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UNEG AGM 2024

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This document presents the progress in the development of the ESI guidance. It is being submitted to the UNEG AGM 2024 by the ESI Working Group for information only.

**STRUCTURE OF THE GUIDANCE**

This guidance will be disseminated as a modular web-based system, which will become more comprehensive as topic-specific modules are added. This is an initial document, intended to generate discussion among UNEG members leading to an agreed format and content level (e.g., scale, level of detail and presentation of topic-specific modules), which will be applied as further topics are addressed through additional modules. The web-based system is intended for use at three levels:

**Level 1 – Introduction to the guidance (2 units)**

This briefly reviews completed elements of the ESI Working Group, which has provided the rationale and scope of the guidance, based on a review of existing UN entity evaluation systems and practices and opportunities to strengthen these. This introduction provides a summary of the “state of play” of UN entity evaluation of environmental considerations in intervention areas, which are not primarily targeting environmental management. It also briefly explores the growing body of UN entity guidelines and approaches, designed to strengthen performance with regard to environmental effects. As topic-based modules are added to the guidance, it is likely that many users will skip Level 1 and proceed directly to explore specific topics. However, documentation at this level could usefully be updated at regular intervals to record changes in the overall UN-entity evaluation coverage of environmental effects of their work.

**Level 2 – UN categories (1 unit)**

This level provides a simple organising structure under which topic modules can be added. It recognises basic differences in the principle work areas under the UN umbrella, which will give rise to varying types and levels of environmental considerations. The development of this guidance is at an early stage and this categorisation currently appears adequate. As further modules are added, it may be considered useful to make sub-divisions within the three categories. Users interested in specific topic areas may skip Level 2 and proceed directly to relevant modules.

**Level 3 – Evaluation Guidance for specific UN activity areas (Unlimited categories for later addition)**

This level will contain the main sets of guidance targeting specific areas of UN intervention. It will be populated over time, seeking to cover main activity clusters, which are evaluated by UNEG member offices. Guidance will be carefully focussed on the thematic area and will not address generic evaluation practices and methods, which are already well-covered in many UN evaluation manuals and guidelines. UNEG members are invited to suggest additional topics, which will be added as ESI Working Group resources permit.

**GUIDANCE: LEVEL ONE – INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDANCE**

**Unit 1: Review of existing UN entity approaches to evaluation of environmental considerations**

This ESI guidance document is the third phase of an exercise conducted by the UNEG Working Group on Integrating Environmental and Social Impact into Evaluations. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the attendant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) all recognize the close interlinkages of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability. In 2019, the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) established this Working Group, with the eventual objective of establishing a common UN-wide approach, norms and standards for appropriately incorporating environmental and social considerations into all evaluations, in line with the UN system-wide effort to move towards a common approach to environmental and social standards for UN programming.

The Working Group first conducted a stocktaking of the evaluation policies and guidance of UNEG members in terms of the advice they offer on evaluating the social and environmental considerations relevant to supported interventions. Initial review work showed that policy documents are primarily concerned with outlining the procedures and responsibilities in each specific organisation and were found not to offer suggestions on the incorporation of social and environmental factors. Following the policy documents, a total of 59 evaluation guidance documents from 46 UNEG agencies were reviewed for their reference to social and environmental aspects. This showed that social considerations are relatively well-covered, when compared with those on the environment. The review showed that only 16 documents had any coverage at all of environmental considerations and even this was usually limited. Assessment was then made of 53 evaluations, selected by several UNEG member agencies for their coverage of environment aspects, to assess any good practices, which might be inputted into future guidance. In all, 112 documents from UNEG member bodies were reviewed. In addition, 29 survey responses were received from agencies.

This initial stocktaking review found that the importance placed on environmental considerations partly depends on the extent to which the agencies define their mandates to directly cover this area. Drawing on the survey results, 45% of the agency evaluation offices reported that their work is highly engaged with environmental aspects, while most of the others felt a medium level of engagement. Reflecting the perceived overlap between agency development interventions and environment, many agencies reported having environmental safeguard policies, which need to be applied during the preparation of projects or programmes and which could then provide an entry point for evaluations to address these issues.

Overall, based on survey results, 84% of responding evaluation offices feel that environmental aspects have not been well addressed in their existing guidance documents. This generated a highly consistent perception among UNEG members that there is a need for additional guidance in the broad area of the environment. Specific areas that were identified as priorities where such guidance is needed included: climate change (which now often tends to be the primary environmental concern on people’s minds); environmental impacts of development projects and how to minimize environmental footprints of interventions; and environmental risks. These concerns obviously address central issues for mainstreaming environment into broader development processes as well as into evaluation.

The stocktaking review found that the areas directly identified by agencies as requiring guidance do not adequately reflect the evaluation gaps revealed from the assessment of existing documents and evaluations. However, a broad range of agencies also noted that their activities may have unanticipated environmental effects. Many suggested a heightened awareness of the interactions between social and environmental factors, driven by the SDGs’ explicit emphasis on these interlinkages. Drawing on the review material in the light of the objectives of the SDGs, an overview of SDG areas, which may warrant environmental evaluation is presented in Table 2 of this Guidance. This shows that most of the SDGs potentially have aspects, which would need evaluating on this dimension, at different levels of intervention.

Also emerging from the initial stocktaking review was a recognition that individual agencies are not best positioned to produce guidance on all environmental factors, which could be incorporated into evaluations of projects, which are not primarily focused on benefits in this area. This pointed to the recognition that UNEG would be the most appropriate body to fulfil this role. UNEG’s guidance document on gender and human rights is generally very well regarded and has been widely used, so agencies see it as a model for work in the environmental area. The advantages of developing guidance through UNEG include its institutional neutrality; that guidance can be more detailed in specific areas than most agencies would be able to produce; and that it can address common needs identified by a broad range of agencies.

It should be emphasised that the guidance is particularly targeted at evaluations where the evaluand is not an environmental project or programme. The purpose is thus to achieve mainstreaming of environmental dimensions into all evaluations as an important input into the United Nations contribution towards sustainable development.

**Unit 2: Some emerging UN approaches on environment and development**

**Key environmental challenges**

Within the international development and humanitarian community, many efforts are under way to develop systematic understanding of the key environmental challenges at global, regional and national levels. There are numerous models, approaching the issue from different perspectives and interests and it is beyond the scope of this guidance to conduct a comprehensive review of the various options. One emerging model, which provides a useful and simple framework for helping to organise UN evaluation approaches is referred to as “The Triple Planetary Crisis.” This highlights the three main interlinked challenges, which the UN assesses that humanity currently faces: climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, briefly summarised below:

* ***Climate change:*** energy use, industry, transport, buildings and agriculture are the main causes of release of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere.
* ***Pollution:***  *air pollution* is the largest cause of disease and premature deaths in the world. It is caused by everything from traffic and factories to wildfires, indoor household air pollution from [cooking with polluting fuels and technologies](https://unfccc.int/blog/too-many-cooks),  volcanoes and mould. *Water pollution* is also a major cause of sickness.
* ***Biodiversity loss:*** the decline or disappearance of biological diversity, which includes animals, plants and ecosystems. The reasons for biodiversity loss include everything from overfishing to habitat loss (e.g. deforestation to make way for development), to desertification due to climate change.

