



### CASE STUDY 5.3

## MINIMIZING ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS TO HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS WITH NEAT+

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While humanitarian response is often focused on immediate lifesaving activities, ignoring environmental considerations can leave displaced and host communities at a greater risk from natural resource degradation or unsafe environmental practices. In rapid and mass resettlement situations, new patterns of unregulated resource exploitation between host and displaced communities can lead to heightened social tensions, increased risks to human health, and negative environmental impacts. Common issues include deforestation, unsustainable water resource management, and limited options for sound waste management.

To address this situation, the Nexus Environmental Assessment Tool (NEAT+) was developed in a joint multi-stakeholder project to improve collaboration between environmental and humanitarian actors on the ground. The tool enables humanitarian practitioners to identify potential environmental hazards by conducting a rapid and simple project-level environmental screening in humanitarian settings. It provides a practical approach to integrate more sustainable environmental practices into humanitarian aid.

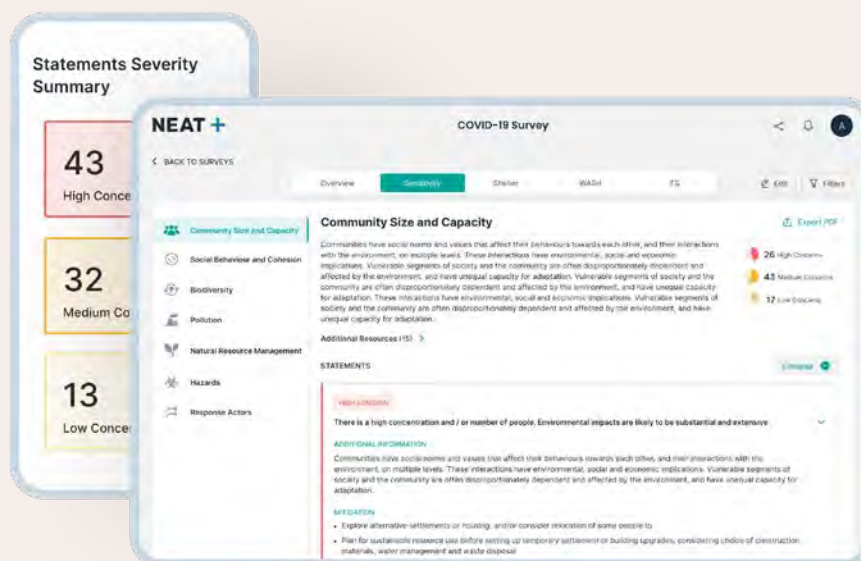
Recognizing the need to include robust environmental intelligence in the tool, NEAT+ developers integrated technological innovation and multiple sources of data. Algorithms weigh user-generated answers from a simple questionnaire to create detailed automated environmental risk reports and mitigation tips. The

NEAT+ assessment questionnaire is completed in the field using KoBo Toolbox, a simple, open-source tool for mobile data collection. The analytics are open-source and can be built on and modified by organizations who wish to change the scale or the language to better suit their operations.

NEAT+ also connects users, who are completing the questionnaire, to environmental spatial data on [MapX](#), an online, open-source mapping platform managed by UNEP/GRID-Geneva. It is built on cloud-computing infrastructure and hosts global environmental data sets from leading research institutions and organizations, as well as project-specific environmental data at the national and local scales. Connecting humanitarian actors to verified environmental global data in NEAT+ enhances the accuracy and reliability of the results in the environmental risk report. The report provides a “traffic light” of potential environmental risks and connects users to mitigation tips and resources for planning sustainable interventions (FIGURE 5.6).

NEAT+ has been successfully tested in over twenty emergency settings worldwide by more than ten different humanitarian organizations, with promising results. Pilot tests have concluded that the tool is easy to use, provides accurate and nuanced results, condenses heavy environmental guidance documents efficiently, and strengthens linkages to planning cycles.

**FIGURE 5.6:** THE NEAT+ SURVEY ALLOWS PRACTITIONERS TO QUICKLY IDENTIFY ISSUES OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN IN ORDER TO MAKE EMERGENCY AND RECOVERY INTERVENTIONS MORE SUSTAINABLE.



Source: UNEP and OCHA 2021.

For example, at the Mantapala refugee camp in Zambia, a NEAT+ pilot process highlighted extensive deforestation around the camp, caused by the domestic energy and construction needs of the displaced community (FIGURE 5.7). Thanks to the participatory process of completing NEAT+, stakeholders identified that a planned livelihood activity—the production of burnt bricks—would result in more deforestation, and recommended re-programming the intervention.

Since socio-environmental relations and impacts vary greatly between humanitarian operations in urban and rural settings, NEAT+ has two adaptations: rural R-NEAT+ and urban U-NEAT+. This differentiation was needed as over 60 percent of refugees and 80 percent of internally displaced people reside in urban areas. Both tools can be accessed freely from the Environmental Emergencies Centre (EEC).<sup>145</sup>

**FIGURE 5.7:** MANTAPALA REFUGEE CAMP IN ZAMBIA, ASSESSED BY NEAT+.



Source: UNEP and OCHA 2021.