

BACKGROUND

Extensive stakeholder consultations as part of the Coordination of Assessments for Environment in Humanitarian Action (Joint Initiative) revealed a need for a simple and pragmatic project level tool that can be readily implemented in dynamic humanitarian contexts and provide information that aligns with and informs the humanitarian response. This tool is envisaged as a first step process for humanitarian actors and attempts to address some of the barriers that currently inhibit the uptake of tools such as: technical complexity, time or resource intensiveness, requirement of environmental expertise, cumbersome usage, or incoherence with existing programming frameworks or donor requirements.

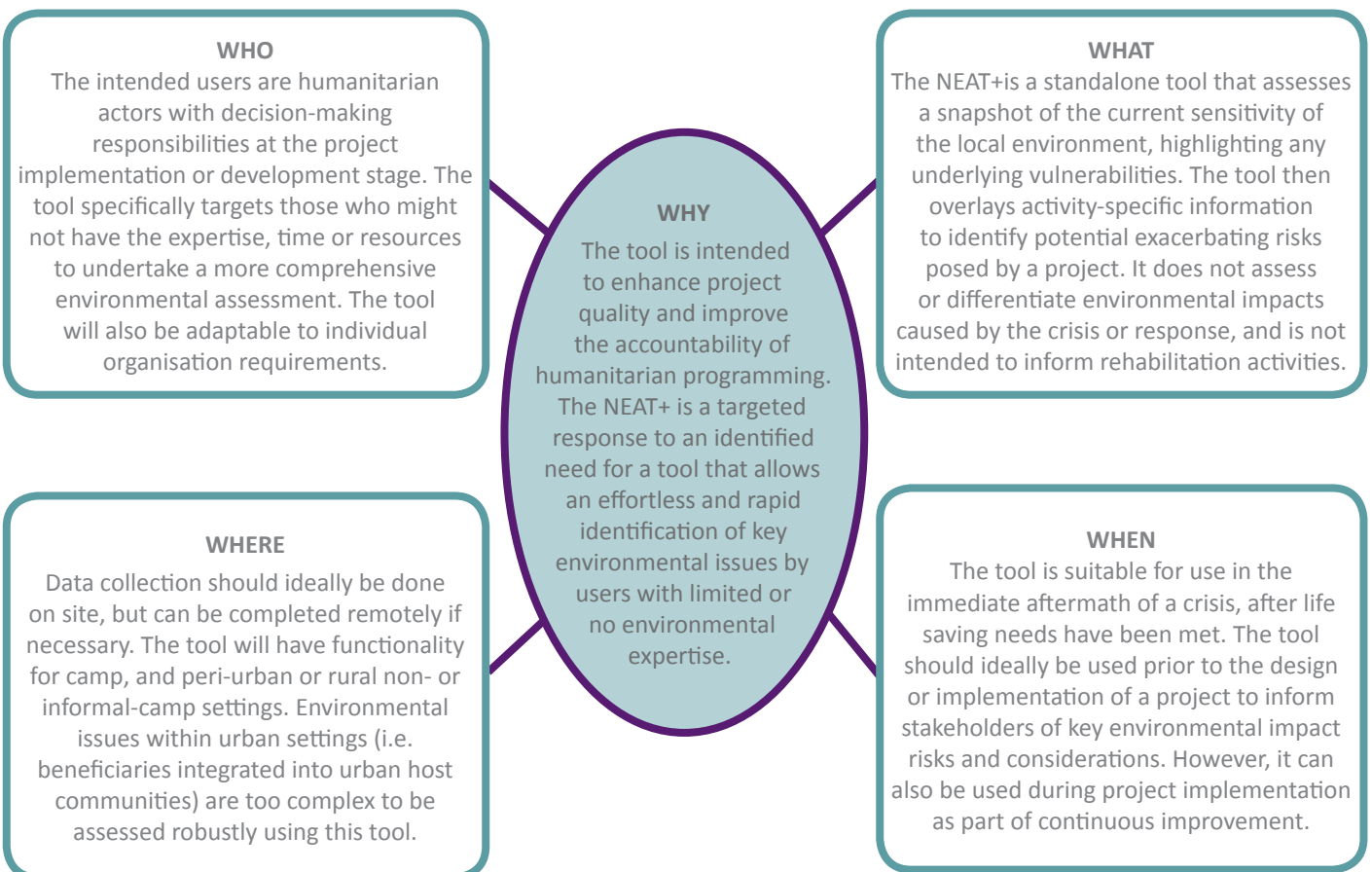
A comparable environmental assessment tool, the Norwegian Refugee Council's (NRC) Environmental Assessment Tool (NEAT),¹ already exists. However, the NEAT was created to meet the requirements of a specific user (i.e. NRC) rather than a broad set of humanitarian actors. With the agreement of NRC, the Joint Initiative will update and repackage the NEAT for wider applicability.



