

GUIDELINES FOR EMERGENCY ASSESSMENT

DRAFT 4: 24th January 2005

A paragraph giving a background on the need for these guidelines would be useful so that the use and scope of the guidelines is better understood. It should answer questions such as Why do we need this new set of guidelines? Aren't existing materials good enough, how does the reader specifically benefit from reading this document.

Is this addressing the need to improve the "A" in FACT??

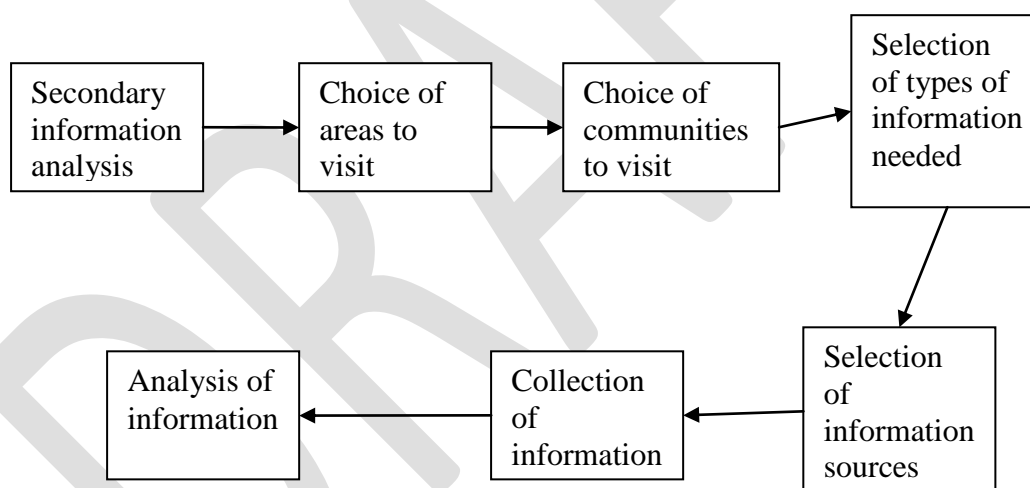
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale: Why do we need an assessment?-

Assessment is a vital element of the programme-planning process. Assessment provides the information on which decisions are made. Whilst good information does not guarantee a good programme, poor information virtually guarantees a bad one!

1.2 Assessment process

The process of assessment is as follows:



1.3 What do these guidelines provide?

Two types of assessment are covered:

Initial assessment: This is *either* our first assessment in an area (or the first for a long time) *or* our first assessment after a major change has taken place (a flood, for example).

Monitoring: This is a process of *updating* information from the initial assessment. Through continual assessment we *develop* the initial information to reflect changes in the situation and our improved understanding of it.

The document is divided into 5 sections:

SECTION 1: An introduction to the main ideas on which the assessment is based.

SECTION 2: Preparation for the assessment. This includes objective setting; coordination with RC/RC partners and other organisations; and setting up the assessment team.

SECTION 3: Phase 1 of the assessment. This is the analysis that is done before leaving for the field: review of secondary information and identification of the areas to be visited during the field-work.

SECTION 4: Phase 2 of the assessment: the collection of primary information in the field. This is the core of the assessment. The section explains the process of information gathering and provides procedures for initial assessments and monitoring.

ANNEXES: These contain explanations of techniques for gathering field information and relate to the procedures in Section 4.

1.4 Who will use these guidelines?

The guidelines are designed for use by anyone undertaking an assessment:

- All parts of the RC/RC Movement, *especially those working at the local level* (national societies- **which tier of the national society?? Headquarter, state, or provincial etc??**and delegations).
- Generalists. No specific technical knowledge is required, though curiosity, common-sense and experience are needed.

The emphasis is on **local teams** – **we would like this term clarified, as we understand “Local” as local Red Cross chapters. However in its present form these guidelines will only be understood by Federation delegates and senior Federation/NS programme staff.** includes rather than external experts. Local assessment means that assessments can be carried out frequently, costs are reduced (less travel expenses etc.), and the crucial links between assessment, project-planning and project-implementation are enhanced. In situations where the local systems lack capacity, external assessment teams can be engaged.

1.5 Continual assessment and programme planning

Assessment is a dynamic process, reflecting the environment in which it is undertaken. *Continual assessment* enables us to respond to changes and to build upon information collected previously. Continual assessment is vital for *prediction* of future problems.

Continual assessment necessitates continuity in management systems and human resources. If the same managers cover all phases of an emergency (pre-emergency, emergency, recovery) time is saved through reduced need for briefings; knowledge-loss is minimised; and consistency between different programme phases is improved. The use of a standard assessment methodology means that assessment data can be compared with previously-collected information. Allocation of the same – locally based – staff to both “initial assessment” and “monitoring” activities enhances understanding of the context and reduces the time spent in “secondary data collection” when a disaster strikes.

Programme planning must be flexible, particularly at the start of an emergency. Basic information is needed within the first days in order to launch an appeal- **this sentence is very general; it should be spelled out that there must be clear linkages between the assessment and the international Federation Appeal system or a national appeal system. A footnote to the preliminary appeal and appeal formats would be**

appropriate. This information cannot be completely accurate; the flexibility of the programme plan should reflect this. As information improves and the situation becomes more stable, programme plans become firmer.

1.6 Types of emergency

The type of assessment undertaken depends upon the type of emergency.

	Type of emergency	Example of type	Historical example	Assessment approach
1	Natural emergency, rapid onset	Earthquake, flood	Bam earthquake 2004, Hurricane Ivan 2004	Initial assessment informs first appeal; information gradually updated with time
2	Political, rapid onset	Military attack, population displacement	Goma 1994	As above
3	Natural, slow onset	Drought, desertification	Southern Africa late 1990s / early 2000s	Situation is monitored. "Thresholds" are set to determine the point at which we should intervene; arrival at the threshold is usually predictable
4	Political, slow onset	Political instability with potential to deteriorate into conflict	Macedonia in 2000s	As above but thresholds are often unpredictable
5	Combined natural/political, rapid onset	Drought + conflict	Afghanistan early 2000s	Situation is monitored; capacity to respond is linked to rapid deterioration
6	Combined natural/political, slow onset	Chronic, long-term conflict in adverse climate	Southern Sudan since 1983	Situation is monitored; capacity to respond is linked to threshold
7	Industrial	Accident at nuclear power plant	Chernobyl, 1986?	Initial assessment informs first appeal; information gradually updated with time

2. PREPARATION FOR THE ASSESSMENT

There should be a consistent use of the tense, i.e it should be in the active voice, imperative. E.g: “the team leader should give a briefing covering...”. The guidelines mixes tenses, which makes it confusing for the reader.

