Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on How to conduct an Environmental Screening
Environment Assessment Working Group of the REH

What – This SOP aims to explain how to conduct an Environmental Screening (ES) at the project level, as well as how to implement an ES process within your organisation.
Why – In order to reduce the environmental footprint of your projects, it is important to conduct an ES to know the main environmental risks of your projects onto the environment and of the environment onto your project. This environmental risk analysis is also increasingly required by donors.
How – This SOP explains how to conduct an ES step by step, explaining the differences between the main tools that exist for humanitarian projects. It focuses in particular on the NEAT+ tool.

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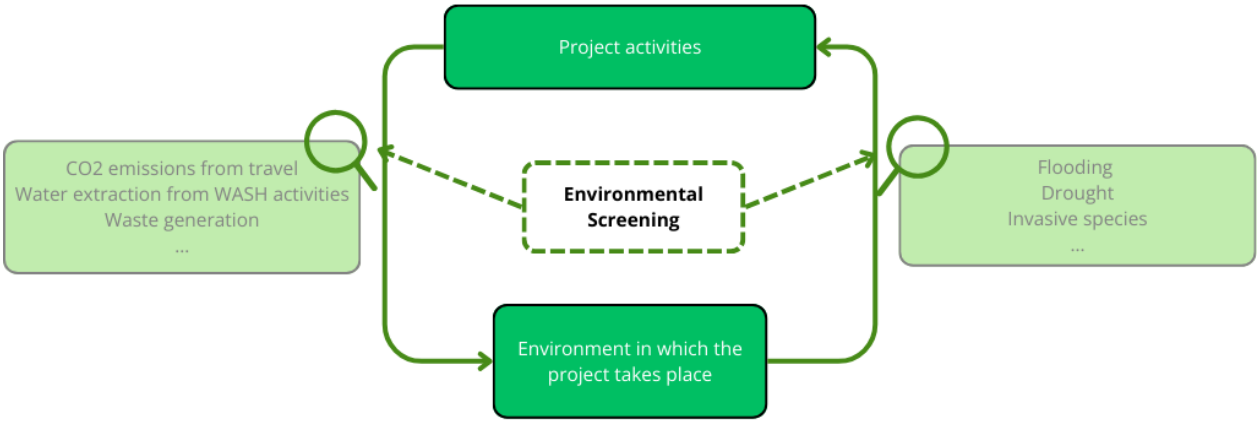
Introduction

Environmental screening (ES) is a fundamental step to improving the environmental sustainability of humanitarian projects. It involves identifying the physical inputs and outputs of a project, comparing them with environmental sensitivities, and identifying potential impacts on the environment. It allows you to identify potential mitigation measures that are relevant to your project. **This process allows projects to mitigate risks, avoid any further harm on the population, enhance sustainability, and ensure compliance with humanitarian and donor standards.**



Suggested Methodology

In order to be as accurate as possible, an ES should involve as many relevant stakeholders to the project as possible. This would allow for a comprehensive analysis of the potential risks and impacts, as well as identifying potential mitigation measures. However, in restricted contexts such as can be the case in humanitarian settings, it is important to try to have most relevant sectors and stakeholders represented.

There are several steps, from conducting a screening using a tool such as NEAT+, to the result analysis and selection of mitigation measures, using the MERA matrix for example, to establish an Environmental Management Plan (EMP) or environmental report. It is suggested that whilst the screening can be done by the project or area manager, the results analysis should be done during **a workshop session** that gathers the project stakeholders and eventually representatives of the community targeted by the project. If not possible, you could also facilitate a series of discussions with key actors to analyse the results, prioritise the risks and mitigation measures.