**UN system-wide response to environmental challenges**

The system-wide response is coordinated by the UN Environment Management Group, which is currently focussing on three areas[[1]](#footnote-1), two of which respond directly to the Triple Planetary Framework:

1. Common Approach to Biodiversity
2. Common Approach to Pollution
3. Greening the Blue (UN Footprint)

EMG documents to date have not produced **detailed response frameworks and would need further clarification to be useful to evaluators. The most comprehensive EMG work to date has focussed on the UN Footprint, which involves all entities. One notable feature of EMG documents to date is that the UN evaluation community does not appear as a major contributor to development of its approaches. It therefore seems a matter of urgency for UNEG members to work together to bring cumulative evaluation findings in this area into EMG approaches and guidance.**

**Brief overview of selected UN entity guidelines for project approaches towards environmental management**

**Numerous UN entities have developed frameworks for addressing potential environmental effects of their activities and others are in the process of doing so. The main focus of these is on the project conceptualisation and design phase – notably in such areas as environmental screening and safeguards. These are potentially extremely useful to evaluators, since they assume collection of baseline data and progress monitoring indicators. It is outside the scope of this guidance to review the expanding range of such documents, but it is clear that each evaluation office should use its organisation’s project review systems (whether screening, safeguards, environmental reviews or impact assessments) as a key input into its evaluation design and key data sources (e.g., for inclusion in its evaluation matrix) when considering environmental effects. Examples of recent UN procedural documents are briefly presented and discussed below.**

* *Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures (SECAP). IFAD 2021[[2]](#footnote-2).*

Under SECAP, all projects undergo an environmental, social and climate appraisal to help IFAD determine whether a project or component should be supported. If so, an appraisal is conducted to determine how the risks and impacts (both those that affect the project and those caused by the project) should be addressed. The appraisal determines the level of environmental, social and climate risk and suggests appropriate mitigation measures. The appraisal also assesses the capacity and commitment of the borrower/recipient/partner to implement the project in line with the suggested mitigation measures. The SECAP sets nine social and economic standards, four of which concern environmental aspects, as shown below:

*Standard 1: Biodiversity conservation*

*Standard 2: Resource efficiency and pollution prevention*

*Standard 7: Physical and economic resettlement*

*Standard 9: Climate change*

The SECAP also uses a *mitigation hierarchy* to help manage biodiversity risk. This features measures to avoid impacts on biodiversity from the outset of development activities, and when this is not possible, to minimize them, or if minimizing these impacts is not possible, offsetting any residual adverse impacts.

* *UNEP Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework (2020)*

This document provides a substantial collection of guidance summaries. Many of these are at a high level of abstraction and it is not clear how they could all be activated. Although this framework is to some extent focussed on UNEP’s specific mandate and operations, it could also be useful to evaluators in a broader range of UN entities as a quick “think piece” to raise awareness of issues that may be relevant to their interventions.

* *GEF: Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluation for Full-sized Projects[[3]](#footnote-3)*

Although this document specifically targets GEF-supported projects, some of its key elements could usefully be applied to a broader range of project evaluations. Specifically, the guidelines propose that evaluators should report:

* available qualitative and quantitative evidence on *environmental stress reduction* (e.g. GHG emission reduction, reduction of waste discharge, etc.
* *environmental status change* (e.g. change in population of endangered species, forest stock, water retention in degraded lands, etc.)
* *Geospatial Tools and Applications to Support Independent Office of Evaluation of IFAD[[4]](#footnote-4).* This document describes a range of remote applications, such as Earth Map, which can provide cost effective geo-spatial data to compare aspects of natural resources and the environment before, during and after interventions. It also references other key documents, which provide more detail on the use of such applications and methods.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**GUIDANCE LEVEL TWO: IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR CATEGORIES OF UN ACTIVITY REQUIRING SPECIFIC APPROACHES TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS**

***Introduction***

To place the full range of UN bodies within a comprehensive and coherent set of categories in relation to environmental implications of their work is a substantial challenge. Although each body has a specified mandate, these are subject to both periodical formal updating and informal re-interpretation, as understanding of the inter-connectedness and overlapping among areas to be covered by the UN system expands. This means that, in practice, the range of support activities provided by any specific UN organisation may well gradually expand and that several different agencies are likely to be interested in the same development challenges, globally or nationally, at the same time.

***Environmental dimensions of UN activities***

The UN is now a highly complex and vast collection of bodies, with varying histories, mandates, skills and resources. The work of some of these bodies has very obvious connections with environmental management and they have therefore for some time seen this as an area which requires planning, inclusion in programme and project design and evaluation. The connections for some other agencies are less obvious, but many are becoming increasingly aware that their activities do have environmental implications, which have not so far been strongly incorporated in their programme planning and have often not been considered in their evaluation approaches and activities. One of the aims of this ESI Guidance document is therefore to enhance and activate consideration of environmental aspects in the evaluations of all agencies, including those which have so far been relatively weak in this area.

***Thematic Areas and Categories of UN Organisations***

A potential starting point to link thematic areas and organisational categories is to examine UN expenditures, which are presented in the Secretary General’s Report covering 2022[[6]](#footnote-6). This report describes three broad expenditure “categories,” as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Thematic Areas of Expenditure by categories included in SG’s Report**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Category 1: Human rights, peace and security, humanitarian assistance: | (11 billion Dollars approximately) |
| Category 2: Sustainable development, with particular attention to Africa ( | **2 billion Dollars approximately)** |
| Category 3: UN System Management | **(1.7 billion Dollars approximately)** |

One valuable feature of the three categories is that they draw attention to the enormous scale of Category 1 expenditure. The major drawback is that the SG’s report does not discuss the bulk of UN funding, which is expended by the Specialized Agencies, Funds and Programmes. In this respect, an earlier report[[7]](#footnote-7) provided the following broad breakdown of UN expenditure (for 2007):

**Figure 1: Percentage of UN expenditure by broad funding category (2007)**

Figure 1 suggests that about half of UN expenditure passes through the Specialized Agencies. A small proportion, which would include much of the overall system management expenditure, is from the regular budget. Peacekeeping (including humanitarian activities) and Funds and Programmes were at similar expenditure levels at the time of this assessment.

Whilst this brief expenditure overview gives a working concept of the relative scale of different UN activity areas, two major factors suggest that funding must be seen as a highly dynamic and variable factor. Firstly, the definition of UN institutional mandates demonstrates considerable flexibility and allows for many overlaps in areas of interest of different UN bodies. This is particularly the case where an area might be approached either as a substantive focal area or as a cross-cutting issue – most notably gender equality and climate change. This is also evident from the increasingly comprehensive approaches adopted to processes, which were previously regarded as largely distinct areas of action. This would apply, for example, with regard to disaster management, which is now seen as a cyclical activity requiring more developmental approaches to have long term effects. Secondly, the UN system has to constantly respond to major and uncontrollable changes in its operating environment, which may require substantial additional funding to be transferred to specific areas. Recently, this has been particularly the case with regard to national and international armed conflict, which calls for substantial peace building, peacekeeping and/or humanitarian funding and action.

