CHAPTER 3

ASSESSMENT

Objective of Chapter 3

By the end of this chapter you should be familiar with a series of tools and approaches to conduct a participatory assessment, while paying attention to key cross-cutting issues (security and protection, discrimination and minorities, and the humanitarian principles of impartiality and independence).

3.1 BEFORE YOU BEGIN …

3.1.1 THE PROCESS

Identifying needs, recognising local capacities, pooling demands and delineating constraints and opportunities are primary challenges in the project cycle, as they will inform the programme design. How the assessment is conducted can make the difference between a meaningful programme and a project that is of little interest to the affected population.

Instigating this phase and responding to these challenges in a participatory manner is neither an easy nor an obvious task. The involvement of affected populations is, nevertheless, increasingly seen as not only useful, but also vital.

Essential questions to answer are set out below.

- What are the key elements of the context? This requires knowledge of the area's history, geography, economy, culture and social anthropology.
- What happened? This entails analysing the crisis and its effects on the local population and its environment.
- Who is who? It is important to know which organisations are present in the zone, as well as the local authorities, stakeholders, and the affected population.
- How is the affected population facing the crisis? Understanding vulnerabilities, capacities and coping mechanisms is essential in the design phase.
- What are the needs and the demands? The needs and demands of whom? It is crucial to comprehend what people require and what factors affect how these needs are transformed into demands.

Various methods and issues relating to participatory assessment are described in this chapter, in the sequence right.

Here are a few tips on using the various tools presented in this chapter.

- Participatory exercises can take **time** in the short term. But, if carried out appropriately, they can save a lot of time and help to avoid or manage difficulties later in the process!
- **Planning** is essential to the success of participatory exercises, so make the necessary adjustments and preparations before you arrive in the field. You can conduct a preliminary field visit, holding group discussions to inform representatives of the population of the exercise's purpose and its modalities.

- These exercises require that you and your team have a **sensitive attitude.** Make sure that the team is well prepared.
- In many situations, people are used to pre-formatted aid responses. Consequently, introducing a participatory process at this stage, which may differ significantly from more common question/answer methods, might at first have a destabilising effect. The initial response might be: what is this new game? What do they want? Be prepared, and, if necessary, be proactive in offering an explanation. (See chapter 2.)
- Transparency is also vital in relation to **security**. If people in the field or the parties to a conflict become suspicious of new and strange work, then problems may be looming. Also, be sensitive to security constraints. Do not take maps with you—for instance, in cases where villagers or the inhabitants of a camp for the displaced have indicated 'quasi-military information'.
- Do not forget that the objective of these exercises is not only to access a community and to collect data but also **to involve truly local stakeholders in reflections concerning a future project.** Carrying out exercises mechanically, in an extractive way, can strip them of their participatory features. Furthermore, do not be afraid to adapt your tools to suit participants from the affected population, and let individuals express themselves and structure the information that they provide according to their own practical experience and usual forms of dialogue.
- In this chapter, the presented tools are collective exercises, but there are many other ways of gathering information, including **informal means** like observations, visits and discussions. Make sure that you triangulate data garnered through collective exercises with those acquired in other ways.

To get the most out of this phase you should have read Part 1 of the handbook. Hence, an acceptable level of clarity, transparency and understanding should exist between you and your organisation on the one hand, and between you and the affected population and its associated structures on the other. Otherwise, you risk creating false expectations.

3.1.2 WHERE TO BE CAREFUL! KEY CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

It is important to be aware of key cross-cutting issues throughout the assessment phase, particularly in relation to the preparation of participatory exercises (such as choice of participants, location and the topics to be addressed).

A Security and protection

The participation of affected populations in the assessment phase presents specific advantages and risks for the security of humanitarian personnel and the protection of affected populations.

The advantages include the following points.

- Consulting the affected population on security issues can enhance one's understanding of the situation, facilitate recognition of advance warning signs, and help to avoid potential dangers.
- Involving the affected population in the early phases of a project can contribute to building a relationship of trust—the affected population is more likely to share security information with the aid organisation. The targeting of an organisation's teams and its programmes can, therefore, be prevented or managed by the population.
- Listening to various groups and individuals (women and children, for example) can bring to the fore protection issues that would otherwise have gone unnoticed.

The risks include the following points.

- Asking questions about the situation of a particular group (the victims of atrocities, refugees, displaced persons and besieged people, for instance), whether during individual interviews or group meetings, often leads to political considerations. In certain contexts, this can be interpreted as subversive and can put informants and the aid organisation in danger.

- The aid organisation can be suspected of collecting strategic data for the enemy or for a foreign power.
- By providing information, the population shifts from being a victim to being a potential eyewitness.

It is important to be aware of these risks, and to assess how they can be dealt with in the specific context in which you are working.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How can the participation of affected populations in the assessment phase enhance their security and that of humanitarian personnel?
- Which means of communication and which participatory assessment methods (focus groups and interviews) can put participants at risk, and how can this be avoided?
- What kind of information can put the lives of informants in jeopardy? Is collecting this type of data necessary?
- Where do you store the information? Should it be kept confidential? How do you guarantee that it remains so?

B Discrimination and minorities

In the assessment phase, there is a danger that certain groups, especially minorities and the marginalised, will be excluded. This can distort the information and the decisions that will inform the programme design, such that these groups may be excluded from the programme as a whole.

When consulting people on their needs or collecting information on local initiatives, for example, it is important to ensure that you obtain data that reflects the situation of all social groups present. Your choice of translator and/or 'cultural bridge' is essential here. When first engaging with a community, aid agencies are generally introduced to local leaders and to influential people; their intermediaries are often educated individuals hailing from the local elite. It is important, therefore, to go beyond these first contacts, while paying attention not to offend them.

> In **Afghanistan,** the traditional venues for exchange and negotiation within communities are the *shura* (Dari) or the *jirga* (Pashtun). These assemblies are very lively events; important issues can be raised in them. Yet, in most instances, they are dominated by a small number of 'white beards' or influential people. Although the aim is not to modify the social balance of power, it is crucial to understand who is speaking, and who would like to talk but does not. It is a very subtle exercise to ensure that the voiceless are given the floor in a way that does not antagonise the traditional elite. It requires observation of who is in the room, certain role-playing skills and a sense of humour. Like other exercises, this kind of meeting has to be prepared well in advance, with a skilful translator or national colleague.

KEY QUESTIONS

- How can I make sure that minorities and the marginalised are involved in the assessment phase, without stigmatising them further, or offending influential groups or individuals?
- Does my intermediary or national colleague enable me to have access to all groups? If not, how can I gain access? With whom can I interact to secure this access?

C Impartiality and independence

Maintaining your impartiality and independence, and being seen to respect these principles, will depend on who you speak to and engage with, and how you do so. This can require making sure that you are in contact with 'all sides', across political, religious or socio-cultural lines, or that you explicitly refuse to engage with the parties to a conflict, for instance. This means that you have to have a good sense of who is who, and of the political and social dynamics prevalent in the area.

If it is the first time that your organisation has worked in the region, it is fundamental to understand these dynamics before you engage preferentially with any local stakeholder. The choice of your cultural bridge is critical. In some areas, it may be best to work with someone who is not a member of the affected population, someone who is not, and cannot be perceived to be, involved in local socio-political dynamics.

When collecting information, it is necessary to triangulate it with that obtained from various sources, in order to paint as true a representation of the situation as possible. Designing a programme on the basis of biased data risks undermining the perception of independence and impartiality, and potentially creating security problems.

An essential part of respecting these principles is to communicate and to explain them from the outset. Remember always to ask yourself whether your actions are consistent with your principles.

KEY QUESTIONS

- Have I undertaken a stakeholder analysis before interacting in a preferential manner?
- Am I able to engage with various political, religious and social groups? If not, how can I do so?
- Have I communicated my principles to my intermediaries, and do they understand my position? Are my actions in line with these values?

3.1.3 FROM CONSULTATION TO SUPPORTING LOCAL INITIATIVES

The elements presented in this chapter can be used in different ways. One of the key factors to take into account is how you and your organisation view your position in regard to possible approaches to participation: instrumental; collaborative; and supportive. The main issues to consider are presented below.