Defining Roles and Responsibilities

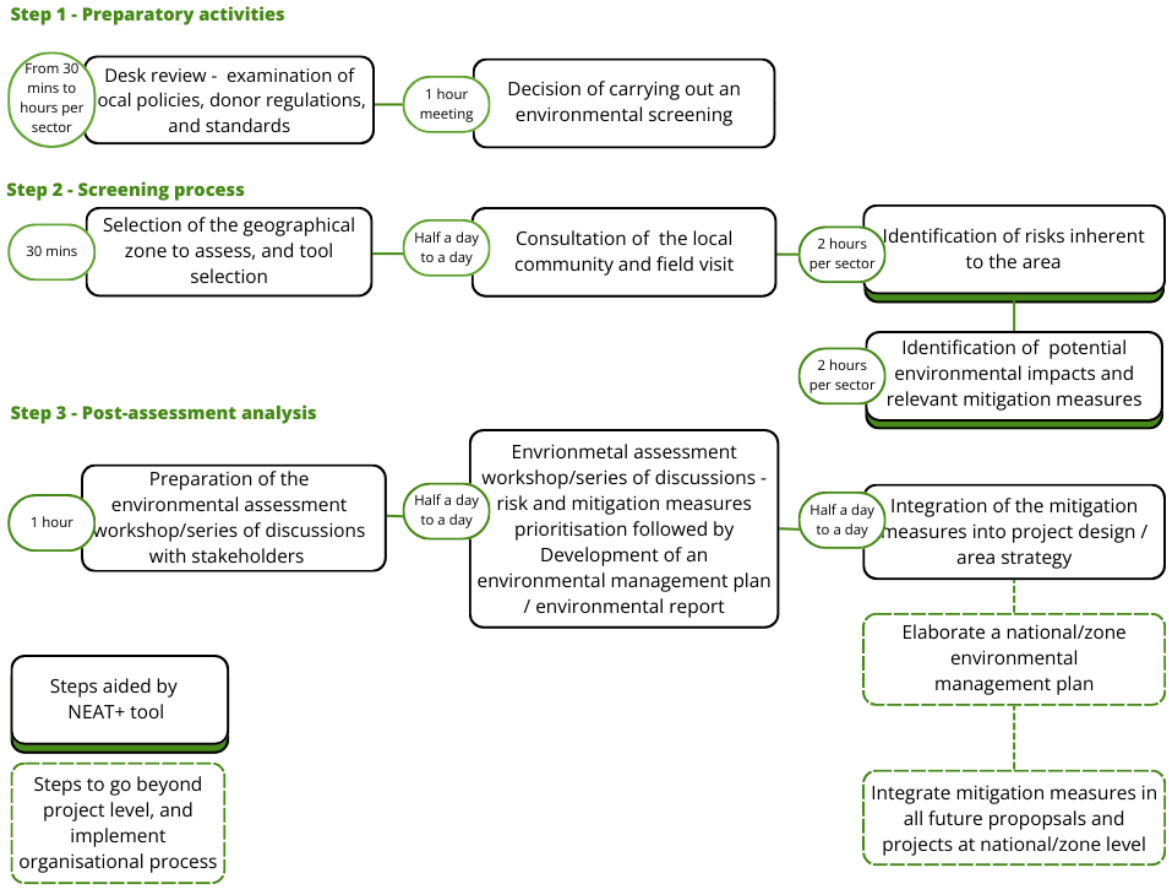
Roles should be assigned to facilitate an effective ES, from the screening (use of a tool) to the monitoring and evaluation. **A clear lead** should be identified (usually project/programme lead/manager), under the authority of the area manager/director, whilst involving other stakeholders, for example for risk prioritisation. This will allow to have management buy in, as well as to have an accurate analysis of risks. To ensure that the EMP is followed, it is very important to include the MEAL department and/or grants.

R Responsible A Accountable C Consulted I Informed

Activity	Area manager / director	Project lead/ Programme coordinator	Technical advisors	Support staff (logistics, HR, admin...)	MEAL / grants	Communities/ Beneficiaries
Decision to conduct an ES	R	A	I	I	I	I
Conduct ES with tool - NEAT+	A	R	C	C	I	I
Results analysis workshop	A	R	C	C	I	C
Environmental Management Plan	A	R	A	A	I	I
Monitoting and evaluation	A	A	A	A	R	I

This figure is given as an example, and can be adapted to different organisations' ways of functioning.

Steps to Conduct an Environmental Screening



Step 1 – Preparatory activities

Step 1a – Desk review

Conduct a thorough examination of local policies, regulations, and environmental considerations relevant to the intervention area. The review should include all relevant documents that could influence the intervention, such as **donor regulations, technical standards, environmental guidelines, and sector-specific best practices**. Knowing the environmental policies enforced in your country is the first step in understanding the rules and requirements that apply to your activities. You should look up the environmental rules, regulations and laws that apply to your sector. This will also flag if a rapid ES is enough, or if you need to conduct a full Environmental Impact Assessment process[1].

