



A PRACTITIONER'S TOOLKIT

Making water, sanitation and hygiene safer through improved programming and services

Toolset 3-F
Policies, strategies, guidelines

TS3-F-5 – International Rescue Committee, Environmental Health Sector Framework

<p>Context</p>	<p>The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is an international humanitarian NGO that works in more than 40 countries and in 22 US cities. Its teams work across a range of sectoral areas, from WASH and emergency response to health (including reproductive health), women’s empowerment, children and youth, governance and protection of rights (including with respect to GBV), as well as in research and advocacy.</p>
<p>Implementing organisations</p>	<p>International Rescue Committee.</p>
<p>Description of good practices</p>	<p>The Environmental Health Sector Framework outlines what the International Rescue Committee (IRC) does in this sector and the impact these actions have on the people IRC serves. It is an aid to help IRC country programmes design effective environmental health programmes with clear goals and clear links to other IRC sectors.</p> <p>The framework incorporates safety and dignity concerns throughout, highlighting how the sector activities consider and respond to these issues. Some examples are outlined below.</p> <p>Goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRC activities in this sector save lives by preventing potentially fatal diseases and ensuring that people (notably women and girls) can safely access essential environmental health services. These activities also lay a foundation for further socio-economic development by supporting good health and well-being, enhanced economic productivity, educational attainment and women and girls’ empowerment. • The safety and empowerment of women and girls should be mainstreamed into any project where this is not the main goal, given the high prevalence of violence and oppression of women and girls in many of the areas where IRC works. <p>Educational achievement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to safe water at home and school prevents children (especially girls) from losing valuable learning time or dropping out of school completely to fetch water. The availability of toilets, with facilities for washing and drying sanitary cloths, at schools encourages adolescent girls to continue their education. Children who are healthy enough to attend school and concentrate have a better chance of achieving their potential in education. <p>Safety and empowerment of women and girls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women and girls bear the brunt of the burden of water fetching, face greater risk of assault when fetching water or seeking a place for their toilet needs, and are the most exposed to the smoke from cooking fires. Providing safe access to improved environmental health services, such as nearby water supplies, household toilets and improved cooking stoves, therefore reduces the risks and burdens they face, providing for improved health and more time for productive, educational and social activities. Women’s and girls’ inclusion in decision-making around environmental health activities also provides the opportunity for an increased influence on decisions that have a profound impact on their quality of life.

Ensuring access to essential environmental health services:

- IRC provides environmental health services that are **accessible to the whole population**. This means that they must be **designed in consultation with the users**, ensuring that vulnerable groups (such as women, children, marginalised groups, the disabled and people living with HIV/AIDS) are consulted and their needs incorporated into intervention designs. No users are inhibited from benefitting through overcrowding, inappropriate design, prohibitive user fees, **unsafe access** or excessive distance. Strong institutions support and sustain services and the ongoing community engagement required to ensure services are managed in such a way that they're accessible to all.
- IRC ensures that **all segments of the community are consulted** and that the advantages and disadvantages of the technology options available are clearly explained to the community. These actions ensure that selected solutions are suitable for, and acceptable to, the whole community.

Strengthening institutions to support and sustain environmental health services:

- IRC ensures **women's participation in decision-making** by promoting their inclusion in key decision-making positions while providing training and mentoring to support them in their roles. Where necessary, IRC may use separate mechanisms for women's representation and will offer support to **community-based organisations that help women voice their needs**.
- Example of a project which helped to reduce time spent collecting firewood and treating water for drinking:
- In response to a humanitarian crisis in Pakistan, the IRC introduced fuel-efficient stoves, which proved very popular and reduced the use of fuel wood by almost a half. There were other benefits. Families explained that **women and children now spent less time collecting wood**, allowing them to take part in other activities. They also no longer had to cook in a cloud of smoke and felt healthier as a result.
- Building on this success, IRC provided stoves to families affected by the severe floods in Pakistan of 2010. After getting feedback from users, IRC adapted the stove design to include a water boiler, providing safe drinking water 'on tap' for families whose water supplies had been contaminated by the flood waters.
- Although this case study was not written from the perspective of reducing GBV, the reduction in time required for collecting wood and also providing a household-based water treatment would have a positive effect on reducing risks to GBV for women and children who undertake this task, as well as reducing vulnerabilities to environmental health-related diseases due to drinking contaminated water.

Acute/rapid onset emergency:

- IRC responds to acute emergencies by providing facilities and services that are **essential for life, personal safety and dignity**, such as clean water, safe, easily accessible defecation areas and toilets, and key hygiene products.

References/Links

International Rescue Committee (no date) Environmental Health Sector Framework. New York, USA: IRC. ([on USB stick](#))

**VIOLENCE
GENDER
& WASH**

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