

## Introduction

This brief is intended to highlight key WASH elements for camps closure. It focuses on specific actions, including the highlights of public health risks associated with health, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) when dealing with decommissioning of WASH infrastructures.

The overall closure implementation actions and modus operandi should be context specific and properly planned in coordination with key stakeholders.

## Reasons for Camp Closure

The process of phasing-out activities and closing a camp for displaced people, where responsibilities are clearly transferred from one agency or authority to another, is a momentous – and often fraught – process in the life cycle of a camp.

The moment a camp closes effectively marks the end of a time when a host country and many host communities have cordially offered asylum and assistance to other people in need – refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs).

As such, it is also a time for the international community to express gratitude to the host nation for honoring its international responsibilities, a gesture it can do through ensuring responsible clean-up and accompanied rehabilitation.

However, in some instances, camp phase-out and closure have been poorly planned and the lack of co-ordination and information sharing between agencies, authorities and community members has translated into former camps completely abandoned with no consideration given to clean-up, safety or rehabilitation.

### ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMMING

The environmental and infrastructure aspects of camp closure and phase-out should be incorporated into UNHCR's programming tools, guidelines/instructions and future training on camp planning and establishment.

After closing, sites rehabilitation and other environmental restoration works done in a camp/settlement, including infrastructure repair, should comply with and support the National Development Plan for that country/region.

## Objectives of Camp Closure

The basic objectives of closing a camp in a responsible manner are to:

1. remove immediate and obvious hazards from the area;
2. compensate the host communities in particular, in some appropriate manner;
3. repair – to the extent possible – any serious level of environmental degradation that may have taken place; and
4. leave the site in a state that would allow local people to engage directly in subsequent activities, for example agriculture if that was the land's former use.
5. In the build up to closing a camp it is often uncertain whether some people may opt not to leave: particular attention needs to be given to this issue, as some vulnerable individuals or families might require special assistance or continued protection.

### TIMELINE & PH RISKS

Decommissioning of all site infrastructures must be carried out as rapidly as possible following the departure of the resident refugee population in order to prevent unauthorized removal of reusable and valuable resources and minimize public health associated risks to the host population and hosting environment, such as:

1. environmental contamination (water, ground)
2. poor latrines decommissioning
3. solid waste hazards

## Step 1: Inventory & Mapping

Ensure proper inventory of any WASH equipment and material used in the camp (including labelling) is the first step to undertake when dealing with camps closure.

This might include document equipment model and type, property and ownership, monetary value, status and aging of the equipment, purpose and current use.

The inventory should also include all infrastructures for future use or demolition. Detailed camp layout maps should identify key features of the camp and show a record of the road network, and former and present infrastructures, including burial sites, water points (including types, depth, size of the casings, installation depth of the pump, etc), latrines, dumping sites and any other potential hazards.

Ad-hoc rapid assessments can be carried out as soon as the close-up has been approved/confirmed – preferred option – or once a camp has been vacated in order to determine approximate needs in terms of human resources and materials required for clean up and rehabilitation.

### Step 2: Framework with Stakeholders

UNHCR should develop in due advance – 2 to 3 months before close up occurs - a framework outlining the respective responsibilities of UNHCR, government and partners (INGOs, UN Agencies – including UN Development agencies) during camp closure and phase-out.

Meeting with local stakeholders to agree on camp emptying procedures is essential to ensure a smooth transaction between phases - from camps emptying to handover land and equipment. This step includes definition of roles, responsibilities and expectations, drafting of procedures, chronogram, and action plan and documentation process.

Create a timely, consultation-based mechanism for the handover of infrastructure and existing services to local government authorities and communities is essential. Consultation with refugees should also be ensured in order to address potential stealing of valuable items (such as GCI latrines superstructures).

Community ownership mechanism should include clarification on land and structural ownership, access rights and resources.

### Step 3: Awareness & Communication

Develop and put in place an appropriate and responsive awareness raising and communication outreach programme for camp closure and clean-up activities at least 2 months before the close-up of the camp.

### Step 4: Local Labor

Make use of local labour for dismantling activities/installations through community mobilization processes is the most effective way to ensure cooperation with local villagers. Local workers must to be provided with proper safety equipment and tools, supervision lines and clear objectives, as per ad-hoc terms of reference/job description.

