

MERCY CORPS
ENVIRONMENTAL SCREENING GUIDE
 CLIMATE CHANGE UNIT



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INTRODUCTION

The environment underpins and defines all aspects of human society, including economic development, health and food security. Good environmental practice helps programming in two ways. It keeps us within environmental guidelines set by donors; if sound environmental impact assessments (EIA) are made ahead of implementing an activity, it avoids the need to make changes that could have been anticipated before. Secondly, adverse environmental impacts would conflict with Mercy Corps commitment to the 'Do No Harm' principle. By ensuring we create no adverse environmental impacts we therefore support programs and remain true to core mission values.

This environmental impact assessment tool introduces environmental screening in the context of program design and monitoring to ensure minimal likelihood of causing environmental harm. It is intended to help programmers assess likely risks surrounding small scale activities, including small-scale grant projects allocated to local partners in emergencies. It also guides on how to deal with large scale environmental impact assessments currently demanded on many large USAID grants, and likely to be needed before long for DFID and EU projects. The hope is it will guide writers through the dilemma of having to work with donor guidelines that may appear vague; despite vagueness proposal designers need to tick decisively on forms stating whether activities will have a negative impact or not. Both the proposal writer and the donor may have subjective interpretations of the guidelines hence confusion may arise. This is important as a proposal may be sent for significant review, or perhaps be rejected if the project does not conform to required environmental guidelines.

Finally, this web tool is also intended to be dynamic – as donor guidelines change or new knowledge arises relevant to projects including environmental activities, they will be included here. In this first iteration of the learning tool there are bound to be gaps. Please write with additional information or guidance needed to [Jim Jarvie](#) and we'll do our best to provide solutions.

How the tool works

The tool has two sections, each supported by back up documentation:

1. **Screening:** Screening functions to identify significant issues and eliminate the insignificant ones. Ideally it should be carried out at the project concept development phase. This way environmental opportunities and risks can be appropriately integrated into subsequent design stages, rather than being brought in at the last minute. A series of checklists are provided to decide whether or not environmental concerns should be considered in sectors as varied as agriculture, forestry, and WATSAN.
2. **Help on guidelines:** In this first iteration the tool attempts to explain what the guidelines available for USAID proposals actually mean. The issue proposal writers need to address is the *threshold* over which an activity is ticked as needing environmental monitoring. An EIA for a recent Democratic Republic of Congo MYAP (Multi-year assistance program) completed by Mercy Corps is discussed as a real-life example.

Examples of screening needs and thresholds in Mercy Corps projects

Even when Mercy Corps programming has not explicitly included environment, activities with potential environmental impacts have common throughout the life of the agency. Yet few were designed and implemented with environmental assessments that perhaps could have added value to program activities. Our general lack of environmental screening leaves the agency vulnerable to an increasing focus on environmental performance from numerous donors and partners.



Examples of such issues that have arisen in emergencies and development programs include:

- **Tsunami timber procurement:** Rebuilding with wood procured hastily led to purchase of illegal timber from unsustainably managed forest.
- **Tsunami fishing recovery programmes:** In Sri Lanka 120% of the fishing fleet was restored in a country where over-fishing was already a problem.
- **Brick kiln provision for IDPs:** Brick kilns were provided with no consideration of fuel source. If wood is sourced illegally from neighbouring protected areas or community forest, conflict over rights and tenure issues can be triggered.
- **River basin management plans:** When developed and implemented without a proper EIA undesired downstream impacts can include siltation, water shortage, decreased fish stocks and other diminished ecological services.

SCREENING CHECKLISTS & ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The checklists in the associated spreadsheet provide guidance on whether there may be an environmental impact that needs to be taken into consideration. Example data has been inserted in some places.

