

# Mainstreaming Environment into Early Recovery: Briefing Note and Strategy



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## 1. Introduction

It is the aim of this Briefing Note with Strategy to present key environmental aspects and opportunities that relate to Early Recovery as a support to the UNDP Crisis Interface Team (CIT) within the Crisis Response Unit (CRU).

It is CIT's ambition to mainstream and integrate environmental aspects and opportunities into Early Recovery activities and approaches across the Early Recovery cluster as a multi-dimensional issue.

The overriding objective of CIT in this approach is to:

1. Demonstrate and Advocate for the importance of environmental issues as they relate to Early Recovery activities and approaches as well as support to Disaster Risk Reduction initiatives; and
2. Develop support mechanisms for the facilitation of improved environmental considerations into Early Recovery activities and approaches.

The note is part of a suite of tools and guidance prepared for the UNDP Crisis Interface Team (Geneva) focused on mainstreaming environmental issues into Early Recovery.

## 2. Why Environment and Early Recovery?

Disasters, crises, emergencies and conflict can all have a significant, often detrimental, impact on the surrounding environment. In addition, the subsequent relief, recovery and reconstruction phases can exacerbate negative environmental impacts if the activities are not designed to take the environment into account.

The potential impact on the environment can threaten human life, health, livelihoods and security of the affected populations and failure to address these risks can undermine the relief process, causing additional loss of life, displacement, aid dependency and increased vulnerability. Therefore Early Recovery interventions should help to identify and mitigate the direct and indirect impacts associated with the following four areas of risks:

- **Life:** Acute threats to human life can be caused by the release of hazardous materials, such as industrial chemicals, asbestos and hydrocarbons, into the environment. Significant contamination of air, soil and water resources may result from such situations and can cause severe sickness or even death;

- **Health:** Threats to public health can also be caused by increasing amounts of uncontrolled wastes (decomposing in public spaces leading to increased vermin and disease spread) as well as from the release of hazardous substances into the environment. While short term exposure may not be lethal, over the longer term it can threaten human health;
- **Livelihoods:** Threats to human livelihoods are caused by damage to natural resources and ecosystems such as forests, pastures, soils, wetlands and coral reefs. The sudden loss of these environmental resources often implies immediate loss of livelihoods and subsequent reliance on humanitarian aid. Often it is the poor and **vulnerable members of communities that are the most affected; and,**
- **Security:** Threats to human security occur when critical natural resources or ecosystem services are damaged. In some cases, this damage increases vulnerability to natural hazards such as the destruction of coastal mangroves.

In situations of mass displacement IDP and refugee camps are built out of short term necessity, but in practice usually endure for many years. If not well managed, competition for scarce resources around such camps, such as water, wood and land, can create conflict drivers which hamper long term peace building efforts.

Finally, in the midst of a crisis, there is a common perception that natural resources and the environment represent a trivial or less pressing issue than immediate humanitarian needs. Because the practical benefits of integrating environmentally sustainable policies and practices are not well understood by enough actors in the field and too little human capacity of the issue is in place in crisis situations, this myth too often remains unchallenged. Though natural resources are often the starting point for economic and social reconstruction and environmentally sensitive recovery is vital for ensuring long term sustainable development, the marginalization of the environment is widespread.

In contrast though, disaster response and Early Recovery can also afford opportunities and benefits from integrating environmental aspects into the relief and recovery activities, i.e. from economic growth through recycling initiatives as sustainable livelihoods and emergency employment. Furthermore, robust Early Recovery measures that have sound integrated environmental management will support longer term resilience of the community for improved Disaster Risk Reduction.

### 3. What Parts of Environment for Mainstreaming

Since work in the 'Environmental' field is a very expansive area then it is prudent to select which areas of Environmental work are considered pertinent to Early Recovery (ER).

The following factors are taken into account when selecting the proposed environmental fields as relating to Early Recovery:

- Early Recovery should focus on sustainable gains in the response and provide the foundation for resilience as well as contributing to longer term development objectives;
- Successful Early Recovery projects have in the past been based on specific actions to help affected communities move from humanitarian relief towards self-sustaining development where the emphasis is on 'specific', i.e. a determined start and end point for the Early Recovery project/intervention;
- The ideal outcome of any Early Recovery measure is that people are more resilient than before the crisis which can lead to DRR benefits; and,
- The nature of Early Recovery is that it is locally owned and can be handed over to the local authorities etc. for continued progress.

