

Environmental Stewardship Tool – Community Level Analysis

Background

The [Environmental Stewardship Tool](#) (EST) was finalized in May 2019 and has been rolled out across CRS, CAFOD, Caritas Australia, TROCAIRE and partner organizations. Since then, the tool has piqued the interest of both development and humanitarian actors inside and outside the Caritas Network. **The tool aims to support the integration of environmental considerations and risks into programme design.** It has been highlighted as helpful in improving program quality and design, raising awareness of environmental risks with partners and helping agencies' meet their own commitments to environmental stewardship, contributing to raising our profile and trust with partners and donors.

The environmental stewardship tool itself is too technical to be used directly with communities, yet their insights are critical to help identify potential environmental risks resulting from our interventions and subsequent mitigation strategies. We have therefore designed a **complementary process**, that is more appropriate for use directly with communities. The **EST - Community Level Analysis**, aims to ensure community voices and knowledge inform/ validate design, ensuring we reduce and mitigate any risks to the natural environment as a result of our interventions. **It must be used with a particular intervention in mind once you have an idea of the activities you are proposing.**

Purpose

This guidance document provides users of the EST a process to **engage communities** to further articulate issues raised during the EST analysis done by the design team. It is meant to be a supplement to the EST. Questions should be asked with the intention to elaborate on critical points on environmental stewardship as perceived by the community. It can also serve to clarify discussions and validate mitigation measures emerging from the EST application by the design team; in that way **complementing the EST analysis**. This supplement could be used by agencies to explore complex contexts and better understand key environmental issues related to planned activities. It is particularly useful for those that prefer **community based qualitative processes**. Depending on the level of 'due diligence' demanded by the agency and its donors, the **EST - Community Level Analysis** could be used as an alternative to the EST, but as this is not as comprehensive, it does not capture important technical considerations, as well as the EST itself. In that sense, this guidance is **not a substitute for the EST**, particularly in the case of interventions that have a high level of interface with the natural environment (Agriculture, WASH, Shelter and Settlements, DRR...). For those, we recommend the full EST analysis in addition to community level conversations.

The EST is a risk register meant to ensure activities do not exacerbate unintended risks to the natural environment resulting from our interventions; with this complementary guidance supporting the integration of community voices into that process. For more guidance on how to conduct a full participatory analysis of natural hazard and climate risks in vulnerable communities please refer to the [Community Led Disaster Risk Management](#) guide.

This EST in Communities supplement can be used in different ways:

- **Before applying the EST:** The guidance questions below can be used as FGD as part of partners' community level assessments. In this sense, the questions help explore environmental issues affecting communities more broadly which can help inform the intervention's overall strategy and design.
Or
- **After applying the EST:** Can be used to validate the results of the EST reflection, including the mitigation measures identified by the design team.
Or
- **As a standalone tool,** in very specific circumstances, for scoping environmental issues with communities, in the case of small interventions that *do not have a high level of direct interface with the natural environment and pose no environmental risks* (for instance an advocacy or governance project, a women's empowerment intervention, psychosocial support ...).

Feel free to **adapt** this process as needed and incorporate other questions as you see fit. We suggest this resource be **translated into local languages** so as to facilitate the discussion with communities. Both the EST and this supplement should be used at **programme design stage**.

Methodology:

Step 1: Decide how you will use this tool. Either:

- **Before** the design team applies the EST. This will support context analysis and scope key environmental issues with communities before delving into more technical issues with the full EST.
Or
- **After** the team has applied the EST. This will integrate community voices and validate the analysis and related mitigation measures identified by the design team in Tier 3 of the EST.
Or
- **As a standalone,** to better understand the context, gaining insights from communities on key environmental issues. This is not a robust technical analysis for programmes that interface directly with the environment (agriculture, WASH, shelter and settlements ...). For those we recommend the full application of the EST along with this supplement.

Step 2: Discuss the process with the design / assessment team. Reach out to partners and/or community leaders to identify participants along with their preferred time and location. It may be best to have separate groups of men, women, elderly, youth, etc. to draw out any additional aspects and better understand how different groups experience environmental challenges.

Step 3: Conduct a **focus group discussion (FGD)** using the suggested process (below), adapt this guidance as needed. You may, for instance, want to ask additional questions that explore systemic issues, such as power dynamics, access, use and control of natural resources and how these contribute to conflict at community level.

Step 4: Following the focus groups, plan a debrief session with the facilitation and design team. Using the input from the communities, triangulate the information with the outcomes of the EST (Tier 3). Adjust programme logic and activities to reflect the results of the EST analysis and the community consultation process. Consider:

- What needs to be adjusted (included or excluded) in the intervention, activities and approach?
- What mitigation measures should be incorporated to ensure we do no harm to the natural environment?
- What measures can we incorporate into the intervention to enhance environmental outcomes for the community (for instance, improving soil quality as part of a food security initiative or influencing local municipalities to address waste management and collection).
- Are there any additional studies/ measures/ capacities/ stakeholders that need to be considered or involved for successful implementation to reach the desired impact?
- How will these be monitored? What elements of this reflection need to be featured in the MEAL plan?

Process with Communities:

Estimated Time: 90 - 120 minutes.

