

Camp phase-out process

- Camp closure is the official removal of status recognising a particular area as a camp. This decision is made by a government and starts the camp phase-out process.
- Environmental considerations should feature prominently in phase-out and closure planning.
- Participatory approaches to camp phase-out can help identify and implement activities within a site's boundaries that need clean-up and rehabilitation, e.g. shelter demolition and proper sorting and disposal of waste materials.
- Participatory approaches can also help identify and implement activities needed to address concerns related to a site's wider environment and infrastructure, e.g. tree-planting where there has been deforestation or the fixing of damaged roads.
- Further assessments with local host populations should identify additional, durable solutions.
- Hand-over of the site to the host community or local officials should be planned as early as possible to prevent confusion about roles and responsibilities.
- Phase-out activities end when all humanitarian assistance ceases. Any further interventions should be conducted by longer-term development organisations.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS IN CAMP PHASE-OUT

INTRODUCTION

Camps are established to help meet the needs of displaced people – those fleeing from conflict, as well as people temporarily displaced as a result of a disaster. They are only envisaged as temporary solutions, although many continue to operate for many years or decades. As soon as conditions allow, however, camps and camp-like structures should be closed and the area rehabilitated to remove dangers and obstacles.

The announcement of “camp closure” is the official removal of camp status from a site by a government. This signals the beginning of “camp phase-out,” which includes a series of activities that leads to the final withdrawal of most if not all humanitarian actors.

KEY ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

The phase-out of a camp requires environmental issues to be considered, both within the camp limits and the wider landscape. Two sets of activities may take place: clean-up and rehabilitation. The objective of site clean-up and rehabilitation is to make the area safe from physical, biological and chemical threats, so host communities are not left worse off than before. Some basic considerations are:

- Clarify land ownership / user-rights before implementing activities.
- Determine agencies' roles / responsibilities for activities.
- Engage displaced persons, host communities, and local authorities in decision-making.
- Give particular attention to vulnerable individuals' needs.
- Local Camp Phase-out Committees can be effective for conducting clean-up and rehabilitation operations.
- Monitor activities closely using environmental indicators.
- Successful sanitation and waste clean-up activities will minimize contamination of soil and water.
- Landscape rehabilitation should seek to restore the productive capacity of the land, addressing livelihood security, ecosystem functionality and human health.
- The wider the area to be rehabilitated, the more cost-effective natural regeneration can become.
- Try to use site rehabilitation to link humanitarian actions with longer-term development work.
- Promote community-based natural resource management with longer-term actors.

CHECKLIST: BASIC ENVIRONMENTAL CAMP CLEAN-UP AND REHABILITATION ACTIVITIES

- ✓ Map and demarcate all known and potential hazards, as well as burial sites.
- ✓ Make open wells, sewage systems, latrines and waste pits safe, e.g. filling in latrine pits.
- ✓ Consult early with host populations and local authorities to determine intended use of former camps, including any remaining infrastructure or services.
- ✓ Determine if any abandoned shelters can be re-used or converted for future use by the host community; systematically demolish shelters that cannot be of further use or which the host community do not want.
- ✓ Leave, when possible, materials that can degrade naturally on site, e.g. roofing thatch and construction poles.
- ✓ Tins, glass, batteries and metal waste may either be re-used by local people or will need to be removed off site and recycled if possible.
- ✓ Identify other materials or items that can be re-used or recycled by local people, e.g. plastic sheeting.
- ✓ Collect and remove off site any toxic materials, e.g. chemicals and medical wastes, some of which may need specialist treatment.
- ✓ Ensure the proper collection, sorting and disposal of other construction wastes, e.g. rusty nails, or other non-biodegradable materials through proper training, monitoring and provision of tools.
- ✓ Negate pollution of groundwater reservoirs.
- ✓ Put in place preliminary anti-erosion measures if necessary.
- ✓ Decide if adding locally appropriate vegetation to areas that suffered depletion is needed. If so, determine ownership of trees to ensure future care.
- ✓ Create environmental awareness among displaced populations and communities and engage them in activities.

Further reading and resources

Camp Management Toolkit, Camp Set-up and Closure, Chapter 7 (NRC, 2008).
<http://www.nrc.no/camp>

Environmental Perspectives of Camp Phase-Out and Closure, A Compendium of Lessons Learned from Africa (UNHCR, CARE, IUCN, 2007).
<http://www.unhcr.org/4a967ce69.html>

Checklist-Based Guide to Identifying Critical Environmental Considerations in Emergency Shelter Site Selection, Construction, Management and Decommissioning, Version 1.0 (Kelly, 2005).
<http://www.proactnetwork.org/proactwebs/ite/en/resources/tools-for-environmental-assessment>

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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