**Identifying environmental considerations of individual SDGs**

It is now customary, or in many UN entities compulsory, to identify specific SDGs, which are expected to be addressed by any intervention. Evaluators should pay close attention to those SDGs, which the project design indicates fall within the project or programme’s expected effects. In many cases, these appear somewhat speculative and it is therefore particularly important to consider whether evaluative evidence suggests that they have actually been addressed and, if so, with what effects.

Table 2 below provides a suggested set of “first principles,” which might be utilised as a basis for identifying potential environmental considerations for all SDGs. This is an initial platform, which may be used by evaluators to identify relevant areas for detailed assessment of interventions within their own organisational context.

**Table 2: : Overview of Potential Key Environmental Evaluation Considerations for each of the Sustainable Development Goals**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| SDGs | Social Considerations | Environmental Considerations | Key Environmental Evaluation Factors |
| Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere | Primarily a social goal. | Requires environmental management: e.g., to ensure that increased production does not deplete environment. | Poverty reduction often implies increased production. Evaluation needs to assess unexpected (or extent of expected) negative effects on environment. |
| Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture | Primarily a social goal. | Goals depend on environmental management of sustainable agriculture. | Sustainable agriculture implies close attention to environmental factors, including land and water management. Climate Change adaptation needs to be intrinsic to interventions and carefully evaluated. |
| Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages | Primarily a social goal. | There are many environmental requirements if human health and well-being are to be ensured. | Climate change adaptation is essential in many locations to ensure that new pests and diseases, damaging to health, are not promoted by environmental change. Interventions intended to promote health and well-being may cause unintended environmental stress, which needs to be carefully evaluated. |
| Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all | Primarily a social goal. | Limited (if any) environmental considerations. | Inter-relationship between social and environmental considerations not extensive. However, there could be CC adaptation needs, e.g., affecting functioning of schools in heat waves. Disruption of schooling by CC-related extreme weather events (e.g., hurricanes) is already common and the contribution of social-focussed interventions to minimising this should be considered in relevant evaluations. |
| Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls | Primarily a social goal. | In some situations, interventions in this area may have environmental implications. | In many locations, particularly rural, woman and girls play a major role in natural resource management; for example, in such areas as water and fuel wood management. Agricultural roles may also be gender-determined. Evaluation should therefore consider intended and unintended changes in relationship between women/girls and the environment from gender-focussed interventions and how these my affect NRM and environmental quality. |
| Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all | This is both a social and environmental goal. | The relationship between sanitation and water management is challenging, particularly for large urban populations. | In major urban areas, water-borne sanitation may severely challenge water availability, posing a threat to environmental sustainability. Evaluation needs to carefully consider any intended or unintended challenges to water availability, particularly in the context of Climate Change Adaptation needs. |
| Goal 7 Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all | This is primarily a social goal, with sustainability as an environmental consideration. | Complex environmental considerations, including CC mitigation obligations and sustainability of water supplies in case of increased hydropower. | Need to evaluate relative costs of traditional and sustainable energy sources to assess viability of expanded sustainable sources in short, medium and long term. Environmental impacts of hydropower expansion interventions need careful assessment, for example with regard to effects on availability of water for agriculture and drinking in rural areas. |
| Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all | This is primarily a social goal, with sustainability as an environmental consideration. | Economic growth may be achieved at expense of the environment; e.g., through increased industry and/or agriculture. | Evaluation needs to carefully consider intended and unintended effects of different types of increased production on the environment. |
| Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation | This is primarily a social goal, with sustainability as an environmental consideration. | Development of infrastructure and industry characteristically pose environmental challenges, which may be major. | Evaluation needs to consider in detail the extent to which industrialization and infrastructure have proved to be resilient (in particular to CC and weather-related events) and environmentally sustainable. E.g., what environmental resources are necessary for industrialization; to what extent has infrastructure displaced or damaged environmental resources; do infrastructure return periods take account of CC Adaptation needs? |
| Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries | Primarily a social goal. | Reducing inequality may involve increasing productive activity in poor and environmentally fragile areas and countries, with potential environmental consequences. | Evaluation should consider the extent to which inequality has been reduced through increased use of environmental resources, particularly in fragile locations, with potential or actual negative effects. |
| Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable | This is both a social and environmental goal. | The goals of resilience and sustainability have substantial environmental considerations. | Evaluation should consider to what extent and with what priority, the concepts of environmental resilience and sustainability have been realised; taking into account CC mitigation and adaptation needs. |
| Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns | Primarily an environmental goal. | Extent to which consumption and production make sustainable demands on the environment. | Evaluate extent to which sustainability of consumption and production have been assessed or measured and measures taken to maximise them. |
| Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts\* | Primarily an environmental goal. | Covers both Mitigation and Adaptation. | Evaluation of mitigation and adaptation approaches and their effects. |
| Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development | Primarily an environmental goal, with social considerations in terms of development intentions. | Sustainable use of marine resources, including through protection and conservation. | Evaluation of conservation and protection measures and their effects on use patterns, including on poverty. |
| Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss | Primarily an environmental goal, with social considerations in terms of development use intentions. | Sustainable use of terrestrial resources, including through protection and conservation. | Evaluation of conservation and protection measures and their effects on use patterns, including on poverty. |
| Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels | This is primarily a social goal, with sustainability as an environmental consideration. | Peace and social inclusion may increase opportunities for effective environmental management. | Assess extent to which peace and social inclusion have enabled and empowered environmental management. Evaluate environmental effects of more functional institutions. |
| Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development | Enabling goal for both social and environmental considerations. | Improved implementation institutions, coordination and data systems for global environmental management. | Evaluation at level of global environment architecture, including inter-relations between relevant bodies. |

**A Generic Approach to Strengthening Evaluation of Environmental Considerations**

The medium to long term intention of this Guidance site is to provide advice to address environmental considerations in specific areas of UN activity. However, this is likely to take some time. Furthermore, to ensure consistency across an increasing number of advice modules it is considered useful to prepare a context-free approach.

Earlier outputs of this ESI assignment showed that both the survey of UN entity evaluation offices and the extensive document review highlighted weaknesses in assessing environmental effects of UN supported projects and programmes. One underlying factor in this challenge was identified as the predominant focus of evaluation Terms of Reference on rating performance against the “DAC Evaluation criteria.” Since environmental effects are usually not specified as an important area for evaluation attention on the basis of the DAC criteria, they often receive limited attention and appear only marginally in the assessment of performance. The ESI working group therefore proposed that one straightforward way to improve this situation would be to “match” environmental considerations to the DAC criteria.

