2. Background

The linkage between disasters and environmental damage is recognized as important to predicting, preventing and mitigating the impact of disasters. Efforts are beginning to apply theory and experience to reducing possible negative environmental impacts during disasters. The UNHCR has developed, and continues work on, guidelines and procedures for dealing with the environmental impact of refugee displacements. CARE International has begun a multi year program to integrate environmental factors into its disaster preparedness and response capacity. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), through the USAID supported Biodiversity Support Program (BSP), is also addressing links between disasters and the environment. These efforts are, however, limited in scope and singular, rather than part of a broad trend by humanitarian assistance organizations to include the environment as an integral and routine part of disaster mitigation and response.

Accurate and timely data, and a conceptual framework to understand this data and from which to define response actions, are key to mounting effective relief programs. Relief assistance cannot be effective if managers and decision makers exclude, or are unaware of, critical factors such as the environmental impacts of the disaster or relief actions.

Being ignorant of, or purposefully disregarding, the environmental impacts of relief operations also conflicts with two guiding principles for humanitarian assistance[2]. The first is that relief operations should, if possible, “do no harm.” Operations that don’t consider environmental impact are likely to do harm. This harm is likely to be unanticipated,

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An option is to only conduct an Initial Environmental Evaluation (IEE), the first step in an EIA. The IEE seeks to identify salient environmental issues and to highlight which issues need further assessment. Yet, using the IEE as a stand alone process, separate from a full EIA, presents the same problem of truncating or shortening the full EIA: one risks missing or misstating environmental impact since the IEE is only an initial, not a comprehensive, assessment process.

Contextual Differences:
Developmental & Disaster Environmental Assessments

Development	Disasters
1. Legal requirement often exists (country &/or donor)	1. Rarely a legal requirement but some donors may ask for it
2. Deliberate & pro-active	2. Reactive
3. Will take time, be thorough & extensive: needs comprehensive data collection	3. May need to be partial in coverage
4. "No project" option is a possible outcome	4. "No project" outcome is not an option
5. Project launch planned	5. Sudden onset
6. Location chosen	6. Unpredictable location
7. Duration planned	7. Uncertain duration
8. Beneficiary population identifiable & static	8. Beneficiary population heterogeneous & dynamic
9. Environmental goals may be made compatible with socio-economic ones	9. Priority given to "life saving" activities sometimes difficult to reconcile with environmental goals

Source: UNHCR and CARE International

response requirements and specific impact on humans. In a sense, the context statement serves as a summary of the emergency situation and highlights salient factors which can frame or impact an environmentally aware response.

The context statement also allows identification of environmental aspects of the emergency which may require specific technical responses. An example would be an emergency with a hazardous chemical spill, which would require a specific specialist and technical response above and beyond the core focus of the REA on human impacts.

A draft context statement format can be found at the end of the paper.

6.2 Rapid Identification of Current Demands on the Environment

The identification of current demands on environmental resources is accomplished through a rating of how well the disaster victims' basic needs are being met. Needs that are not being adequately met pose the greatest immediate threat to the environment and require attention in assistance planning and provision. For example, if cooking energy needs are not met there is a high risk of tree cutting and open fires, leading to problems from deforestation and air pollution.

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consequences of relief efforts. Where these consequences are judged to be significant or unacceptable, relief planners then can decide whether not to provide the assistance or to incorporate mitigation actions in the assistance. The process of reviewing possible assistance impacts also contributes to decisions as to what types of assistance are best suited to the situation.

The substance of the Unmet Needs and Impact assessments should be fairly standard across disaster types and locations. On the other hand, identifying potential assistance impacts needs to be based on criteria and matrices that are more specific to expected relief operations. It is also important to avoid the clutter of a one-matrix-fits-all approach, which could serve to confuse rather than simplify the impact assessment process.

7. Rapid Environmental Assessment as a Process

The REA is a simple and straightforward process, relying on observation and common sense rather than technical specialization. The rating process and format are designed for use by non-specialists in the field. At most, the REA requires less than two hours to complete, and thus can be revised and reviewed with ease during a disaster response operation. In addition, most of the basic data and backing analysis for a REA rating are the same as those developed for contingency planning, making it possible to lay much of the REA groundwork before a disaster.

The REA process provides a temporal snapshot of environmental conditions. The straightforward REA format and process means that the rating tables and checklist matrix can be easily redone. This makes the REA ideal for monitoring changes in environmental impact factors over the early stages of a disaster.

Re-rating can be done as often as needed. The results of the re-rating provide both the substance for regular inputs into operations planning and implementation and periodic environmental impact reporting on emergency operations. The assistance impact checklist can be a tool for planning and evaluation staff in developing and reviewing disaster response operations.

