



# WASH & Environment Positioning Paper

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## Acronyms

ACF	Action Contre la Faim International
CSD	Commission on Sustainable Development
EE	Environmental Education
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EMP	Environment Management Plan
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In its fight against hunger and malnutrition, and its emergency response/preparedness programmes, Action Contre la Faim (ACF) Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programs systematically take into consideration environmental preservation, protection and recovery. However, due to the nature of ACF interventions contexts, some questions raise: when there are no other choices, in which context and upon which criteria can we decide that the fulfilling of short term human needs is more important than the conservation of the environment? Which types of environmental care activities are included in ACF mandate? What can be done to minimize the sometimes necessary negative impact of our WASH activities on the environment?

This Positioning Paper aims at answering those burning questions as well as more formally **establishing the ACF position and implementation methodologies as regards to the different issues related to the environmental care**. The overall purpose of this paper is to:

- Mainstream environmental issues in ACF WASH projects.
- Stand as a platform to develop technical strategies aiming at preserving, protecting and recovering the environment in ACF missions.
- Establish standard approaches according to implementation contexts.
- Emphasise the prioritisation of environmental education and capacity building to increase environmental awareness among beneficiaries and ensure future sustainable self-management.

This WASH & Environment Positioning Paper fits in the more general set of ACF policies, including ACF Technical Policy, ACF WASH Policy, ACF Hygiene Promotion / Health Education Policy, ACF HIV-AIDS Policy and ACF Gender Policy.

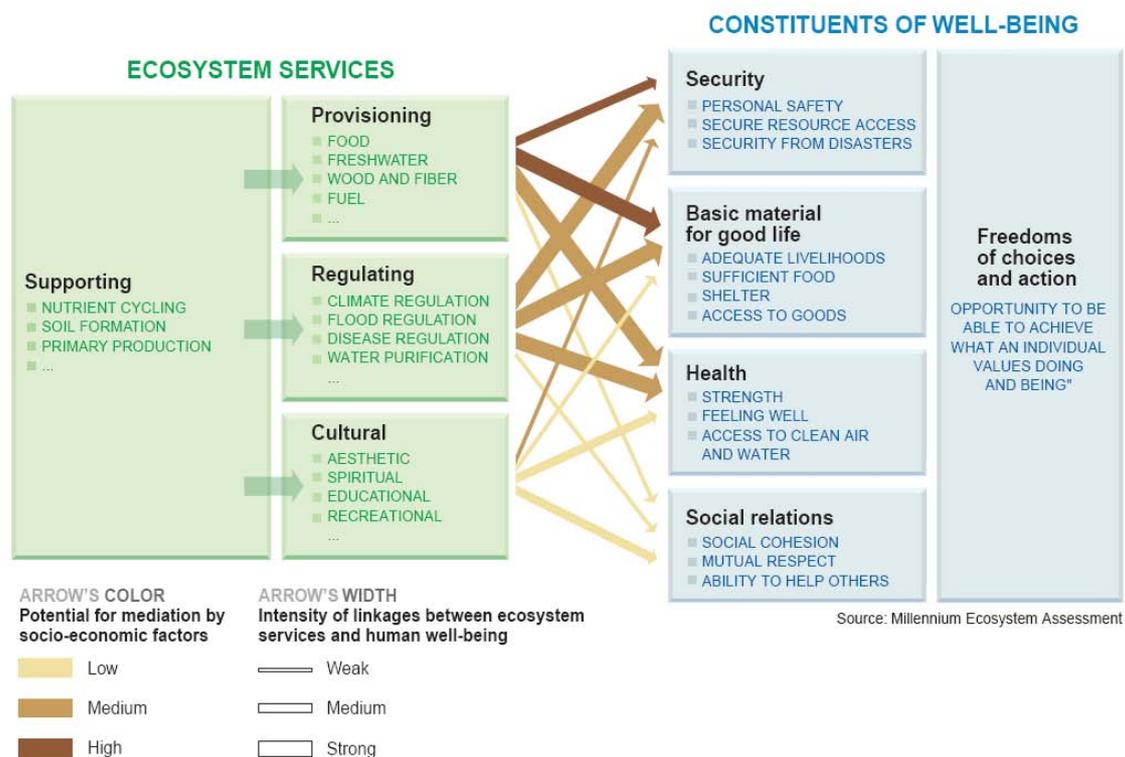
## 2. GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

