

ECT WASH — Lessons Learned

Conduct of NEAT+ with communities in Southern Leyte and Maguindanao provinces

Country
PHILIPPINES

Organisation
ACCORD

Duration
NOVEMBER 2023 TO
MARCH 2025



BACKGROUND

The Philippines ranks as the highest disaster-prone countries in the world, with a World Risk Index score of 46.91 (World Risk Index, 2024). Natural disasters are now more extreme, frequent, and unpredictable, leading to greater disruptions in communities and making recovery efforts more challenging. This growing complexity requires a more integrated and adaptive approach to disaster risk reduction and response, ensuring that environmental risks are addressed alongside humanitarian interventions. Tools like NEAT+ is beneficial in this context, as it enables stakeholders to assess potential environmental impacts, integrate environmental considerations into interventions, and promote more sustainable, resilient solutions that benefit both people and the environment.

The NEAT+ assessment was conducted with the six target villages/barangays in Southern Leyte and BARMM for the implementation of WASH interventions. It was participated in by the village council/Barangay Local Government Units (BLGU) together with representatives from the community such as women, persons with disabilities, and older persons through a focus group discussion and key informant interviews. Engaging with the community in collecting information is invaluable for understanding specific environmental issues and risks in their area. This could also facilitate a conversation that will provide a wide range of perspectives and needs of the community.

As the result of NEAT+ was processed, mitigation strategies were selected based on the local context of the communities. These were discussed with the team to ensure the same level of

understanding of the implications of the findings. The process of providing feedback to the community involved helping them understand the assessment questions and ensuring that the staff were well-versed with firsthand information. This allowed the NEAT+ results, particularly those related to potential environmental risks and mitigation strategies, to be clearly communicated. A validation was conducted to ensure that the communities had a better understanding of their environmental situation and the link between their practices and the environment.

The NEAT+ tool was also introduced at the municipal level during DRR training activities to provide Municipal LGU with an overview of its application. This introduction will help them integrate NEAT+ into their humanitarian interventions, ensuring that environmental risks and impact are considered in planning. The tool also facilitated better alignment of DRR efforts with sustainable WASH practices and the needs of community in vulnerable situations, enhancing the municipality's overall resilience to climate and environmental challenges.

Additional activities such as WASH assessments and community profiling were also carried out. These efforts were aimed at addressing environmental challenges in the project-covered areas, with a focus on integrating environmental considerations into WASH interventions. Southern Leyte and BARMM were selected as geographical focus of the Project due to the high vulnerability of these locations to disaster, climate and environmental risks, as well as limited access to sustainable WASH services.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

Challenges:

When conducted at the community-level, the NEAT+ process can take half a day. Therefore, it is important to conduct an initial assessment and become familiar with the questions in advance. This preparation allows gathering only the missing information directly from the community which helps save time. Translating some technical terms in the NEAT+ into layman's language was initially challenging, but providing context-based scenarios helped in facilitating effective communication of the concepts that can be easily understood by the community members.

In terms of technical improvements in using NEAT+, in some instances, mitigation tips are missing. This may be related to software or Microsoft office version issues. There are also cases where data was lost during the upload and download process on Google Drive, it would be a good improvement if NEAT+ could have an online repository that can also generate results/analysis like mWater. This may help organizations have a system/database for all NEAT assessments conducted.

Successes:

Emergency Response – hygiene kits

During the 2023 emergency response to the massive flooding in Leyte region, hygiene kits were distributed to select the most vulnerable and most affected community members. The procurement and preparation of these kits prioritized reducing packaging and using environmentally friendly or reusable materials. Community discussions were held regarding the importance of managing hygiene kit packaging, with cloth drawstring bags used for packing the items, which offered a reusable and multifunctional solution for beneficiaries. In addition, the kits included reusable cloth sanitary pads, which received positive feedback from the community, as disposable pads in the area were quite expensive.

Capacity-Building Activities – no use of single use plastic

The application of NEAT+ in solid waste management has promoted sustainable practices, particularly reducing single-use plastics in training and capacity-building activities. ACCORD used reusable, eco-friendly materials, setting an example for participants. This has also influenced LGUs to limit plastic use in their events, encouraging broader environmental responsibility and fostering a culture of sustainability within communities.

WASH – Rainwater Harvesting Facilities



Rainwater harvesting systems are essential for disaster risk reduction and preparedness, particularly in areas prone to water shortages or disruptions caused by natural hazards. NEAT+ has identified rainwater harvesting as a low-risk, sustainable solution that enhances resilience in vulnerable communities. In the Philippines, through community consultations and NEAT+ and WASH assessments, rainwater harvesting systems were recognized as a viable alternative to reduce dependence on existing water sources. These systems are strategically located in areas with limited water access and

at designated evacuation centers to ensure accessibility during emergencies, especially for women, children, and persons with disabilities. The design includes easy-to-use levers or taps, replacing traditional twist handles to accommodate individuals with limited hand strength or dexterity. Taps are installed at lower heights to ensure accessibility for wheelchair users and individuals with restricted mobility.

The inclusion of reusable, eco-friendly materials like cloth bags and reusable sanitary pads was particularly well-received, aligning both community needs and environmental goals. This environmentally conscious approach extended to capacity-building activities, where single-use plastics were eliminated, setting an example that influenced local government units (LGUs) to adopt sustainable practices in their own events. In addition, the installation of rainwater harvesting facilities not only ensures reliable water sources but also raises awareness on sustainable water solutions.



Milagros (in green shirt), a person with a disability, and her elderly mother (in pink shirt) have struggled with their household water supply due to the weak flow from their faucet. Despite her advanced age, Ate Milagros' mother has taken on the responsibility of fetching water for both of them, even though they live in separate homes. The installation of a Rainwater Harvesting (RWH) Facility at the local gym, just 20 meters away from their home, has significantly improved their situation.

Aligned with Sphere standards on water access, the facility ensures that water collection point is within or less than 500 meters from the dwellings homes and is easy to use, particularly benefiting older people and persons with disabilities by providing safe, reliable, and accessible water. This intervention highlights the importance of inclusive water infrastructure in improving the quality of life for communities in vulnerable situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

NEAT+ will also be introduced at the provincial level, where it will inform local policies and disaster risk reduction planning. Environmental mainstreaming in humanitarian intervention linked with the NEAT+ result will be promoted to partner LGUs.

At the community level, NEAT+ results will help drive behavioral change by translating applicable mitigation strategies into accessible advocacy initiatives and information, education, and communication (IEC) campaigns. These efforts aim to raise awareness, promote sustainable practices, and mobilize communities to implement effective environmental protection and disaster preparedness measures.

Results of NEAT+ in line with the application of Sphere standard should be considered in the capacity-building especially in DRR-related activities. This will not only raise awareness on the possible environmental risk and mitigation strategies but also could potentially be integrated in the local government plans fostering ownership and long-term sustainability.