2.1 Objectives

Be clear- *who is the reader, who are you addressing this to??* about the *objectives* of the assessment. Why are we doing the assessment and what information do we need? Decide upon the questions that must be answered. These depend upon who will use the assessment results. Possibilities include:

- Programme planners who need numbers, quantities, timeframes and logistical details.
- Field-staff who will implement future programmes.
- Fund raisers who need to be able to convert quantities to costs, and therefore require a full breakdown of potential expenses.
- Lobbyists who need information about the socio-political situation for advocacy.
- Others.

Draw up terms of reference, explaining precisely what the assessment team are expected to accomplish.

If your target group is the national society headquarter staff and delegation staff then your statement of drawing up terms of reference is relevant. Else it is too ambitious to expect a local chapter, with one staff to draw terms of reference for a group of volunteers going on an assessment.

2.2 Coordination and cooperation: the movement

Try to use all available Movement resources. Exceptions to this principle might be made if, for example, the security situation puts local agencies at risk. If more than one Movement partner takes part in the assessment, assess the capacities of each and define their roles. These should be based on:

- Specific mandates and operational specialities of each partner.
- National society law and practise in the affected country.
- Human and logistical resources. Identify staff-members who are familiar with the area (within the country and external).
- Potential role in future operations.
- Constraints for specific partners (e.g. national society working in an internal conflict).

2.3 Coordination and cooperation: non-movement agencies

Determine which other organisations (government and non-government) are active in the area. If others are carrying out assessments determine whether or not it is possible to collaborate with them (see “inter-agency assessments”, Section 2.4.2).

If collaboration is not feasible it is still essential to know who else is carrying out assessments and where. Repeated assessment of the same region is inefficient, and frustrating, and can have negative impacts on accuracy and security. Review of other agencies’ assessment reports is an essential component of the secondary data review and cross-checking of information.

If the “assessment coverage” is already extensive, and we are satisfied with the methodologies used by others, there may be no need for a RC/RC assessment; we can use the data of others for our programme planning or we might conclude that needs are adequately covered and there is no need for an RC/RC intervention. Alternatively, we might conclude that there is a major gap in the coverage and focus our assessment on this.

2.4 Assessment team

Appoint a team leader and decide upon the structure of the team. Define the roles and responsibilities of each team member. When choosing the team consider the following:

- Include local people **or do you mean local/national staff** who speak the relevant language(s).
- Ensure that both men and women are represented.
- If the assessment is not organised by the national society, include national society members in the team where possible.

The choice of team members is influenced by the objectives of the assessment. Try to ensure that people understand the objectives and do not only concentrate on their own interests. It is often said that if you send a water-engineer to do an assessment you will end up with a water project (any other discipline can be substituted!). *Clear terms of reference will minimise this problem.*

2.4.1 Generalist, specialist or multi-disciplinary team?

The composition of the assessment team depends upon the type of emergency, the available time, and security/access/resource constraints. There are three possibilities:

1. Generalist(s). One or more people with *experience and common sense* but no specific professional background.
2. Selected specialist(s). One or more people chosen because of their specific experience and skills.
3. Multi-disciplinary team. A group of specialists representing all aspects of RC/RC work (engineers, health-workers etc.).

The advantages and disadvantages of each approach are outlined below:

Team structure	Advantages	Disadvantages
Generalist(s)	Team can be assembled locally, hence assessments	Lack of specific skills means that follow-up

	can be done frequently	assessments are needed when technical problems are identified
	Adaptable to a delegation or national society structure, thus reducing the need for external support	Technical problems may be overlooked
	Flexible and can adapt easily to local conditions (security, cultural etc.).	In extreme situations assessment teams may need to provide assistance (e.g. if people are injured, having a health professional on the team is obviously useful)
Specialist(s)	Focused: can identify key problems quickly	May be too influenced by previous experiences and over-look factors specifically related to this situation
Multi-disciplinary	Technical problems can be investigated in detail, thus avoiding need for immediate follow-up	Difficult to assemble the full range of professions; therefore assessments are not frequent
	Diverse experiences provide broad basis for analysis	Danger of overkill; we may not <i>need</i> all technical specialities
		Difficult to coordinate team (methodologies must be compatible and logistics can become complicated)
		Large teams can present a security threat and can be intimidating to small communities
		Expensive (air-fares etc.)

Based on these arguments, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Team structure	Use
Generalist	Initial assessment (except when it is <i>known</i> that specific skills are needed); monitoring
Specialist	Extreme urgency when lives are in danger
Multi-disciplinary	Initial assessment or monitoring when we already know the main sectors of concern, or we are looking for specific information

2.4.2 Inter-agency assessments

Assessment teams may also be “inter-agency”. This enhances cooperation between agencies (common analysis and strategies) and is efficient in terms of resource-utilisation. It reduces the danger of “assessment fatigue” amongst the population being assessed. In some circumstances inter-agency assessments are carried out for security reasons (for example, if the UN provides helicopter access to insecure areas); inter-agency assessments may also be *impossible* for security reasons. There are numerous ways of dividing the responsibilities in an inter-agency assessment. Two scenarios:

- Agencies specialising in different fields divide the sectors between them. For example a FACT team- **you are introducing a concept such as FACT without any background. The average reader in an NS or country delegation is not knowledgeable or aware of FACT. Still confusion as to who your reader is!** looks at water supplies and access to health-care while UNICEF considers schooling for displaced children.
- Agencies with similar interests divide the area geographically. For example ICRC and WFP divide the area during a food-security assessment.

Numerous other combinations exist! In general, feasibility of inter-agency teams depends upon:

- Sharing of common values and operational principles.
- Agreement upon a shared assessment methodology or compatible methodologies.

There are circumstances under which joint assessments are **not** appropriate. For example:

- Assessments are mandate-specific (e.g. ICRC protection work).
- Collaboration jeopardises the principles of neutrality and impartiality (e.g. military and political organisations).
- The presence of other agencies presents a security risk. For example, if an agency is perceived as being close to one side in a conflict its inclusion in the assessment would jeopardise the principle of neutrality and place others at risk.
- Other.

It is impossible to list every possible combination of events. Therefore when deciding upon the team structure, common-sense and understanding of the context should be applied. Establish formal agreements specifying the roles and responsibilities of each agency.

2.4.3 Team briefing

Once the team has been established, the team leader gives a briefing covering:-**It seems this statement is aimed at a delegation or a fairly advanced NS with a staff capacity.**

- Terms of reference; what is expected from the assessment.
- Plan of action, including methodology to be used.
- Working relationships. Responsibility of each team member, hierarchical organisation etc.
- Logistical arrangements (transport, accommodation etc.).
- Security. Situation and procedures.
- Other issues relevant to the particular assessment.

It is vital that all people (including **interpreters**) who will take part in the assessment are present for the briefing.

