can leak or diffuse to the environment. All substances should be stored in approved sealable containers in a covered facility with an impermeable surface.			

- **At this point in time, the teams cannot use the reports as they are to plan for environmental risks, the prioritization needs to be reviewed and the number of recommendations needs to be reduced.**

Other general remarks on the tool:

- The questions at the beginning of each module 'general and enablers' are quite useful → but maybe some redundancy with the Environmental Sensitivity questions and also some questions need to have no relation with environment and are more common-sense questions that we ask in sectorial assessments.
- **A lot of the questions need to be reviewed in full (not coherent, too wide, not appropriate wording, confused, etc.). The WG suggests sector-specific experts review all the modules (work for the technical groups?).**
- **Overall, the logic between the questions and the results needs to be explained** (why are these questions being asked and how do they impact the end result?). Indeed, **there are still too many questions/we do not know the impact the questions have on the risk analysis in the end** → it can be frustrating for those filling in the tool.
- It would also be useful to be able to extract all the questions in an excel prior to filling out the tool to be able to have an overview and prepare.
- Waste is addressed too succinctly throughout the module.
- **Specific vulnerabilities** (due to gender, age …) are never addressed, and seem to us like a blindspot.
- One idea could be to organize the recommendations by step of the project cycle: assessment, implementation, etc.

In Annex 1, you will find more detailed feedback on the modules tested by our Working Group: Sensitivity, WASH and Food Security.

In conclusion, the WG cannot recommend the use of the U-NEAT to their teams at this point in time: there are too many questions whose relevance, or importance, would be challenged by the field teams, and the reports produced are not usable as they are. As such we feel that those points need to be improved before inviting our organizations to use the tool.

ANNEX 1 – Technical feedback on U-NEAT

<u>Overall feedback</u>
- Some answers are numbered when some are not, easier for consistency if all have numbers.
- It would be useful to have automatic saving after every question/two questions and not every time you finish a question group.
- It would also be useful to have, additional to the progress bar, **a number and/or overview of how many questions there are** in total and per group of questions.
    - o Potentially adding an estimation of the time for filling each module would be useful as well.
- We also have the impression that there are less 'pop-up' questions (or 'skip logic') in the U-NEAT than in the R-NEAT (meaning sub-questions that are asked *only* in relation to specific answers). Potentially this means that some questions might be removable/are relevant only in certain cases.

<u>Environmental Sensitivity</u>
- It seems that in the Environmental Sensitivity final report of the U-NEAT the organization per type of hazard has disappeared, which is a shame because it was useful.
- Specific questions:
    - o 4.10: why can we not fill in multiple risks, when it is possible for the question on environmental risks?
    - o 6.1: 25 000 people is a very low scale for an urban zone, the different ranges are weird/not relevant within UNEAT. 'Response profile' has three Ss
    - o 6.4: missing 1, and we are wondering how much influence the ranges have on the overall answers?
    - o 8.7: it is hard to judge – in the rural version there was an aid to answer
    - o 9.5: would be useful to have multiple choice answer
    - o It might be helpful to have the memo to help answer the questions available before (it is only accessible when we get to it, not before)
        - ▪ We need to be able to zoom on the map (we were working on an example in Tripoli, Lebanon, for which it was very hard to spot the specificities on the map)
        - ▪ On a side note, the colors are not distinguishable for colorblind people (see how to make it [here] or [here])
    - o Questions on the perceptions of people in the region of climatic changes:
        - ▪ We understand the importance of integrating local perceptions in the analysis. However, the NEAT+ is designed as a tool that can be desk-based and does not need any data collection. If this question remains, it is necessary to collect info prior to filling in the module, then this needs to be clear from the beginning – before starting the module.
        - ▪ Otherwise, if this feedback is not necessary, change the structure of the question to something around 'What has the evidence been around climatic changes', as this is information that is usually now available online.