Each checklist has four columns, as indicated in the example below:

Screening question	Areas addressed	Areas outstanding	Guidance
Has the study area been defined widely enough to include all the area likely to be significantly affected by the project?	<i>The brick kiln project has taken into account the need for fuel wood and sustainable sourcing</i>	<i>A sustainable wood supply for the kiln has not been identified</i>	Review area maps, especially downstream areas; Community consultation

These are:

- *Screening question:* A question inspired by the project in the local context.
- *Areas addressed:* Areas of concern that have been addressed satisfactorily.
- *Areas outstanding:* Areas of concern that are unresolved – these will need further research or expert advice.
- *Guidance:* Advice on where the information may be located.

The current version contains the following lists, and more can be added if needed:

1. General checklist
2. Agriculture
3. Emergency response
4. Forestry & Agroforestry
5. Fisheries
6. Water Resources

The forms are generic and will need to be tailored to specific projects on a case by case basis. When using the checklist, bear in mind that even if an issue is satisfactorily addressed, it still may need inclusion in an EIA or at least a monitoring plan. Fortunately, in most cases, it will reflect an issue that only may require further consideration.

Additional information

Agriculture

Suggested thresholds and trigger points:

- Any land clearance of undisturbed or environmentally sensitive areas should have further environmental assessment carried out.
- Any chemical use should follow the UN PIC & U.S. PIC-Nominated Pesticides List (see impacts and further information link below).
- Any project involving the use of chemical applications should have further environmental assessment that considers potential for pollution or need for training (*this is a requirement for USAID funded projects*).
- Pesticides should not be used without appropriate training

Potential impacts:

- Destruction or degradation of natural habitat, including deforestation, desertification and drainage of wetlands
- Loss of biodiversity
- Introduction of exotic and non-native animal and plant species
- Erosion and loss of soil fertility
- Siltation of water bodies
- Reduction in water quality



Further information:

- USAID/AFR guidance: preparing PERSUAPs for pesticide programs in Africa
http://www.encapafrika.org/meo_course/Course_Materials/Module9--Special_Topics/Agriculture_Irrigation_Pest_Pesticide_Management/How_to_prepare_a_PERSUAP_031504.doc
- USAID Pest Management II: Safer Pesticide Use. Overview of the potential impacts of pesticide use:
<http://www.encapafrika.org/EGSSAA/saferpesticides.pdf>
- USAID, Pesticides in USAID programmes. Environmental requirements and considerations. Slideshow
http://www.encapafrika.org/ESDM/esdm_course_materials/English/Pesticide_Procs_26Sept05.ppt#1
- USAID Agriculture: Soil and Water Resources, including Irrigation. Overview of the environmental impacts of agriculture: <http://www.encapafrika.org/egssaa/agriculture.pdf>

Emergency response

Suggested thresholds and trigger points:

- Any project that involving the use of hazardous material will require further investigation.
- Any infrastructure construction that is for more than one community needs to assess its environmental impact. This includes sanitation facilities.
- If there is going to be procurement of cooking stoves the most appropriate stove and fuel for the region should be used.

Potential impacts:

- Deforestation
- Contamination and depletion of water supplies
- Land use changes
- Air pollution
- Poaching
- Health effects on disaster victims
- Women's and children's safety

Further information:

- USAID 2006, Environmental guidelines for small-scale activities in Africa. See Chapter 10, Humanitarian Response and Natural Disasters.
<http://www.encapafrika.org/EGSSAA/humanitarianresponse.pdf>
- The Sphere project: Humanitarian charter and minimum standards in disaster response
 - Chapter headings:
http://www.sphereproject.org/component/option,com_docman/task,cat_view/gid,17/Itemid,203/lang,English

Forestry & Agroforestry

Suggested thresholds and trigger points

- If timber harvesting or land use change for re-establishing forest is being considered, expert advice should be consulted, including consideration of land tenure issues.
- Forestry activities in undisturbed/primary forest should only take place if the forest has been legal management plans, preferably certified by the [Forestry Stewardship Council](#).



- Any project in an environmentally sensitive or protected area should involve a full environmental assessment.
- Any project that involves the construction of access roads or other infrastructure that reaches/affects more than 1 community should be subject to further environmental assessment than this checklist.
- Any project that will involve chemical applications should be subject to further environmental assessment that considers potential for pollution or need for training (*this is a requirement for USAID funded projects*).