3. THE ASSESSMENT, PHASE 1: SECONDARY INFORMATION

This analysis is carried out before going to the field.

3.1 Secondary information review

Secondary information is information that has been collected *prior to this assessment*. It may have been collected by the RC/RC or another agency and can be in the form of written reports or verbal communication. Secondary information comes in two categories:

- Information collected prior to the current emergency.
- Information collected in response to the current emergency.

It is impossible to define a list of all possible information sources for every situation. Use the questions defined when setting the assessment objectives to identify appropriate sources of secondary information. *Examples* include:

	Situation	Example of secondary information	Examples of sources
1	Natural emergency, rapid onset	Geographical scope, intensity, previous response details	Aerial survey, seismic data, civil defence reports
2	Political, rapid onset	Rebel groups and their areas of operation, locally available resources, relationships between different groups	Political and social studies, economic data, news reports, people coming from the area recently
3	Natural, slow onset	Climatic data, population figures (static and moving), market data	Meteorological agency, government census office, NGO price monitoring
4	Political, slow onset	Historical development of political processes, economic and social changes	Historical studies, economic and social data (government, university, “think tank”)
5	Combined natural/political, rapid onset	Meteorological / market data, transportation systems (roads, airports etc.)	Meteorological agency, market surveys, NGO reports
6	Combined natural/political, slow onset	Economic changes, political history, population movements	Historical studies, NGO reports, regional surveys (including neighbouring countries)

Secondary information gives a *first impression* of the nature of the emergency and gives us some clues about how to organise the assessment. For example, if secondary information indicates that the main problem relates to the long-term deterioration of agricultural livelihoods we should, perhaps, include an agriculturalist and/or food security specialist on the team. This does *not* exclude the need to collect general information and investigate other sectors; we may find that field-work *contradicts* secondary information and that the problems actually lie elsewhere.

Secondary information review is easier and more effective if a **baseline** already exists. This provides information about the situation *before* the current emergency (or continually updated information in the case of a chronic emergency). An up-to-date and well-organised baseline saves a lot of time and improves the reliability of an assessment; if we have an accurate understanding of the situation before the crisis we are better able to discern the *impact* of the crisis.

Many governments and international agencies compile baseline data. Often these are related to specific sectors (for example the World Food Programme's "Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping"): such baselines are an important source of secondary data. From the RC/RC perspective, recent Vulnerability and Capacity Analyses (VCA) are excellent sources of baseline data. **It is highly recommended that all delegations and national societies in disaster-prone areas establish, and regularly update, a baseline.** It is not possible to provide a complete list of information required in a baseline; this will depend upon the country and the type of emergency.

3.2 Identification of areas to visit

It is rarely possible to visit the entire area affected by an emergency. Therefore we must identify **representative areas** in a systematic way. Statistical methods for doing this are normally unfeasible in an emergency situation (constraints of time and access). Ideally the chosen areas should be defined according to social and economic characteristics. However, it is sometimes more practical to define areas according to administrative boundaries; this is acceptable if diversity within the administrative areas, and similarities between administrative areas, are explained.

Based on the review of secondary information and discussion with people who know about the situation, identify areas that are:

1. Directly affected by the emergency (within the earthquake zone, subjected to military conflict etc.).
2. Indirectly affected by the emergency (e.g. refugees are moving into the area, the economy is affected etc.).
3. Not affected, or minimally affected, by the emergency.

Try to visit as many of the areas in category 1 as possible. If time allows, visit at least one area from each of the other two categories as these provide important comparisons. Sometimes, for security or political reasons, it is impossible to visit category 1 areas. In such cases try to talk to people who have *come from* these areas (probably now in category 2 areas).

If the *areas* chosen are large or contain many communities, a further level of sampling will be needed in order to choose the communities that we will visit. If the

communities are similar to each other we can take a random sample; list all the communities and randomly pick the required number. If the communities are significantly different we must choose a variety of communities reflecting their characteristics (ethnicity, economics, town/village etc.).

It is generally better to visit more areas, and interview less people in each, than vice versa.

Caution: In many emergency situations “humanitarian hubs” develop around key towns. Organisations congregate in these and coverage of needs is good in the immediate vicinity. Meanwhile gaps in coverage exist *between* the hubs. When deciding upon the areas to visit, try to include some of these “gap” areas.

4. THE ASSESSMENT PHASE 2: PRIMARY INFORMATION

Primary information is the information that *we* collect during *this* assessment:

4.1 Introduction to primary information gathering

4.1.1. Some assessment tips

- **Participation** is *always* essential. Encourage the people affected by the emergency to explain the situation in their own words and in their own time. Even in rapid onset emergencies it is *always* possible to include *some* local opinion.
- Look for **marginalised groups** and ensure that their interests are considered. Who is powerful and whose voice is not heard? Marginalisation may be based on gender, ethnicity, social status and many other characteristics.
- Look for **changes** and **trends** that affect society. Try to understand what is **causing** these changes.
- Look out for the **unexpected**. Be prepared to have your assumptions challenged.
- Consider the impact of issues on **society as a whole**. For example **HIV/AIDS** is not only a health issue. In many parts of the world it has a devastating social and economic impact.
- Throughout the assessment, think about **how the information will be used**. What sort of programme would be appropriate? Consider both the positive *and* the negative effects that a programme might have (the Better Programming Initiative, BPI, gives useful guidance).

4.1.2 Extremely urgent situations: the need to make assumptions

In very urgent situations we often do not have time to carry out a full assessment. If lives are in danger and/or time and access are limited we must combine the limited amount of first-hand information that we collect with **assumptions**. The RC/RC has worked in most types of emergency and there is a great deal of knowledge within the institution. For example we know that if people have been violently forced from their homes at short notice they will certainly need (amongst other things) shelter material, food, water, medical assistance, and help with re-establishment of family links. Some information is always context-specific (e.g. numbers of people affected). Therefore in a rapid assessment **assumptions are combined with best estimates**. As time goes by we should be able to build up more accurate information based on the actual situation but, *if we are to respond quickly*, we nearly always have to make this sort of assumption. In such situations **it is vital to have someone on the team who has experience of the type of emergency and, preferably, knowledge of the location**.