To know the local policies, you can reach out to the Ministry of Environment. The following websites may also be useful:

- ECOLEX: laws and regulation database on environmental protection https://www.ecolex.org/
- FAO Database: search legislations by “environment” tab https://www.fao.org/faolex/en/

[1] An EIA is a tool of environmental management forming a part of project approval and decision-making. EIA may be legally mandatory and governed by rules of administrative procedure regarding public participation and documentation of decision making, and may be subject to judicial review.

- Climate Laws: overview, status/targets for climate change adaptation & mitigation https://www.climate-laws.org/

Step 1b – Decision of carrying out an Environmental Screening

Hold an initial meetings to review findings and determine the need for an in-depth assessment.
This can happen:

- When a new base/area is opened;
- When there is a change in context (influx of displaced persons or refugees, disaster);
- Before the country strategy is drawn up/updated;
- As part of a project proposal (as soon as possible, if this has not already been done);
- Ideally, for any new project/programme (but with only one environmental sensitivity screening per geographic area);
- To comply with national legislation;
- To comply with donor regulations;
- To comply with your organisation's climate and environment strategy.

The decision can be taken by the area manager and/or programme coordinator, in consultation with other stakeholders. A clear lead should then be identified for the ES process.

Step 2 – Screening process

Step 2a - Selection of scale of screening and tool

To ensure that the results of the ES are accurate and specific, it is advisable to focus on an area that is homogeneous in terms of topography, landscape, population, resources, etc. This generally corresponds to the intervention area covered by a base and/or project (for example, camp delimitation) with the possibility to add a buffer zone or not depending on the extent of your project's activity and potential impacts. By aggregating the results of each local assessment, it is possible to obtain a global vision at country office level. At this stage, you should also select which tool to use (see section **Comparative analysis of different environmental assessment tools**). For this SOP, we will show how to conduct an ES using the NEAT+ tool (Excel version), as it is currently the tool that is most adapted to humanitarian projects.

Step 2b – Consultation of the local community/field visit

In order to have a relevant analysis of the environmental situation, it is primordial to have insights from the community on their perceived risks and priorities with regards to environmental issues. This step will allow to ensure that no risks are missed in the risk analysis and that the mitigation measures implemented are acceptable and fitted to the context. This consultation could be done through key informant interviews, focus groups or through designated focal points. The field visit and walkthrough will also allow to have additional information for the screening and analysis.

Step 2c - Conducting ES screening using NEAT+: analysis of the environmental risks

The NEAT+ tool (as an Excel version) facilitates a structured approach to assessing impacts. This initiative tool is a questionnaire for project-level analysis. Short tutorial videos are available in English and French.

The NEAT+ is made up of two parts:

1. The environmental sensibility questionnaire – which asks questions on the affected population, the crisis and the environment in which it takes place
   Question example: Has the host community noticed a change in rainfall amounts?
2. The activity modules – each module asks specific questions on the proposed activities of your project, divided by sector (WASH, FSL, Shelter).
   Question example: How is water from hand washing facilities disposed of?

Environmental Sensitivity Analysis

NEAT + Nexus Environmental Assessment Tool

Assessment of: Test project	Date of Assessment: 21-Dec-20
Assessment completed by: Vathanya	Location: Kabul
Organisation completing assessment: OCHA	Country: Afghanistan

Issues of High Concern	Issues of Medium Concern	Issues of Lower Concern
There is a high concentration and/or number of people. The potential environmental impact is greater.	There may be a weakened or poor governance system. There may be low capacity for environmental management.	The community may have low self-sufficiency. There may be a greater demand (and impact) on the local environment.
The community may not be socially cohesive. This can prevent collective action and lead to social conflict.	This area may be at risk of soil erosion from water.	The environment has fragile ecosystems. Further assessment is required to determine if loss of biodiversity is accelerating.
The environment has high biodiversity value. Vulnerable and/or rare flora and fauna may be at risk.	This area may be at risk of flooding.	Indoor air pollution, caused by poor ventilation and cooking/heating, may be an issue.
The community may be close to a protected/conservation area. There may be legal/social implications.	The area may be affected by (previous) conflict related hazards or pollution.	The area may have poor slope stability. Landslides or mudslides may be a risk.
There are areas of high cultural significance. This can threaten social cohesion.	There may be high and/or unsustainable rates of extraction of resources from the local environment.	This area may be at risk of soil erosion from wind.
The community is close to an international border. Transboundary resource management and/or pollution may be a concern.		Natural resource availability/accessibility may be affected by changing climatic conditions.