Table 6 Instrumental, collaborative and supportive approaches to participation in the assessment phase

Description	Potential Benefits	Risks	Reminder
Instrumental			
Participatory data collection and feedback processes	Greater relevance and enhance quality of programme Initiating trust between the organisation and the affected population	Manipulation of information to orientate decision-making (by your organisation, or local stakeholders)	Triangulate information Be aware of the political stakes in relation to the provision of aid
Collaborative			
Assessment carried out jointly by your organisation and a local stakeholder (such as a local NGO or CBO)	Reinforcing local capacities (good in situations where crises are recurrent) Strengthening the link between relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) Minimising costs Initiating trust between your organisation and the affected population	Loss of impartiality, depending on whom you collaborate with	Know whom you are working with well. If needed, train local partners in participatory assessment methods

continued ▶

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Table 6 Instrumental, collaborative and supportive approaches to participation in the assessment phase continued

Description	Potential Benefits	Risks	Reminder
Supportive			
Assessment conducted by affected population or associated structure	Reinforcing the weight and recognition of local capacities Increasing ownership of the programme and motivation to be involved in future stage of the programme Initiating trust between your organisation and the affected population	Risk of low-quality assessment conditioned by habitual behaviour in relation to aid provision or poor local capacity Partiality of needs assessment	If needed, train local stakeholders in assessment methods Know the context and the people whom you are supporting well Both sides should together conduct an institutional analysis, putting their strengths and weaknesses on the table

3.2 UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

This section is concerned with the need to understand better the socio-cultural, historical, ethnic, geographic and economic components that, together, form the context. Some elements of it are generic, and these are presented here; others are more sector-specific and are dealt with in Part 3.

It is important to distinguish between analysis of the context as it existed prior to the current crisis, and analysis of the crisis itself. Failure to do so, often leads to considerable confusion in regard to comprehending the impact of the disaster, and thus to loss of pertinence in relation to the programme.

Although a lot of information exists in written form in books, in articles and on the Internet, it is important to solicit the views of the affected population and of key stakeholders. This will allow you to reach a shared understanding with them, and also offer the opportunity to have them validate or correct the 'context picture' that has been created.

3.2.1 THE HISTORY

The first challenge is to identify the most relevant events, dates, changes and issues, rather than to get drawn into a sea of detail. In this respect, a focus group, comprising a diverse range of key informants, organised around a small set of well-chosen questions, can be a very powerful instrument.

Exercise 1 The historical timeline

Objective

The aim of this exercise is to understand the recent history of the area and its people by identifying the main events that have impacted on the lives of the affected population.

Participants

A diverse range of participants, particularly in terms of ethnicity, is important to ensuring that gross manipulation is at least partly avoided. Depending on the context, the exercise can be conducted with a mixed group or with separate groups.

Step 1 You will need a board and some pens, a stick, or other local materials.

Step 2 Draw a line, and pinpoint two or three events that have occurred in the past 20 years (or more). Position them on the line in chronological order and explain to the participants that the goal is to fill the space with other events that have happened in the time in-between. It may be useful to mark the present.

Below are some fundamental questions that can assist you.

- Which developments have had an important effect on the area in the past five years? Ten years? Twenty years? One hundred years?
- What signs of this can be seen in the surrounding landscape?
- What kind of impact did these events have on the population?

Do not hesitate to highlight positive *and* negative events. Do not forget to 'pass the pen'!

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Exercise 1 The historical timeline continued

Step 3 Encourage memory recollection based on the information provided above (Step 2). Recall what happened before and after the incident. Do not think twice about letting participants draw, and take note of comments and feelings that manifest.

Step 4 Ask participants if they feel that the drawing includes all significant events (such as earthquakes, floods, harvests, arrivals of IDPs, fighting and the opening up of boundaries). Ask if they can identify possible cause–effect relationships between developments.

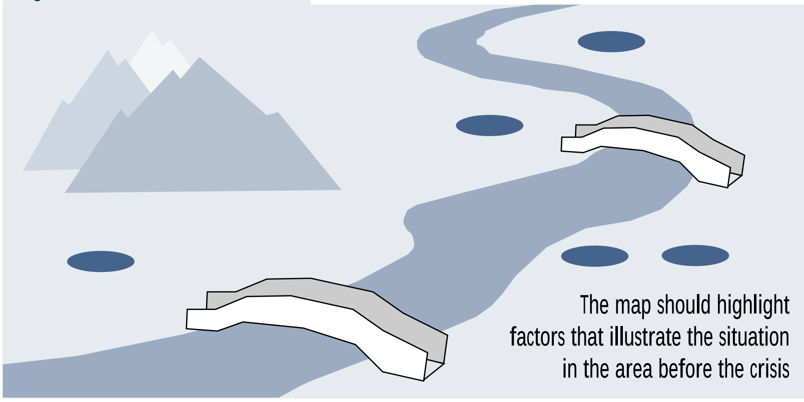
Do not forget that people can be very proud, very ashamed or very suspicious of their history. Indeed, the history of populations is often manipulated, even more so in times of crisis. *To work together we need to know each other.*

During the exercise, do not hesitate to present factors concerning the history and the geography of your own country. Establishing a kind of 'double past', as demonstrated below, can pave the way for building confidence and trust.

3.2.2 THE GEOGRAPHY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The next step is to form a general view of the geographical (mountainous areas, fields and rivers, for instance), social (public buildings and religious sites, for example) and economic (such as infrastructure and production sites) environment that existed **prior to** the crisis. Collective mapping exercises are very useful here.

Figure 9 The area before the crisis



Exercise 2 Mapping exercise

Objective

The goal is to understand how the affected population views the area in relation to topography (volcanoes, rivers, mountains, lakes), social organisation (schools, town halls, hospitals, health centres), culture (churches, mosques, cemeteries, sacred trees or sites) and economic system (crops, local markets).

Participants

The size and the composition of the group will depend on the situation.

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Exercise 2 Mapping exercise continued

Step 1 Plan the meeting: invite people to the group session. Offer information about the objective

Step 2 Before mapping: make sure that participants decide collectively how the map will be drawn and who will be responsible for sketching it

Step 3 Mapping: ask participants to start by outlining the boundaries of the zone. Be careful if there is any conflict in the srea; continue with the environment, infrastructure, and so on. Do not forget to ask questions and to invite participants to take the pen or the stick

Step 4 After mapping: askone of the participants to present the map to the group and request that the participants correct it, if necessary

Step 5 Make sure that you keep a copy of the map or take a picture of it for later use

3.2.3 SOCIETY AND THE ECONOMY

A The social make-up

Analysis of a population's social composition necessitates a high degree of sensitivity. In most instances, participatory dialogue on this issue requires the carrying out of significant preparatory work with key stakeholders and informants, as well as with potential operational actors (for example, your team and the NGO/CBO that you wish to work with).

Issues that need to be understood include:

- ethnic composition;
- gender relations;
- relationships between, and the role of, different age groups (knowledge of age distribution is useful here); and
- social hierarchies (based on caste, religion, ethnicity, language and wealth, for instance)

Information can be collected via a literature review, or through interviews with key informants, for example. Including a social anthropologist in your team or someone with relevant experience can be a very useful way of addressing these issues effective.

B Socio-economic stratification and the economy of the area

In assessing a situation, it is important to understand the socio-economic stratification of the population. Sophisticated socio-economic tools have been developed for this. In relation to a participatory assessment, it is vital to undertake this exercise in a way that is meaningful to the affected population in general and to the groups involved in the exercise.

There are different and complementary tools available for this exercise.

Qualitative tools

- **Wealth and vulnerability ranking** This is a key tool for understanding the distribution of wealth in a village or area and its evolution;
- **Identification of the population's resource basket** This tool enables one to comprehend what resources are available to the population and from where they can be obtained. This exercise has to be carried out through disaggregated focus groups (by gender, wealth group, and ethnic group, for instance)
- **Identification of the pillars of survival** This tool allows for proper identification and prioritisation of the population's survival strategies;
- **Analysis of production processes** This facilitates understanding of the different production-process phases and will be very helpful in appraising properly the impact of the crisis on the local economy.

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Exercise 3 Participatory wealth- and vulnerability-ranking exercise

Objective

The goal is to understand better the different 'wealth groups' that exist in the affected area. This exercise can help you and your team:

- to identify various wealth groups;
- to comprehend perceptions about wealth and vulnerability;
- to pinpoint poor and vulnerable people;
- to understand the system of ranking that is accepted by the affected population (based on caste and religion, for example) and the criteria for social differentiation; and
- to appreciate each group's means of survival.