4.1.3 How the assessment works

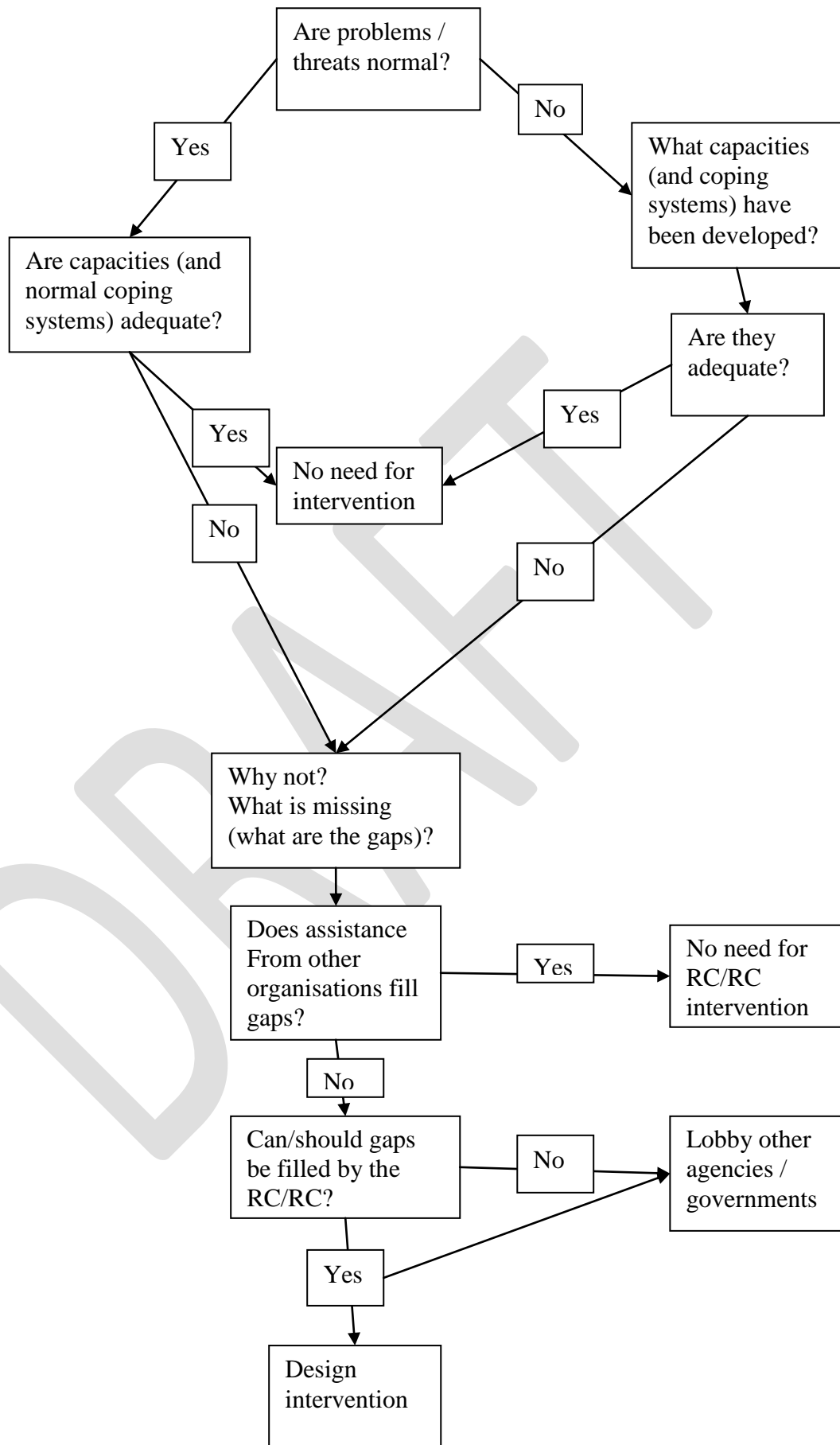
We want to know:

The **problems** that already exist or may occur in the future; the **population** that is **vulnerable** to the problems; the **capacity** that the vulnerable population has to resist the problems; and the options for **assistance** that are available to the vulnerable population. Hence we can estimate the **gap** that exists between the people's needs and resources. Taking into consideration the **capacity and mandate** of the RC/RC we can then decide whether or not an **intervention** by the RC/RC is necessary.

The assessment is based on a series of interviews and observations. **Questionnaires are not used**. This is because most of the information that we need cannot be reliably collected by questionnaire (it is too complex or sensitive). Interviews are based on the "semi-structured" approach explained in Annex 3.3. It is essential that all people doing assessments understand this approach.

Semi-structured interviews are complemented with "indicators" (Annex 2.4). These relate to particular sectors (health, water etc.). They can be collected by non-specialists through consultation with "key informants" (Annex 3.5). The indicators help specialists who were not part of the assessment team to understand the situation and provide a basis for long-term monitoring and baseline data (Section 4.2.2).

The assessment process is illustrated in the following flow-chart:



4.2 COLLECTING PRIMARY INFORMATION

This section provides a step-by-step guide to the actual process of information-collection. THIS IS THE CORE OF THE ASSESSMENT.

4.2.1 INITIAL ASSESSMENT

Before starting this work you should be familiar with:

- Problem analysis (Annex 2.1). This is the basis for all interviews.
- Random sampling (Annex 3.1). This is important for choosing interviewees.
- Techniques for gathering information (Annex 3.2-3.5). These include interview technique, the organisation of focus groups and key informant interviews, and observation techniques.
- Livelihoods and household interviews (Annex 2.2, 2.3).

The steps described below *do not need to be done in this order*. If you have a large assessment team you will be able to cover several steps at the same time. You should also be prepared to repeat some interviews when necessary. For example, if information from one interview contradicts information from another, you may want to go back and check the first information. ***BE FLEXIBLE AND USE COMMON SENSE!***

Decide upon the information that is needed

The secondary data review (Section 3.1) gives us an impression of the situation. From this we can decide upon the first focus of our field assessment and the type of questions that we need to ask. For example, if an agricultural area is affected by drought it is clear that we will need to discuss, amongst other things, crop yields with farmers. We *should not* exclude other sources of information; always be prepared to have initial assumptions contradicted and look out for the unexpected.

Problem analysis: the core of all interviews

Our assessment is based on the analysis of problems, vulnerabilities and capacities (See flowchart, section 4.1.3). Problem analysis is explained in Annex 2.1. Make sure that you are familiar with the process before field-work begins. **It forms the basis of all interviews.** You must be able to carry out problem analysis without notes and adapt it to different groups or individual informants.

Talk to the local authorities

The first step is always to talk to the local authorities. Explain the reason for the visit and seek their authorisation. Explain the methodology to be used and the objectives of the assessment (make it clear that this is not an “investigation”).

Observe

After meeting the authorities, take an informal walk around the area. This provides an initial impression of the community and can help “break the ice” (Annex 3.2).

Understand the context: first group interview

Organise an initial focus group, with a diverse set of people, to investigate the broad context of the community (Annex 3.4):

Social structure: How is the community organised? Who is powerful and who is excluded? Examine the relationships (social and economic) between different groups (e.g. ethnic groups or groups with different livelihoods).