### Global environmental problem

Environmental degradation is a main cause of poverty in the world. Nearly 60% of the services that eco-systems supply are currently degraded or used in an unsustainable way. It is still difficult to measure the costs generated by the loss and degradation of these systems. Loss or degradation are often directly attributable to humans (largely to meet rapidly growing demands for food, fresh water, timber, fibre, and fuel) but can also be caused by natural disasters. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Synthesis Report<sup>1</sup> states that the degradation of ecosystem services could worsen significantly during the first half of this century and it is a barrier to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

As shown by the figure below, the existing linkages between categories of ecosystem services and components of human well-being imply that environment protection is a key factor to maintain minimum standards for people life as food security, health or access to water.

**Figure 1.** Linkages between Ecosystem Services and Human Well-being.



<sup>1</sup> Source: [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/crp4millennium\\_ecosystem\\_en.doc](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/crp4millennium_ecosystem_en.doc)

Most of these problems can be solved through comprehensive and integrated management of natural resources. Environmental issues must be managed with a global vision that works at three levels: *international* to define rules to protect natural resources and to avoid international (especially regional) conflicts; *national* to apply defined rules and to define national environmental policies; and *local* to develop local initiatives to ensure communities' sustainable access to natural resources.

## The VII Millennium Development Goal<sup>2</sup>

The goal 7 of the MDG is designed to ensure environmental sustainability. Four targets have been set up for this goal by the international community:

- Target 7.A: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.
- Target 7.B: Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving, by 2010, a significant reduction in the rate of loss.
- Target 7.C: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.
- Target 7.D: By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

ACF WASH & Environment Positioning Paper is aiming to contribute to the achievement of this particular goal by ensuring the achievement of targets 7.A, 7.C and 7.D.



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<sup>2</sup> Source : <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

## International agreement regarding environment issues

Over the last forty years the United Nations has been extremely mindful of the important role that the environment plays in human development, and set out some general plans for development:

The Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (Stockholm; 1972) mentioned the need for a common outlook and for common principles to inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment, for the benefit of all the people and for their posterity.

Agenda 21 (Global Programme of Action on Sustainable Development) is a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the United Nations System, Governments and Major Groups in every area in which human impacts on the environment.

The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21<sup>3</sup> and the Statement of principles for the Sustainable Management of Forests were adopted by more than 178 Governments at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3 to 14 June 1992.

The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was created in December 1992 to ensure effective follow-up of UNCED, to monitor and report on implementation of the agreements at the local, national, regional and international levels. It was agreed that a five year review of Earth Summit progress would be made in 1997 by the United Nations General Assembly meeting in special session.

The full implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Commitments to the Rio principles, were strongly reaffirmed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 26 August to 4 September 2002.

On the other hand, the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)<sup>4</sup> is the first plan to explain, describe and detail the work that is required from all different sectors and actors to reduce disaster losses. It was developed and agreed on with the many partners needed to reduce disaster risk - governments, international agencies, disaster experts and many others - bringing them into a common system of coordination. The HFA outlines five priorities for action, and offers guiding principles and practical means for achieving disaster resilience. Its goal is to substantially reduce disaster losses by 2015 by building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters. This means reducing loss of lives and social, economic, and environmental assets when hazards strike.