Figure 1: Results of a NEAT+ environmental sensibility module.

The ES lead in consultation with involved team and/or local key informants, when necessary, can fill out the NEAT+ questionnaire (around 2 hours for the Environmental Sensibility part, about 1 to 2 hours for each sectoral module). The NEAT+ will then provide a risk analysis for the project overall (figure 1) and for each activity (figure 2).

Shelter (Siting)

Environmental Concern	Environmental Sensitivity	Potential Activity Impact	Potential Environmental Risk
Key environmental concerns			
The environment has high biodiversity value. Vulnerable and/or rare flora and fauna may be at risk.	High	Low	Medium
Other environmental concerns			
Rates of deforestation may exceed regeneration capabilities. Deforestation may be a risk.	High	High	High
The environment has a low regenerative capacity. The effects of land and soil degradation are more significant.	Medium	Medium	Medium
The water sources may be vulnerable to contamination. Water quality may be an issue.	High	Low	High
Mitigation Tips			
• Ensure the tenure security of inhabitants.Tenure security provides certainty and protection from eviction, encouraging long-term consideration for the local environment and thus improving the likelihood of sustainable behavior by future inhabitants. • Ensure that there is reliable access to a sustainable safe drinking water source. Ensure that human settlements do not have an adverse impacts on the quality and quantity of nearby water sources. • Ensure that energy consumption does not deplete already scarce non-renewable resources and work to minimise the negative localized environmental concerns of energy consumption such as deforestation and indoor air pollution. • Clearing and site preparation activities can lead to loss of biodiversity and land/soil degradation. Siting decisions can also influence future interactions with the nearby natural environment, typically through encroachment, leading to concerns such as land clearing for agriculture/livestock, deforestation or human/wildlife conflict. Where possible, minimize proximity to pristine natural areas.			

Figure 2: Extract of results of a NEAT+ Shelter module.

Step 3 – Post-assessment analysis

Step 3a - Risk and Measure Mitigation Prioritisation

Organise a workshop or facilitate a series of discussions with key actors to discuss the results of the NEAT+ and prioritise risks and corresponding mitigation measures. Include project teams, partners, stakeholders, and if possible members of the community. The table below can be helpful to help prioritise the risks, based on criteria

that you will define. You can also use the website ThinkHazard as an extra resource for climatic risks, or the MERA matrix to refine the risk analysis.

Impact	Criteria			
	Importance to the crises-affected community	**Likelihood**	**Scale**	**Other**
Overgrazing/erosion	Highly important	Very likely	Local	Long term
Deforestation	XXX	XXXX	XXXX	XXXX
Water Scarcity	XX	XXX	XXX	XXX
Water Quality	XX	XXX	XXX	XXX
Waste Generation	XXXX	XXX	XXX	XXX

Based on this risk prioritisation, you can then use the results from the NEAT+ and/or the MERA matrix to help select which mitigation measures are most relevant to your project. You can define your own criteria for prioritisation.

(Suggested) Criteria	Mitigation measure 1	Mitigation measure 2	…
Financial (Additional costs, no cost, cost saving…)	€€/0-9/xx		
Sustainability			
Technical feasibility			
Social acceptance			
Effectiveness (Quality, appropriateness, relevance)			
Within the scope of project (Yes / No)			
Implementation capacity of the organisation/partners			
Alignment with organisational strategies or external parties			
Compliance with donors'(Standard) national regulatory framework			
Summary			

Step 3b – Development of an Environmental Management Plan or environmental report and integration in the project/strategy

Based on the prioritised list of risks and selected mitigation measures, you should develop and EMP or an environmental report.

An EMP should outline actions, responsible parties, timelines, and monitoring indicators, as per the template below.