Potential Impacts:

- *Positive.* The project may have a beneficial impact on desirable environmental qualities. For example, protection of forest may improve water quality.
- *Negative.* The project will cause a deterioration of desirable environmental qualities. For example, logging of forest may cause increased silt load in water.
- *Direct.* The project will have a direct effect on an environmental factor. For example, protection of a catchment forest will have a direct positive impact on maintaining biodiversity.
- *Indirect.* The project will indirectly affect an environmental factor. For example, a project may have a negative indirect impact on forest resources adjacent to the project site because of increased population density associated with increased employment opportunities.

Further information:

- Jennings and Jarvie. A Sourcebook for Landscape Analysis of High Conservation Value Forests. www.proforest.net/objects/publications/HCVF/hcvf-landscape-sourcebook-final-version.pdf
See chapter 3 - Identifying and managing High Conservation Values Forests: a guide for forest managers.
- USAID 2006, Environmental guidelines for small-scale activities in Africa. See chapter 7 Chapter 7: Forestry: Reforestation, Natural Forest Management, and Agroforestry. <http://www.encapafrica.org/sectors/forestry.htm>

Fisheries & aquaculture

Suggested thresholds and trigger points:

- Any project that involves fishing reconstruction or development should have information about the state of fish stocks and the marine environment of the region.
- If chemicals are to be used or exotic species are to be introduced then an environmental assessment of their impacts should be carried out.

Potential impacts:

- Over harvesting
- By catch
- Toxic substances
- Threat to endangered species
- Pollution
- Habitat destruction
- Impact on fresh water sources
- Disease
- Adverse impact on other organisms
- Adverse impact on downstream users

Further information:

- Asian Development Bank, Environmental assessment guidelines. P. 120 for REA of fisheries: http://www.adb.org/documents/Guidelines/Environmental_Assessment/Environmental_Assessment_Guidelines.pdf
- SIDA, Guidelines for the Review of Environmental Impact Assessments, P.49 assessment of coastal related activities: http://www.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=118&a=2532&language=en_US&searchWords=environmenta%20screening
- USAID Environmental Guidelines for Small-Scale Activities in Africa 2nd Edition. Chapter 6 Fisheries: <http://www.encapafrica.org/EGSSAA/fisheries.pdf>

Water Resources

Table guidance is taken from materials developed for a Mercy Corps Kunduz watershed project in Afghanistan.

Suggested thresholds and trigger points:

- Any construction near or involving water sources should involve further investigation and if necessary a full environmental assessment. This should consider risk of pollution, alteration or diversion of water courses and effects on up and down stream communities

Potential impacts:

- Changes in Hydrology
- Pollution
- Changes to soil
- Impacts on ecology
- Socioeconomic influences
- Impacts on health
- Causing imbalances such as disease occurrence of weeds, affects on animals and changes of structure.

Further Information:

- USAID (2006), Environmental guidelines for small-scale activities in Africa. See chapter 16, water supply and sanitation <http://www.encapafrica.org/EGSSAA/watsan.pdf>

Further general information sources

Below are further, more generic information sources on how potential impacts can be assessed and in some cases give very good advice on thresholds on whether to tick the **Yes** or **No** box.

- Climate Care's project policy
http://www.climatecare.org/media/documents/pdf/cc_project_policy_jan07.pdf
- Fair Trade, certification overview: Describes principles of fair trade:
<http://www.transfairusa.org/content/certification/overview.php>
- Forest Stewardship Council, policy and standards information: These form the basis for all FSC forest management standards:
http://www.fsc.org/en/about/policy_standards/princ_criteria/8
- Mercy Corps carbon connections seminar, report on proceedings:
<http://www.mercycorps.org.uk/files/file1196418652.pdf>
- Understanding the compliance and voluntary carbon markets:
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmenvaud/331/33105.htm>

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FROM CHECKLIST

As a result of using the checklists and framing thinking around the results, there are three likely outcomes:

1. No environmental impact is anticipated. No further environmental review is required.
2. Adverse environmental effects are not anticipated yet doubt remains. For most activities there will not be a need for an EIA or reporting to donors, but project staff should monitor over time that no environmental harm is being caused.
3. Substantial adverse environmental effects may be caused without pro-active mitigation and monitoring. These should be highlighted to donors in EIA documents and monitoring procedures put in place to anticipate them.