Later modules of this guidance will provide detailed advice on how to tailor the DAC criteria for application in specific operational fields. At this stage it is considered useful to consider a potential generic approach to relating the DAC criteria to environmental effects. This is presented in Table 3 below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **DAC Criterion** | **Generic Evaluation Questions for Terms of Reference** |
| **Relevance** | To what extent were environmental challenges identified at the project design stage?  What steps were taken in the project design to address these? |
| **Coherence** | Did the project relate to any other environmental programmes or policies in its operational area or nearby? |
| **Effectiveness** | Has the project contributed towards any environmental results – either positive or negative? |
| **Efficiency** | Were inputs to promote environmental gains and/or reduce environmental damage provided in a timely and cost-effective manner? |
| **Sustainability** | Are systems and resources in place to ensure that environmental benefits are continued or scaled up?  Are systems and resources in place to ensure continuous environmental protection as needed? |
| **Impacts** | Has the programme promoted all results chains necessary to eventually reach intended environmental benefits?  Has the programme fulfilled all assumptions and addressed all risks, which could prevent its impact objectives from being met? |

**Table 3: Generic Evaluation Questions to relate Environmental Considerations to DAC Criteria**

**GUIDANCE LEVEL THREE: Guidelines for inclusion of environmental considerations in SPECIFIC categories of UN activitY**

**Category 1: Human rights, peace and security, humanitarian assistance.**

*Sub-Category: Effective Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance*

**Specific Topic: Thematic guidelines for Inclusion of environmental considerations in UN projects involving large-scale settlement of refugees or displaced persons.**

***Section 1: Context of the thematic guidelines***

During earlier stages of the ESI Working Group, sixteen evaluations of activities focussed on humanitarian activities were reviewed. With regard to the quality of evaluation coverage of the environment, ten of these were assessed as weak, five as medium and only one as strong. This suggests either that humanitarian activities have not been seen as having strong environmental effects, or that approaches to evaluate these effects have not been well developed, or that such approaches have not been seen as a core evaluation component for activities in this area of UN activity. The earlier review showed that the humanitarian category covers an extremely broad range of activities, which cannot be covered in one set of guidelines. Accordingly, this guidance component focusses on a narrower field, namely settlement projects and programmes for refugees and displaced persons.

A brief review of expert discussions around settlement activities involving UN entities shows that there have long been concerns about their potential or actual interaction with aspects of the local environment. An important “wake up call” was provided more than 25 years ago by the 1996 Symposium “Environmentally Induced Population Displacements and Environmental Impacts Resulting from Mass Migrations” hosted by UNHCR, IOM and Refugee Policy Group. This looked both at environmental factors promoting displacement of people and at the effects of large “camp” style settlements on the environment. Many of the conclusions and recommendations of the symposium are still valid and useful.

Large camps usually have a more immediate impact upon the local environment than smaller camps, which can be more easily linked to local resource management systems. The published report on the Symposium[[8]](#footnote-8) notes that: “Since environmental matters must be addressed throughout all sectors by different organizations and on a long-term basis, coherent planning is essential to make interventions mutually complementary. Environmental planning, preferably in the form of an environmental action plan for the affected area, must be jointly undertaken by those involved in assistance operations for displaced persons, and must be based on solid economic, scientific and technological principles. For this purpose, *an action-oriented environmental impact study is useful*”.

The consensus among Symposium participants was that critical time pressures to provide emergency settlement accommodation for large numbers of people have promoted an approach in which likely environmental effects are not coherently assessed and mitigated in project/programme planning. It is assumed that consideration of such concerns will delay priority actions required to immediately settle the maximum number of people and that any negative outcomes can be addressed at a later stage.

The possibility of remedial action to address environmental challenges depends on regular and accurate monitoring of effects of the settlement. The Symposium highlighted the importance of progress in the technology of monitoring systems. For example,[[9]](#footnote-9) “Thanks to the variety of global information systems now available, especially the new earth observatory satellites... in conjunction with the progress on the image processing software algorithms, it is much easier to examine changing patterns of land use and the impact of human action on forest and cropland composition”.

Four categories of negative environmental impact from mass settlements were identified as common by Symposium participants and remain highly relevant today:

* *Direct impacts*: damage to the ecosystem, primarily to forests and fresh water sources; general pollution of the areas around camps, including solid waste from relief supplies.
* *Indirect impacts:* disruption of local and regional markets, price hikes, distortion of social networks around camps, the breakdown of respect for protected area barriers.
* *Deterioration of environmental health conditions*, i.e. severe strain on sanitation and sewage systems, water supply, and air. Smoke from wood burning is known to be a health risk for the upper respiratory tract. When displaced and refugee women have to walk long distances to gather fuel wood, they risk physical violence including rape.
* *Strife between the resident population and the temporary camp dwellers*, with political and protection consequences. The presence of large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees leads to fierce competition for natural resources, often made worse by the failure of “temporary” settlers to follow local resource management principles and regulations.

Settlement experts noted that on environmental grounds, there would often be a preference to disperse migrants or refugees into smaller settlements, which place less stress on natural resources. However, “Environmental considerations hardly play a role in the preference of many host governments for large camps. Defence and interior ministries typically determine  
the location and size of camps, basing their decision on security considerations  
and practical concerns. In addition, they were rarely inclined to grant sites in  
areas where refugees can find a sustainable livelihood, which may become an added inducement to stay longer”.

Main aspects of environmental impactof major settlement activities were reported to be *in descending order[[10]](#footnote-10)*:

1: Deforestation.  
2: Degradation and loss of grazing land/ground cover.  
3: Water Degradation.  
4: Reduction of regional biodiversity.  
5: Reduction of land under agricultural production.  
6: Accumulation of human waste, garbage, or harmful chemicals and pesticides.  
7: Air pollution.

Although the relative importance of these factors may have changed in the 25+ years since the Symposium, experience of settlement interventions up to the current time suggests that they all remain important and should be areas of focus for evaluators.

A major challenge facing evaluators with regard to forming authoritative findings and recommendations on environmental factors is the fragmented evidence base. To date, evaluators and researchers have tended to treat these factors as peripheral to the key objectives of UN interventions and have investigated them through disconnected approaches, often drawing on limited sets of case studies.

Conclusions of such case studies have often recorded negative effects of refugee settlements. For example, in Jordan, a major recipient country of refugees, the main negative environmental impacts of refugees (collated from several studies) focus on pressure on clean water and infrastructure, ground water pollution, air pollution, increasing solid waste quantities and noise rates. One report[[11]](#footnote-11) calculates that Syrian refugees (including non-camp refugees) have contributed to increase the solid waste quantity by 340 tons daily across Jordan, which has burdened the solid waste management sector especially in the main hosting cities such Mafraq, Irbid and Amman.

In addition to the many environmental challenges already identified at the Symposium more than 25 years ago, more recent research activities have provided the basis for growing awareness of climate effects on large scale settlements. For example, it has been summarised[[12]](#footnote-12) that “the status quo of leaving the stateless population exposed and susceptible with limited capacity to adapt is not going to work if states wish to adapt to climate change impacts”. This indicates the importance of including a climate adaptation perspective in settlement programmes. This is particularly the case since such settlements are often located in environmentally poor locations  particularly prone to extreme weather events, such as heavy rains and floods, droughts, extreme cold or cyclones[[13]](#footnote-13).

The relationship between climate change and environmental risks posed by refugee settlements is reported by another set of case studies[[14]](#footnote-14). “Though there is widespread recognition that climate change and environmental protection should be a priority, there is not yet a genuine environmental strategy to tackle issues of climate change adaptation and mitigation and which defines operational activities. The responsibility of humanitarian organisations in relation to environmental issues remains weak. This raises questions about their responsibility to “Do no harm”. Despite the gradual introduction of the term “environment” as a cross-cutting issue in policies and strategies, environmental issues are generally perceived as being separate to the humanitarian sector and addressed mostly by development actors. However, as shown in these case studies, humanitarian crises can have a significant impact on the natural environment, particularly when these are prolonged crises”.