8. Who is the Intended User?

The REA is designed to be used by, and of use to, a broad range of people who may be involved in emergency response. The most likely users are emergency response personnel and environmental specialists managing assessments and operations at the field level.

But the REA is more specifically designed to be used by non-specialists, the people who are most likely to be present when an emergent situation turns critical. Raising the environmental sensitivity of these unintended emergency managers is important, as the earlier an issue is

identified in an emergency response the more likely it is that an effective and efficient response will be pursued.

Finally, the REA is intended to be used by disaster-affected communities, particularly as part of a participatory approach to assessment, planning and response. The use of the REA at the community level is best accomplished where a community has a pre-emergency relationship with an assistance organization. But this connection is not a prerequisite, particularly if a community has a coherent governance structure which can be quickly trained in the use of the REA.

9. The REA as Best Practice

Environmental assessment during disasters is not yet a common practice in relief operations. But this can change with the development of a REA process. However, the inclusion of environmental factors in disaster relief requires that any assessment process be broadly accepted and used by NGOs and IOs. If only a few NGOs or IOs pay formal attention to environmental factors while the majority do not, there will be no real impact in reducing the negative linkages which can develop between disasters and relief assistance.

There are two ways to make environmental assessment a formal part of relief operations: (1) create a formal impact assessment standard to be met as a condition for receiving assistance, or (2) use the REA process as a best practice for effective relief operations. An obligatory environmental impact assessment standard is more convenient for funding agencies, but requires a consensus among (at the least) the lead funding agencies. This would take time and delay effective inclusion of environmental factors in foreign disaster management.

The alternative, of establishing a rapid environmental assessment process as a best practice for relief operations, is more practical. A best practice can be proposed by one party and evolve through practical use and collaboration. This evolutionary approach is also practical in that different types of disaster will result in different elements in the impact rating forms, but

crisis. Once this rapid assessment is completed, the more detailed guidance and guidelines developed by UNHCR can come to play in designing and implementing environmentally sensitive operations.

2. The REA can aid partner NGO and UNHCR field staff in identifying specific environmental issues and formulol.oc 3/2001 enting

The REA structure outlined in this paper will be in draft operational form and ready for field testing by the beginning of 2002. The draft REA process will be available at the project web site (www.bghrc.com, Disaster Management). Comments are welcome.

Context Statement
(Draft)

The Context Statement section of the Rapid Environmental Impact Assessment process has

recommended that these capacities (and any from the government) be taken into account in considering whether to initiate a separate response or to work collaboratively with the affected organization.

Existing or Perceived Environmental Concerns

Prototype Unmet Basic Needs Assessment

Unmet Basic Needs Rating Form

Needs	**Needs: met (1) to not met (10)**
Water, including:	
Consumption	
Sanitation	
Energy, including:	
Protection from Climate	
Heating/cooling	
Clothing	
Food	
Processing: food	
Processing: water	
Lighting	
Shelter	
Transport: goods and services to displaced	
Evacuation of waste	
Transport: displaced to goods and services	
Personal Protection	
Safety	
Health, including:	
Acute care	
Water (quality)	
Environmental sanitation	
Nutrition/food assistance	
Vector Control	

Environmental Impact Factor Assessment: Prototype Rating Form and Background

Environmental Impact Factors
Rating of Importance

Criteria	**Rating Range**	**Rating: 1 to 10**
Number of Affected (V)	Low to High	
Duration (time since onset of disaster) (R)	Short to Long?	
Density of affected (V)	Low to High	
Self-Sufficiency (ability of victims to meet needs without recourse to direct extraction from the environment or external assistance) (V)	High to Low	
Environmental Efficiency (whether victims' efforts to meet needs are relatively more or less damaging to the environment) (C)	High to Low	
Homogeneity (V)		
- Social (V)	High to Low	
- Cultural (V)	High to Low	
- Economic (V)	High to Low	
Expectations (what minimum standard of living do the victims expect) (V)	Low to High	
Absorptive Capacity (C)		
- Resources (level of resources are available to the victims without direct and immediate damage to the environment) (C)	High to Low	
- Waste (how well the local environment absorbs waste produced by the victims) (C)	High to Low	
Effectiveness of External Assistance (in covering otherwise unmet needs) (R)	High to Low	
Environmental Fragility (susceptibility of the disaster area to additional immediate damage by victims) (C)	Low to High	

Background to Table Elements

Environmental impact is dependent on the number of persons affected, the duration of the event, and the density of the temporary living conditions. The greater the number affected, and the longer the event the greater the impact. The closer together the victims are crowded,