Economics: What are the main economic activities, and which groups undertake each of them? How, and why, is this changing?

Environment: Is the environment changing in the short- or long-term? What reason do people give for changes?

Politics: How do local and national politics affect different groups within the community?

Service provision: How extensive and effective is the coverage of services: health (human and animal), water, and education.

Livelihood group interviews

Always carry out some *livelihood group* interviews (Annex 2.2). If you have time interview representatives of all the main livelihood groups; if not, at least talk to representatives of the most poor and vulnerable.

Household visits

Undertake *at least 3 household visits* in each community (Annex 2.3). If possible (particularly in large or diverse communities) carry out more household visits. The exception is a situation in which household visits are culturally inappropriate or might put the informants at risk. Identify households through random sampling (Annex 3.1).

Key informants and indicators

Identify important issues for investigation from the secondary information review and from the initial field interviews; interview “key informants” based on this knowledge (Annex 3.5). Collect as much of the “indicator information” (Annex 2.4) as possible from key informants. *Even if some indicators do not seem to be directly relevant to the situation, it is recommended that you collect the information for baseline data and future use.*

Additional focus groups and key informant interviews

Additional focus groups and key informant interviews can be convened if time and opportunity permit. If you meet an interesting old lady, for example, take the opportunity to talk to her.

Cross-checks

Always think about the information that you are given. Does it make sense when compared with information collected elsewhere? If not, you should check your sources and try to find the reason for the discrepancy. If your assessment involves several teams, agree times during the day when you will get together to compare information. You may need to add more informants to clarify the situation. Sometimes inconsistencies are due to different perspectives (for example, different problem ranking). Elsewhere they may indicate that one or more informant is not giving the full picture. Investigate as carefully as you can; if you cannot get to the bottom of the problem explain this in the assessment report.

Continue to observe!

Throughout the assessment, complement your interviews with observation (Annex 3.2).

4.2.2 MONITORING

Monitoring is the process of updating information (part of the “continual assessment” process; see Section 1.5). Monitoring enables us to:

- Improve analysis. Initial assessments are usually rushed; monitoring enables us to investigate issues in more depth and to interview a wider range of people (increase our sample size).
- Adapt to changing circumstances. Emergencies change, and it is important that our analysis changes too.
- Identify problems in advance. By monitoring certain indicators we are able to identify problems at an early stage and put preventative measures into place.
- Adapt programmes. Changing circumstances bring changing needs. Continual update of analysis helps us to keep programmes relevant.

In the RC/RC we do 2 types of monitoring:

- Situation monitoring. Continual assessment of the lives and environment of the affected population.
- Programme monitoring. This concerns RC/RC activities and how well they are addressing the needs of the community.

These guidelines only relate to situation monitoring.

There are 4 options for monitoring:

1. **Repeat assessment.** The initial assessment is repeated. Whilst this should provide comprehensive analysis, it requires a lot of resources (time, people, and logistics). There is a danger of **assessment fatigue**. If assessments are carried out too frequently the informants will eventually become tired of the process. Assessment can become “routine”; the people doing the assessment become less curious and merely repeat previous assumptions.
2. **Selected key informants.** An alternative to “repeat assessment” is to select certain key informants from whom good quality information can be collected regularly. This reduces resource requirements and assessment fatigue. However there is a danger that key informants gain too much influence; if one person is used for all information his/her perspective will take precedence over all others. The problem of “routine” is also relevant with key informants.
3. **Indicators.** These minimise dependence on personal perception. “Impersonal” indicators can provide standard information that can be compared over time. For example, comparing the price of staple foods with daily labour rates can give a good idea of the extent of poverty in an urban area. There is a danger that only information that can be quantified will be collected; we may overlook important social issues. There is also a danger that indicators will be used out of context; incorrect relationships (for example, linking an indicator with the economic environment) can produce false conclusions.
4. **Informal methods.** RC/RC staff “keep their eyes open” whilst carrying out normal field-work, and thereby identify changes within programme areas. Review of the news and discussion with counterparts in the government and other agencies enables RC/RC staff to keep abreast of changes in the wider environment.

The advantages and disadvantages of each approach are summarised below:

	Approach	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Repeat assessment	Provides detailed analysis	Requires a lot of resources (time, people, logistics); danger of “assessment fatigue” from both assessors and affected population
2	Selected key informants	Provides detailed analysis with less resources than repeat assessment	Key informants have a lot of influence; questions and answers can become routine
3	Indicators	Impersonal: minimal dependence on individual perceptions; quantifiable: comparison over time is straightforward	Often difficult to define appropriate indicators; danger that indicators are taken out of context; danger that quantifiable data will be given too much priority
4	Informal methods	Continuous process, carried out together with programme work: no additional resources required; open-ended: no set format means that all sorts of information can be collected; promotes cooperation with other agencies; encourages RC/RC staff to be proactive	Unstructured and subject to personal interest

Approach 1 (repeat assessment) should only be used if the situation has changed a great deal since the initial assessment, or if the initial assessment took place more than one year ago. In general, the best way to monitor is to combine Approaches 2, 3 and 4.

A basic monitoring procedure is outlined below. This is not the only way to work and there is no set order in which the activities should be carried out. Use common-sense to decide which monitoring approaches are most appropriate to your situation.

Variables to be monitored

The initial assessment gives an idea of *what* should be monitored. Normally this includes:

- Issues of high concern (e.g. access to food in a food security crisis);
- Issues about which we do not know enough (we need to supplement the information from the initial assessment);
- Factors that are changing rapidly and need to be constantly updated.

Key informants

Determine the key informants that will be useful for monitoring. For example, if we are concerned about child health then key informants might include mothers and the staff of the local clinic. If the situation is changing rapidly, interviews with key informants should be undertaken at least once per month (sometimes, in extreme

cases, daily). In more stable situations, the period can be increased to 3 months. In order to avoid assessment fatigue and reduce the influence of individual informants, *different informants can be used each time*. For example, interview different mothers each time, but try to ensure that the interviewees have similar socio-economic status.

Indicators

Identify indicators that can provide information about the variables that we want to monitor. Some of the indicators from Annex 2.4 may be useful. Other, context-specific, indicators might be needed. It is difficult to decide upon the most appropriate indicators for monitoring as this necessitates a good understanding of the relevant sector. Therefore, *do this in collaboration with a sector specialist*. Try to use as few indicators as possible.

Thresholds

With the help of sector specialists, define *critical points* or *thresholds* for each of the indicators. A “threshold” is a value that indicates that we may need to take some action. For example a Crude Mortality Rate (CMR) of more than 1 per 10 000 would be cause for alarm. The fact that the threshold has been reached tells us nothing about the reasons for deterioration of health, nor does it enable us to define our response. It *does* provide the prompt to do a detailed assessment. When any threshold is reached, we should immediately undertake a full investigation (probably a specialist assessment related to the indicator of concern).

