

Key messages

- Identify emergency and development funding that can be allocated for environmental activities.
- Aim to influence government policies that impact a camp's environment.
- Build the capacity of local government institutions to protect natural resources.
- Ensure baseline data are collected.
- Use a participatory approach that includes input from women and vulnerable groups to establish an environmental action plan.
- Extend interventions and assistance to host communities.
- Work with all stakeholder groups to identify environmental indicators and to perform regular assessments.
- Promote long-term community-based natural resource management.
- Introduce community specific environmental interventions as needed.
- Include non-formal environmental education and awareness-raising activities with new environmental interventions.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN CAMP SETTINGS

INTRODUCTION

There is an environmental impact associated with every displaced persons camp. Soil erosion, vegetation loss, water pollution, and soil contamination are among the main concerns. The severity of this impact, however, can be decreased with timely and sound environmental management.

Good management will ensure that environmental baseline data is collected before a camp is even established. This is often done through rapid environmental assessments and resource mapping. By gathering timely information, camps can be established at least 15km from protected or ecologically significant natural resources, families can be given plot sizes of at least 400m², and roads can be constructed across, rather than parallel, to slopes.

KEY ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

To ensure that environmental management activities are prioritised, it is important to identify funding that can be specifically allocated to environmental activities. In a camp setting, environmental management should, at a minimum, include:

- establishing an environmental action plan, including a land-use strategy, with local residents, giving particular attention to women and vulnerable groups;
- ensuring the completion of regular and participatory environmental assessments using predetermined environmental indicators;
- supporting long-term community-based natural resource management; and
- policy advocacy that influences government policies impacting the environment of camp settings and promotes the capacity of local governments to protect resources.

Based on community needs, specific interventions should be adopted. Such interventions might include permaculture, kitchen gardening, agroforestry, tree planting, promoting fuel-efficient cooking practices, rainwater harvesting or composting.

For successful implementation of an intervention, however, it is important to have coinciding environmental education and awareness-raising campaigns that can inform and mobilise a community (see back panel for a checklist of tips).

CHECKLIST:

Environmental Education and Awareness-Raising

- ✓ Initiatives should be ongoing and mainstreamed for lasting results.
- ✓ Effective campaigns should aim to enhance participation in environmental problem identification and behaviour changes.
- ✓ Initiatives should be targeted at a wide-variety of sectors within a society.
- ✓ Local knowledge about the environment should act as a foundation for new initiatives.
- ✓ Promote simple, relevant and cost-effective activities.
- ✓ Activities should seek to empower the broader community.
- ✓ Use gender and culturally sensitive participatory approaches to include communities in the planning, implementation and management of initiatives.
- ✓ Targeting existing community groups, such as women and youth groups, is an effective method for transferring knowledge.
- ✓ Approaches should include a mix of formal and non-formal education activities.
- ✓ All new initiatives should be linked to and if possible build on ongoing environmental programmes.
- ✓ Preventative activities are better than reactive activities – it is better to start a campaign when a threat is present but before a natural resource has actually become impacted.

Further reading and resources

Refugee Operations and Environmental Management: Key Principles for Decision-Makers (UNHCR, 2001).
<http://www.unhcr.org/3b03b24d4.html>

Camp Management Toolkit, Environment, Chapter 6 (NRC, 2008). <http://www.nrc.no/camp>

Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (Sphere Project, 2004).
<http://www.sphereproject.org/>

Forest Management in Refugee and Returnee Situations: A Handbook of Sound Practices (UNHCR, IUCN, 2005). <http://www.unhcr.org/438724c42.html>

Livestock Keeping and Animal Husbandry in Refugee and Returnee Situations: A Practical Handbook for Improved Management (UNHCR, IUCN, 2005).
<http://www.unhcr.org/4385e3432.html>

Permaculture in Refugee Situations: A Handbook for Sustainable Land Management (SAFIRE, UNHCR, 2001).
http://postconflict.unep.ch/liberia/displacement/documents/UNHCR_SAFIRE_Permaculture_Refugee_Situations.pdf

Cooking Options in Refugee Situations: A Handbook of Experiences in Energy Conservation and Alternative Fuels (UNHCR 2002).
<http://www.unhcr.org/406c368f2.html>

Guidebook for Planning Education in Emergencies and Reconstruction, Environmental Education, Chapter 23 (UNESCO 2006).
http://postconflict.unep.ch/humanitarianaction/documents/02_04-01.pdf

ProAct Network is a Swiss-based non-governmental environmental organisation. Our work aims to help vulnerable communities improve their resilience to disasters, climate change and humanitarian crises, through sustainable environmental management. This briefing note was compiled under the project "Strengthening Environmental Awareness and Management Capacity in Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) in Darfur", funded by Christian Aid.

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