Participants: 6 – 12 individuals per group (could have multiple groups to reflect relevant community dynamics e.g. men, women, youth, ability, important social and leadership roles...). Ensure you have a cross section of people from the community for an inclusive process¹.

Designate a note-taker and facilitator, including for smaller group discussion (consider gender and other dynamics as needed).

Materials:

- a. Markers and paper for note taking and drawing.
- b. Depending on the location and the preference of the participants, natural materials (sticks, stones, leaves, ash) could be used to draw a map of the village to highlight specific challenges in target areas throughout the community.
- c. Photo examples of proposed activities e.g. if a gabion will be built you might want to have a photo of one to show them what it would look like.
- d. Description of the intervention to share with participants so they know what we intend to do.
- e. Ensure the design team and any animators conducting the FGD have a reviewed and adapted the suggested questions below and that these exist in the local language.

Step 1: Welcome participants

- a. State you and your partner(s) names, your organization and inform participants that you are here to gather their input about a proposed programme in their community.
- b. Discuss the process up to this point and highlight the fact that there are additional questions which came up during the design phase which require input from the community.
- c. It is always advantageous to have a procedure for effectively reporting complaints & feedback and to inform participants about how those will be handled at this stage as per your organization's protocol.
- d. Ask participants if they have any questions up to this point.

Step 2: Explain the proposed approach of the intervention.

- a. Explain the specific activities being planned in the target community. This is critical as we will be seeking community input *into the intervention design and related activities*.

¹ At this stage, the intervention is just being designed so you may not yet know your target participants. Ensuring an inclusive process where different voices in the community can be heard, will enrich the process.

- b. If needed, provide photo examples to articulate what the activities might look like.
- c. If you are validating the results of the EST Tier 3 mitigation measures with the community (*post-EST*), be sure to describe the proposed intervention, activities and the key risks and mitigation strategies identified as part of the EST analysis. Focus on the key risks (in red) and mitigation strategies in Tier 3.

Step 3: Seek feedback from communities with the following guiding questions:

*****PLEASE ADAPT QUESTIONS TO NEED AND CONTEXT*****

Questions

- 1) What are the most important natural resources (i.e., forest, pastureland, water sources, agricultural land etc.) that exist in your community?
 - a. *Follow up question:* do you feel that any proposed activities would negatively impact these resources in any way? If so, how?
- 2) Do you feel any of the proposed activities will have a negative impact on access to and use of water sources within the community? Land? Forests? Pastures? Or any other relevant ecosystem? (No need to ask if this is highlighted in the response from question #1).

Follow up questions: if so,

 - a. Would you eliminate any of the activities outright?
 - b. How would you change specific activities to reduce the potential negative impact to the environment and the community?
 - c. Are there any other actors/ groups who need to be engaged to ensure the desired impact?
- 3) What are the climate or hazard risks faced by the community? Could this affect the activities? How?
 - a. *Follow up question:* Do you feel any of the proposed activities will put anyone in the community at higher risk of hazards? If so, who and what hazards specifically?
- 4) What are the most important cultural sites (i.e., churches, shrines, cemeteries, etc.) that exist in your community?
 - a. *Follow up question:* Do you feel any of the proposed activities will have a negative impact on any of these sites? If so, how?
- 5) Are there any other environmental issues present within the community, or in relation to the intervention planned, that you are concerned about? If so, what are these?
- 6) Do you have specific recommendations on how to reduce or mitigate any potentially negative impacts from the activities we discussed (further to question 2)?

For those conducting the FGD after the EST analysis, this is the moment to validate the suggested mitigation measures with the community and ask them, if these are viable and relevant? If not, what would they suggest?
- 7) Are there any rules/ regulations/ norms (formal and informal, legal or customary) present in your community that could help reduce or mitigate some of the risks we identified?

Follow up question:

- a. Can any of these rules/ regulations/ norms (formal and informal, legal or customary) create barriers for environmental stewardship in your community? How? Can we address these through the intervention (for instance through sensitization with communities)?

Step 4: Close the meeting.

- a. Explain that this input will be used to finalize the intervention design.
- b. Ask participants if they have any additional questions. If people want to ask confidential questions inform them of where they can reach you as per your agency's feedback mechanisms.
- c. Thank them and end the meeting.

Step 5: Reintegration of Community Voices into Programme Design:

As with all other community level assessments/ engagement, these will then need to be considered/ applied in the final design. There is no single way to do this as it programming documentation formats and protocols which differ by agency.

We suggest using bottom rows on the table on Tier 3 to add any additional mitigation measures discussed by the community. Any adjustments made by the communities to the mitigation measures identified by the design team could then be made directly to Tier 3 or relevant project documents, for instance: detailed implementation plan, activities calendar, overall risk matrix etc... We recommend integrating mitigation measures into a MEAL plan so that they can be tracked, and learning captured.

For additional guidance relating to highlighting environmental issues more broadly within communities, the following resources should be consulted:

- [Managing Natural Resources: A SMART Skills Manual](#) (CRS)
- [Guide to Facilitating Community Led Disaster Risk Management](#) (CAFOD, Caritas Australia, CRS)