Informal methods

This is more a question of attitude than methodology. During their normal activities RC/RC staff-members, particularly those working at branch level, are constantly in touch with local people, government officials and the staff of other humanitarian organisations. This gives an excellent opportunity to build up a good understanding of the context and to look out for changes in the lives of the people. **Observation and curiosity are the key attributes**. By taking an active interest in the communities in which we work we can build up a solid understanding that will complement the more formal approaches described above. Knowing the communities also provides a good basis for cross-checking; if we understand local dynamics we will be able to pick up discrepancies in the information that we are given.

Baseline

The information that you collect should be compiled systematically and stored in a way that makes it easily accessible. This could be done in an electronic database, a library or a combination of the two. It is essential that all information can be accessed easily and quickly (this saves a lot of time if an emergency strikes). It is also important that the information is regularly analysed; this helps us to pick up trends.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1

REPORTING FORMAT: INITIAL ASSESSMENT

The reporting format provides a standard framework that can be used for all assessment reports. This helps when we want to compare information from different assessments.

Narrative information

Provide a narrative summary of the situation in the areas visited during the assessment. **Focus on changes and trends.** Include the following issues:

“New” problems: Explain the causes of “new” problems, including long-term trends.

Links between problems: Explain the links between problems, where these exist.

Local social structure:

- Ethnic groups.
- Community organisation (hierarchy, power, inclusion/exclusion). Traditional and new social support systems.
- Household structure: Typical household composition, including the roles played by women, men and children.

Service provision: Existing health (human, animal), water, and education services.

Environment: Details of environmental change, the reasons for this, and the short- and long-term implications.

Economy: Main economic activities and the groups that undertake each.

Politics: How different groups are affected by local and national politics: who are the winners and who are the losers? Analyse possible political influence of relief assistance.

Essential information needed from every assessment

Note: In the tables below 2 rows are shown, for the purpose of illustration. During real assessments, use as many rows as you need!

Problems: List the problems identified during the assessment in order of severity (the most severe first). Specify whether problems are “current” (they already exist) or “potential” (they may exist in the future).

Severity	Description of problem	Current or potential?
1		
2		

Indicators: Where relevant, list indicators that demonstrate the severity of the problems listed above (see **SECTION XX** for sector-specific indicators).

Problem	Indicators

Nature of the problems: Specify whether problems are “normal” (they have always existed) or “new”.

Problem	Normal or new	If normal, frequency of occurrence	If new, when did problem start?

Affected population: Link each problem to specific groups or individuals. Estimate numbers of people affected.

Problem	Affected groups/ individuals	Number affected in each group

Location: Specify the location(s) of the people affected, and whether or not this is their usual place of residence (i.e. have they been displaced?).

Affected group	Location	Normal residence? If “no”, where is normal residence?

Capacity of population: Provide details of the coping strategies used by the people affected. Estimate, on a percentage scale, the extent to which these can cover the problems:

100%: People are able to fully cope.

0%: Coping strategies are entirely inadequate.

Affected group	Problem	Coping strategy	Percentage coverage (A)

Assistance provided: Identify organisations or systems (national and international) that provide assistance to the people affected.

Affected group	Assistance mechanism	Problem addressed	Percentage coverage (B)

Gaps in capacity to cope: Estimate the short-fall in people's ability to cope with the problems, based on the two previous tables.

Affected group	Problem	Gap in capacity (100 – A – B)

Access to affected populations: Provide details of physical access (distance, road condition etc.), political access (willingness of authorities to allow access) and security access (safety of travelling to affected areas).

Group	Location	Access details

Proposals for intervention: Explain proposed intervention strategy:
Short- and long-term proposals

Intervention type	
Problem to be addressed	
Beneficiary population	
Number of beneficiaries	
Location of beneficiaries	
Duration of intervention	
Primary implementers	
Identity and role of other partners	
Constraints	
Approximate budget (where possible)	

ANNEX 2: HOW TO COLLECT THE INFORMATION

ANNEX 2.1 PROBLEM ANALYSIS

This is the basis of all interviews. We are trying to discover, from the perspective of each informant, what the problems are, who is affected, and how well they are able to cope. It is likely that different informants will have different perspectives. This is fine; it is one of the reasons for which we interview different people. “Problem analysis” can be done by following the steps described below. *It is not necessary to follow each step in exactly this order.* What is important is to understand the principles and adapt the procedure to each interview.

Step 1: Problem identification

Ask each group or individual to explain all the problems that affect the community, or may affect it in the future. Normally the most serious problems will be brought up without prompting.

Step 2: Problem ranking

Rank the problems in order of severity. **Pair-wise ranking** (Annex4.5) may be useful.

Step 3: Are problems “normal” or “new”?

Ask whether or not the problems are “normal”. Have they always existed? If so, do they happen regularly (e.g. an annual “hunger gap”)? If problems are “new”, when did they start (e.g. declining rainfall in a previously fertile area)? What are the trends?

Step 4: Affected population

Determine which groups are vulnerable to each problem. These might be defined according to, livelihood (e.g. waged labourers); age (e.g. children under 5); family circumstance (e.g. single women); social status (e.g. marginalised clans); other criteria (probe this!). Vulnerability is often a combination of factors (for example, a marginalised clan may be restricted to one type of livelihood, thereby accentuating vulnerability). *Remember: people are always vulnerable to something (e.g. a farmer is vulnerable to a failure of rains). Do not make assumptions about vulnerability based on experiences elsewhere.*

Step 5: Number of affected population

Estimate the number of people affected. This may be approximate if reliable information does not exist; always indicate the level of confidence that you have in the estimate.

Step 6: Location of affected population

Gather details of the location of the people affected. Determine whether or not this is their normal place of residence, i.e. whether or not they have been displaced. If they have been displaced, ask when this happened and under what circumstances.

Step 7: Capacity of affected population

Ask informants to explain the ways in which people are coping with the problems. Are these adequate? *Estimate* the extent to which coping mechanisms cover the problem: 100% implies that all needs are covered, 50% that half are covered and so on.

Step 8: Assistance provided

Identify organisations or *systems* that provide assistance to vulnerable people. These might be local or international. They might be traditional systems (e.g. *zakat* in many muslim communities) or ones set up specifically to address this problem. *Estimate* the effectiveness of the assistance in the same way as was done with the coping strategies.

Step 9: Outstanding needs

If the combination of “coping strategies” and “assistance” does not cover the needs, there may be a need for further help. Define the extent of the outstanding needs and consider whether or not these fall within the mandate and capacity of the RC/RC.

