Camp phase-out process

➤ Camp closure is the official removal of status recognising a particular area as a camp. This decision is made by a government and starts the camp phase-out process.

➤ Environmental considerations should feature prominently in phase-out and closure planning.

➤ Participatory approaches to camp phase-out can help identify and implement activities within a site's boundaries that need clean-up and rehabilitation, e.g. shelter demolition and proper sorting and disposal of waste materials.

➤ Participatory approaches can also help identify and implement activities needed to address concerns related to a site's wider environment and infrastructure, e.g. tree-planting where there has been deforestation or the fixing of damaged roads.

➤ Further assessments with local host populations should identify additional, durable solutions.

➤ Hand-over of the site to the host community or local officials should be planned as early as possible to prevent confusion about roles and responsibilities.

➤ Phase-out activities end when all humanitarian assistance ceases. Any further interventions should be conducted by longer-term development organisations.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS IN CAMP PHASE-OUT

INTRODUCTION

Camps are established to help meet the needs of displaced people – those fleeing from conflict, as well as people temporarily displaced as a result of a disaster. They are only envisaged as temporary solutions, although many continue to operate for many years or decades. As soon as conditions allow, however, camps and camp-like structures should be closed and the area rehabilitated to remove dangers and obstacles.

The announcement of "camp closure" is the official removal of camp status from a site by a government. This signals the beginning of "camp phase-out," which includes a series of activities that leads to the final withdrawal of most if not all humanitarian actors.

KEY ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

The phase-out of a camp requires environmental issues to be considered, both within the camp limits and the wider landscape. Two sets of activities may take place: clean-up and rehabilitation. The objective of site clean-up and rehabilitation is to make the area safe from physical, biological and chemical threats, so host communities are not left worse off than before. Some basic considerations are:

- Clarify land ownership / user-rights before implementing activities.
- Determine agencies' roles / responsibilities for activities.
- Engage displaced persons, host communities, and local authorities in decision-making.
- Give particular attention to vulnerable individuals' needs.
- Local Camp Phase-out Committees can be effective for conducting clean-up and rehabilitation operations.
- Monitor activities closely using environmental indicators.
- Successful sanitation and waste clean-up activities will minimize contamination of soil and water.
- Landscape rehabilitation should seek to restore the productive capacity of the land, addressing livelihood security, ecosystem functionality and human health.
- The wider the area to be rehabilitated, the more cost-effective natural regeneration can become.
- Try to use site rehabilitation to link humanitarian actions with longer-term development work.
- Promote community-based natural resource management with longer-term actors.

ProAct network — environmental partnerships for community resilience

CHECKLIST:
BASIC ENVIRONMENTAL CAMP CLEAN-UP AND REHABILITATION ACTIVITIES

✓ Map and demarcate all known and potential hazards, as well as burial sites.

✓ Make open wells, sewage systems, latrines and waste pits safe, e.g. filling in latrine pits.

✓ Consult early with host populations and local authorities to determine intended use of former camps, including any remaining infrastructure or services.

✓ Determine if any abandoned shelters can be re-used or converted for future use by the host community; systematically demolish shelters that cannot be of further use or which the host community do not want.

✓ Leave, when possible, materials that can degrade naturally on site, e.g. roofing thatch and construction poles.

✓ Tins, glass, batteries and metal waste may either be re-used by local people or will need to be removed off site and recycled if possible.

✓ Identify other materials or items that can be re-used or recycled by local people, e.g. plastic sheeting.

✓ Collect and remove off site any toxic materials, e.g. chemicals and medical wastes, some of which may need specialist treatment.

✓ Ensure the proper collection, sorting and disposal of other construction wastes, e.g. rusty nails, or other non-biodegradable materials through proper training, monitoring and provision of tools.

✓ Negate pollution of groundwater reservoirs.

✓ Put in place preliminary anti-erosion measures if necessary.

✓ Decide if adding locally appropriate vegetation to areas that suffered depletion is needed. If so, determine ownership of trees to ensure future care.

✓ Create environmental awareness among displaced populations and communities and engage them in activities.

Further reading and resources

Camp Management Toolkit, Camp Set-up and Closure, Chapter 7 (NRC, 2008). http://www.nrc.no/camp

Environmental Perspectives of Camp Phase-Out and Closure, A Compendium of Lessons Learned from Africa (UNHCR, CARE, IUCN, 2007). http://www.unhcr.org/4a967ce69.html

Checklist-Based Guide to Identifying Critical Environmental Considerations in Emergency Shelter Site Selection, Construction, Management and Decommissioning, Version 1.0 (Kelly, 2005). http://www.proactnetwork.org/proactwebsite/en/resources/tools-for-environmental-assessment