<u>WASH module</u>
- Overall feedback:
    - o Some **submodules on WASH need to be added** (e.g. desalination plants, wastewater treatment)
    - o It is not clear what the differences between the latrine and the shower sub-modules are → maybe only one necessary?
    - o A lot more questions than in the rural version – maybe review to see if they are all useful and if some are not redundant, so that it is not too frustrating for the user.
    - o There is no sub-module on energy (potentially you could copy-paste the one in the shelter module directly in the wash module).

- A lot of questions are asking whether the project adheres to SPHERE standards, and could be skipped or taken out, as it might be frustrating for those filling in the tool.
- **The WG suggests that a WASH group sits down and reviews all the questions and their relevance.**
- Specific questions:
  - Enabler and General:
    - Potentially too many questions? Maybe review to see if they are all useful and if some are not redundant, so that it is not too frustrating for the user.
  - Water:
    - Potentially make it mandatory, because the questions are important and easy to answer → maybe integrate it in the enabler and general section.
  - Design for water abstraction systems:
    - W3.12: question that is way more specific than the ones before - ideally the questions should be coherent between each other, or build gradually toward more specificity. Alternating between very broad, trivial, questions, and very specific ones makes us wonder about the purpose and logic behind them.
    - W3.14: should be multi-choice and reformulate the question.
    - W3.15: is very basic- SPHERE standards → it can be frustrating when answering the questions as these are basic SPHERE standards // W8.10
  - Water trucking:
    - W4: should be reformulated.
    - W4.6: should have more options (difference between consumption and distribution).
  - Latrine:
    - W8.4: add in 'not applicable' or erase if not relevant.
    - W8.5: some answers are missing, and not applicable for water networks.
    - W8.6: to redo completely (not because it is on the water network that it is not applicable)
    - There is an issue in the selection structure between W8.3 and W8.7
  - Solid waste:
    - W11.7: is not very well introduced
    - Missing some questions - in general, there aren't enough questions to properly assess solid waste issues.

Food Security and Livelihoods modules

- We have only tested the Food Security Module as the Livelihoods module has a lot of redundant questions with the Food Security Module
- Compared to the R-NEAT, 3 interesting sub-modules have been added: 'Food security general, barriers and enablers', 'Food markets', and 'Food systems'. However, there are too many questions and some questions are more useful for a general FSL assessment and seem not directly linked with environmental considerations.
- Overall, there seemed to be two types of questions:
  - Either very standard FSL assessment questions, so need to explain the link with the environment and why this question is being asked if these questions are kept. Otherwise, standard FSL assessment related questions with no link to environment should be deleted.
  - Or the questions asked if some sort of environmental assessment was done → which leads to the recommendation 'do this type of environmental assessment' which is not very useful as a recommendation.
- There were redundancies in the questions, such as between food market and food systems.

- **We recommend integrating the livelihoods module within the Food Security one (rename it Food Security and Livelihoods) as there are some redundancies in the questions, and most organizations treat both together**.
- On the **Livelihood Module**, as mentioned it was not tested here but we looked at the questions by sub-sector. It is not relevant to distinguish by temporality of livelihood interventions (provisioning, strengthening, diversification) + by economic sector (primary, secondary...), it brings more confusion and most of the time, livelihood interventions are mixing several temporalities as well as several economic sectors.
- For questions that are redundant between 2 sub-modules, would it be possible that the question already answered copy paste the answer to the similar question? However, this would need to have questions that are formulated exactly in the same way, which is not always the case.

Specific examples:

o Food security general:
- F1.8: This question is already asking the result of a pre-existing analysis. The additional help does not seem to target Environmental risk: for ex "crop failure" is not an environmental risk created by the practice. Moreover, this question should be split in sub questions as it covers different topics: food production, food storage, food cooking...

> F1.8. Do food production, storage, cooking or consumption practices create any environmental risks for any population groups?
>
> Risks include crop failures, food contamination or loss during any of: transit, sale, storage, or processing, or during and after cooking.
>
> ○ Yes - extensive and well-known risks
>
> ○ Yes - some risks identified
>
> ○ No / Unknown

o 2/ Food markets:
- F2.5 / F2.8: many questions like these are just part of an FSL assessment. It is not clear what relevance they have in an Environmental risk assessment, if any. (Other examples: F3.11, F3.18 and all nutrition questions in F6...)