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<sup>3</sup> More information about Agenda 21 can be found at: <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agenda21/index.htm> including the complete Rio Declaration document: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm>

<sup>4</sup> More information about Hyogo Framework for Action can be found at: <http://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/hfa>

### 3. ACF ENVIRONMENTAL APPROACH

#### 3.1 Global aim of ACF environmental activities under WASH projects

The global objective of WASH-related environmental care activities remains the same as in the ACF WASH Policy:

→ Extract of ACF WASH Policy 2011

*To guarantee, through access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, survival and socio-economic development of vulnerable populations, especially preventing under nutrition, and ultimately impacting on the reduction of the mortality.*

Mainstreaming the environment within ACF will to reduce the negative environmental impacts of the organization and its programs while reaching global aims, by optimizing the use of energy, conserving natural material cycles (carbon, nitrogen, water, minerals, etc., therefore preserving soils, vegetation, climate, etc.) and conserving evolutionary potential (biodiversity).

Mainstreaming the environment within ACF will contribute to:

**a) Guarantee the sustainability of natural resources to ensure survival and socio-economic development of population.**

Effects on public health and food security due to the lack of environmental care considerations are already present in different countries. A few examples are given below:

Inadequate agricultural and irrigation practices (flood irrigation, lack of maintenance of agricultural drainage channels network, high rate of use of chemical fertilizer) could led to poor soil fertility and high salinity, impacting considerably food security of local population, creating dependence to mechanization and use of chemical fertilizers.

One VIP latrine requires 1500 bricks and 5 bags of cement to construct. Brick making (firing) requires local trees to be cut down for fuel and firing bricks produces carbon dioxide emissions. According to brick makers, one big tree (15 m high) is required to fire about 2000 bricks. If there is a reduction of available wood resources, women (mainly) are forced to walk longer distances to collect wood required for a variety of uses\*.

Over-pumping of aquifers to meet growing demand for irrigation and drinking water supply of large towns, could lead in a drastic fall of static water table, which will create unmanageable food and water scarcity for their population. Over-pumping of aquifers in coastal areas could also lead to intrusion of salt water.

\* Source: "Environmental Guidance Note for Disaster Risk Reduction" IUCN, (International Union for Conservation of Nature)

## b) Prevent or mitigate environmental related disasters.

Healthy and diverse ecosystems are more robust to extreme weather events and contribute to provide the benefits which help communities to reduce their vulnerability to disasters. A few examples are given below:

In Aceh, the huge demand of rocks, clay and wood needed for the reconstruction of the tsunami affected area and their constant extraction from natural environment increased the risks of floods and landslides in a region already naturally vulnerable to these types of disaster<sup>\*\*</sup>.

In Bolivia, the watershed of the Rio Grande river experiences, since 1992, episodes of flooding and change of riverbed, putting the population in position of chronic vulnerability. Floods are both due to deforestation in the lower watershed, as well as massive erosion in the upstream watershed as a consequences of non-sustainable agricultural practices such as the over preparation of the cultural land, the elimination of vegetation cover, direct exposure of the soils to erosion through surface water runoff and reduction of rain water infiltration, the over-pasture and deforestation<sup>\*\*\*</sup>.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Source: "Environment and Reconstruction in Aceh: Two years after the tsunami", UNEP, 2007

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Source: ACF reports



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## 3.2 Environmental Activities

### 1) Environmental Preservation Activities

ACF defines environmental preservation measures as all the means put in place **to avoid or mitigate** negative impacts of usual WASH activities on the environment. Different level of environmental care will be considered according to level of humanitarian priority.

This particular type of measures should be put in place at the earliest stages of the programming phase even in an emergency context. However, the priority given to environmental preservation will strongly differs between emergency and non-emergency contexts.

During the **emergency phase**, the work of ACF remains focused on life-saving activities, facilitating immediate access to basic goods and services such as drinking water and sanitation facilities, food, shelter, nutrition and psychosocial care.

