

Good practices and soft skills for conducting needs assessment in emergencies

General

- Be aware of the underlying power dynamic that comes with your role as a representative of a relief agency.
- But don't underestimate your vulnerability in a needs assessment setting where you are out of your 'normal setting'. Under Tearfund's policy, when you, other staff and partners are dependent and reliant on others due to your context, you are considered 'vulnerable'. Ensure that you think through what that might mean for you and how you can mitigate potential risks.
- Safeguard interviewees and yourself in the process.
- Ensure beneficiary accountability in the process ie introducing your organisation, your name.
- Be sensitive and respectful.
- Ask open-ended, conversational questions where you can. For example, asking how the interviewee's day has been may highlight issues of primary concern for them.

1. BEFORE carrying out needs assessment:

- Be aware of the cultural practices and sensitivity around interacting with community members ie whether it is appropriate for people of the opposite sex to talk to each other.
- Ensure your in-country safety and security briefing covers local cultural practices.
- Be aware of the depth of vulnerability and pre-existing trauma the interviewees have faced.
- Be aware of the existing protection needs eg in IDP camps, children without parents.
- When selecting informants to talk to, ensure the vulnerable groups are represented ie women, elderly, people living with disabilities etc.
- Ensure you approach or notify the community leader/camp leader before conducting needs assessment.

2. DURING needs assessment:

- Always be with another staff member. Better to pair up to lower your vulnerability, and increase transparency and accountability.
- Remember to introduce Tearfund and your name and ask the interviewee's name before you start questions.
- Be on the same level as the interviewee ie sit if they are sitting.

- Be sensitive.
- Prepare yourself to handle trauma and grief.
- Remember to align expectations and not create dependency.
- Be present and observe more than you ask. Be conscious of your surroundings and not just driven by your tasks.

3. AFTER carrying out needs assessment:

- Thank the interviewee and ensure beneficiary accountability through sharing the results of the assessment.
- A helpful response might be: *'Thank you for your time. We will return to share the results of this assessment and propose a way forward. Anything else you'd like for us to keep in mind before we speak with other members of your community?'*
- If any complaints or issues arose during the needs assessment, ensure these are captured in a feedback log and responded to promptly by the appropriate member of staff.

Common scenario

Common scenario	Suggested response
When interviewee offers food and drink:	If this is a common local cultural practice, accept it in moderation.
When interviewee asks for food and money:	<i>'After we conduct all the assessments, we will see what we can do, but unfortunately I can't promise anything.'</i>
When interviewee asks, 'What do I get out of this?':	<i>'After the assessment, we will have a better idea of what the next steps are. Your suggestion can help this process.'</i>
When you witness safeguarding risks (eg parents hitting their children):	Do not interfere immediately if it is not life-threatening. Seek local staff's advice and refer if necessary.

Resources

Disaster Ready – [Emergency needs assessment online game \(login required\)](#)

Through a scenario, you will have the chance to practise the planning and implementation of an emergency needs assessment in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Choose your team, conduct interviews and apply the Sphere standards in this interactive learning experience.

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