

Water and Sanitation in Emergencies

1. Objectives and Intended Audience

The objective of this review is to provide a short, accessible overview of what may be considered 'good practice' in the field of emergency water and sanitation. It is aimed primarily at NGO field staff who are not specialists in water and sanitation but who may, in the context of some future emergency operation, be involved in decisions about water and sanitation activities.

The review is not therefore intended to be a technical manual. Such manuals are available and easily obtainable (see Annex 1). However their language and technical emphasis make it difficult for non-specialist personnel to use them effectively to 'read into' the subject. It is assumed that readers who require more detailed technical information will make use of such manuals. To increase its accessibility to non-specialists this review incorporates the following features: the use of technical language has been minimised; points are supported where possible by actual examples drawn from recent relief programmes; and 'good practice' is considered in relation to seven scenarios which have been selected to represent the range of situations likely to be faced by relief agency personnel.

These scenarios are considered in Chapter 7. Four of the scenarios involve population displacement: into arid areas, into hilly or mountainous areas, into areas of abundant surface water and into areas of existing settlement. Displaced populations invariably create acute demands in the water and sanitation field and the subject of emergency water and sanitation (as represented by the accumulated body of experience and literature in the field) has largely focused on their needs. One of the key technical manuals developed during the 1980s focuses solely on the needs of refugees and internally displaced populations¹. The present review attempts to broaden this focus by also considering 'good practice' in relation to resident populations affected by drought and other 'natural' hazards and these scenarios form two of those considered. Although

¹ UNHCR (1982) in Annex 1.

the majority of emergency water and sanitation activities continue to be undertaken in a rural context, experiences, such as in the former Yugoslavia, in Iraq and in Monrovia, Liberia, have increasingly forced NGOs to consider undertaking such interventions in urban contexts also. The final scenario therefore is that of urban areas. Additional information is provided in seven Annexes. Further documentary resources and useful contacts are provided in Annexes 1 and 2. Key technical guidelines devised by UNHCR are provided in Annex 3. Useful checklists, guidelines and other information which may not be easily obtainable by field-based personnel are also provided. A checklist for environmental needs assessment is provided in Annex 4; guidance on preventing the spread of cholera in Annex 5; a checklist for taking account of gender considerations in Annex 6; and the use of chlorine as a water disinfectant in Annex 7.

A major difficulty in preparing a review such as this lies in identifying what actually constitutes 'good practice' in the field of emergency water and sanitation. Factors contributing to this difficulty include the following:

- despite having many common themes, few emergency programmes are exactly alike and it is therefore difficult to generalise about 'good practice';
- the subject area is not only complex and multi-disciplinary but also has strong linkages with other subject areas, notably health, and is consequently difficult to define precisely;
- the field is highly specialised, with comparatively few individuals having developed a particular expertise in it, and with poorly developed mechanisms for the professional exchange of information;
- few agencies disseminate or publish information on their experiences and it is difficult to identify 'good practice' on the basis of the limited documentation currently available.

As a result, a sense of what constitutes 'good practice' in the field is still emerging and is currently only poorly developed. This review cannot therefore claim to be a definitive statement. Instead, it attempts to overcome the problems by drawing on the knowledge and experience of practitioners from different agencies and backgrounds, with familiarity with different geographical areas. It should therefore be regarded as a step in the process of stimulating discussion and encouraging the emergence of a widely shared sense of good practice, which can be reflected in subsequent versions.