In a second phase, this exercise can help in making comparisons between groups and in elaborating the social map of the area.

Participants

Make sure that women, elders and young people are represented. Small focus groups are better to avoid discrimination and inequality and to hear the voice of the 'voiceless'.

Step 1 List the wealth groups

Wealth groups	1	2	3	4

Step 2 List the different resources available to the population

Resources	A	B	C	D	E

Step 3 Establish the distribution of resources by wealth groups

Resources / Wealth groups	1	2	3	4
A				
B				
C				
D				
E				

continued ▶

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Exercise 3 Participatory wealth- and vulnerability-ranking exercise continued

Step 4 Attribute weight to each category using the proportional-piling system (see below for details on how to use proportional piling)

Resources \ Wealth groups	1	2	3	4
A	●	●●●●	●●	●
B	●●●●●●●	●●	●●●●	●●
C	●●	●	●●●	●●●●●
D	●●●●	●	●●	●●●
E	●	●●●●●●●	●●●●	●●●

During the exercise, there is normally a lively debate on the number of beans or stones to be attributed to each category. The debate, and the behaviour (body language) that can be observed, often reveal many elements concerning power relations and the perceptions that each group has of itself and of others.

Exercise 4 Pillars of survival

Objective

The goal is to develop a picture of the different coping strategies of affected populations.

Participants

Separate focus groups might need to be organised in order to identify the key elements of specific group survival strategies.

Do you need guidance?

The central pillar represents the main survival mechanism, while the 'branches' portray additional strategies - the most important of which are represented by the lower 'branches' (see the example on coping strategies in the food-security chapter).

Step 1 Explain the rationale behind the pillars of survival. Ask participants to identify groups with different survival strategies, and then to describe them. You can choose to have separate pillars for each group

Step 2 Through ranking and brainstorming, ask participants to establish a hierarchy of survival pillars

Step 3 Try to identify possible variations (poor farmers and special groups, for instance). Promote debate and try to comprehend the reasons for people's priorities

It is often interesting to take a disaggregated approach, holding separate working sessions composed of different groups.

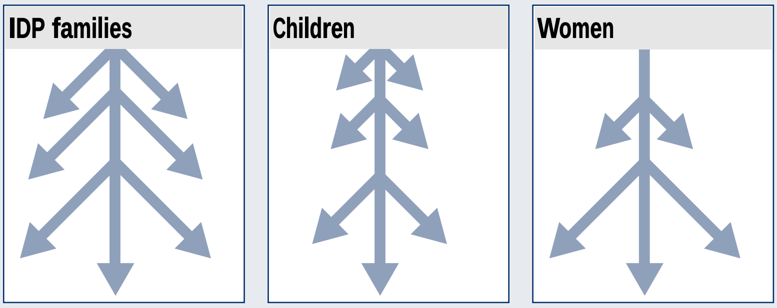

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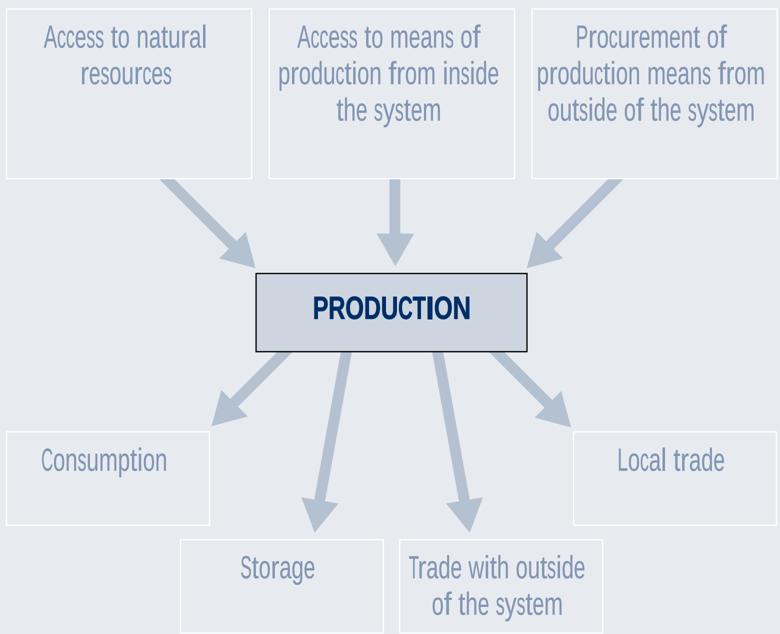
Figure 10 The status of the 'agricultural-production function' prior to the crisis



Participatory analysis of economic processes is less problematic than wealth ranking, although it also touches on social and economic relations between different segments of the population, and must, therefore, be carried out with care. Table A presents a way of describing visually the status of agricultural production prior to the crisis. This kind of graph can be drawn during a focus group.

Exercise 5 Graph on economic processes

Objective

The goal is to identify inflows and outflows in relation to the means of production, as well as the output of economic activity.

Participants

The group can be composed of participants representing various sectors of economic activity. Alternatively, separate groups can be set up differentiated by the kind of economic activity that they are engaged in.

Step 1 Explain the process and the rationale behind it—that is, to understand the way that the economy functions in order to comprehend, at a later stage, the impact of the crisis

Step 2 Let people 'brainstorm', while one person maintains an organised record of ideas on a visual support, such as a paperboard

Step 3 Ask people to identify 'weak points' in the chain

Step 4 Keep the drawing for use at a later date

Quantitative tools

Proportional piling is probably the best tool to quantify issues in a participatory process in a context of limited literacy.

This tool can be used for a variety of purposes e.g. each time you need to estimate relative quantities (e.g. estimating needs, post-distribution monitoring, impact evaluation, etc.).

Exercise 6 Proportional piling

Objective

This tool has been designed to quantify factors in any given environment, including with those that are illiterate. It helps provide an understanding on proportions and percentages of various items through an enjoyable game. Potential applications of this exercise are very diverse. For example, it enables you to:

- Understand the economic differences in a population;
- Understand the distribution of resources to different socio-economic groups;
- Understand the distribution of various food items in a meal;
- Identify the respective weight of different survival strategies for a group; etc.

Participants

Make sure that women, elders and young people are represented. Small focus groups are better to avoid discrimination and inequalities and to hear the voice of the 'voiceless'.

Step 1 Prepare your session. Make sure all participants have been invited. You will need several sets of stones or beans, mussels or dry fruits of similar size and colour, a set of large pieces of paper or a large area of clean land or sand under the shadow of a tree

Step 2 Present the objective of this exercise and clarify the specific subjects under study

Step 3 Ask participants to make piles of stones or beans the size they think represent the phenomenon under study. For instance: 55 beans represent the proportion of poor people in the area, 20 of average economic level, 25 of rich people; or 70 stones represent the size of the wheat component of the ration, 20 the beans, 5 the meat, 5 the vegetable

Step 4 Have a debate on this proportion and try to identify possible variations. If needed organised sub groups to quantify the different options. You can for instance ask: how was it 20 or 5 years ago, last year and have each time a different proportional piling

Step 5 Record

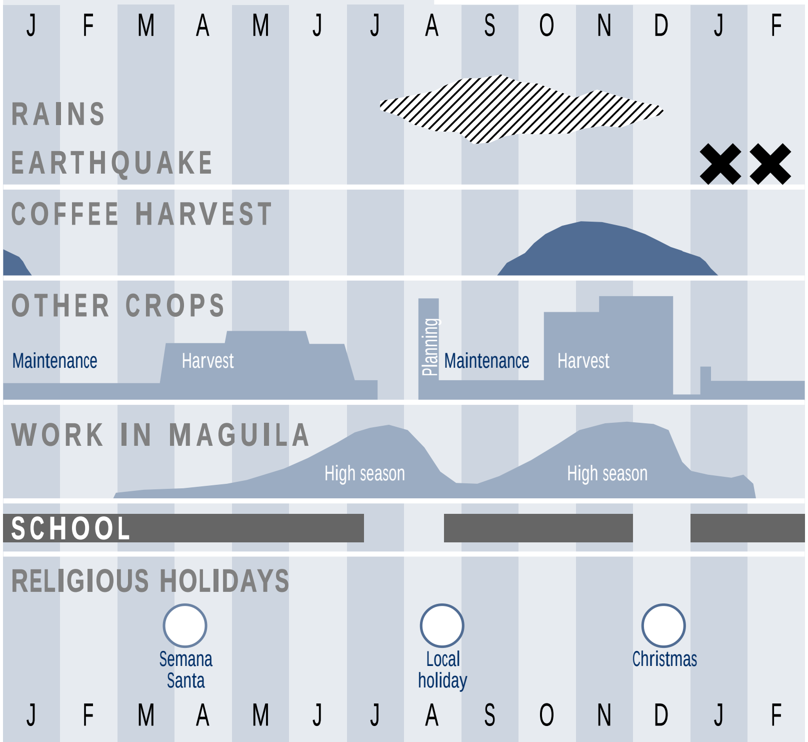
Step 6 Final discussion and elaboration of a piece of the assessment

3.2.4 TIME: CALENDARS AND SCHEDULE

Drawing up a calendar of activities in relation to seasonal and climatic patterns is also a very interesting exercise, which can yield a significant amount of data.