Step 10: Summary of problem analyses from different groups/individuals

The problem analysis is carried out with all informants (individuals and groups). The problems perceived as most important will often differ between informants. This is not a problem. Simply list all the problems that are considered to be serious; these will generally be connected anyway. The important thing is to understand the extent of the problems affecting the community and to analyse ways in which the RC/RC might be able to help.

ANNEX 2.2 LIVELIHOODS INTERVIEW

Livelihoods interviews should be carried out in most assessments. This is because livelihoods form the basis of people’s existence; if livelihoods are threatened the sustainability of the community is likely to be in trouble. Livelihoods affect everything! Oxfam define livelihoods as: “*A livelihood refers to the capabilities, assets and strategies that people use to make a living. That is, to achieve food security and income security through a variety of productive economic activities*”. Different groups of people within a community have different livelihoods. For example, some families might combine crops, livestock-rearing and the selling of handicrafts. Others who live in the same community but have no land might be solely dependent on wage labour (either within the community or further away). **We are interested in defining the different livelihood groups within the village and discovering which are most vulnerable.**

Note: Thorough livelihoods analysis is complex and time-consuming. The approach described below should provide a *basic* understanding of livelihoods. If a rigorous analysis is needed the “Household Economy Approach” of Save the Children is recommended.

- Define the different livelihood groups through secondary information, or discussion with key informants or a focus group.
- Arrange meetings with people from as many livelihood groups as possible (about 5 people per group); as a minimum, talk to the poorest or most vulnerable groups.

For each group:

- Carry out the “problem analysis” explained in Annex 2.1.
- Estimate the number of households that are in this livelihood group.
- Define all the income sources of the livelihood group *this year*. Use proportional piling as above.
- Define all the income sources of the livelihood group *in normal years* during the same season (if we are doing the assessment in March, consider the situation in *March* during a normal year). Quantify as much as possible (for example “the family harvested 600 kg of wheat” or “the husband worked for three months for \$x per month”). Use **proportional piling** to estimate the significance of each income source.
- Where appropriate, analyse income sources at other important times (e.g. before and after the harvest, before and after the start of a food distribution).
- Explain the reasons for the changes in income sources.

Note: “Own produce” is included as an income source. For example, if a farming family consumes all their produce, include this as an income source.

ANNEX 2.3 HOUSEHOLD INTERVIEW

Household visits are an essential component of any assessment. They provide an opportunity to witness living conditions first hand. Importantly, they are an excellent forum for talking with women and children in a relaxed and natural environment. Identify households through random sampling (Annex 3.1) Points of discussion include:

- Diet (what do people eat and how is this changing?). Use **proportional piling** to analyse the relative significance of different foods, now and in normal times.
- Use of water: where does it come from and how is it stored?
- Health issues (particularly child health).
- Sales of assets (items sold, prices, comparison with normal). A **seasonal calendar** could be used to compare this year with a “normal” year.
- Women’s roles and responsibilities and how these are changing. Is there an increase in the number of women-headed households? What are the implications?
- Children’s lifestyles and how these are changing. Are there child-headed households? If so, why is this? What are the roles and responsibilities of children in the household and community? How many children go to school and what is the standard of education?
- Size and composition of a typical household: numbers of adults/children, men/women, boys/girls.

Interview tips

Wherever possible the interviewers should be women who speak the local language. Be focused, but keep the conversation informal and **look out for the unexpected** (this is a very important component of this type of interview)!

- Visits of this kind can be intrusive. You are in someone’s home. Accept traditional offers of hospitality (e.g. tea). Be sensitive about the way you ask questions. Common sense, respect and politeness are all vital attributes! Keep the conversation as conversational as possible. Do not rush.
- Observe. Look around. See what food is being prepared. Note the household items, their condition, and what seems to be missing.
- Ask. Ask general questions about their lives and livelihoods and the changes that are taking place in these. Ask specific questions about the things you see around you: “What is that vegetable?”, “When do you eat it?” and so on.
- Try. Taste food if it is offered to you. This helps build trust and is a good entry point for a discussion of food.

If you are talking to a woman, ask if it is possible to meet some of her friends. If so, convene a small focus group (3-5 people) in the home.

Constraints

- In some cultures it is not possible for strangers to visit women in their homes. Sometimes a male relative must be present. If so, politely explain to the man (men) the reason for the interview and the importance of hearing the women’s point of view in their own words.

ANNEX 2.4 INDICATORS

Sets of “indicators” are provided for various sectors. **These are not checklists.** The indicators lists include information that can be collected by non-specialists. They can be used by specialists to determine whether or not an in-depth sector assessment should be done. They can also be used as a basis for monitoring (this depends upon a good understanding of the context; see Section 4.2.2). In general, it is best to collect indicator information from key informants (Annex 3.5). Possible information sources are given with each set of indicators. *It is unlikely that you will be able to collect all of the indicator information during every assessment. This is fine; just collect as much as you can.*

ANNEX 2.4/H

HEALTH

Information sources: Ministry of Health, local clinics, community health workers, humanitarian organisations (local and international), communities (women)

Issues of interest:

- Is there a health emergency? What is its nature? How is it likely to evolve?
- Is the main problem related to health, health systems and/or access to health systems?
- What is the existing capacity to respond? Who is responsible for what?
- Are there gaps in the response? Is there a need for health intervention?
- Is there a need for specialised units (ERU, surgical, decontamination etc.)?
- What further information is needed?

The following indicators should help answer these questions:

	Information	Indicators
H1	Age breakdown (if proportions differ significantly, investigate the reasons)	Average for developing countries: 0 – 4 years: 12.4% 5 – 9 years: 11.7% 10 – 14 years: 10.5% 15 – 19 years: 9.5% 20 – 59 years: 48.6% Pregnant: 2.4%
H2	Crude Mortality Rate	Problem if exceeds: 1 per 10 000 per day Critical if exceeds: 2 per 10 000 per day
H3	Under 5 mortality rate	Problem if exceeds: 2 per 10 000 per day Critical if exceeds: 4 per 10 000 per day
H4	Acute Respiratory Infection in children < 5	Problem if exceeds: 10% per month in cold weather
H5	Diarrhoeal diseases in children < 5	Problem if exceeds: 50% affected per month
H6	Malaria in non-immune population (adults who have not grown up in malaria-affected areas + children	Problem if exceeds: 50% affected per month

	under 5 years of age)	
H7	Measles coverage	Problem if less than: 90% coverage for children 6 months – 12 years
H8	EPI coverage	Problem if less than: 85% coverage
H9	HIV prevalence	Data on prevalence at current time
H10	Tuberculosis	Does a national policy exist? Does a Direct Observed Treatment programme exist?
H11	Sexually Transmitted Diseases	Do treatment protocols exist?
H12	Reproductive health	Is there widespread access to RH services or knowledge?
H13	Any additional health problems existing (endemic diseases)?	Description
H14	Mental health assessment	
H15	Level of destruction of health facilities	Level of healthcare / facilities / equipment / medicines / consumables / vaccines / number of staff
H16	Access to health services for affected population (national and private sector)	Proportion of population that has access to: medical, surgical, gynaecology, obstetrics, mother and child health, distance Groups/individuals excluded from access
H17	How is the national health system organised?	Ambulance system? Referral system to intensive care available / functioning?
H18	Other health actors	List