Recently, some more focussed “technical’ research activities have attempted to expand the range and types of evidence available. Maystadt[[15]](#footnote-15) (et al) analysed data on the location of refugee camps, together with the annual variation in their size, across Africa between 2000 and 2016. They related the location and annual population of these camps with satellite-based indicators including not only standard indices of vegetation cover, but also more direct measures of deforestation, land use, agricultural productivity, and vegetation burning, as well as modelled population changes. Using the “Hansen dataset “ of annual tree cover loss, specifically designed to capture evidence of deforestation by satellite, they found that a 10% increase in the presence of refugees was associated with a 16% fall in tree cover. Further, their “results indicate that such refugee-induced deforestation is not driven by vegetation burning or the abandonment of land by the hosting population but seems to be associated with a conversion from forest-dominant to crop-dominant land”.

An important contribution towards scientific and technically based research[[16]](#footnote-16) has recently enhanced the understanding of specific vulnerabilities of refugee camps, when compared with “counterfactual” sites in proximate locations. According to its authors, “This research offers three contributions to climate-sensitive decision-making in refugee contexts: a quantitative, integrated assessment of the environmental and climatic exposure of refugee camps relative to other camps and border sites within each country; identification of the main drivers of exposure in each refugee camp and across a country; and methods that are designed to be iterated in novel refugee contexts with potentially different drivers of exposure, which has been a key limitation of previous studies on refugee camp exposure. While the location and management of refugee camps is driven by a variety of geophysical, climatic, and socioeconomic factors, including logistic and political concerns associated with aid distribution and land tenure, this research offers a new way to assess the exposure implications of camp site selection and hopefully will inform more climate-sensitive camp planning and management practices going forward”. Whilst the technical methodology of this research offers significant advances over more common case study approaches, the challenge remains how to translate such specialised approaches into findings and recommendations, which can be readily interpreted and adopted by project designers, managers and evaluators.

UNHCR is the major UN entity responsible for helping to ensure the well-being of refugees. However, national governments are mandated to decide where settlements will be established and how large they might be. Such decisions are often taken by government in the hope that settlements will be relatively short-lived, but this is rarely the case.

In order to strengthen approaches to understanding and improving environmental considerations of its settlement activities UNHCR (with CARE) published the FRAME toolkit[[17]](#footnote-17), providing a modular Framework for Assessing, Monitoring and Evaluating the environment in refugee-related operations. This includes modules on environmental assessment, rapid environmental assessment, community environmental action planning, environmental indicator framework and evaluation.

As stated in its introduction, the Toolkit[[18]](#footnote-18) consists of a series of analytical, planning and management tools, which are intended to help ensure:

* timely collection of baseline data on the state of the environment that will help influence decisions and actions taken at all phases of a relief operation;
* that potentially negative impacts of a refugee or returnee operation are identified and appropriate remedial steps taken to counteract or at least limit the possible impacts;
* appropriate monitoring systems are put in place;
* affected communities are consulted and helped to be part of the project or programme process, through the use of a series of participatory approaches and tools;
* activities are routinely evaluated, with the results being used to further improve project or programme management;
* data are analysed, lessons are learned and information is shared;
* government authorities are informed of decisions taken or recommended following conclusion of a particular activity; and
* that the investigations will have been undertaken using technically sound and appropriate guidance.

The Toolkit is an extensive and detailed set of guidance, covering a comprehensive range of issues, methods and procedures. It is a high-quality resource and reflects decades of practical experience and understanding of the key current issues and methods in environmental management of settlements. However, the comprehensive nature of the Toolkit suggests the need for some caution in its use. Whilst rapid environmental assessment as part of project preparation processes is limited in its operational requirements, implementing the full procedures of other modules may present severe challenges in terms of time, human resources and finance. This is particularly the case for the environmental indicator framework. This is both comprehensive and detailed and it seems optimistic to expect that full, timely and accurate collection of all of the intended data will be the norm. Exploring the extent and quality of indicator data actually collected will therefore be an early task for evaluators (whether at mid-term or completion). A high-quality database covering most or all of the many and diverse indicators would be a major resource, while a partial and/or poor-quality database will require evaluation “workarounds”.

One limitation of the Toolkit is that its Module 7[[19]](#footnote-19) on Evaluation is rather generic and does not relate UNHCR’s specific environmental evaluation tasks to earlier steps in the organisation’s framework approach, such as Environmental Assessment, Rapid Environmental Assessment, Community Environmental Action Planning and Environmental Indicators. The Toolkit would benefit from an update clarifying the relationship between the different modules and particularly to suggest options for evaluators in the event that the recommended processes have not been fully followed at the expected quality.

***Section 2: Strategies for strengthening evaluation of the environmental effects of large-scale settlements***

* ***Raising the profile of environmental effects in settlement projects***

An evaluation office will be greatly strengthened if its parent institution takes measures to raise the entity’s profile and performance with regard to managing, monitoring and evaluating its environmental effects. This process may take some time, since it presents managers with the need to balance the costs of strengthening with the perceived value-added. A brief overview of entity environmental assessment systems shows that some (such as UNHCR with its FRAME toolkit) have already taken major initiatives, whilst others have not yet moved far in this direction. Some measures, which will help environmental evaluators of settlement activities, are discussed below.

* ***Presence of UN entity environmental specialist covering settlement projects***

The evaluation task will be facilitated by the presence of an environmental specialist within the management chain of the settlement project. Few such projects are likely to have an “in house” specialist, but document review suggests that increasing awareness of environmental issues has led some entities to appoint such a specialist at regional or national level. In such cases, it is probable that environment-focussed activities have already been introduced into the project and that the results of these are monitored (to some extent).

Evaluation offices should ensure that such institutional factors and their implications are assessed for settlement projects and that appropriate recommendations are made to entity management, including for the appropriate location of environment specialists. In this way, evaluations will not only inform specific projects and related activities but will also have the cumulative effect of ensuring that adequate attention is given to environmental considerations in project concepts, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. A key factor in this overall process should be consistent attention to management responses and follow up through management action records, with a particular focus on key staff allocations, which often pose significant challenges in the face of competing priorities.

* ***Consistent and specific inclusion of environmental considerations in evaluation Terms of Reference***

It is common for evaluation ToRs to be heavily focussed on gathering evidence to enable rating of progress towards the major project objectives against the DAC criteria. In many cases, this leads to the inclusion of environmental considerations as only a marginal and unspecific evaluation component. This in turn means that these considerations often receive relatively little attention by evaluators and are not assessed at an appropriate level of detail. Furthermore, responding to the ToR, the evaluation team may not include any specific environmental expertise, leading to lack of detail in the evaluation report and weak or absent recommendations to strengthen approaches in this area. To promote appropriate inclusion of environmental considerations in ToRs as well as in evaluation teams, this document proposes matching these to the DAC criteria (See below). If this practice is consistently followed, it is anticipated that both evaluation ToRs and teams will be strengthened, leading over time to better evaluations and improved project approaches and results.