Compiling a calendar of various productive and non-productive activities in a participatory manner reveals information that is essential for the assessment and for the planning of any initiatives. Unfortunately, this is seldom done. Many setbacks in humanitarian programmes have their origin in the disconnection between aid action and the local activity schedule, including planting, harvesting, and moving flocks and herds from seasonal pastures to other areas.

Figure 11 **Seasonal activity calendar** El Salvador 2000



Exercise 7 Seasonal activity calendar

Objective

The goal is to understand the seasonal actions of affected populations and to identify the main events (religious and political proceedings and traditional holidays, for example), activities (such as planting, harvesting and the seasonal migration of livestock), and problems (like blocked roads during the rainy season and snowfall) that occur throughout the year.

Participants

To fill in the calendar you need a representative from all of the affected population's social groups. Forgetting one group can lead to a skewed understanding of the situation and to errors or omissions in the **programme design.** Several small groups can be useful, so as to understand the specificities of each. It is possible to work with one group if all of the different socio-economic groups are represented and able to speak, and if discrimination of minorities is not too strong.

Step 1 Planning the session: identify the number of sessions and the groups that will partake in the exercise. Be aware of the situation of minorities and of the risk of discrimination

Step 2 During the session: discuss with the group which timeframe will be covered (such as one calendar year) and the way that they want to divide it up (into months or weeks, seasonal periods, or holidays, for instance). Make sure that you know how the local calendar relates to the one that you usually use. Ask participants to complete the calendar

Step 3 After drawing the calendar: ask one person to present it to the other participants and to complete it or to make adjustments, if necessary.

Step 4 Make sure that you keep a copy of the calendar or take a picture for future reference

Daily schedules are another useful tool for visualising how members of the affected population organise their time. They highlight daily routines, times when people are most busy, or, conversely, when they are more available.

Figure 12 Example of a woman's daily schedule (prepared in Afghanistan)

6am	Wake up. Fetch water.
7am	Care for the children.
8am	Clean the house.
	Work in the kitchen/garden.
10am	Go to the market to buy food.
12pm	Prepare lunch.
1pm	Men eat lunch.
2pm	Women eat lunch.
	Clean dishes/kitchen.
4pm	Put wood or fuel in *bukhari* (heater) to warm water.
	Bathe children.
6pm	Prepare dinner.
7pm	Put youngest children to bed.
7.30pm	Dinner for men.
8pm	Go to bed. Sleep.

Exercise 8 The daily schedule

Objective

The goal is to understand the daily activity patterns of a specified group.

Participants

This exercise can be done in small, homogeneous groups (distinguished by gender, age, socio-economic class and profession, for example). It is important to note that people's daily routines vary greatly between groups.

Step 1 Invite all of the participants, and make sure that they understand the aim of the exercise

Step 2 Draw a timeline or a table (each column corresponding to a part of the day), spanning the time between when participants wake up and when they go to bed

Step 3 Ask them to describe their activities throughout the day. You can enquire as to what they did yesterday, for example, or what they do on a 'typical' day

Step 4 Open the discussion on the participants' daily activities, and, for instance, the constraints that they face during the day. Questions include: do you go to fetch water early in the morning? How far is the nearest water point? How much time do you spend preparing food?
People's schedule can, of course, vary, depending on the season of the year and the time of the week (such as weekends and Fridays in Muslim countries). Hence, it may be necessary to draw up more than one daily schedule.

3.2.5 OTHER IMPORTANT FACTORS

Various other factors, expected or unexpected, can be part of the situational analysis, including local initiatives, previous experience of aid programmes and participatory approaches.

These may not necessarily constitute a topic for a focus group, but information can be gathered through key informants, observation, or discussion in participatory exercises described above.

Keep your eyes and your ears open! Be ready to hear or see the unexpected.

3.3 UNDERSTANDING THE CRISIS AND ITS EFFECTS

A crisis is an event that can be described in many different ways by different actors. Humanitarian agencies often tend to have a narrow, supply-driven view of the crisis and its impact. One often forgets to take into account the opportunities that arise from it, and the adaptation mechanisms that frequently exist in areas where crises are recurring phenomena. Where aid workers have little knowledge of the context, they tend to neglect in their analysis important elements of the situation prior to the crisis and the crisis itself. It is useful, therefore, to make the effort to engage in a collective exercise to assess the crisis and its effects.

It is also easy to forget that areas are often affected more than once in a person's lifetime. While aid workers, particularly expatriate personnel, are deployed for just a few months, people often have to deal with difficulties and disasters on a regular basis. Consequently, it is essential to see one's actions as something that will be integrated into the affected population's coping mechanisms—as a means of assistance when these processes are overwhelmed by the magnitude of the crisis or when they cannot function properly due to internal or external factors.

Experience shows that it is useful to adopt a two-step approach:

- establish a global picture of the crisis; and
- go into detail, analysing the crisis in relation to the environment, the local economy, and the population's activity calendar.

A series of participatory exercises is presented below, but do not forget that a lot of information can also be collected informally, through, for instance, informal interviews (such as listening to people's anecdotes), observations, and visits.

3.3.1 ESTABLISHING THE GLOBAL PICTURE OF THE CRISIS

Be open. Our perceptions of the crisis are often very different from those of the affected population, notably concerning its causes.

Listen to the discussion, let people talk, and try to understand their views on the causes of the crisis. In the case of natural disasters, this exercise can also reveal local beliefs and traditions related to the event.

3.3.2 GOING INTO DETAIL

Having developed a general description of the crisis, it is possible to discuss in greater detail how it has affected the lives of members of the affected population, and how it is still doing so. At this point, it might be important to establish a different audience, either by enlarging the group or by organising a greater number of specific groups.

Several typical Participatory Rural Appraisal tools are useful here, including site visits, 'transect walks', mapping exercises and elaboration of calendars.

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Exercise 9 Analysing the crisis

Objective

The aim of this exercise is to establish and validate collectively the **global picture** of a crisis and its impact on the affected populations.

Participants

Mixed focus groups are welcome; minorities, though, have to be present. In certain contexts, specific focus groups for minorities should be set up, especially when the crisis involves conflict or attacks on particular groups. Be careful with cross-cutting issues (security and protection, discrimination, and impartiality). In most instances, you should triangulate collected information by interviewing key informants.

Step 1 You will need a board and some pens, a stick and the ground, and other local materials

Step 2 This exercise can be organised around three main factors: Crisis trends in the area; the crisis being analysed; the impact of this crisis.

Step 3 Invite the affected populations to fill three paperboards (pictures are welcome!)

Crisis trends in the area	Description of the crisis being analysed	Description of its impact
Types • Frequency • Impact of previous crises • Existing prevention or preparatory measures	What happened? • When? • What area was affected? • Were there any warnings?	What happened to you? • What happened in the village? • What happened in other affected areas?

Step 4 Open the debate. Does everybody agree with the points being made? Does the impact of the crisis differ depending on factors like social position, age and gender?

A The crisis in terms of geographical and social environment

Affected populations benefit from a geographical understanding of the crisis. These exercises are effective participatory tools to help identify simultaneously:

- the geographical impact of the crisis;
- the existing physical constraints on the affected population; and
- the physical restrictions on humanitarian action, such as limited access due to insecurity, destroyed infrastructure, or climatic considerations.

As seen below, the map prepared in section 3.2.2 can be used to highlight changes arising from the crisis. Comparison of maps drawn 'before' and 'after' the crisis provides a rich source of information.

