



ENVIRONMENTAL DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS: PROMOTING SOUND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN REFUGEE OPERATIONS

A GUIDE TO PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

PART I ENVIRONMENTAL DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS IN REFUGEE OPERATIONS

1. BACKGROUND

The purpose of UNHCR's Environmental Demonstration Projects (EDPs) is to translate UNHCR's Environmental Policy and subsequent **Environmental Guidelines**, and recent lessons learned from field operations (such as the TSEMPRAA Project, 1998), into practice. This action is being spearheaded through applying the four principles outlined in this Environmental Guide for Implementation:

- *Prevention before cure* – prevent environmental destruction or degradation from taking place as this is more efficient, appropriate, and often cheaper, than curing these problems later.
- *Cost-effectiveness* – make the best use of available resources, avoid duplication of effort and ensure that a monetary, or similar, value is attached to all environmental goods and services, so that they are not over-exploited for short-term gains.
- *Integration* – environmental activities should not be viewed on their own. Ultimately, environmental concerns should, whenever relevant, be incorporated into all relevant UNHCR activities.

BOX 1. DEMONSTRATION PROJECT: WHAT'S THAT?

Demonstration projects aim to develop, support and promote activities that contribute to improved environmental management. A broad range of actions can be considered, including:

- Baseline studies, e.g. opportunities and needs to promote an unfamiliar concept, e.g. permaculture.
- Pilot project – e.g. feasibility studies such as opportunities for community forestry.
- Stop-gap – to fill a void where unanticipated funding is urgently needed, e.g. introducing fuel saving measures in emergencies.
- Catalytic – to mobilise funds and generate action for anti-erosion measures.
- Link to country programme – to realign activities that have been supported for many years with new approaches, needs identification and more active participation.

Demonstration Projects are intended to translate UNHCR's Environmental Policy into practice.

Prepared by:

UNHCR Engineering & Environmental Services Section
EES/HOTS01
Case Postale 2500
CH-1211 Geneva 2 Dépôt, Switzerland

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- *Local participation* – refugees and local host communities should benefit from – and be involved in – UNHCR’s environmental activities. Other local stakeholders, including government authorities and departments may be just as important.

Environmental demonstration projects – supported with earmarked funding from UNHCR – are increasingly seen as opportune, appropriate and a cost-effective means of promoting sound environmental management at the country level. Designed to respond to local needs at a given time, EDPs are, to a large extent, community driven, and vary in structure and approach from one situation to another (Box 1). Some take the form of a pilot study, a “testing of the waters”, that allows the rapid collection of baseline data or elaboration of a larger project, for example. Others are catalytic, for example to attract other funding or to enable and mobilise communities to take action that benefits themselves and the environment.

UNHCR’s EDPs – although still relatively few in number – are finding considerable support at the field level. They have also sparked a great deal of interest among donor agencies and implementing partners. Part of the reason for this surge of interest is thought to stem from:

- their simplicity;
- the community level at which they are aimed;
- their relevance – they respond to identified/expressed local needs;
- their ability to produce tangible, often visible results in a short period of time;
- their cost-effectiveness;
- the notion and possibility of replicating successful ideas elsewhere in similar circumstances;
- the fact that if refugees and local people are convinced by the practise being promoted – and benefit from this – they will continue to use this practice, e.g. when they return to their homes; and
- such projects instil a large element of confidence and ownership among project beneficiaries.

2. ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide describes one way in which UNHCR is promoting sound environmental management. It is intended to:

- ☞ describe what UNHCR means in terms of a “Demonstration” project;
- ☞ explain why UNHCR supports and promotes these projects;
- ☞ outline what it expects/wants to achieve through this approach; and
- ☞ provide a step-by-step guide to developing and managing a Demonstration project, outlining a number of issues that need to be taken into consideration at various stages of the project cycle.

This guide is not intended as a manual of project management. While some background information is provided in Part II on project planning – in particular with relation to setting objectives, outputs and indicators – it should not be considered its main purpose. Reference is made to other sources for this (Annex I). Information contained in this guide, however, may help with some elements of project management.

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While some care is of course necessary in ensuring the satisfactory implementation of all phases of a project, users should not feel restricted in their approaches and should always be on the lookout for interesting and stimulating opportunities that might bring positive results. Above all, users should not shy away from simple, common sense practices. Indeed, these are a starting premise for successful projects in many instances.

Designing and managing an EDP does not require extensive specialised training or skills: identifying peoples' needs, finding an appropriate means of responding to these, enabling refugees and others to have a practical role in implementation and management, and close monitoring of progress and impacts, are essential. Knowing when and how to intervene is a key requirement.