* ***Ensure appropriate inclusion of environmental expertise in evaluation teams***

As well strengthening ToRs to ensure coverage of environmental considerations, UN entity evaluation offices should require evaluation teams to include an appropriate level of environmental expertise within the overall budget and time allocation. This needs to be carefully considered in terms of the range of environmental aspects to be reviewed within the context of the overall scope of issues to be addressed and the evaluation budget. Improved ToRs with suitable specification of environmental considerations will not deliver better coverage if insufficient expert time is allocated to assess how these considerations have been addressed. This poses a threat to strong inclusion of the environment, since there is often a substantial disconnect between the limited budget allocated for evaluation and the scope of issues to be addressed. In such cases, evaluation teams will tend to focus their efforts on primary project objectives, followed by core “cross cutting” issues such gender and human rights. Accordingly, since project evaluations usually have limited resources, the inclusion of an “environmental specialist” is often seen as an unaffordable luxury and the task is left to a generalist with some relevant experience.

This contributes to a “vicious circle”. Since there is no specialist dealing with the environment in the evaluation team, there is no incentive to require detailed attention in the ToRs. This promotes marginalization of such effects in evaluation implementation and reporting, which gives the impression that there few noteworthy issues. This circle is reinforced by relatively “low key” approaches to environment in recommendations and annual evaluation reports. An important challenge resulting from this is the lack of cumulative evidence on environmental effects, which is addressed below.

* ***Address lack of cumulative evidence on environmental effects***

A key challenge affecting consistent coverage of environmental considerations in many UN entities is the fact that project evaluations (Mid Term and Final) are decentralised. The implications of this vary across entities. In some, it means that the EO has limited involvement other than rating the final report. It may influence the evaluation through guidelines or ad hoc advice on request, but it does not develop the Terms of Reference or approach, for example through determining the key evaluation questions. In other entities, although final evaluations are paid for by the project, they are largely managed by the EO, which gives it a far stronger input.

Regardless of the institutional structure and processes of the concerned entity, it is often the case that an informal “standard budget” emerges for decentralised evaluations. This is not related to the specifics of the project and is often too low to ensure adequate coverage of all aspects. In such cases, important underlying issues, such as gender and environment are likely to be limited to marginal coverage with weak evidence bases. Since these areas are not seen as core project deliverables, implementing managers may be satisfied with such evaluations, since they see their primary accountability as contributing towards specified long-term objectives. With regard to environmental considerations, the cumulative effect of numerous project evaluations with weak coverage is to confirm to managers that the topic need not receive priority at any stage of the project cycle - design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

* ***One proposed response to limited evaluation of environmental considerations : Using meta evaluations to promote a strategic approach to project and evaluation strengthening***

Once the processes described above become routine within complex organisations, they are difficult to change. Where systemic weaknesses are highlighted only by disconnected sets of decentralised evaluations, it is difficult for an EO to raise them as a major concern to top management. This reduces the extent to which an evaluation office can fulfil one of its key roles, as a catalyst for positive institutional, international, regional and country level change. This cannot be generated only by improved methods for evaluation of individual projects, but by a more strategic approach, which can assess and promote system- wide improvements over time. Such positive changes should be clearly visible in medium to long term field level environmental results.

One strategic approach would be to establish a systematic programme of **meta-evaluations** on key themes raised by the entity’s project-level evaluation reports. Under this, the EO would commission or conduct a meta evaluation on the basis of all individual midterm and final evaluations reports in the sector, which have been approved within a set period of time. This period could best be defined in terms of institutional funding cycles, which are often of four or five years and are likely to produce enough project evaluations to permit sound aggregation of findings.

In “broad brush” terms, these **meta-evaluations** would address such issues as:

* Extent to which individual evaluations have assessed environmental effects of large settlement projects
* Identified strengths and weaknesses of large settlement projects with regard to their environmental effects
* Quality and extent of evidence from monitoring systems to support this assessment
* Quality and extent of overall body of evidence reported by evaluators to support this assessment
* Proposed changes to strengthen the evidence base on environmental effects
* Proposed changes to strengthen management of environmental effects of large settlement projects
* Allocation of institutional responsibilities and resources necessary to strengthen evaluation of aggregate (positive and negative) environmental effects
* Targeted debriefing of key high-level stakeholders to generate ownership and momentum for essential improvements.

Such **meta-evaluations** would be primarily desk-based, utilising document review and electronic interviews with key stakeholders within and outside the entity. Since they are not expected to require field work missions, it should be possible to pursue meta-evaluations as a cost-effective way of continuously strengthening both field level activities and their evaluation. In view of their high potential contribution to the effectiveness of both projects and their evaluation, Evaluation Offices should create an adequate funding window to ensure that environmental effects can be kept under continuous review.

* ***Assessing environmental effects of joint programmes***

Large-scale humanitarian crises are often addressed through joint programmes, including UN entities and other implementers, notably national and non-governmental bodies. Such programmes make evaluation of non-core objectives such as environmental effects highly challenging, particularly if these are unexpected or unplanned. The initial decision is whether to undertake individual evaluations for each entity covering its main operational areas or to undertake a more ambitious joint evaluation of the entire project.

The challenges and benefits of joint evaluations have been widely discussed. In 2014, UNEG published a Resource Pack on Joint Evaluations, which includes detailed guidelines and a toolkit. The Pack has specific guidance on approaching human rights and gender in joint evaluations, but not for environmental considerations or even climate change. The resource pack spans a total of 135 pages and it is not feasible to summarise it here. Evaluation Offices considering joint evaluations of settlement projects are therefore referred to the Resource Pack for more detailed consideration and planning.

However, some additional challenges for joint evaluation of environmental considerations in humanitarian settlement projects are presented below. To develop a consistent joint evaluation approach may be complicated by different institutional systems and reporting requirements. In most cases, specific roles and responsibilities are given to each individual entity in the project. Managing environmental effects of the intervention may be one such role. A major challenge can arise when one entity is responsible both for specific environmentally focussed components and for evaluating overall effects in this area. Such a structure can give rise to “compartmentalization,” under which environmentally focussed components (e.g. creation of woodlots and associated capacity building) are specifically and “internally” evaluated, without assessing their effects on overall project outcomes. For example, a woodlots project may be evaluated as successful in meeting its own targets (numbers trained, area covered, number of trees), but these may contribute little to the overall project results in terms of sustainability or progress towards impacts. Conversely, the entity leading on environment may be reluctant to evaluate effects in this area of the overall settlement project, as this could be seen as infringing on the mandate of other project partners.

With regard to institutional systems and procedures among joint implementers, there may be important differences among participating UN bodies and outside partners. For example, one entity may require environmental screening during the design process for all large settlements, another may require some level of Environmental Impact Assessment, while others may have no statutory requirements. Further, non-UN funders may also have varying approaches to project design and evaluation concerning environmental effects. For example, some funders may require all of their activities to be assessed for effects towards and from climate change. Other funding partners, such as the GEF and GCF, have specific evaluation requirements and standards, which need to be adhered to for joint programmes to which they have contributed (although it appears these bodies have not been active in the field of settlement programmes).

