

PROACT NETWORK UPDATE

April 2009

MISSION STATEMENT

“ProAct Network helps vulnerable communities improve resilience to disasters, climate change and humanitarian crises, through sustainable environmental management.”

ABOUT PROACT

ProAct Network, a Swiss-based environmental NGO, was established in 2007. As of 1 April 2009, its headquarters is in Nyon (VD) – visitors are most welcome!

ProAct works with a small core staff, giving preference to developing a global network of technical partners – agencies and individuals – with whom we work.

Priority themes in our workplan are:

- * environmental management in relation to human displacement;
- * climate change adaptation;
- * disaster risk reduction and risk management; and
- * conflict prevention and reduction in relation to the use of natural resources.

ProAct works to support a range of UN agencies, humanitarian and development aid-focused NGOs, government agencies and local community structures engaged in environmental management.

Find out more on www.proactnetwork.org



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REFLECTING ON 2008

“Busy” would be an appropriate description of ProAct’s work in 2008, as we worked hard to consolidate our institutional structure and relations with key partners and collaborators. All of this in addition to developing and supporting an active work programme on the ground.

The inter-linkages between disaster prevention, risk reduction and environmental management were highlighted in our 2008 programme through a series of publications and high level events. Much attention was given to promoting innovative alternatives to hard engineering options for risk reduction, and our work is frequently cited in a number of high level fora. As a result of continued collaboration with partners who helped develop this work we anticipate substantial practical follow-up actions to take place in 2009.

In the humanitarian context, providing support to the UN Cluster system with our partner CARE International was a major component of our 2008 programme. ProAct and CARE have developed tailored guidance, policies and technical assistance to many clusters to help ensure that the environment is taken into consideration during emergency responses. A number of independent assessments were also carried out on environmental management and energy-related concerns in camps for refugees and internally displaced people, work that is continuing and already expanding in 2009.

We have received many positive comments on the successful niche which ProAct has developed over the past two years and I appreciate this a great deal. However, I also hope to see our institutional stature grow further in the years to come, primarily through increasing the number of partnerships and the provision of increasing support to vulnerable and affected communities.

Moving forward, we remain fully focused on our mission and strategy and on developing and strengthening our network of collaboration around the globe. I hope that we can still rely on your continued interest and support to achieve this. Thank you.

*Jean-Paul Jeanrenaud
Chairman, ProAct Network*

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION INSTITUTIONAL PROGRAMME REVIEW, BURUNDI

At the request of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), a review was undertaken of the ecological impacts of its humanitarian operation in Burundi.

High standards have been set to reduce possible environmental impacts of NRC's four offices in Burundi. Waste is recycled, energy consumption is kept as low as possible, procurement is environmentally conscious and buildings are well constructed and maintained.

In relation to shelter activities, NRC's Burundi shelter programme has constructed over 200 permanent and 600 semi-permanent classrooms, and more than 13,000 shelters for returnees and the host population. Shelter staff showed excellent knowledge of the origin and production techniques of all materials used: advantages and disadvantages of different products are carefully considered before selection, while a logistics database keeps track of supplier and contractor performances. At the same time, however, it is difficult to be fully efficient given the unavailability of certain materials in-country and the limited availability of imported goods such as iron sheeting and cement, as solutions to these are largely outside the control of NRC at present.

As in almost every camp situation in Africa, the question of domestic energy is a hot topic, and the Burundi programme is no exception. The Government of Burundi has requested that existing firewood supplies to the refugee programme are reduced by 75 per cent in 2009. Various approaches have been tried or suggested in recent years to reduce the amount of fuelwood consumed in the camps, but none has been effective thus far. Developing a realistic firewood management programme remains a challenge.

Having studied past attempts – and new opportunities – to address the energy dilemma, ProAct mission members Karen Walker and Chris Taylor point out that the most appropriate solution would appear to be to develop sound management and harvesting plans for plantations in the vicinity of camps and beyond. This would have environmental, economic and social benefits for local host communities, as well as wider benefits since management plans do not exist for most plantations in Burundi. Linked with an awareness programme, some basic assessments, training and monitoring these combined and complementary activities should in the short-term make a positive contribution by reducing the amount of wood being consumed, both by refugees and the host population.

