



## Minutes

### Environmental Assessments Working Group

April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Watch the recording here: <https://youtu.be/hCjIEi7JvYk>

The mission of this working group, gathering 10 NGOs, through its exchanges and sharing of experience, is to help humanitarian actors take better account of the environment in the design of their projects by using environmental assessment tools (in particular NEAT+ but also CEDRIG, EST, OIE, etc.).

**This session presented the analysis done on existing tools and will introduce an ongoing initiative to develop a multisectoral environmental risk analysis matrix.**

#### 1. The REH and the Working Group

The REH ([Réseau Environnement Humanitaire](#)) is a network of francophone humanitarian and development practitioners, working together to reduce the environmental footprint of aid. It exists since 2012, and formalised in 2021. There are over 250 members, including more than 30 organisations. The network has 4 working groups to operationalise its work:

- One on **waste management**
- One on **sustainable procurement**
- One on **environmental assessments**
- One on **carbon**

The WG has been around since 2021, and its aim is to help members of the WG and the rest of the sector to use environmental screening tools. Initially, the WG focussed on the [NEAT+](#), but now they have also explored other tools, such as the [CEDRIG](#) and the [EST](#), which will be presented below. To help the sector, the WG has developed video [tutorials](#) for the NEAT+ (in French and in English), as well as tested and provided feedback on the NEAT+ in [2022](#) and in [2023](#). The WG has also been a member of the NEAT+ Steering Committee since its creation.

The current members of the WG are: Action Contre la Faim, Handicap International/Humanity & Inclusion, Médecins sans Frontières, Oxfam, ACTED, Première Urgence Internationale, French Red Cross, Netherlands Red Cross, Solidarités International, Terre des Hommes and Groupe URD.

#### 2. Presentation of the NEAT+ and of the WG's feedback

The [NEAT+](#) (Nexus Environmental Assessment Tool) is a project-level environmental screening tool. It exists in two versions the Rural one (available on Excel and Kobo) and the Urban one (available on an online platform). Originally, the rural version was specifically designed for situations of displacement. The NEAT+ tool combines environmental data with site-specific and activity-based questions to automatically analyze and flag priority environmental risks. Overall, it allows the users and organizations to **understand environmental sensitivities, mitigate risks, and find opportunities** for greener humanitarian operations. It is available in English, Spanish and French (urban version only in English). The WG organised two sessions (one in 2022 and one in 2023) to test out the tool and to provide feedback to the tool developers.

**Feedback on the rural version:** The tool is useful for awareness-raising (especially the environmental sensitivity) and it produces a very useful risk matrix at the end (see picture).

### Operation and maintenance of water systems

Environmental Concerns	Environmental Sensitivity	Potential Activity Impact	Potential Environmental Risk
<b>Key environmental concerns</b>			
The water resources may have a low regenerative capacity. Water scarcity may be an issue.	Low	Low	Low
The water sources may be vulnerable to contamination. Water quality may be an issue.	Low	Medium	Low
<b>Other environmental concerns</b>			
There is low capacity to manage wastewater. Environmental sanitation and disease transmission may be an issue.	High	Medium	High
Natural resources may be scarce and in high demand. This can lead to social conflict.	High	Low	Medium
<b>Mitigation Tips</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular water testing should be utilized to ensure that water remains of a potable quality, or to identify early signs of possible contamination. Testing should occur at various points of the network as contamination can occur in different places.</li> <li>Water leakages wastes water, leads to erosion, increases risks of contamination and creates stagnant pools of water. Visual monitoring (particularly at taps, valves, connections, etc.) or pressure testing can be used to identify potential leakages.</li> <li>Chemicals, such as chlorine or diesel, if inappropriately stored or located can leak or diffuse to the environment. All substances should be stored in approved sealable containers in a covered facility with an impermeable surface.</li> </ul>			

But the tool is incomplete: it is missing modules (health) and many sub modules, and questions and mitigation measures need to be revised in full for relevance and repetition.

Interested in knowing more? Check out our [feedback report](#)

**Feedback on the urban version:** Online version is more user-friendly and you could potentially see others' results in a similar geographic area. But there are big **technical bugs**, and it is a **lengthy** and **heavy** tool, with a complicated final report, such that users can get frustrated.

Overall, the WG thinks that the tool is not functional as it is, that it is incomplete: it is missing modules (health) and many sub modules, and that questions and mitigation measures need to be revised in full.

Interested in knowing more? Check out our [feedback report on Urban NEAT+](#)

### 3. Presentation of CEDRIG and of the WG's feedback

The [CEDRIG tool](#)<sup>1</sup> was developed by the SDC and its main purpose is to assess risks from climate change, environmental degradations and natural hazards at the **strategic/programmatic/project** level. It takes a dual perspective, looking both at environmental and climatic **risks** and **impacts**. It is available in English, Spanish, Russian & French. The WG received a training from the SDC in September from which it formed its feedback.