* ***Evaluating against the DAC evaluation criteria***

**Introduction**

Earlier outputs of this ESI assignment showed that both UN entity evaluation offices and document review highlighted weaknesses in assessing environmental effects of UN supported projects and programmes. One underlying factor in this challenge was identified as the predominant focus of evaluation Terms of Reference on rating performance against the “DAC

Evaluation criteria.” Since environmental effects are usually not specified as an important area for evaluation attention on the basis of the DAC criteria, they often receive limited attention and appear only marginally in the assessment of performance. The ESI working group therefore proposed that one straightforward way to improve this situation would be to “match” environmental considerations to the DAC criteria. This section outlines a first impression of how this might be done with regard to “large settlement” projects, which are often established to deal with refugee flows, but may also serve people who are internally displaced by natural hazards or human-induced disasters.

***Using the DAC criteria and Theories of Change to evaluate the contribution of project phases***

An evaluation which includes the environmental effects of a large-scale settlement project[[20]](#footnote-20) (or programme) will assess three phases:

* Pre-project - the project concept and design
* Implementation
* Post project – sustainability and progress towards impacts.

Most modern humanitarian and development-related projects are based on a Theory of Change (ToC), which sets out expectations of the eventual **impact** – (most of which will become evident after the project, building on **sustainability**), together with activities (design) and Implementation (**efficiency and effectiveness**) expected to contribute towards the impact. Although settlement projects are often in response to emergencies and may therefore have a shorter conceptualisation and design phase than conventional development interventions, they should still require a Theory of Change as part of the project funding document. This will be focussed on the main objectives, but should also cover assumptions and potential negative effects, including those on the environment and measures to be taken to mitigate these. There are also sometimes positive effects achieved, for example, by capacity building and environmental activities jointly implemented by settlement residents and neighbouring communities.

The ToC will a key starting points of the evaluation, since it provides essential information on the intentions of all phases of the project, which can help structure assessment of performance against the DAC criteria (see Section y below). If there is no ToC, the evaluation should create a retrospective one, to be agreed with project managers, to help structure and calibrate its assessment of achievements.

***Relating project phases to the DAC criteria***

The “DAC criteria” are integral to most international evaluations. As noted above, earlier phases of this ESI guidance work have shown that both external reviews and UNEG member offices regard the evaluation of environmental considerations as weak across the UN system. In order to strengthen this aspect, it has been proposed that these considerations should be related to DAC criteria and ratings, which is expected to “mainstream” them into evaluation processes. Definitions of the current criteria are provided in Box 1 below.

**Box 1: Brief definitions of the DAC evaluation criteria**

**Relevance:** *The extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries’, global, country and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change.*

**Coherence:** *The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution.*

**Effectiveness:** *The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives,**and its results, including any differential results across groups.*

**Efficiency:** *The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely*

**Impact:** *The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.*

**Sustainability:** *The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue.*

**Project design phase**

***Project Design Phase***

The design phase provides the foundation for setting project objectives and the activities and processes intended to contribute towards reaching them. It is therefore a crucial focus for assessing the **relevance** of the original programme concept. A design, which focusses exclusively on humanitarian needs without considering and mitigating environmental effects, is unlikely to be assessed favourably in terms of **relevance**. This is particularly the case since the negative effects of many earlier settlement interventions have been documented and widely discussed. Evaluators should also be aware that the relevance of a project (in this case with regard to its environmental effects) may change over time. For example, settlements are often considered as a short-term solution to a major humanitarian challenge. This may rule out systematic contributions towards environmental management, which need to build on specific issue identification, development of strategies for capacity building and of joint processes with neighbouring communities. Over time, there is often an increasing degree of recognition that settlements will be there for the medium to long-term and that options to promote sustainable livelihoods for refugees and neighbouring communities should therefore be developed and implemented. This would require amendment of the Theory of Change and expansion of implementation approaches to ensure that the project continues to be relevant to the revised understanding of its scope and timescale.

The design phase should also be assessed in terms of the **coherence** of the concept and design. For example, location of a large settlement in an area, which has previously been assessed as environmentally fragile, is unlikely to be rated positively in terms of **coherence**. However, evidence from numerous evaluations and expert discussions suggests that such locations are often favoured by Governments for emergency settlements, for political or security reasons. Where this is the case, the potential environmental damage may require strong mitigation measures. If these are not present in the project design, its coherence will be reduced. In such cases, evaluators should bear in mind that project managers may need to modify the original design over time, to retro-actively strengthen attention to the environment.

***Key evaluation questions for the project design phase:***

In order to assess key aspects of the design phase in the context of project **relevance** and **coherence**, the following questions are suggested:

*a: Was any form of EIA (EA, REA) or environmental safeguards review conducted prior to project approval?*

*b: If not, why not? Was there any explanation? Was it formally stated that the settlement would have no environmental effects, either positive or negative?*

*c: If an EIA (EA, REA) or environmental safeguards review was undertaken, were any environmental effects anticipated?*

*d: If no, what explanation was given for the lack of such effects?*

*e: If negative environmental effects were anticipated, were mitigation activities planned to reduce or eliminate these? If so, was a system put in place to measure and monitor the effects of these?*

*f: If positive environmental effects were anticipated, were activities planned to maximise these? If so, was a system put in place to measure and monitor the effects of these?*

*g: Overall, what system has been put in place to measure and monitor environmental effects of the settlement project? How well has this system been implemented? What activities will the project implement to ensure continuity of this system after project completion?*

*h: To what extent are potential environmental effects and their mitigation included in the project Theory of Change?*

***Project implementation phase:***

During this phase, the project design is put into action, laying the foundation for the intended sustainable benefits and eventual impacts. The Theory of Change provides details of cause-and-effect pathways leading towards these impacts and will provide an analytical framework informing evaluation methods and analysis. However, evaluation findings and discussions among practitioners suggest that environmental considerations are often absent or weak in the Theory of Change of major settlement projects. This is likely to reflect weaknesses in the project design, affecting not only relevance and coherence of the activity, but also its implementation performance. However, it is possible for a strong implementation team to “rescue” a poorly designed project. This may be evident through approved changes in implementation approaches and revised interim targets. These may have been reported by any mid-term review or evaluation. In principle, the Theory of Change should be updated to reflect such changes, but in many cases project managers “park” the ToC until the time of final evaluation and it is not used as a living document.

Since environmental considerations may be absent or weak in the project design and its Theory of Change (if any), they may also not be well observed and reported by monitoring systems. To ensure that they are not overlooked, evaluators should ensure that at least the following evaluation questions are addressed in their work (whether in Mid Term or Final Evaluations).

***Key evaluation questions for the project implementation phase:***

*a: Which aspects of the environment have been affected by project implementation and to what extent?*

Although each interaction between a major new settlement and its environment may be considered unique, observations of previous projects suggest the following key areas for investigation:

* Deforestation.
* Degradation and loss of grazing land/ground cover
* Water Degradation or loss of supply
* Reduction of regional biodiversity
* Reduction of land under agricultural production
* Accumulation of undesirable human waste, garbage, or harmful chemicals and pesticides
* Air pollution.