Be aware of sensitive information, such as the location of landmines and checkpoints. Especially in a conflict context, this information can affect the security of affected populations.

Figure 12 The area before the crisis

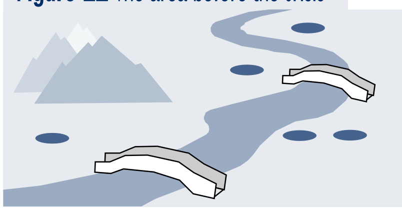
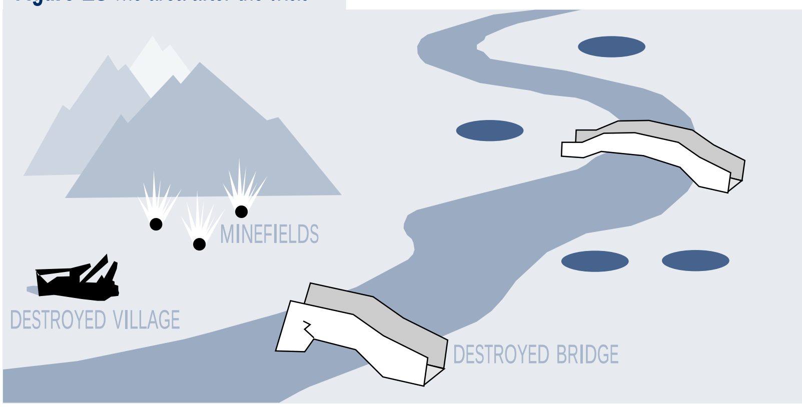
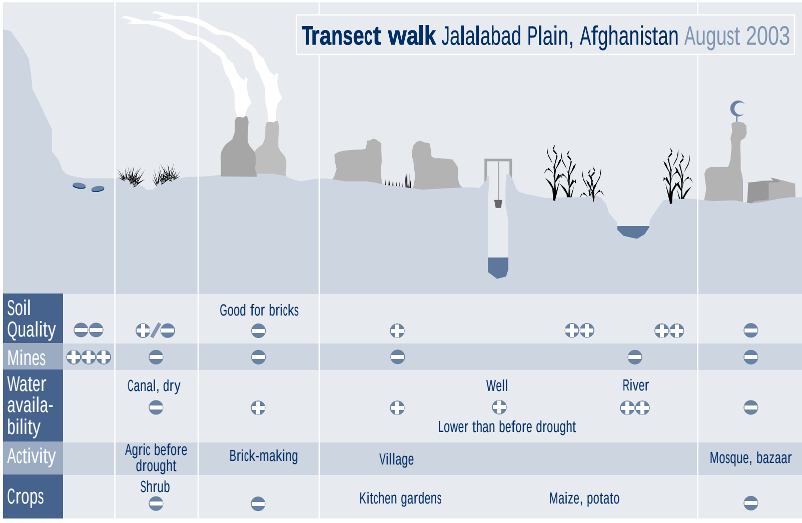


Figure 13 The area after the crisis





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Another useful tool (to complement maps) is the transect walk, providing a cross-sectional rather than a bird's-eye view of the impact of a crisis. It helps in verifying and qualifying elements on the map, and enables the collection of data that is not marked on the map.

Exercise 10 The transect walk

Objective

To establish a joint understanding of various characteristics of the area: the geography, topography, vegetation, agricultural activities, hydrology etc. This is done by walking straight across an area with a group from the affected population, taking notes, and drawing a cross-section of the visited area with participants.

Participants

Choose a small group. If possible, invite the affected population to choose the group's members. Make sure that a diverse range of people (men and women, farmers and IDPs, for instance) is represented. Do not forget that, in some cultures, walking with a foreigner or 'outsider' can be a source of insecurity, so make sure there are no risks to security before engaging in this exercise.

Step 1 Plan the walk: choose a guide and identify the logistics, materials and time that you will need

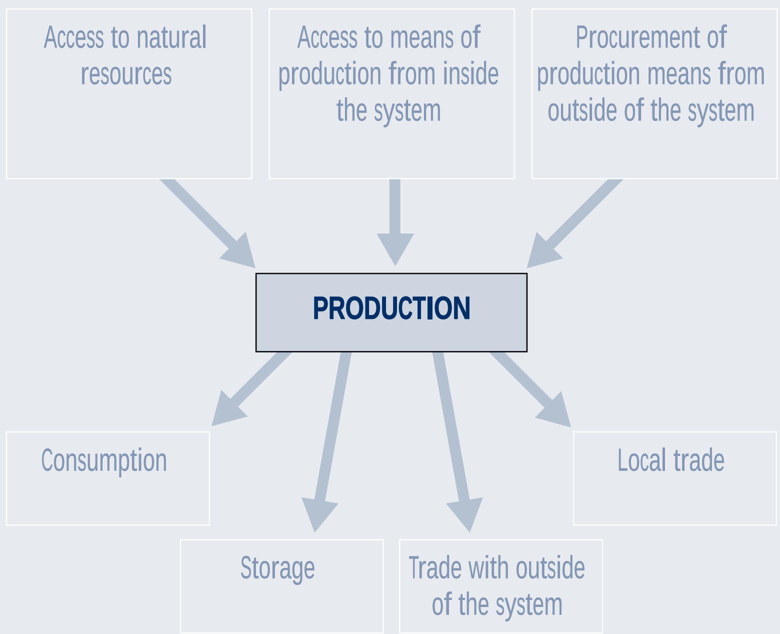
Step 2 Before the walk: decide collectively on who will do the walk ('the transect walk recorder'). You can ask several persons to do this

Step 3 During the walk: stop, ask, observe (at water points, schools, rivers and forests, for example), and discuss what you see.

Step 4 After the walk: ask the transect walk recorder to present 'the transect' to other participants and to open a discussion on what has been seen

The purpose of conducting a participatory transect walk is to view the affected region through the eyes of the affected population: open your eyes and your ears, walk, ask and generate discussion and adapt your approach if necessary.

Figure 14 The status of the 'agricultural-production function' prior to the crisis



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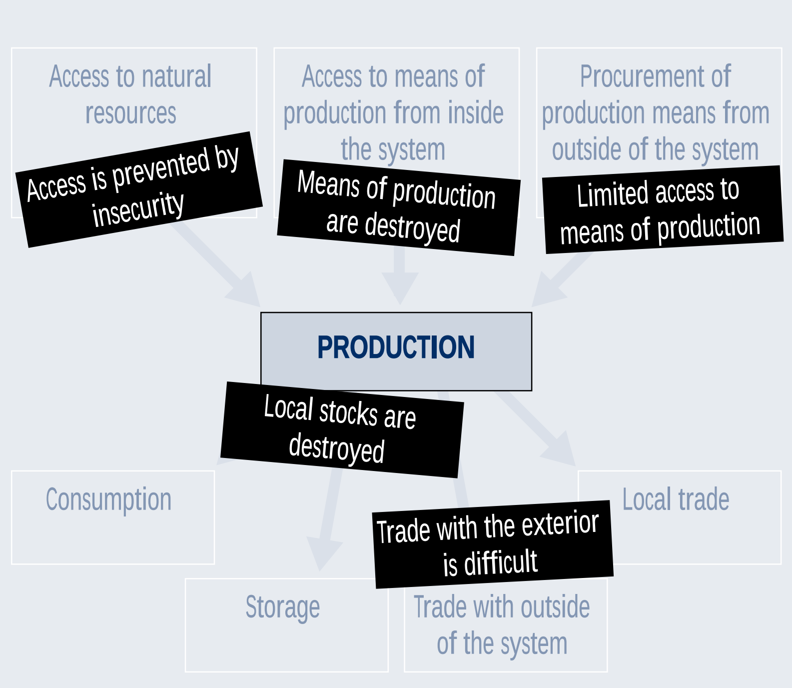
B The crisis and the local economy

The objective of the following exercise is for the focus group to explain how the crisis has affected production processes. Table A shows agricultural production in normal times, especially before the crisis; Table B shows how the crisis has impacted on agricultural production. Both are easily established in a participatory manner, as indicated in the context analysis.

Another interesting exercise is to compare loss of assets among the various wealth groups that have been identified above, since the impact

Figure 15 The crisis affects the system



of the crisis will surely differ between them. This can be done through proportional piling or by conducting a new wealth-ranking exercise.