3. WHAT COULD CONSTITUTE A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT IN UNHCR?

Far from being a myth to be explored, EDPs are based on a number of simple principles, the main objective of which is to support and encourage meaningful activities that benefit refugees, local people and the environment. As a guideline, the following criteria should be met:

- Support must be requested by and/or agreed with Branch Offices in the respective countries;
- Projects should serve as a catalyst, with funds only intended to meet preliminary phases of an initiative;
- EDPs must demonstrate sound environmental practices;
- Projects are largely expected to be community-developed and driven;
- Refugees and local communities must be addressed in projects;
- EDPs should ideally address several problems/issues - stand alone activities should be avoided;
- Projects should respond to new openings and/or needs;



BOX 2. EXAMPLES OF MODEL PROJECTS

- Sudan – particular focus is given to public awareness raising, energy saving, environmental education and forestry-related activities. A spin-off project is supporting the rehabilitation of former refugee camps in eastern Sudan, again through the active involvement of local communities.
- Djibouti – a programme designed to lessen the burden on women and children, in particular, through the promotion of fuel-efficient stoves, development of local tree nurseries, school-based environmental education and income generation.
- Uganda – enhancing soil quality and conservation through agroforestry, composting and recycling organic wastes, establishment of demonstration plots, and awareness raising.
- Afghanistan – a combination of environmental awareness, promoting sound forestry activities and promoting alternative technologies, including biogas and micro-hydro energy plants.
- Zimbabwe – promoting intensive agriculture through a design system known as permaculture, which involves user needs analyses, demonstration and training, and active monitoring and follow-up.
- Thailand – a combination of anti-erosion measures with the promotion of fuel-efficient stoves and general awareness raising.
- Rwanda – a combination of physical habitat restoration and protection that enables refugees and others to cultivate terraced slopes around Byumba refugee camp.

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- EDPs should be viewed as an opportunity to broaden the geographical coverage of environmental-support activities;
- EPDs should aim to bring rapid impact and visible results; and
- From the outset, the hand over of responsibilities to relevant and appropriate management authorities should be foreseen.

There is no blueprint for designing or managing a Demonstration Project: **no two projects are likely to be the same** (Box 2). If such a blueprint existed, it would of course defeat the purpose of these projects insofar as they are intended to respond to a particular set of needs, at a given place and time.

4. WHY DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS?

Many of the practical activities being developed, supported and promoted through current EDPs are not new to UNHCR. However, an emphasis on promoting community-based initiatives and on encouraging the replication of activities that give tangible and meaningful benefits for people as well as the local environment, make these stand out. Their salient features may be considered as being that:

- projects are increasingly being designed to respond to user needs – as determined through a series of appropriate analyses;
- projects do not (or very rarely) focus on a single activity: there is a strong drive towards integrating a number of complementary activities;
- projects correspond closely with UNHCR's 1996 *Environmental Guidelines*, although projects also include issues such as environmental awareness raising which is increasingly being considered as a key principle that UNHCR should promote;
- there is a strong emphasis on, and requirement to, monitor projects regularly;
- model projects are usually evaluated each year to determine progress and fine tune any activities which are not meeting expectations;
- project ownership is increasingly being decentralised from UNHCR HQ to Branch Offices in terms of design, regular management and monitoring, and towards physical and practical ownership at the community level (refugee and local people), to the extent possible.

5. WHY COMMUNITY-BASED ACTIVITIES?

There is growing acceptance of the fact that approaches, tools and methods that involve end users (in this case refugees and people living around or adjacent to refugee camps/settlements) in identifying their needs, and in designing and managing ensuing projects, produce better alternatives than conventional surveys and inventories.

Important lessons that need to be kept in mind are that:

- ☞ the provision of ready-made packages/projects to communities does not work, which is why no blueprint can be provided for designing or even monitoring a project;

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- ☞ involving communities in any form of natural resource management can be a long, and sometimes difficult, process. However, once this approach has been understood and adopted, progress can be rapid; and
- ☞ when approaches, practices and procedures relating to natural resource management are formulated and agreed upon by the communities (refugee as well as local), they are more likely to be followed and respected. This means that enforcement and compliance requires much less attention and fewer resources. This factor, in turn, may be considered a strong point in favour of making the project more successful and cost-effective, and the results/outputs more relevant and lasting.

6. SOME BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

One of the main issues to address is that whatever practices/techniques are being promoted/supported, must be appropriate to the target communities – different cultural groups might require/prefer different adaptations of stoves, posters, or other tools/materials. In addition – and particularly for refugees – any skills that people learn and adopt while in exile should be capable of being transferred (in terms of skills learned) or transported (perhaps in the case of a fuel-efficient stove) with them, when they return home.

For this reason, it is essential that adequate training and back-up be given throughout the duration of an EDP so that individuals and communities are not only empowered with certain knowledge but that they have the confidence to develop and use these tools/practices on their own and that they will be able to identify problems and circumvent these through a sound understanding of the basic principles of the actions being taken.

Demonstration projects are, of course, **intended to demonstrate success**. Experience has shown the benefits of starting small projects – both in size and number of people one is attempting to reach. Avoid targeting the entire population: given our limited resources, it is more advisable to select 2-3 sub groups – e.g. in different parts of a camp – and concentrate on these. It is better to focus on a small number of people and ensure that the tools/practices being promoted are well accepted by these, than to attempt to reach the whole camp population.



BOX 3. WANT TO DEVELOP AN EDP?

