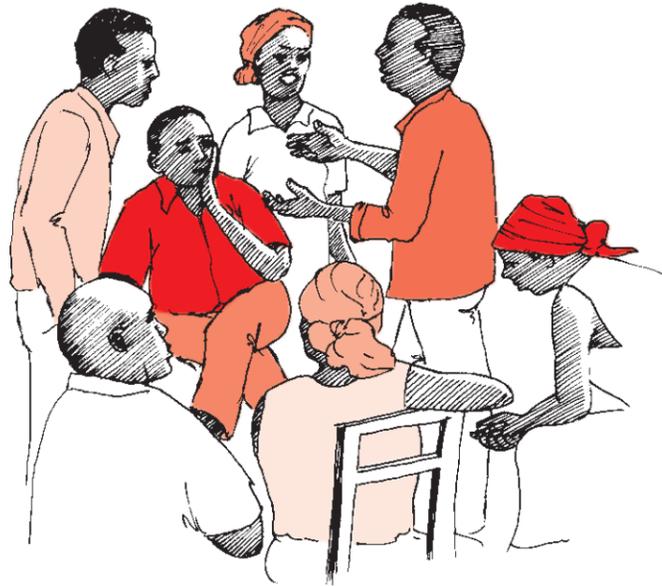


# Needs assessment

by Rachel Blackman

## TOOL 1 Listening

Ask questions to find out what people are hopeful, worried, sad, happy or angry about. Listen carefully and explore people's answers to gain the best understanding of needs.



**Many development projects are not sustainable because they are not 'owned' by the people they seek to help.**

Sometimes a project starts when one influential person in the community, or an outsider, looks at the community and identifies the issues that they think need to be addressed. For example, they may think that a community needs better access to water.

The problem with this is that the community members themselves may not think their water supply is a problem. Even if they do agree that they need better access to water, they may think that access to education and healthcare are higher priorities. If there is no demand for an improved water supply, people will not necessarily use it or maintain it.

The best way to find out demand is to ask community members what change they want the most in their community. This is called a *needs assessment*. A development project may then be set up to respond to this demand.

On these pages are a number of tools that can be used to carry out a needs assessment. It should involve as many people as possible, as issues will affect people differently. For example, lack of access to clean water may affect women more than men. Poorer or more isolated members of the community should be involved. Carry out the needs assessment with a cross-section of the community according to gender, age, ethnicity, ability, wealth, and religion.

With some issues, such as hygiene promotion or HIV and AIDS prevention, the community may not be fully aware of the need. The facilitator should raise and discuss these issues.

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## TOOL 4 Focus groups



A focus group consists of 10–20 people and enables them to discuss their different views and come to a collective understanding of the needs of the community. By exploring issues together from the start, communities start to own the project. Ask questions such as:

- What are the main pressures that people in this community face?
- If you could change only one thing in this community, what would it be? Why?

## TOOL 2 Interviewing

Talk to key people in the community about their knowledge, experience and understanding of important issues. These people may include health workers, traders, religious leaders, village chiefs and teachers. Ask questions such as:

- What are the main problems you face?
- What are the main pressures that people in the community face?
- What could we do ourselves to improve the situation?
- What changes would you like to see in the future?



## TOOL 3 Community mapping

Ask a group of community members to draw a map of their community to tell their story together. They can draw on paper or on the ground, using whatever resources are available. Don't give too much guidance of what to include, but the map might show the natural and physical resources in the area, or important people and organisations. Once the map has been drawn, encourage discussion by asking questions such as:

- How did you decide what to include? What was excluded?
- Which are the most important parts?
- What were the areas of disagreement? Why?
- What can we learn from the map about the needs of the community?



## TOOL 5 Identifying the priority need

Once the needs have been identified, community members should be given the opportunity to say which needs they feel are a priority. Write or draw the needs on separate paper bags. Give each person six seeds, stones, beads or bottle tops to use as counters. Each person in turn puts their counters into the relevant bags, according to their priorities. They should put three counters for their first priority, two for their second and one for their third. The counters in each bag are then counted and the results announced.

