

Chapter 18

Immediate action

Immediate action refers to intervention that must take place immediately in order to respond to an emergency and lead to stabilisation. This usually occurs directly after the impact phase of an emergency (period of cyclone, onset of genocide, etc.) but can occur at any point in a programme as the situation changes (cholera outbreak, etc.). This is often the most crucial stage of any emergency intervention programme where the most excess mortality occurs and where rapid and effective action can have the most impact on the health and well-being of the affected population.

18.1 Objective of immediate action

Immediate action is designed to meet existing and imminent urgent sanitation needs. It should involve relatively simple emergency interventions that can be implemented rapidly. The emphasis should be on preventing the spread of disease through the provision of basic services and amenities.

It is likely that the rapid assessment and priority-setting stage will identify the need for the immediate provision of some basic facilities or activities in order to contain excreta, solid waste, medical waste and wastewater at source, and minimise the spread of disease in the affected area. Assuming that the agency has the capacity to do this, it will allow them to act whilst they or other agencies design an appropriate longer term programme.

The overall aim of immediate action can be summarised as follows:

Immediate actions are designed to contain and localise excreta, solid waste, medical waste, dead bodies and wastewater, and promote best hygiene practice in order to create a safer environment and minimise the spread of disease in the affected area.

18.2 Action selection process

Figure 18.1 summarises the process used to select appropriate immediate actions. Although it is essential that actions have the maximum beneficial impact and that they can be imple-

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mented rapidly, it is also important that they do not conflict with or complicate long-term needs and plans.

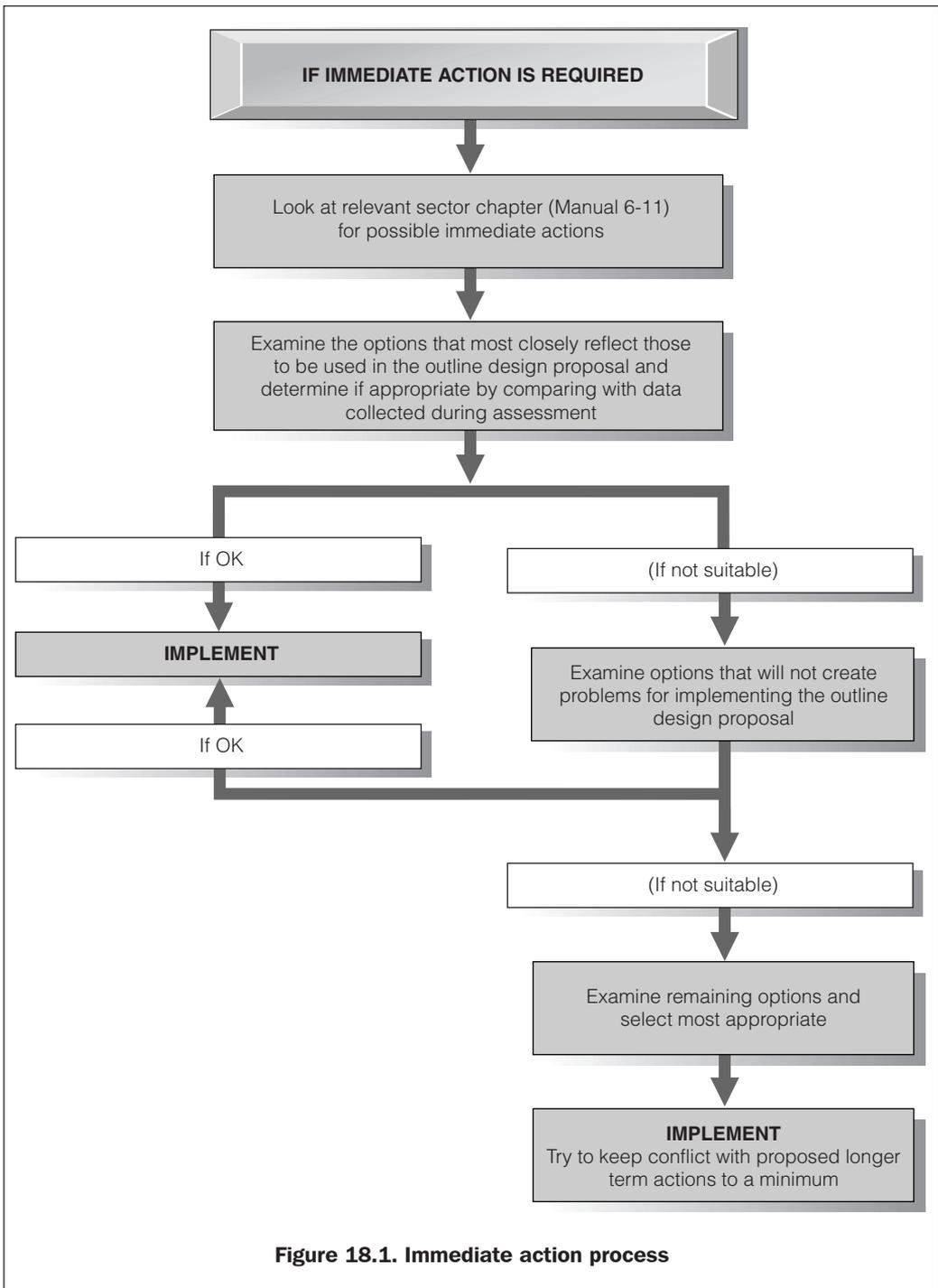


Figure 18.1. Immediate action process

18.3 Relationship with longer term activities

At this stage, the level of technology is basic to allow rapid implementation, and the emphasis should be on temporary emergency measures rather than long-term solutions. It is important, however, that the longer term plans produced in the outline programme design are taken into account and that conflict with these is minimised.

Once the immediate actions have been selected they need to be implemented immediately and rapidly. At this stage it is not possible to plan the implementation in detail, but care should be taken that decisions made now will not hinder or complicate the programme in later stages. For example, if a decision is made to pay workers from the affected community at this stage, it will be very difficult to mobilise community volunteers in future. It is therefore important that long-term aspects are considered from the onset.

It is likely that in the immediate action stage of an emergency, many of the practical activities will be conducted by agency staff with the help of a rapidly mobilised task force comprised of community volunteers. It is essential that only the basic **immediate** actions be conducted in this way. All longer term aspects of the programme must be properly planned and implemented in partnership with relevant stakeholders, according to the processes described in the detailed programme design.

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