A full report of this review is available on our website (Programmes). Le rapport est aussi disponible en français.

ProAct would again like to thank NRC staff in Burundi and Norway for their valued assistance during this review. Please contact karen.walker@proactnetwork.org or chris.taylor@proactnetwork.org for more details.



Preventing the making of charcoal is just one of the challenges facing the NRC firewood management programme.

ASSESSING ENVIRONMENTAL PRIORITIES, RWANDA AND THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Work has recently begun to assess and address the environmental impacts of refugee and IDP camps in both Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Working with UNHCR and CARE International in Rwanda, a recent assessment was made of the environmental conditions of three refugee camps hosting refugees from the DRC and Burundi. Observations showed that conditions in the camps have worsened in recent years and that in one case positive advances that had previously been made were now in reverse. Key issues of concern in most camps relate to soil erosion, gully formation on account of the high rate of water run-off from compacted soils and steep slopes, sanitation, deforestation and overcrowding.

Space is a premium in the camps – as it is in many parts of the country – which limits viable opportunities for engaging in income generation activities, including agriculture and livestock. A strategy for active re-engagement of environmental activities is now being prepared for UNHCR and district authorities.

ProAct has just signed an agreement with UNEP to begin work in eastern DRC on issues relating to energy, shelter and sanitation for IDPs and returnees, primarily in North and South Kivu. An initial scoping mission will be carried out late May 2009 to identify potential partners on the ground, assess the current environmental situation and develop a comprehensive programme of intervention in support of the ongoing humanitarian operation.

The physical location of camps like Gizika in Rwanda poses particular challenges in terms of environmental management and developing livelihood options. Deforestation, soil erosion, gully formation and water management are key concerns in most camps

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION: AN UPDATE

ProAct will be present at the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction organised by the International System for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) in Geneva from 16–19 June 2009.

ProAct and some of its partners will take part in a side event organised by the ISDR Partnership for Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction (PEDRR), that will focus on examining the linkages between ecosystems, livelihoods and disaster risk reduction. Specific attention will focus on how ecosystem management can serve as a long-term preventive and mitigation measure against disasters, while at the same time help achieve sustainable livelihoods.

In addition to PEDRR, ProAct has also been invited as a member of several other networks in climate adaptation. Among these is the Harbin Alliance, which seeks to harmonise climate adaptation and DRR agendas, the AdMit Consortium, which is developing an adaptation product for the carbon markets, and the Nairobi Work Programme on impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change, part of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

We look forward to meeting you at the Global Platform! For further information on ProAct's climate programme, please contact nina.saalismaa@proactnetwork.org



ENVIRONMENT IN CONFLICTS: TRAINING FOR EMERGENCY SHELTER

ProAct has just completed the Integrating Critical Environmental Issues into Emergency Shelter Cluster Activities project, funded by the Global Emergency Shelter Cluster through CARE International. This project focused on developing human capacities and technical resources to integrate environmental issues into emergency shelter operations.

Shelter specialists often have little time to consider environmental issues during emergencies. To help address this, a specialist training group, Interworks, was requested to develop a three-day course designed to enable environment specialist to acquire the knowledge and skills to serve as Environment Advisors in support of Emergency Cluster operations.



Training materials developed by Interworks were piloted first in Sri Lanka for the South Asia region and shortly thereafter in Honduras, for the Central America/Caribbean region. Thirty-three participants attended in total. One of the highlights of both training events was a field exercise where trainees were able to use the Emergency Shelter Environmental Impact Assessment and Action Checklist, an assessment tool developed under this project.

Both trainings were considered as a success by the organisers and participants. These events have also increased the number of potential Shelter Cluster Environment Advisors from 8 to 46 individuals, with many potential advisors speaking a second language fluently.