The WG thinks that the tool can be useful, at a country-office level to do a **full assessment** of environmental risks and mitigation measures. However, it is hard to use at a **project level** for humanitarian projects and it requires **prior environmental knowledge and/or environmental expert** to analyse the risks and propose mitigations measures. As such, it is not adapted to use at project level in humanitarian settings and at the time of project proposal development, so not well suited for the member organisations.

### 4. Presentation of the EST and of the WG's feedback

The [EST](#) (Environmental Stewardship Tool)<sup>2</sup> is a project-level environmental screening tool, developed by CRS and Caritas. It is separated into several steps where it:

- Asks questions on your project and its impact on its environment
- Then transposes this in a risk matrix
- And proposes mitigation measures for sectors

The tool is available in English, Spanish & French.

The WG thinks that the tool, thanks to its format, is **really user- friendly and useful** for field practitioners to conduct a screening at project level and to suggest mitigation measures. However, it is **incomplete** (missing

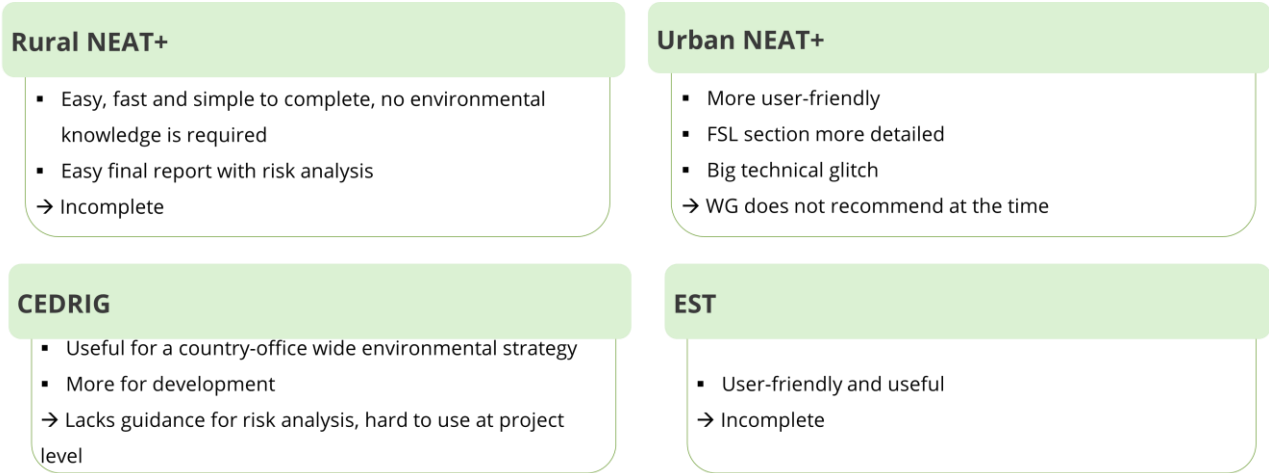
<sup>1</sup> It is currently being revised.

<sup>2</sup> It has just been revised.

sectors) and **might miss some guidance on the last step** of integrating mitigation measures during project design.

### 5. WG feedback and analysis

Overall, the WG’s feedback for the best known or best suited tools in the sector, can be summarised by the following infographic:



And so, it seems that there is no tool that 100% fits the WG’s members’ needs yet. So, the members are not fully satisfied with the existing environmental screening tools and they can see that the **real added value of environmental screenings comes from the field discussion to analyse the risks** related to their context and project activities.

### 6. The multisectoral environmental risk analysis matrix (MERA matrix)

To answer the above analysis, the WG is working on a multisectoral environmental risk analysis matrix (MERA matrix). It is a combination of all valuable inputs from those tools, **it is not a new tool. It is a catalogue of potential environmental risks and mitigation measures per sector and per activity.** The aim of the matrix is:

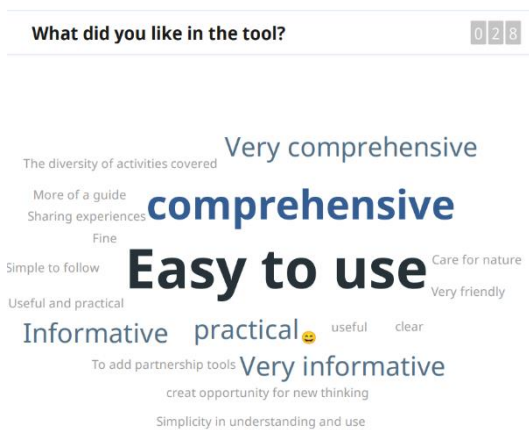
- To support sectorial teams to **analyze** the priority environmental **risks** related to their activities in their specific context (**FSL, WASH, Shelter, Health & MHPSS**)
- To provide recommendations in terms of **mitigation measures** for those risks and guide the teams to select the most relevant ones, based on their capacities to **operationalize** them

You can see a [first draft of the FSL section of the matrix](#).

FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS (FSL)		
SUB-SECTOR/ACTIVITY	POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL RISK	MITIGATION MEASURE
<b>FOOD ASSISTANCE</b>		
In-kind food distribution	Increased greenhouse gas emissions through transportation of aid items	Whenever possible, prioritize procurement of locally-produced food Quantify GHG emissions to ensure appropriate movement planning Rationalise movement planning : limit truck movements, consider truck pooling initiatives Preposition food stocks
	Improper food storage and/or untreated/composted food waste can create hygiene and health problems for people, plants Overcrowding at distribution site and impacts on grassland	Ensure appropriate standard procedures for commodity storage Ensure safe disposal of contaminated and spoiled food items Promote adapted and safe composting practices Ensure appropriate design of distribution rounds and dimensioning of distribution site Ensure appropriate dimensioning of grazing areas for livestock Provide access to safely designed sanitation facilities with proper treatment systems and sanitation chains
	Deforestation induced by increased use of wood and charcoal for cooking food aid items	Distribute clean cooking energy and energy-efficient stoves as standard items (through in-kind or cash-based) Give preference to clean cooking energy over firewood or other traditional solid fuels that are affordable, sustainable, safe and appropriate in the longer term. Distribute selected food items that have a reduced time of cooking Ensure appropriate sensitization around risks and impacts of deforestation

To develop the matrix the WG adopted a collaborative methodology for sector consensus and buy in:

- First, with expertise available in the WG review the content of **existing** tools<sup>3</sup> and consolidate existing content from other tools for each sector and activity
- Then, reach out to have a review of draft matrix with sectorial taskforces of experts, using the **clusters networks**
- Finally, sectoral workshops to review the draft with a wider set of experts (such as the [FSL matrix workshop](#) conducted on April 16th)



The first draft of the matrix will be done for end of June/beginning July for the 3 sectors that started the process (WASH, FSL and Shleter). It will also be disseminated in the autumn.

Initial feedback on the FSL matrix was provided during the workshop, which highlighted the fact that it was easy to use.

The aim is to have an excel that people can download and adapt to their own needs.

**Q:** Is there any monitoring of the mitigation measures and their impacts (for any of the tools)?

**R:** Indeed, it is a very good question, and one of the main obstacle for environmental mitigation at project level. ECHO is working on this as well, with their [voluntary environmental indicators](#), which propose KPIs per sector to monitor this. We also hope that people can use the matrix to follow up on their activities and on the mitigation measures, and that in the operationalization of the mitigation measures, that you can also think about the monitoring. But it is one of the main obstacle indeed.

**R:** One way to prioritise implementation is to integrate a summarized version of the mitigation and management plan from the screening exercise into the general monitoring framework of the project.

**Q:** Sometimes we struggle a lot with perfecting a tool, but all the tools are limited, a tool will never cover everything. Also do you think organisations are working towards suggesting one tool, or several depending on activities?

**R:** Indeed, one tool will never cover everything, as it is very context specific and dependent. What we suggest is to work on capacity-building (as NRC is doing with their trainings for NEAT+) – and in that sense the NEAT+ is quite a good awareness raising tool. As for choosing one tool<sup>4</sup>, the way the WG sees it, is to conduct a NEAT+ or other type of environmental sensitivity, to be aware of the specific risks link to the area of the project, and then to use the matrix to integrate mitigation measures.

**Q:** Does any of the tools presented or MERA consider the analysis and identification of the **external risks (reoccurring flood, drought, etc)** that exist in the area and mitigation measures to them?

**R:** The NEAT+ looks a little bit at climate risks, and so does the matrix. But in the suggestions for the development of NEAT+, this is definitively something to be looking at.

## 7. Next steps for the WG

The WG will:

- Continue **testing and providing feedback** to the tool owners
- Finish the sectoral matrix and develop **missing sectors** (MHPSS, health...)

<sup>3</sup> EST, NEAT+, CEDRIG, ECHO MER, donor recommendations etc.

<sup>4</sup> One participant highlighted: "That's a tricky (and important) question. I fully agree there's no fit-for-all tool, but in practical terms, it's more likely organizations will select one to be able to invest in capacity-building, which is not simple. Where we might have opportunity to add additional tools is for very specific sectors such as mine action".

- Propose the work done for the matrix as an **interim alternative**, and to **start the revision process** for other tools
- Disseminate the matrix throughout the sector and receive feedback

**Thank you all for joining, and if you have any questions, you can reach out to [evalenv@environnementhumanitaire.org](mailto:evalenv@environnementhumanitaire.org)**