Credit: UN Environment/OCHA Joint Unit

THE UPDATED TOOL

The NEAT+ builds on the NEAT and preserves the design mentality of a rapid assessment process that does not require environmental expertise, whilst still offering a technically sound and robust analysis. The NEAT+ is not intended to substitute an EIA or an assessment by a trained expert, nor is it designed to meet specific legislative or institutional requirements.



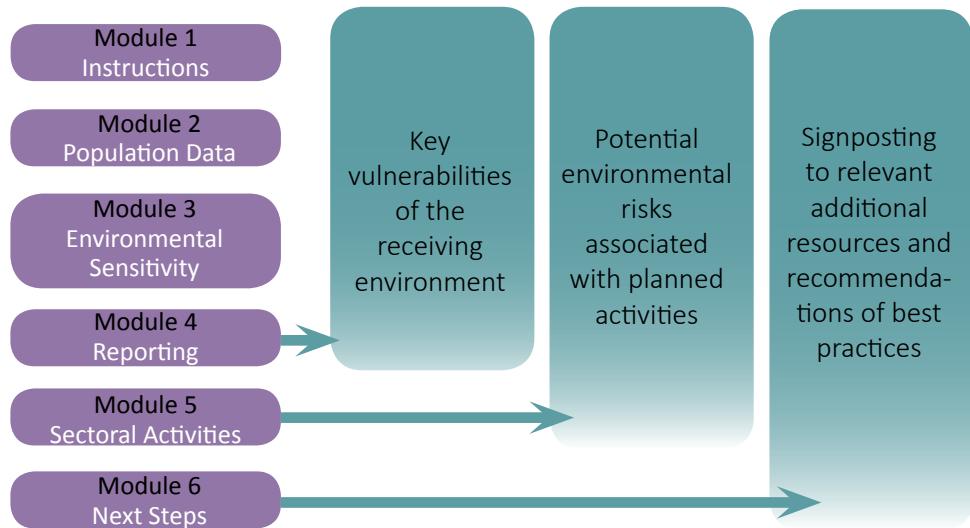
¹ The Norwegian Refugee Council's Environmental Assessment Tool (NEAT) was designed as a project level tool to understand the sensitivity of the local environment and potential environmental risks associated with planned or ongoing activities.

The NEAT+ is a deliberately light and agile process. It is acknowledged that the results from NEAT+ may not be as nuanced or comprehensive as that of other environmental assessment tools that adopt more rigorous processes. However, the NEAT+ is intended as a pragmatic first step process and a “good enough” tool for the numerous instances where environmental issues would otherwise be overlooked. The continued challenges in promoting the current environmental assessment tools suggests that new and more innovative approaches- lighter and less burdensome than existing ones- should be investigated.

The update offers an opportunity to make the development of the tool more consultative and collaborative, and to expand the scope to cover additional sectoral specific modules. The tool will also be made more holistic, by incorporating inter- and intra-sectoral considerations throughout. This is also designed to encourage users to recognize the wider implications related to environmental mainstreaming.

AN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The tool consists of several interdependent modules, and adopts an environmental impact assessment process. The sensitivity of the receiving environment is first established. Potential activity-related risks from the relevant sector specific modules are then overlaid, to enable a more comprehensive analysis of the potential impacts posed by proposed projects. The tool does not recommend activity-specific mitigation measures nor evaluate residual risk. Rather, it provides generic best practice and signposts the user to additional resources or possible next steps. The user owns the process of drawing up a mitigation plan and where necessary can request environmental expertise.



Data input will be done using KoBoToolbox, a data collection tool developed for humanitarian actors which allows both online web-based and offline app-based collection of data. Various environmental sensitivity conditions and the environmental risk statements (of proposed activities) will be categorised into high, medium or low based on a multi-criteria evaluation. This analysis will be done automatically within the tool using pre-programmed logic in Microsoft Excel. Information can also be directly inputted into Microsoft Excel, for example in the case of desktop analysis or paper data collection.

It is envisaged that Microsoft Excel will automatically populate a reporting template, which can be extracted for accountability and knowledge management purposes. This report output will summarise the environmental baseline and highlight key environmental issues of concern. As the tool will be designed using open source software, it is anticipated that users can adapt the reporting functionality to their respective donor or organisational requirements, as to better seamlessly integrate the outputs into their programming cycle.

The tool will also capitalise on the advanced functionality within Microsoft Excel and Kobo. The tool is designed to be interactive throughout the data input process- unobtrusive prompts about potential environmental concerns can help increase environmental awareness of the user. GPS data and photos can also be captured on Kobo, to be used for remote analysis or validation, potentially through a helpdesk function.

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