Project Phase	Potential Impact	Mitigation Measure/Action	Responsibility	Indicators/Mean of verification	Cost
Implementation	*Noise/vibration from…*	*Time restriction, Vehicles follow the speed limit, maintenance of equipment etc.*	*Contractor/project team/ community/ site manager*	*Complaints from affected communities / working hour schedule/ maintenance record*	
Construction and Operation	*Loss of vegetation*	*Restrict clearing of vegetation to project*	*Community/project team*	*-Visual observation*	

		boundaries, do it in phases, revegetation of indigenous, etc.		*-Number of indigenous trees planted or m2 of area revegetated*	
Operation	*Conflict among water users*	*Setup water user associations, develop a water management plan.*	*Project lead/community*	*Plan, record of water scheduling, record of water related disputes*	

As a shorter version, it is possible to write **an environmental report**, which prioritises the strategies to mitigate risks, using the guiding points below:

1. Pre-crisis access to and use of local natural resources, including energy and construction materials, water sourcing and waste management.
2. An overview of the environmental impacts of the crisis, outlining specific environmental risks, unmet basic needs of affected people that could lead to adverse impacts on the environment and potential negative environmental consequences of the humanitarian response.
3. Hazards linked to extreme weather events (flooding, landslides, erosion, droughts, tropical storms) in the area of implementation, that could lead to further negative environmental consequences.
4. Opportunities and threats linked to resource management in the area of implementation. There are several important aspects concerning the natural resources in a specific area that should inform the settlement design:
    - availability, value and importance of natural resources
    - vicinity of protected natural habitats, ecosystems and cultural or spiritual sites
    - requirements of displaced and host communities (water, construction material, energy)
    - current local practices of natural resource management
    - main drivers of resource scarcity
    - availability of the local resources in the long term (taking into account climate change and other trends)
    - possibility of conflicts over limited availability of resources
5. An environmental degradation mitigation strategy centred on minimising the negative environmental impacts of the intervention, which should be integrated into operations and monitoring processes.

Based on the EMP or the environmental report, integrate the main mitigation measures into your project design, and/or within the country/area's strategy. This will allow all future projects to integrate mitigation measures for similar environmental risks in the same area.

Step 3c - Monitoring and Evaluation

Use the EMP or environmental report to monitor the implementation and impact of the mitigation measures. Periodically update analysis as the environmental setting changes.

Comparative analysis of different environmental assessment tools

There are many existing tools developed for humanitarian, developmental and crisis settings, to be able to conduct rapid environmental analyses. A table was developed to provide a comprehensive comparison of a variety of tools, as well as the links to these tools.

The NEAT+ tool in its rural version is as of now the ES tool that is the most appropriate for a rapid environmental screening. It provides a long list of mitigation measures, that needs to be prioritised. This can be done with the use of the VEHA tool or the MERA matrix (see comparative table for further information).

Alignment with Donor Requirements

An environmental screening is also a prerequisite for some donors. For instance, it is mandatory for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Shelter projects funded by DG ECHO as part of their Minimum Environmental Requirements, and for 'physical works' (construction) funded by GAC. Other donors such as BHA, AFD and Sida also require and/or recommend conducting an environmental assessment or screening[2].

Conclusion

Environmental screenings, facilitated by tools like NEAT+, enable humanitarian projects to minimise harm, enhance sustainability, and meet donor and community expectations. This SOP outlines a comprehensive process to achieve these goals effectively, at the project level and to implement an organisational process.

Environmental screenings are the first step of environmental assessments and should inform whether further assessments are required to avoid any harm on the environment and consequently on populations supported by humanitarian aid.

A word on the EA working group: *The mission of this WG of the REH, through its exchanges and sharing of experiences, is to support member organizations to better take the environment into account in projects through the use of environmental assessment tools (in particular NEAT+ but also CEDRIG, EST, OIE, etc.). The WG collaborates with other actors on this topic, notably the Joint Environment Unit of UNEP/OCHA to better the tool and its governance. The WG also produced training material to benefit the entire humanitarian community, as well as shares technical user feedback on the tool it uses, such as NEAT+. Members of this working group are the ACTED, Netherlands Red Cross, Solidarités International, Groupe URD, Action Contre la Faim, Première Urgence International, Humanity and Inclusion, Terre des Hommes and Oxfam.*

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[2] For more information, see ACF's donor requirements analysis.