### Step 5: Demolishment & Recycling

Demolish and remove all concrete structures upon agreement with local authorities/ stakeholders. Where possible, use debris to fill in unusable wells, and emptied

latrines pits, to reduce the amount of waste that will require dumping.

Collection and removal of any chemicals waste may require specialist disposal.

Recycling of materials, e.g. building materials and latrine slabs and encourage local community initiatives for recycling tins and metal should be included in the demolition plan.

### Step 6: Decommissioning of Latrines

Ensure decommissioning of latrines – applicable for family, communal and institutional latrines.

Procedural actions include:

1. Dismantle latrines superstructures
2. Removal of the slab if feasible – slabs made out of plastic /concrete/ ferro-cement
3. If removal of the slab is not feasible, break / smash the top slab cover and above ground masonry structures (including plinths) and allow debris to fall into the pit
4. Pour lime in the pit (approximately 15-20kg per pit)<sup>1</sup>
5. disinfection of re-usable slabs and superstructures material with chlorine and brushes, rinse, place the slabs in a chlorine bath for a minimum of 30 minutes, dry it and store it safely
6. fill the pits with soil/debris only if excreta level is up to 50cm from ground level, and repeat the operation as debris would tend to sink
7. plan for trees planting and if not possible pile debris on top of the filled pit (to a height of approx. 30-50cm above ground level) to allow for further subsidence as the contents settles and decomposes further
8. level and grade the site after decommissioning, allowing for raised soil (at least 50cm agl) to settle, as with time and rains the soil will tend to sink.

<sup>1</sup> Many micro-organisms are adapted to a neutral pH (7). Highly acidic or alkaline conditions will have an inactivating effect. Addition of lime to excreta in dry latrines and to sewage sludge can increase pH and will inactivate micro-organisms. The speed of inactivation depends on the pH value. Lime will only assist in deactivating of micro-organisms. Care should be taken NOT to pour disinfectant in the pit latrine: this can have a negative effect on biodegradation of the excreta. Broken/crushed cement blocks added to pit latrine will increase alkalinity and pH, provide additional surface area for bacterial growth. Addition of wood chips or other organic matter is also very useful as it provides carbon (digestible energy source for bacteria) and air pockets which will further encourage the breakdown of the septage.

For decommissioning of soak pits, follow the same procedures as per the decommissioning of latrines.

### Step 7: Marking & Mapping Post- Decommissioning

Provide a site plan to the landowner/local authority to avoid the installation of water points on or near the areas where toilet pits were decommissioned in place.

The sites of decommissioned toilet pit should also be clearly marked using whitewashed stones or signage. The neighbors should also be informed to restrict access to the area for about a 1-year period.

Burial sites should also be clearly marked and properly mapped.

### Step 8: Dismantling Water Facilities

Ensure dismantling of storage water tanks and tapstands with apron:

1. where possible disconnect and remove the storage tank (i.e. Oxfam type/bladders/PVC)
2. break (smash) the tank platform, water points aprons and move debris into latrine pits

Ensure decommissioning of motorized boreholes - unless clearly agreed with local authorities on the O&M operating procedures or in case the equipment does not belong to UNHCR – in that case a clear agreement should be made:

1. disconnect the electric cables
2. remove the submersible pump
3. dig 30 x 30 x 120cm trench around the casing of the BH
4. install one side threaded 6" diameter GI pipe and other edged angle iron (30cm long) welded
5. prepare 1:3:6 concrete and fill the pit around the casing

Whenever possible, equip motorized boreholes with handpumps and ensure spare supply chain and training of local technicians for minor repairing.

Ensure proper hand-over to local authorities/WASH local organizations/Gvt/Ministry of Water-Environment of any WASH equipment dismissed from use (spare generators/submersible pumps/storage tanks/digging tools/plumber tools and spares/spare pipes & fittings/tapstands, etc).

Ensure proper overlap with handover stakeholders for any structures/equipment to be left in place including capacity

building, trainings, action plan and budget, especially if the water sources in the camp are handpumps.

### Step 9: Solid Waste Management

Clear all burnable waste and rubbish to central collection points and incinerate. Anything that will not burn or decompose must be collected separately to be removed to the local authority approved dumping sites/landfill.

Collection and removal of any medical waste may require specialist disposal.

### Documenting – M&E

Document each phase of the camp closure for recording and accountability purpose

### References & Further Reading

- UNHCR, Care, IUCN. Environmental Perspectives of camp phase-out and closure – a Compendium of lessons learned from Africa. 2007.