> F2.5. Do target populations have sufficient knowledge on achieving appropriate nutrition from available, affordable food?
>
> F2.6. Are humanitarian food security activities designed to support market recovery?

- F2.9: questions "Have you assessed ..." allow for ambiguous answers. "Yes" only means the assessment has been done, but not whether risks have been identified or not.

> F2.9. Have you assessed potential market volatility relating to environmental fragilities? (e.g., sudden tax increases on fuel, livelihood wage cuts, or price/availability changes)

- F2.10: this question appears even if we select "No" in F2.9, and thus cannot answer. And also we do not see the direct link with the environmental risk assessment in this question.

o 3/ Food and nutritional assistance:
-
> F2.10. Are markets resilient to food price and availability shocks?

- F3.23: link with environmental risk is unclear. Maybe adding some explanation (is it a matter of ecosystem contamination by foreign crops? Something else?) would serve to build knowledge for the people filling in the tool.

(same remark for F5.9)

> F3.23. How far are preparation and distribution points located from potential sensitive ecosystems?

- F3.27: "have you tested the water quality?" seems more of a WASH / Health question

o 5/ Livestock and agriculture
- F5.14, and all "Livestock" questions: add one "Does the project include livestock distribution?" question at the beginning, and skip all Livestock questions if the answer is "No"
- Most of the questions are for both livestock and agriculture, while most of the time the answers would be different as those 2 sectors are technically different. For example: question F5.8. Have the land use requirements for livestock grazing or farming been considered? --> recommendation to divide this sub module 5 in 2 sub-modules: one on agriculture, one on livestock.
- F5.19. Have you assessed livestock/agriculture -dependent people's coping strategies? --> what is the direct link with environment? And also add a question, if yes, what are the strategies that could harm the environment?

o 6/Food systems
- F6.4: On those type of "Have you assessed ..." questions, offer an initial "yes/no" answer, and then adapt the following questions accordingly.
  Specifically on this question: this assumes that the person answering has knowledge of what are "circular bioeconomy opportunities". Could be better served by asking 3-4 more specific questions that would serve as a mini assessment. (Same remark for F6.8. It assumes that people have access to an external (to NEAT+) tool to assess the environmental health impact of food processes > replace with a small number of specific questions for a mini assessment.)
- F6.7: this is an economic analysis – link to the environment?
- F6.10: this question was already included in another sub module, but slightly differently. For those questions, ideally, they should be exactly the same question, and if one has been answered in sub module A, then it should be masked in sub module B.
- F6.17: "Do communities have knowledge of what nutrition they need to remain healthy and how to achieve it?" --> what is the link with environment?

Additional remark on the questions:

- It could be useful to have an initial question regarding the planned length of the project, which could then allow us to skip long-term questions in the case of a short-term emergency project.

Overall, for the FSL module, it is very difficult to use due to the unorganized way recommendations are presented: the list is not sorted by priority level, or by type of recommendation (operational vs general). This means the report can go from "distribute lids for cooking pots" to "assess sustainability of supply chains" from one line to the next.

ANNEX 2 – Overall feedback on NEAT+ and its rural version

<u>Overall feedback for NEAT+</u>

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.**
2. R-NEAT and U-NEAT could be merged or the rural version could be updated with the content from the urban version. → **This is being explored by the SC**
3. The 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.

<u>Feedback for all modules</u>

- 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. → waste needs to be integrated throughout the tool.
- 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 does not show 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**.
- It would also be very useful to have the R-NEAT tool in other languages, such as Arabic or Bengla → **the Swedish Red Cross has developed a translated version of those two languages, they need to be incorporated.**
- 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.

<u>Food security and Livelihoods module in R-NEAT</u>

- Agricultural and livestock submodules should be separated. It is also missing questions related to fisheries and aquaculture.
- It is not clear how **cash transfer modality** is taken into account in the FSL modules.

<u>WASH module in R-NEAT</u>

- 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)
- There are only two questions that seem to be solely about health. **They might be removable**.

Shelter module in R-NEAT

- 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".