C The crisis and time: activity calendars

Situating the crisis in relation to the affected population's activity calendar can highlight important aspects in terms of the impact of the crisis. This can be done in a focus group, taking the calendar that was prepared collectively in section 3.2.3. Ask the group to mark on it crisis-related events, such as the site of floods and massacres.

Figure 16 Somalia, the April 1992 war in Baidoa and the Central Sorghum Belt

	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J
SEASONS		GU SEASON							DEHR SEASON			
SORGHUM CROP		Sow		Weed		Harvest		Store con-sume	Sow	Weed	Harvest	
DISASTER		War		Insecurity								
IMPACT		No plantation. Food and seed stocks destroyed or consumed		The few seeds that were sown could not be weeded or taken care of		Yield limited or non-existent		Availability of seed extremely limited				
	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J

Had the war taken place at after the harvest, the impact of the crisis would have been different. This conclusion emerges when such a calendar is established.

2

If the crisis has affected people's daily routines and activities, it can also be interesting to compare their daily schedules before and after the crisis.

3.4 UNDERSTANDING WHO IS WHO

In a fragmented society, conducting a participatory stakeholder analysis is not a simple, risk-free endeavour. On the contrary, it requires tact and skill. Disaggregating the overall human environment in order to produce an organised typology of different stakeholders and their different agendas is, nevertheless, an important step.

Stakeholders that should be considered include, for example, traditional leaders and political structures, national and local authorities, international NGOs (INGOs) and local NGOs (LNGOs), and the perpetrators of violence (militaries and guerrilla forces, for example). One should not be set on traditional means of categorisation, however, as choosing the wrong stakeholder classification process or being attached to standards can mask the specificities of each context.

A socio-anthropological analysis of the area, with a focus on political dynamics, can be useful in yielding important background information prior to a stakeholder analysis.

The stakeholder analysis can be conducted via a relatively easy two-step exercise. Only basic materials are needed, including a board, coloured cards, pencils, or whatever you find on the spot.

Remember that these exercises might take time, as power dynamics and issues such as exploitation may be raised.

Be careful! These exercises will raise all kinds of questions concerning existing power relationships within a community and between groups, including those pertaining to traditional structures and local authorities. Hence, they must be conducted in a very diplomatic and systematic way.

The choice of participants will depend on the objective of the activity. The presence of leaders is frequently a factor leading to bias. In certain cases, it is useful to have several groups in order to avoid confrontation. Remember, the aim is to learn about and to understand relationships, not to alter them.

A Phase 1 List all of the possible stakeholders and describe them

The main question to explore here is: who are the stakeholders and the parties that played, and most likely will continue to play, a role in this situation and the programme? To answer this question, you can follow the participatory method presented below.

Exercise 11 Participatory stakeholder analysis: identifying stakeholders and their characteristics

Objective

The goal is to identify and classify the stakeholders and to construct a picture of the NGOs, institutions and other actors that are present in the zone. It is important to identify elements that aid understanding of who these stakeholders are and how they relate to one another.

Participants

Participants should have sufficient knowledge of the various stakeholders to be able to describe them. It might be necessary to convene separate focus groups in order to ensure that you cover the variety of stakeholders, and to triangulate the collected information with interviews and observations.

Do you need guidance?

The grid below can help in listing known characteristics and indicators. It can be partly filled during a focus group and completed at a later stage.

Step 1 Plan your session: identify participants, and collect the materials that are needed, such as pens, paperboards and pictures

Step 2 Define the boundaries for the exercise. Which area? Which stakeholders? Be sure that everybody is using the same definition of 'stakeholder' or the chosen term

Step 3 Hold a brainstorming session to identify stakeholders

Step 4 Ask participants to classify them

Step 5 Try to fill in the grid. You do not need to fill it with words; you can use images

Step 6 Begin a debate about the importance of stakeholders and/or the influence that they have over the affected population

The following grid can help in listing the characteristics of stakeholders. It is very useful in identifying the main features of the various actors and stakeholders in a participatory manner. It is probably difficult to fill in this grid all at once, but it plays a useful function in guiding the information collection process. This matrix is an example, of course, which can be adapted to suit the context that you are working in and the information that you will need to gather.

Name of actor or stakeholder	Nature	Mandate and stated principles	Origin/ history	Nature of relationships with the organisation and constituency	Capacity to deliver	Capacity to be accountable	Capacity to work in crisis situations	Other
	International							
	National							

B Phase 2 Describe the interaction between stakeholders

There are several ways of identifying interaction between stakeholders. Choosing the tool that best meets your needs is thus very important. It will depend on whether you want to understand relations between power and solidarity or between proximity and distance. Four tools are presented below.

Exercise 12 Interaction diagram

Objective
The aim is to identify relationships, especially power relationships between stakeholders.

Participants
Be careful, power relationships can be a sensitive issue. In some contexts, it may be necessary to set up separate focus groups so as to avoid creating tension or even generating conflict between participants. It is also necessary to ensure that you have an impartial, or at least a diverse, view of relationships between stakeholders.

Step 1 Prepare for your session: you can use a paperboard and some pens. Following this, draw some circles

Step 2 Ask participants to place the names of stakeholders in the different circles

Step 3 Ask participants to draw lines between stakeholders, choosing different colours to represent solidarity, power, and other types of relationships. The thickness of the line symbolises the importance of the relationship

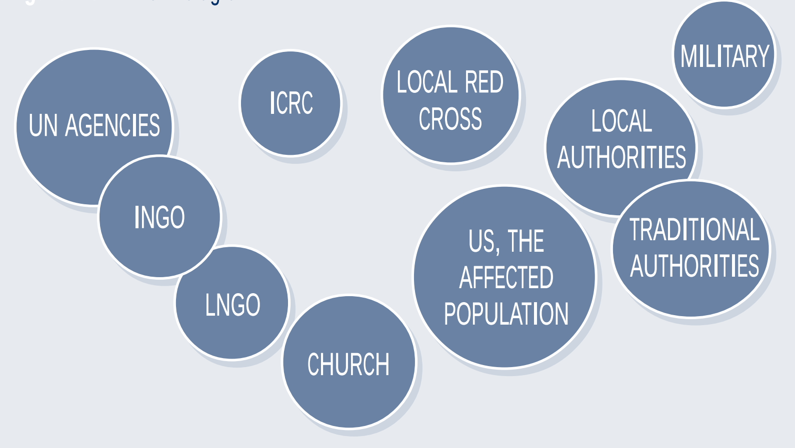
Step 4 Encourage debate to explore the type of relationships that exist between stakeholders and affected populations

2

Figure 17 Interaction diagram

The Venn diagram offers another way of presenting information, which identifies and analyses the level of interaction between stakeholders and between other actors.

Figure 18 A Venn diagram



Exercise 13 Venn diagram

Objective

The goal is to represent relationships between stakeholders. This tool can also be used to identify relationships between social groups and to uncover the degree of power within a group.

Step 1 Preparation work. **Flipchart** you need paper and different coloured marker pens. **Drawing on the ground** you need sticks, grain and smalls stones. Remember to take a photo of the diagram or to copy the information. **Constructing a collage** you should prepare several circles in different sizes and colours. You will also need glue or tape and a surface to work on.

Step 2 Make a list of stakeholders/groups. Ask participants to complete and verify it

Step 3 Draw one or several circles for affected populations and/or sub-groups. Ask participants to place the population in the middle of the paperboard or the circles on the ground

Step 4 Each stakeholder is placed in one circle.

A Ask participants to choose (or to draw) circles depending on the importance of each stakeholder or group. One variation on this exercise is to use small stones, depending on the importance of the stakeholder—zero stones represent an actor of no importance; four stones symbolises one that is very important.

B Ask participants to explain the reasons why certain stakeholders or groups are more important than others. Do not hesitate to ask for examples.

C Ask participants to position circles according to their experiences. The tighter the relationship is between two entities, the closer they should be to each other.

D The group can move the circles until agreement is reached

Yet another way of illustrating relationships between stakeholders is to carry out a 'proximity–distance' analysis.

Exercise 14 Proximity–distance analysis

Objective

The aim is to establish the degree of proximity between stakeholders and affected populations.

Participants

Again, make sure that there is no potential for creating tension between participants, yet the composition of the group should be diverse enough to allow for a rich discussion.