At the request of UNHCR in co-operation with CARE International in Sri Lanka, ProAct also undertook a rapid assessment of environmental conditions related to the current displacement of conflict-affected populations in northern Sri Lanka.



The assessment identified a number of significant environmental challenges related to current IDP sites. Among the recommendations was for Sri Lankan NGOs to take a greater role in addressing environment-related environmental issues at these sites, the posting of an Environment Advisor to support relief operations, and greater engagement between humanitarian organisations and the government on medium- and long-term planning to create environmentally sustainable IDP sites.

Sincere thanks are expressed to RedR UK in Sri Lanka and WWF United States and WWF Central America for their kind assistance in organising both training events. For more information, please contact Charles Kelly on 72734.2412@compuserve.com

POPULATION MOVEMENT IN A CHANGING CLIMATE: NEW POLICY PAPER

Migration induced by environmental factors is not recognised in national or international legal instruments. Cases of people being forced to move on account of climate change are, however, already being recorded while a growing number of areas are being identified as vulnerable and at risk.

ProAct believes that a multifaceted approach needs to be urgently developed to both accommodate and mitigate future flows of people and reduce the impacts of human displacement on the environment, as well as societies. Humanitarian and environmental organisations will increasingly be affected by environment-related human displacement whether they work in areas of disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, disaster recovery, development support, poverty reduction or conservation. Solutions need to be found that integrate livelihood resilience and sustainable resource management with both policy and practice in cases of displacement.

From a wide range of issues, ProAct has identified three main areas of concern:

- * environmentally induced migration is an old phenomenon but a new and growing concern;
- * the topic receives only limited institutional support; and
- * the impacts of population displacement are neither well understood or appreciated.

A new ProAct policy paper outlines the basis of our approach to environmentally displaced persons, highlighting what climate change contributes to the causes and consequences of this growing humanitarian issue, as well as the gaps in institutional support. The principles underpinning this approach to environmentally displaced persons are described with a view to developing and sustaining effective partnerships with at risk communities and other organisations. The paper recognises ongoing work by other institutions on issues relating to terminology, status and the actual number of people who already are, or may, become affected by climate change, and does not wish to duplicate this.

ProAct advocates that the following principles be developed further:

- * greater institutional support is required with both multi-sectoral and multi-level planning;
- * sustainable solutions need to be developed and supported at the local level; and
- * there is a growing need for knowledge gathering and sharing.

For more information on this topic and recent developments, please contact shannon.jaggi@proactnetwork.org

WEBSITE

ProAct's website has been transformed over the past few months and is now structured to reflect the organisations four priority themes – environmental management during a humanitarian response, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and conflict prevention.

If you would like to share information on our site, or should you require further details, please contact caroline.wood@proactnetwork.org

INTERN'S CORNER

As I finished my bachelor's degree in environmental engineering last summer, and having developed an interest in environmental security and humanitarian aid, I decided to take a break from my technical studies and learn a bit more about environmental issues in the humanitarian world.

ProAct staff shared all the aspects and levels of their mission with me: developing and writing policies about climate change, assisting institutional support projects touching water and sanitation, shelter, energy and forestry etc., as well as helping out with internal tasks from ProAct development to report designs and a new website concept. It was such a thrill to work on these issues that are of such growing concern today and to realise that my current studies could lead to some interesting and varied opportunities in this field.

Thank you ever so much for letting me be a part of your work for these past months and I look forward to keeping in touch!

Maoya Bassiouni

Intern June – December 2008
(And not yet quite gone!)



NEXT UPDATE

The next update will be produced in June 2009: contributions from partners and colleagues within the Network are most welcome. The next issue will focus on Strategic Environmental Assessments, and will include a report on ProAct's work in support of the forestry sector in Liberia.

Please send any information you would like to have included in the next update to nina.saalismaa@proactnetwork.org. Deadline for receipt of text is Friday 19 June. Thank You.

For additional information on ongoing projects please visit our new website at www.proactnetwork.org