It should first be noted that if these essential elements are not provided in time, in order to survive, people must look in the surrounding environment for their needs. This can quickly result in environmental deterioration. The mere quick response given by ACF can hence represent a preservation activity.

But more generally, the way in which the needs of population are addressed in emergencies could have a negative impact on the environment: in some cases, population affected by a disaster is provided with a significant stock of food or non-food items whose packaging could saturate the local environment later on. Promotion of water disinfection through boiling could also be a risk for local vegetation, since it could trigger extensive wood cutting. Extensive latrine construction programmes using wood, bricks and stones could also very negatively impact into the local environment.

An effective way for preserving environment in emergencies will be the inclusion of environmental consideration in contingency planning of local and international relief organisation. For example, contingency stock can include solar ovens, or contacts can be taken with local legal wood suppliers.

In **non-emergency contexts**, environmental preservation measures will be systematically mainstreamed with any usual WASH activity implemented by ACF in order to achieve environmental sustainability, ensuring coherence with the long term general objective of programmes.



*Compost Latrine*

## **(1) Environmental Protection & Recovery Activities**

ACF defines environmental Protection & Recovery (EPR) measures as all the activities implemented to proactively **protect** the environment from damage external to ACF activities and **recover** environmentally deteriorated sites. Different level of environmental care will be considered according to humanitarian priorities and level of environmental awareness of the beneficiaries.



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These particular types of activities will be put in place in post emergency, recovery or development contexts, as they are usually not a priority for immediate life saving. In the particular case of contexts following to emergency, during the post-crisis phase the cumulative effects of various environmental impacts may begin to affect the local population living conditions. EPR activities developed during this phase are especially relevant, in addition to the preservation measures implemented during the emergency phase.

An example of an EPR activity can be the reforestation for improving the recharge of the aquifers or avoiding landslides.

### ((( Environmental Education and Promotion

Environmental Education and Promotion refers to organized efforts to teach to the population about how the global and natural environment works, inform about ways that they can sustainably manage their ecosystems, and raise their awareness regarding the risks linked to poor environmental care practices.



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For example, ACF considers that Environmental Protection & Recovery (EPR) activities should be implemented on a demand-driven basis, and not “imposed” to the population. People should have the prior means to understand why such activities are implemented, and see their benefit for them or for other people, even on the long term. ACF hence recommends the implementation of environmental education prior to or in parallel with any EPR program.

For all EPR projects undertaken by ACF, environmental education should be mainstreamed and partnership with environmental organisations should be strongly promoted.

In addition to technical information, environmental education should also include a legal aspect, with the dissemination of national environmental laws, to facilitate their enforcement.

As per the ACF mandate, environmental education has to be adapted to the organization objectives and humanitarian/development context in general.

### (V) Environmental care practices within ACF internal management

It is essential that before trying to promote environmental care in its projects and among its beneficiaries, **ACF must adopt internally environmental care practices, in its headquarters, in its field bases and offices, as well as in all its various internal logistic procedures.** It is a responsibility of ACF to work with the lowest environmental impact as possible.

In this sense, ACF logistics kit (v.3.1) has already included a chapter about environment, enclosing different tools, documents and templates.

On the other hand, several “Environmental Cards” have been develop for helping in the identification of environmental negative and impacts and the correspondent corrective measures.

The recommendations included in the Environmental Cards related to Waste Management and Internal Management will be applied in all ACF WASH projects.

## 4. CRITERIA LINKED TO WASH-RELATED ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITIES

### 4.1 General Criteria

Environmental considerations and activities will be always integrated into the design and implementation of WASH programs. Therefore general criteria of ACF WASH Policy also apply to the WASH & Environment Positioning Paper:

In addition, environmental care activities will be implemented within the following frame:

- Unless life of beneficiaries is immediately threaten, ACF WASH activities will be implemented in such way that natural resources such as land, water and vegetation are preserved and/or sustainably used.
- As long as it stays focused in improving and saving human life, ACF will be proactive in the fight against environmental degradation by implementing activities directly aiming at protecting environment and recover deteriorated ones

### 4.2 Specific Criteria

Different environmental care activities will be implemented according to the type of intervention, whether it is an emergency, rehabilitation or development context.