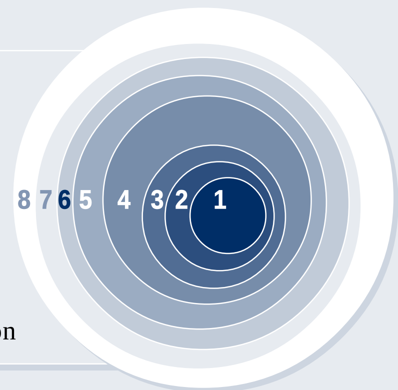
2

Step 1 You do not need much time for preparation

Step 2 This analysis can occur easily by drawing concentric circles. The circle placed at the centre is assigned to the affected population, or to the group that the participants represent

Step 3 Participants then assign one type of stakeholder to the following circle and continue until all stakeholders have been allocated a circle. Do not forget to explore the reasons behind each choice. For instance, why did you insert this stakeholder and not another one? What is the difference between these two actors that made you choose one over the other?

For example,
1 Affected population
2 Traditional associations
3 …
4 …
5 Local NGO
6 International NGO
7 International organisation



3.5 PARTICIPATORY VULNERABILITY AND CAPACITY ANALYSIS

An essential step in regard to participatory approaches to humanitarian action is recognition of local capacities. Failure to do so encourages top-down approaches, which either overlook or undermine existing capacity. Furthermore, designing a programme without considering what can be done or what is already being done locally can either lead to programmes that are of little interest to the population (especially if they overlap with local initiatives or contradict local practice) or that generate feelings of mistrust or frustration.

One way to make sure that a programme can support, rather than undermine, local capacity is to conduct a Capacities and Vulnerabilities Analysis (CVA).

Exercise 15 Capacities and Vulnerabilities Analysis

Objective

The goal is to get the group to understand its own weaknesses, vulnerabilities and capacities. Key questions include the following.

- What are the vulnerabilities of each group? Why do these groups become vulnerable?
- What are the capacities of each group? How are they employed today?
- How can the programme take account of these capacities and vulnerabilities?

It can also be a powerful participatory exercise for:

- improving the targeting and prioritisation of needs; and
- better understanding risks and coping strategies, disaggregated by group (according to gender, age and ethnicity, for example).

continued ▶

2

Exercise 15 Capacities and Vulnerabilities Analysis continued

Participants

The composition of the focus groups is a central issue. In situations where it is possible to have mixed groups, it is important to ensure that women and children have the space to express themselves. In some cases, it is more fitting to have separate focus groups.

Depending on the social situation, it may also be appropriate to divide the data into different categories (like caste and socio-economic group) and to organise focus groups accordingly. This is a real challenge in relation to participatory techniques, as often, due to social pressure within the group, affected populations tend to see or to present themselves as a homogenous group of affected persons.

It is important to take into account divisions on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, class, caste or religion, because they can weaken the social fabric, increasing a group's level of vulnerability.

Do you need guidance?

The following grid can help in listing vulnerabilities and capacities. It is an example; do not hesitate to adapt it to specific needs.

Step 1 Ask participants to complete a list of subjects. Topics to be addressed are those written in the left-hand column. They can be tackled in a different order. They are to be presented at the end of the discussion in the tables below

Step 2 Establish (with participants) a typology of groups. It is important to disaggregate information at least by gender and age, since the roles and opportunities extended to each of these categories—and hence their vulnerabilities and capacities—are often very different

Step 3 Construct a matrix

continued ▶

Exercise 15 Capacities and Vulnerabilities Analysis continued

Step 4 Ask the group to complete the matrix. Remember that a group's social organisation is usually disrupted in times of crisis, generating chaos and opportunities for social change. Discussion on these changes can provide a very interesting 'entry point' for a gender-sensitive participatory analysis—for example, on capacities and vulnerabilities

Step 5 Ask the group to explain the vulnerabilities and capacities that have been listed. This matrix can also trigger further discussion

Table 7 Capacities and vulnerabilities matrix

Physical / material	Capabilities			Vulnerabilities		
	Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children
Health and disability Livelihoods/vocational skills Food supply Water supply Staple crops Livestock Access to markets Transport Housing Technologies Access to capital or other assets Relative poverty and wealth Features of land, climate and environment						
Social / organisational	**Capabilities**			**Vulnerabilities**		
	Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children
Family structures Kinship groups/clans Formal social and political organisations Informal social gatherings Divisions by gender race ethnicity class caste religion Social capital (systems of support & power) Education Systems for distributing goods and services						
Motivational / attitudinal	**Capabilities**			**Vulnerabilities**		
	Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children
Psychosocial profile History of crisis Expectation of emergency relief Existing coping strategy Cultural and psychological factors Change in power structures and relations						

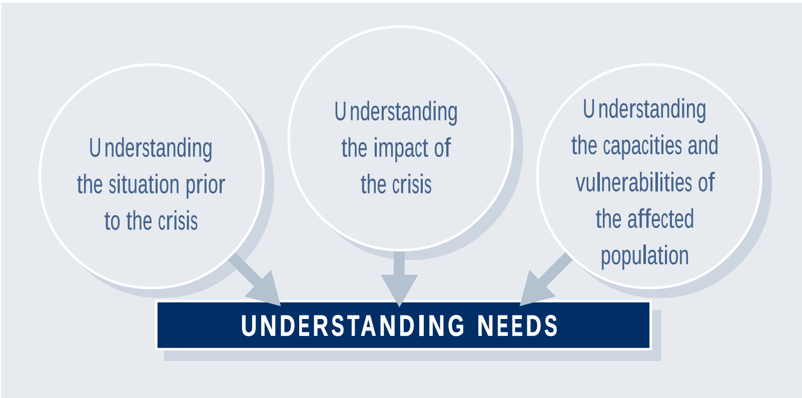
To prepare for this exercise, it may be useful to access resources that may be available in-country: the World Food Programme (WFP)'s Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) Unit; the World Health Organisation's Vulnerability Assessment; the Food and Agriculture Organisation's Socio-Economic and Gender Analysis (SEAGA-FAO); and Oxfam's Capacities and Vulnerabilities Analysis.

3.6 UNDERSTANDING NEEDS AND DEMANDS

3.6.1 BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

2

The identification of needs should be the final outcome of all of the steps that have been developed above. If these steps have been taken successfully, it should be easier to identify needs.



A focus group can be held with participants who have contributed to the previous exercises, where the results are brought together in order to identify collectively the main requirements of the affected population.

This phase remains one of the most difficult, since it is most prone to manipulation, to the presentation of 'shopping lists', or to the imposition of our own appraisal of needs and demands.

As a result, two questions must be addressed.

- How are needs transformed into demands?
- Whose needs and whose demands are we identifying?