As the above shows, there is no mystique involved, just a few simple, proven principles that need to be addressed. In its simplest form, an EDP goes through a number of steps, starting with:

- An idea: it is best if this comes from the community or is at least developed in collaboration with refugee and local community leaders and representatives;
- Concept discussed with UNHCR Environmental Focal Point;
- Project proposal designed by UNHCR/partner(s), including intended beneficiaries;
- Seek funding;
- Implementation/monitoring;
- Periodic evaluation and realignment;
- Regular and detailed reporting; and
- Feedback from UNHCR to project team and beneficiaries.

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Another important feature of course is visibility. If users are happy with this system, then they should promote it to others. If the project/activity is found to be beneficial, people will get to know about it: one way of measuring such success is through the number of requests received for assistance with starting up similar projects elsewhere. **Demonstrating by doing – and the power of a good example – is a key component of the design.**

In view of the limited amount of funds available, Demonstration Projects are not funded on a continuous basis and rarely for more than two years in succession. This should be realised from the outset and a strategy developed for handing over the project to users or another agency, or for integrating the activities within the Country Programme.

Wise project management is crucial for Demonstration Projects as these are often intended to be the forerunners for more detailed and comprehensive activities. Special attention needs to be given to designing the project, setting clear objectives and being realistic about expected outputs. The selection of a small number of practical, but relevant and meaningful, indicators is especially important. EESS gives particular attention to monitoring and evaluating such projects, often with an annual review being conducted in collaboration with the project management team.

POINTS TO BEAR IN MIND

The following notes, based on experience from field activities, are intended to draw attention to some of the key points to look out for at various stages of a project's cycle.

A Few Basic Design Pointers

- ☞ Demonstration Projects should respond to user needs – which will vary within and between communities, and need to be reviewed with time.
- ☞ Projects should be designed in a practical manner that will not involve high-tech, expensive equipment. As a general rule, equipment is not provided for such projects.
- ☞ Concepts and values conveyed through such projects must be culturally sensitive.
- ☞ Local people, as well as refugees, should benefit from EDPs, but their needs might differ.
- ☞ Involve and highlight a special role for women and/or children.
- ☞ When designing a project, give particular attention to formulating and expressing the objectives, intended outputs and measurable indicators. Keep the latter simple and practical.
- ☞ Incorporate traditional knowledge and practices relating to natural resource management in the project. This can quickly help anchor the project and its ownership with refugees and/or local communities. Even when introducing new ideas or concepts, e.g. permaculture, there is still much to be gained from seeing how existing/traditional knowledge and practices might be woven into the overall activities.

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- ☞ Assets produced as a consequence of project activities, e.g. woodlots, improved swamps for cultivation, wood and forest products, need to be addressed in terms of ownership, user rights, and institutional/community organisational arrangements.
- ☞ Environmental awareness raising should be a high priority: this could be formal and/or non-formal. Many different tools are available to assist with this, including traditional means of story telling and information sharing.

Identify Complementary Activities

- ☞ Demonstration projects are multifaceted: different elements of the project, e.g. promoting fuel-efficient stoves, promoting environmental awareness, planting/managing community woodlots, or promoting income-generating activities based on a sustainable harvest of wild grasses, are integrated towards a common goal (see Box 2).
- ☞ Avoid the project being a stand-alone activity. Link the EDP with the UNHCR Country Programme whenever possible. Also try and link with other relevant national priorities at the district and local levels..

Selection of Implementing Partners

- ☞ The selection of an experienced implementing partner is crucial to the successful launch and continuation of an EDP. Support from local and central government is also essential.
- ☞ Clarify the role of all partners – including UNHCR and communities – from the outset.
- ☞ Local management committees should be established, comprising implementing partners and representatives of all interested beneficiaries and stakeholders. Regular meetings should be held with recordings made of all proceedings.
- ☞ Address problems in a responsible manner: as the intention is to pass on the best information and ensure that users are comfortable and confident with the tools/approaches they are being encouraged to use, do not conceal problems from users. Instead, try and tackle them together to demonstrate to others how projects can be redefined according to obstacles encountered.
- ☞ Envisage hand-over of the project to locals and/or government authorities from the outset.

Monitor and Revisit the Objectives

- ☞ Close, visible and regular monitoring is a must. Be prepared to listen to people as they explain why something may not have worked out as intended. Keep an open mind on new developments stemming from community initiatives.
- ☞ Frequently review the project's impacts: new entry points are often identified in the process. Use the results to address any weaknesses and to improve performance.

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- ☞ Evidence of a project's success will come in many forms, one of the most obvious being requests for assistance/guidance from others not yet involved in the project.
- ☞ Ensure that all stakeholders and beneficiaries are involved and consulted regarding project review and any subsequent reformulation.

Use EDPs Wisely, to Best Advantage

- ☞ Demonstration projects are intended to be catalytic. Funds are provided for short periods only, the intention being that project running costs become absorbed in Country Programmes or in a larger community or government run project.
- ☞ Encourage and facilitate the sharing of information and experiences – good and bad – with those involved in the project as well as other agencies who might have an interest in the subject.