#### a) **Emergency**

In emergency contexts, mitigation and preservation measures will be prioritised over recovery ones, unless the population is at risk of disaster linked to their local or neighbouring environment.

- **Environmental Preservation activities will be implemented whenever:**
  - WASH activities may negatively impact on the environment and mitigation activities would not prevent or delay more urgent life-saving activities.
  - An initial Environmental Impact Assessment points out short or mid-term risks of negative environmental impacts on human life, worse than risks supposed to be tackled by usual WASH activities.
- **Environmental Protection and Recovery activities will be implemented whenever:**
  - The population is at risk of disaster linked to their local or neighbouring environment.



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#### b) Rehabilitation and Development

- **Environmental Preservation activities will be implemented whenever:**
  - An initial Environmental Impact Assessment points out negative environmental impacts of WASH activities.
- **Environmental Protection and Recovery activities will be implemented whenever:**
  - Quality and quantity of water for drinking, domestic or productive uses are threatened by the environmental deterioration.
  - Food security of the population is threatened by environmental deterioration.
  - A positive impact could be locally expected and evaluated on the mid-term.
  - The population is at risk of disaster linked to their local or neighbouring environment



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## 5. WASH ENVIRONMENTAL GUIDELINES AND TOOLS

In order to bring the present document to fruition, the **WASH Environmental Guidelines** (Annex 1) will provide tools to ensure mainstreaming environment in ACF projects.

The guidelines are targeted at ACF field workers and project designers with no necessarily high background in environment, in order to ensure that environmental considerations are explicitly addressed and incorporated into all ACF WASH projects.

Several **tools** are provided in these guidelines:

- a) Rapid Environmental Screening template
- b) Environmental Impact Assessment template
- c) Impact Assessment Matrix template
- d) Environmental Cards

These set of easy-to-use tools will be help to integrate environment all along the project cycle management: identification, formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

The following steps will be implementation for all ACF WASH projects:

1. **RAPID ENVIRONMENTAL SCREENING (RES)**. At the very beginning, during the identification and design of the project, ACF staff will made a Rapid Environmental Screening. Refers to the determination whether or not an intervention should be subject to a deeper study with an Environmental Impact Assessment.

In case the screening shows NO need for a further study, the recommendations included in Environmental Card 1 (Waste Management) and Environmental Card 7 (Internal Management) will be applied in all ACF WASH projects.

2. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA)**.

In case the screening shows the need for a further study, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) will be done:

- A deeper impact analysis will be done, through the **Impact Analysis Matrix**, to identify and predict the likely environmental, social and other related effects of the project. Specific environmental care activities (through the **Environmental Cards**) will be recommended for each potential risk or impact detected.
- An Environmental Management Plan will be also included in the document.
- According to the project and its impact magnitude the EIA would be realized either by an external evaluator competent and experienced in this field or by ACF staff.
- It should be added here that an EIA implemented by an external expert is not always possible, for time or budget constraint. This does not remove the obligation for ACF coordinators to anticipate possible environmental impacts of the intervention, design an Environmental Management Plan, and apply environmental care measures.

3. **Monitoring and Evaluation.** During the implementation of projects, this involves the monitoring of predicted impacts and proposed corrective measures to ensure that the terms and condition of approval are met; to monitor the impacts of development and the effectiveness of corrective measures; and, where required, that unpredicted impacts or failed corrective measures are identified and addressed in a timely manner.

For the evaluation process (internal or external) there will be included specific questions or topics for evaluating the mainstreaming of environment in the project.

## 6. ANNEXES

**Annex 1:** WASH Environmental Guidelines

**Annex 2:** Environmental Glossary

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