3.6.2 THE DEMAND AND OFFER CONUNDRUM

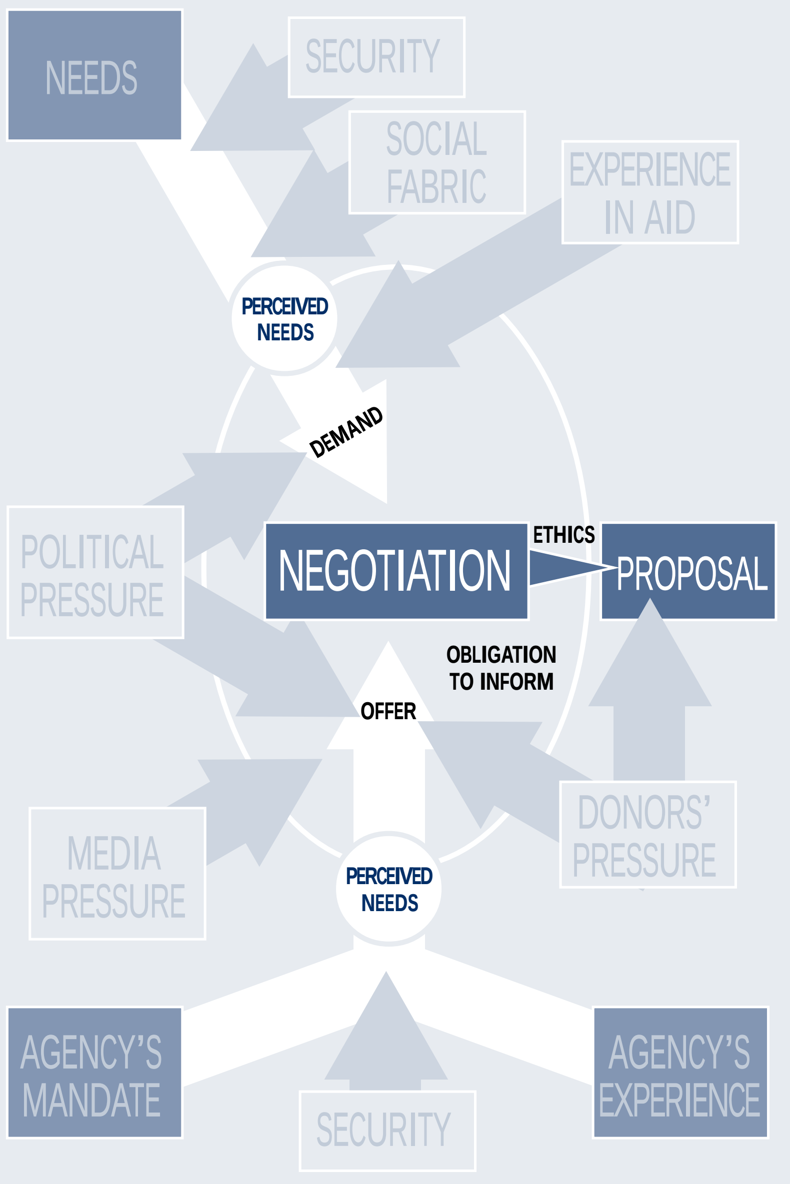
There is sometimes debate in the aid industry about whether the demand or the offer comes first. Indeed, the recipients at the end of the chain are now so aware of how the aid community functions that they are increasingly aware of how they will respond to our questions.

> Similar comments were heard in different parts of the world: 'we know very well what you, aid agencies, want. If we see "blankets without borders", we ask for blankets, if we see "roofs without borders", we ask for roofs … We are the kings of humanitarian aid'.

It is crucial, therefore, to be aware of the numerous biases in the system and to be ready to discuss them with other stakeholders, especially those at the 'receiving end'.

2

Figure 19 The demand and offer conundrum



The first thing to do is to clarify what we know about the way in which needs are often transformed into a demand. To fill in the table above, you may start by listing the factors that affect the formulation of needs and demands, and present them as in the illustration below.

These diagrams can be used in various ways. You can use them personally to capitalise on your understanding of needs and demands, or you can use them to stimulate discusion with stakeholders in focus groups, for example. This may be useful in going beyond the stereotypic formulation of needs, in encouraging debate, and in avoiding shopping lists of requests from members of the affected population. They can also be a way of showing that your approach to identifying needs is not naive. This is important in establishing mutual respect, and to engaging in a meaningful process to identify needs.

Exercise 16 Transforming needs into demands

Objective
The aim of this exercise is to develop a consensus on the process of needs and demands and to understand their formulation.

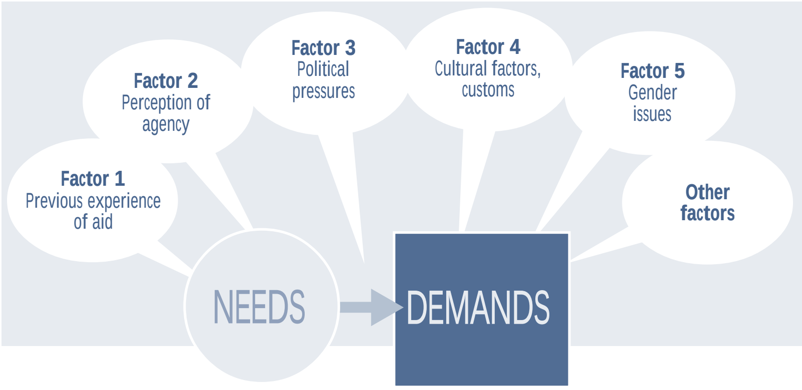
Participants
This exercise can be conducted in mixed or separate groups, to ensure that the needs and demands of various sub-groups in the population are taken into account.

Step 1 Invite the group to list all of the affected population's needs. Be careful to separate 'structural' needs from specific ones resulting from, or exacerbated by, the crisis

Step 2 Distinguish between needs and demands on the list. Share with the group the difference between the two

Step 3 Ask the group: which factors affect needs and how are the latter transformed into demands? Try to establish a relationship between needs, demands and other factors. Do not hesitate to encourage discussion through questions.

The following drawing provides a good example of how to analyse needs and demands.



3.6.2 WHOSE NEEDS, WHOSE DEMANDS?

One danger of participatory processes is that only a section of the population is involved in the assessment phase, introducing bias in regard to the identification of needs and demands. The natural course of action leads us directly to the official local structures that are in charge of 'representing the interests of the community'.

There is always considerable suspicion among aid-agency staff or, sometimes, among the population itself about these local institutions and their interaction with the assistance provided. 'Behind-the-scenes' comments often concern the mismanagement of aid—the attribution of assistance to kin, for instance—and other classic charges. Engaging in an organised, professional, but nevertheless generous, participatory process is supposed to help tackle this.

The following questions are often raised at this stage.

- How can we, via the participatory process, listen more to those who are often 'voiceless'?
- Is it our role to disturb local social and power systems by seeking to hear, in particular, the 'voiceless'?

This is where the importance of having reached an adequate understanding of the social and political context, and of having included a diverse range of participants in the various collective exercises, is underscored.

Still, it remains the case that these are difficult questions, to which there is no single answer. It will depend on the choices that you make. In any event, the management of these questions requires tact, skill, and subtle awareness of the social, economic and political situation, as behind it are issues concerning the protection of the affected population, and the security and impartiality of your organisation.

Not forgetting children's view in the assessment phase

Children are seldom involved in the assessment phase. Yet experience shows that including them allows for better understanding of problems like child prostitution and sex abuse, child marriage, and other cultural traditions affecting child welfare. Moreover, children often provide a specific insight on situations that, otherwise, might not have been fully appreciated.

Below are a few tips on how to engage with children.

- Consulting children directly can be done through child focus groups. When this is difficult or impossible e.g. when children are very young, you can engage with mothers, and other carers (especially when carers, such as siblings, are themselves children or adolescents.

- During needs assessments, children should be encouraged to express their opinions, either through games or directly, depending on their age.
- All dialogue with children should be in their mother tongue, using a vocabulary that they feel comfortable with. Interpreters should be present if humanitarian actors do not speak the child's language.

3.7 KEY ISSUES IN THE ASSESSMENT PHASE AND THE TOOLS AVAILABLE

The assessment phase is essential to a programme's success, since it will generate information on which the programme design will be based. Numerous exercises have been proposed in order to conduct it in a participatory manner. The issues to cover in this stage, and the tools that are available to do so, are summarised below.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT	
Historical context Geographic and climatic context Socio-cultural and ethnic context (ethnic composition, gender analysis, age distribution) Economic and social situation Previous history of development or humanitarian action Previous history of participation	Interviews with key informants Storytelling Focus groups Historical line Socio-anthropological analysis Mapping of the area Activity/climatic calendars Graph showing economic processes Wealth ranking Proportional piling

UNDERSTANDING THE CRISIS AND ITS EFFECTS	
Frequency and types of crises in the area Nature, intensity and the roots of the crisis Nature and intensity of the impact of the crisis Access to the population and security issues	Interviews with key informants Focus groups Storytelling Mapping of the affected area and related changes Transect walks Activity and climatic calendars Graphs showing impact on economic processes Proportional piling

UNDERSTANDING WHO IS WHO

Social set-up and traditional structures Political actors/local administration Local NGOs Actors responsible for perpetrating violence Characteristics of stakeholders Relationships between stakeholders Social and institutional changes	Socio-anthropological analysis Stakeholder analysis Institutional analysis Interactions diagrams Venn diagrams Proximity–distance analysis

UNDERSTANDING VULNERABILITIES AND CAPACITIES

Capacities and vulnerabilities disaggregated by group Coping mechanisms Identification of capacities that can be strengthened through the programme Identification of what is already being done to avoid overlap or undermining local strategies	Capacities and Vulnerabilities Analysis Proportional piling

UNDERSTANDING NEEDS AND DEMANDS

Qualification of problems and needs Quantification of problems and needs Identification of how needs are transformed into demands Differentiation between the needs and demands of various groups	Collection of existing information Proportional piling and wealth ranking