Other areas may need to be added to the above to take account of specific project circumstances.

*b: Were any measures taken to reduce or reverse identified harmful effects?*

For example, measures to enable settlement inhabitants to produce fuel wood on specific plots or to reduce consumption of wood through use of fuel-efficient stoves.

*c: How well did these measures work?*

Monitoring data on the results of measures taken to reduce environmental effects should have been collected by the project. This will provide key data sets for the evaluators. If not, some effects (such as reduced rate of deforestation) may be traceable using external data sets covering the area, including time series of satellite or aerial imagery. However, such remote sources should ideally be “ground-truthed,” to ensure that they do not give misleading data.

These key questions on implementation results will enable collection of evidence concerning the DAC criterion of project **effectiveness**. Interpreting the speed and cost-effectiveness of results generated by the measures taken will also provide much of the information needed to evaluate **efficiency**.

***Post project (sustainability) phase***

In the case of refugee settlements, the concept of sustainability may be difficult to address. Often, the host government officially views the refugees as temporary “guests,” who are expected to return to their home countries within a relatively short (but undefined) time frame. Large settlements are often defined as temporary facilities and measures to enable refugees to live sustainably may therefore initially even be discouraged. Further, refugees have few legal rights within the national constitution and system and little opportunity to request government services and support. Finally, national authorities may be reluctant to improve the sustainability of such aspects as livelihoods and water supply, for fear of attracting a backlash from national residents in the area, who may feel relatively disadvantaged.

Despite these challenges, it is often the case that large refugee settlements become gradually recognised as long-term facilities, in which case attention is raised over time to implementing measures, which might be needed to assist their **sustainability.** These often include enhanced attention to reducing or reversing environmental damage caused by the concentration of a large population, with few legitimate opportunities to develop sustainable livelihoods. Accordingly, successful minimising of environmental damage, as well as positive results from such activities as refugee-managed wood lots, should be counted as progress towards the eventual **impact** of the project.

In the case of internally displaced persons (such as those forced to move by natural or human-made disasters), in principle they have legal rights to services and assistance (unlike refugees). They may therefore be able to gain service provision and employment opportunities over time, including in such areas as agriculture. In the absence of these possibilities, they may gradually redistribute themselves across the country, reducing the scale and effects of the settlement.

***Key evaluation questions concerning project sustainability:***

*a: Is it intended that the settlement should remain in its current location? If so, will it be modified in any way? If so, how? What changes in environmental effects are expected from any modifications?*

As noted above, with regard to large refugee settlements, these are often located in areas, which have provided few livelihood opportunities for the national population. Lack of environmental sustainability is therefore highly predictable. This may be improved by a range of activities in such fields as renewable energy, water management and small-scale agriculture. These may require modification of the physical structure of the settlement.

*b: Will (the UN entity) retain the same management responsibilities for the settlement in future? If not, how will its role change? What measures are proposed to include environmental considerations in any transition process?*

As the settlement gradually becomes accepted as a long-term fixture, changes with regard to its management are likely to occur, with increasing acceptance of responsibility by national, regional and local government agencies. Evaluators should assess the proposed implementation of any stated plans, in terms of the financial and institutional capacities to deliver them, as well as any proposed “handover” process from the UN entity to national government. Since environmental management is rarely a lead component in large scale settlement projects, evaluators should pay particular attention to the extent to which it has been included in plans for transition to increased national ownership.

*c: Have any specific steps been taken to strengthen environmental sustainability of the settlement in the following areas?*

* Deforestation.
* Degradation and loss of grazing land/ground cover
* Water Degradation
* Reduction of regional biodiversity
* Reduction of land under agricultural production
* Accumulation of undesirable human waste, garbage, or harmful chemicals and pesticides
* Air pollution
* (Other 1)
* (Other 2)

The seven areas specified above have been commonly reported as environmental effects of major settlement projects and should therefore be reviewed by evaluators. There may be additional locally specific effects, which will also need to be addressed.

*d: Which body will be responsible for monitoring environmental effects after project funding is closed? Has its capacity and mandate to implement this task been ensured by the programme? Who will bear the cost of this monitoring?*

Even if a credible plan is made to ensure environmental sustainability of the settlement when UN support is reduced or phased out, there is a danger that progress towards the intended effects will not be appropriately monitored. This requires expertise, systems, funding and commitment. This is particularly the case with regard to very demanding monitoring systems, such as that proposed by the UNHCR FRAME Toolkit for environmental indicators. In order to ensure that the personnel and systems are in place in time to take over monitoring responsibilities, measures should have been taken from early stages of project implementation – particularly through capacity building and promotion of changes needed to institutional mandates. Such elements should have been included in the original project design. In assessing future monitoring of environmental sustainability, evaluators will therefore need to match future intentions to measures already taken to make these possible. Development evaluations frequently show that sustainability (and impact) scores less highly than earlier stages of a project. A common factor in this relative weakness is an excessive project focus on outputs and outcomes, with inadequate consideration to where these are leading. This focus may promote failure to take timely measures to enable sustainability. By the time of project closure, evaluators should be able to identify a functional monitoring system covering environmental effects.

*e: To what extent has the settlement been brought into line with national environmental management policies, strategies and systems? If progress in this respect is limited, are there any implementable plans to incorporate the settlement into national approaches in the foreseeable future?*

It may be the case that the UN entity mandate with regard to settlement management is extended beyond the original project, into a new phase. This will provide a form of “deferred sustainability.” However, it should be considered that environmental effects of the settlement may stretch well beyond its boundaries. For example, biodiversity loss from damaged habitats may affect regions within the host country, or even beyond. For this reason, environmental monitoring and evaluation should not be entirely site-specific, but should take account of “knock-on” effects from the settlement. This will best be done by progressively increasing collaboration between project and national environmental management systems; with the ultimate intention of locating settlements within the country-wide system. Over time, incorporation of settlements into national planning systems can be regarded as an **institutional impact** of the project, which may eventually lead to actual environmental benefits as part of the overall impacts to which the project has contributed.

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2. Op. cit. P42. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Op. cit. P8. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Op. Cit. IFAD. Rome. 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For example: *Application of Geospatial Methods in Evaluating Environmental Interventions and Related Socioeconomic Benefits*. Anand, A., Batra, G. In: Uitto, J.I., Batra, G. (eds) *Transformational Change for People and the Planet. Sustainable Development Goals Series*. Springer, Cham. 2022.

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    [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See, for example, *The Ecological Footprint of Refugees* (website). Jean-Francois Maystadt. 2020. IOB, Antwerp. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Indexing climatic and environmental exposure of refugee camps with a case study in East Af*rica. Michael Owen, Andrew Kruczkiewicz & Jamon Van Den Hoek. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. FRAME Toolkit: Framework for Assessing, Monitoring and Evaluating the environment in refugee-related operation. UNHCR. CARE. 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Op. Cit. Volume 1, P6. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Some documents list this as Module 6, which is otherwise missing. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. To avoid confusion, this guidance refers to “projects.” This is taken to include programmes and the same processes will apply to these. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)