PRA TOOLS

A quick guide to 5 selected tools
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The PRA tools

The use of participatory tools lies in enabling sub groups and the wider community to reflect on a number of aspects relevant to and within their community.

Participatory tools can in particular assist in:

• Identifying key actors (positive and negative) and power relationships in the community (which might differ in regard to aspects of e.g. gender or age)
• Evaluating the extent of the risks, vulnerabilities and trends people face locally
• Identifying the most vulnerable groups
• Prioritising risks to be addressed
• The resources and coping strategies the communities already make use of
• Assessing how the community sees itself in the future, how to move forward
• Identifying information gaps e.g. scientific information, market analysis, policy analysis etc

The tools are only as effective as the facilitator and can easily be hijacked and/or applied badly. Therefore it is important that tools are carefully applied and that the facilitator is aware of ways that people can be marginalised, keeping the principles of inclusion in mind.

The tools should be applied in a flexible way to ensure that the data that needs to be collected is gathered and this requires careful monitoring to ensure that all members of the group are heard. The tool selection process is therefore important to prioritise.

For a general overview of available tools:

IFRC, VCA Toolbox – p.17-23[CC6]

Unicef VCA tools

Mediation project, VCA toolbox
http://www.mediation-project.eu/platform/tbox/participatory_vulnerability_and_capacity_assessments.html
Focus group discussion

A focus group discussion is an organized dialogue between a selected group of individuals in a community.

Depending on the topic and context, a focus group discussion can be useful at any stage of your VCA, but usually held at a later stage in a VCA. The participants are from similar and often specialized backgrounds.

While the overall discussion may focus on a specific topic, group members may talk freely and spontaneously about the issue.

It is used to:

- Obtain people’s views on and experiences of a given topic
- Obtain several perspectives on the same topic
- Gain insight into people’s shared understanding of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation
- Identify causes of and possible solutions to problems in implementing a project
- Gauge the impact of activities
- Generate discussion on a specific topic, such as family

Challenges:

- Problems can surface when attempting to separate the individual view from the group view
- Good facilitation, group leadership and interpersonal skills in order to moderate such a group successfully including keeping the group focused on the topic, manage group dynamics and
Historical timeline

mediate any discussions or conflicts that may arise. Historical profile or historical timeline are tools for gathering information about what has happened in the past.

With a historical profile, a community can build up a picture of past events, track changes in the environment and behaviours and understand causal links. Awareness of these patterns can influence the decisions that community members take when planning projects.

It is a good starting point for a discussion on what projects would be relevant for the future.

It is used to:

- Get an insight into past events (such as hazards) and what changes have occurred over time
- Gain an understanding of the present situation in the community (causal link between past and present in terms of health issues or hazards and vulnerabilities)
- Gain an understanding of how things may continue to change in the future (trends).
- Serve as a basis for discussions on future programmes or projects within the community.
- Give people space to voice their opinions and share their history
- Gain a shared understanding of a community’s history and identity

Challenges:

- To maintain the focus of the participants on the selected topics
- Recording the information in a systematic way
- To mediate any potential discussions or conflicts
Mapping

Mapping is a way of visualising the capacities, vulnerabilities hazards and risks in a community.

Maps can be used to understand the local availability of resources by locating places like health clinics, schools, water sources or shelter. It can also be useful in identifying locations at particular risk, such as areas prone to floods or health hazards.

Finally, it can indicate which groups are vulnerable to hazards, due to geographical position in the community (for example closest to the river, or just below the mountain).

Generally, maps facilitate communication and stimulate discussion on important issues in the community. They can help people to understand complex relationships and allow visual comparison of information.

How to use the tool
When instructing the community to develop a risk, hazard and resource map of the area, you should start with a geographic map of the area.

The map might be drawn on a whiteboard, on paper or laid out on the ground in sticks and stones. The idea is to get a good geographical representation of what we have in the community.

Different groups of people will most likely indicate different resources or risks.

Bearing in mind the principle of inclusion, consider with whom or how many sessions of mapping you would like to conduct to get a conclusive picture of the community.

Further resources:
IFRC, VCA Toolbox – p.19-20, 75
A seasonal calendar is basically a matrix listing events and activities in the first column, and their timing according to months in the following columns.

**Purpose:**
The seasonal calendar helps the community in identifying recurring periods of stress, such as harvest, conflict and extreme weather. Or periods where the community have more resources and time available.

The calendar can also be used to show the division of work between men and women in the community and can act as a tool to identify the suitable way and time to implement a project.

Finally, if the facilitator manages to establish trust and confidentiality within the group discussion, the exercise can even help us identify underlying patterns of exclusion or social vulnerability. For example during periods where the community has a lot of idle time, domestic violence or burglaries might rise.

**Challenges:**
- Understanding the group dynamics
- Maintaining the focus on the chosen topic
- Manage conflict
- Establish trust and confidentiality
- Including and recording events that changes from year to year (such as certain religious events or natural hazards)

**For detailed instructions:**
IFRC Toolbox page 92 - 97
The problem tree is a tool that is useful for analysing the relations between effects and root causes of the problems or issues facing the community. It is based on the findings we have from the other tools, which have identified problems and their causes and effect. With the problem tree we can link them and get a picture of which causes are creating which problems, and what effects the problems have.

When we identify the root causes, we can identify proper solutions and be sure we don’t address only effects with our DRR work.

Problem trees can:
- Give structure to the community discussions
- Assist the community in visualising root causes and design solutions to match these

How does it work:
- Gather a representative group of the community members, keeping in mind principles of inclusion
- Give the participants a post-it or a piece of paper and ask them to write down the problems of biggest concern to them
- Group similar problems together
- Draw a tree with roots, stem and leaves on the ground, on a whiteboard or a piece of paper and stick the problem (or group of problems) to the stem
- Facilitate a brainstorm around causes and effect (remember the principles and challenges related to focus group discussions, which are useful in this setting as well)
- Stick the causes to the roots and the effect to the leaves