#### *Proposed Environmental Aspects for Early Recovery focus*

Based on the above then the following environmental fields are proposed for initial focus within this initiative:

1. **Debris** since large quantities of debris can seriously inhibit recovery, access to returning residents, contain potentially hazardous materials such as asbestos as well as require significant number of truck movements on already busy post-disaster roads. Furthermore, debris handling and recycling provides clear-cut opportunities for emergency employment, livelihoods as well as reduced cost of reconstruction and whilst saving raw materials being extracted from the surrounding environment.
2. **Waste** from camps, households, industrial sites, relief agencies etc. since if not handled properly and promptly can cause significant human health risks. Dealing with waste also provides great opportunities for CfW, sustainable livelihoods through recycling initiatives, support local authority in re-establishing this basic service to communities and the safe disposal of waste is critical for recovery otherwise waste is often disposed of in an uncontrolled manner near urban areas; and

3. **Industrial Facilities**, which is often environmentally damaging yet economically productive: engaging with locally damaged industry at a time of disaster can be an opportunity to rethink industrial processes with environmental issues in mind, thereby supporting the labour market and reinvigorating the local economy. The best examples of such work would be industries whose environmental impact has compounded the damage of the disaster; mangrove replacing shrimp farms after a tsunami for instance.

With respect to DRR, it should be noted that a further benefit with debris and waste is that both allow for the handover of any systems put in place as an exit strategy to the local authority or local private sector. This both supports medium and long term economic development as well as builds resilience in DRR since they can lead naturally into disaster preparedness planning for waste and debris.

Industry support can also have strong positive links with DRR by focusing on understanding the reason for failure and rebuilding resilience directly into the industrial system.

*Environmental Aspects NOT considered for Early Recovery focus*

The following are environmental aspects NOT considered applicable for mainstreaming into Early Recovery:

- Pollution to environment where such is life critical and acute, i.e. a fire in tyre storage depot or emissions from damaged industrial facilities like sulphuric acid to ground and water sources. This is not selected as it is an immediate issue to be dealt with by specialised emergency services, and also due to low number of occurrences compared to selected environmental aspects and the very localised impact;
- Pollution to air which is not life critical nor short-medium term damaging to the environment, for example increased air pollution from vehicle emissions or industrial activity following a disaster;
- Localised contamination to land that is not life critical (i.e. it is not on course to impact on ground water or a nearby water source) since remediation of contaminated land is both expensive, long term and not related to sustainable livelihoods not local capacity building; and,
- Landslides since these are not immediately critical (unless unstable) and require heavy mechanisation as well as detailed geotechnical design which is often lacking in the ER phase of response.

## 4. Strategy for Mainstreaming Environmental Issues

To support the mainstreaming of the identified environmental issues into the work of the Early Recovery cluster, the following main strategies are proposed:

- A. To develop and disseminate clear **tools** and mechanisms for the use of ERAs and ER cluster members in firstly understanding the key principles of environmental management within ER as well as secondly communicate and support this to the ER counterpart authorities and Government bodies. This includes online tools that can be demonstrated via tablets, online resources and guidelines;
- B. To develop robust **case studies** for each of the environmental aspects selected (debris, waste and industrial facilities) which concisely illustrate key benefits of working in these fields of environmental work. The case studies should include facts and figures on benefits from implementation of the work and draw on lessons learnt and quick wins;
- C. To integrate this environmental mainstreaming more comprehensively and clearly into the **ERA training programme** including the tools, mechanisms and case studies from above points A and B;
- D. To integrate this environmental mainstreaming across relevant parts of the **UNDP Crisis Response Package** guidelines and training programme under development in 2015 to ensure wide audience as well as facilitate take-up of the aspects into ER cluster work.

## 5. Proposed Mainstreaming Plan

In order to mainstream and integrate the selected Environmental aspects into the Early Recovery activities and approaches, the following plan is proposed:

*Phase 1: Environment in Early Recovery Support Mechanisms*  
Q3 & Q4 of 2015

- Gain agreement on Environmental aspects to be included in the initiative
- Finalise strategy for the integration and mainstreaming of the aspects
- Develop structure and content for support mechanisms such as guides, tools, information management systems
- Develop DRR measures and activities relating to the selected environmental aspects
- Integrate into the ERA Training and CRP Training packages

*Phase 2: Environment in Early Recovery Tools & Systems*  
Q4 2015 – Q2 2016

- Develop and field test the defined support mechanisms such as guides, tools, information management systems
- Evaluate effectiveness of the support mechanisms and revise as applicable

*Phase 3: Demonstration of Environment in Early Recovery*  
Q3 2016 – Q2 2017

- 12 months of using the support mechanisms in Early Recovery activities and approaches through the clusters, Early Recovery advisors etc.
- Evaluation of the results from use and improvements as required.

*Phase 4: Mainstreaming and Integration of Environment into Early Recovery*  
Q3 & Q4 2017

- Full scale roll out and utilisation.

END