ADVICE ON GUIDELINES

This section focuses on outcome '3' from the list above:

Substantial adverse environmental effects may be caused without pro-active mitigation and monitoring. These should be highlighted to donors in EIA documents and monitoring procedures put in place to anticipate them.

Projects that normally have significant effect on the environment and would require a subsequent environmental assessment include:

- River basin development
- Significant irrigation or water management, including dams and water bores
- Pesticide use
- Large scale drainage projects
- Large-scale agricultural mechanization
- land development, resettlement projects, change of land use/conversion
- Road construction or improvement
- Potable water and sewerage projects, if not on a small-scale.
- Fisheries and coastal projects

Projects that normally result in limited or no environmental impact and do not require any further environmental assessment include:

- Research activities
- Education, technical assistance or training programs
- Analyses, studies, academic or research workshops and meetings
- Nutrition, health care, and family planning programs *except* where medical waste is likely to be a hazard
- Maternal and child feeding

Donor Guidelines

There are a host of environmental guidelines from different donors. Those most likely to be encountered by Mercy Corps programs are listed in the *Donor Guidelines* worksheet.

Challenges implementing donor guidelines

Although they try to get to the same place – project implementation without avoidable environmental harm being caused – they tend to be vague. Set against this vagueness are two principle hurdles for proposal developers and program implementers:

1. Despite guidelines vagueness the proposal writer will need to tick boxes that state a) no harm is anticipated or b) harm might be anticipated without environmental measures. The bottom line for writers is that guidelines *do not provide clear thresholds indicating whether to tick Yes or No*.
2. The proposal will be reviewed by USAID, EU or other donor missions. The reviewers will also be responding through a similar cloud of subjectivity as suffered by the writer.

Country Guidelines

These are links to country government environment ministry websites and environmental information sources. Some are only in local languages and others are under construction but they are the basis for expansion. These are listed in the *Country Guidelines* worksheet.



GLOSSARY

The definitions here are some that Mercy Corps staffed have struggled with. Please let us know of other terms that cause confusion and we will add them to the list.

- **Aquaculture:** cultivation of aquatic organisms under controlled conditions, including algae, fish, shrimps and freshwater prawns.
- **By-catch:** describes living creatures that are caught unintentionally during fishing practices.
- **Decommissioning:** To withdraw from active service.
- **Demographic:** A statistic characterizing human populations (or segments of human populations broken down by age or sex or income etc.).
- **Ecosystem:** A system formed by the interaction of a community of organisms with their physical environment.
- **EIA:** Environmental Impact Assessment.
- **Exotic species:** Invasive exotic species are organisms not native to a region.
- **FSC:** Forestry Stewardship Commission.
- **Groundwater depletion:** a term often defined as long-term water-level declines caused by sustained ground-water pumping.
- **Hydrology:** the science dealing with the occurrence, circulation, distribution, and properties of the waters on the earth and its atmosphere.
- **IDP's:** Internally Displaces Peoples
- **Monoculture:** the practice of producing or growing one single crop over a wide area.
- **Scalability:** Indicates an ability to either handle growing amounts of work, or to be readily enlarged.
- **Siltation:** When a river channel becomes filled with silt.
- **Waterlogged:** When ground becomes saturated with water, which can result in land becoming soggy, flooded and unusable.
- **Water Table:** The level below which the ground is completely saturated with water.
- **WATSAN:** Water and Sanitation.

PROGRAM ENQUIRIES

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