ANNEX 2.4/N

NUTRITION

Information sources: Ministry of Health, nutrition surveys, demographic health surveys, local clinics, humanitarian organisations, communities (women)

	Information	Indicators
N1	Nutrition information	< -2 Z scores WFH (overall malnutrition): normal/ increasing/ decreasing < -3 Z scores WFH (severe malnutrition) normal/ increasing/ decreasing Iodine deficiency; prevalence of 5-19.9% in children aged 6-12 years = mild public health problem Vitamin A deficiency; prevalence of >1% in children under 6 years of age = public health problem
N2	Risk of malnutrition due to poor public health	<i>Acute Respiratory Infection</i> in children < 5; Problem if exceeds:

		<p>10% per month in cold weather</p> <p><i>Diarrhoeal diseases</i> in children < 5; Problem if exceeds: 50% affected per month</p> <p><i>Measles Coverage</i> Problem if less than: 90% coverage for children 6 months – 12 years</p> <p><i>HIV Prevalence</i> Data on prevalence at current time</p>
N3	Risk of malnutrition due to inadequate care	<p>Change in work patterns</p> <p>Change in composition of households: large numbers of separated children or orphans</p> <p>Normal infant feeding practices (bottle feeding, breast feeding, manufactured complementary foods)</p>
N4	Risk of malnutrition due to reduced food access	See livelihoods, agriculture, market indicators
N5	Nutrition intervention or community-based support already in place prior to the disaster	<p>Mandate, Policies and experience of Movement components</p> <p>Local population capacity</p>

ANNEX 2.4/W

WATER AND SANITATION

Information sources: Ministries of Water and Health, local water authority, local clinics, humanitarian organisations (local and international), communities, observation

	Information	Indicators
W1	Diarrhoeal disease	Normal/ increasing/ decreasing
W2	Acute watery and/or bloody diarrhoea	<p>Normal/ increasing/ decreasing</p> <p>If increasing details of age group/area (encourage authorities to isolate cases!)</p>
W3	Quantity and quality of water	<p>Sphere indicator: at least 15 litres per person per day</p> <p><i>In extreme cases:</i> 5 litres per person per day for drinking and cooking</p> <p>Details of source (obviously contaminated?)</p> <p>Chlorinated/treated?</p>
W4	Water transport and storage	Means of carrying/ storing (can water be contaminated?); distance and time to water point (Sphere standard: no more than 500m walking);

		household water storage; availability at institutions
W5	Defecation and urination	Toilets or open defecation? Signs of defecation near dwellings. Sphere standards: no more than 20 people per latrine / toilet, no more than 50m from dwellings
W6	Women's use of communal facilities	Safe and/or culturally acceptable? Yes or no; details
W7	Hand-washing/ bathing facilities	Facilities exist/used? Soap available? Secure/private for women and girls? Sphere indicator: 50 people per bathing facility.
W8	Disease-carrying vectors (flies, mosquitoes, body lice, rodents)	Exist? Breeding grounds (stagnant water, refuse)?

ANNEX 2.4/S

SHELTER AND HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

Information sources: meteorological records, aerial survey, local authorities, communities, observation

	Information	Indicators
S1	Shelter requirements	Climate factors: need to resist rain / wind / sun / cold
S2	Physical status of existing shelter	Description, percentage not adequate according to S1
S3	Essential household items	Proportion of population lacking essential items (defined by affected / vulnerable population)

ANNEX 2.4/A

AGRICULTURE

Information sources: Farmers, Ministry of Agriculture, FAO, market traders, aerial survey, communities, daily labourers,

	Information	Indicators
A1	How does this year's production compare with normal?	Aggregate production of staple crops compared with normal for country or province, yield per hectare compared with normal
A2	Are there production problems for some items?	Price trends of key agricultural products. Comparison between products (e.g. grain and livestock), between areas (affected and non-affected areas) and over time (this year and normal years)
A3	Amount of agricultural land affected (e.g. during floods)	% affected / not affected
A4	Livestock health	Good/bad, access to vet services
A7	Availability / accessibility of seeds	Quantity and price at market compared with normal

A8	Sales of productive farming assets	Higher than normal rate of sales
A9	Inaccessibility of land due to insecurity or natural hazard	Amount of land inaccessible

ANNEX 2.4/M **MARKET**

Information sources: Market traders, farmers, daily labourers, employers, transport companies

	Information	Indicators
M1	Are staple foods and essential commodities available?	Yes / no. If “no”, which items are missing? Have they been replaced with other products?
M2	Effect of current crisis on availability of commodities	Change in production? Supply disrupted?
M3	Prices of commodities	Collect prices now; 1 year ago; immediately before and after a recent shock; immediately before and after the last harvest; other significant times.
M4	Where do commodities come from?	Has this changed? Why?
M5	Wage rate for daily labourers	How much? Increasing / decreasing? Why?
M6	Work availability for daily labourers	How many days’ work in an average month? Increasing / decreasing? Why?
M7	Availability and cost of trucks for hire	Number of transporters, approximate number of trucks, cost of hire

When time and/or access are limited markets can act as a good source of information (people come into the market from all the surrounding villages). Market analysis is useful in urban situations where most people rely on purchase for their household needs. Markets can be regularly monitored.

Constraints: Market analysis is complex. The approach presented here is simplified. Consider the following:

- Traders may be reluctant to release information for commercial reasons.
- Markets can be manipulated by cartels or political actors.
- Traders generally raise their prices if they think that the potential buyer is rich (e.g. a foreigner!). Therefore assign local staff to do the survey and cross-check prices with local people (preferably women).
- Traders are busy. Go straight to the point and ask direct questions. This is not the time for semi-structured interviews!

ANNEX 2.4/P **PROTECTION**

Information sources: Local authorities, humanitarian organisations (local and international), religious leaders, lawyers, human rights’ organisations, health and social workers, communities (women and children)

	Information	Indicators
P1	Have families been separated?	Numbers, locations, details

		of registration process
P2	Are the legal rights of resident and displaced people respected?	If no, details of relevant law and its abuse
P3	Are refugees at risk of being forced to return home against their wishes?	If yes, details
P4	Is registration of displaced people undertaken?	If yes, details of procedure
P5	Is there a problem with the management of human remains?	If yes, details
P6	Are people subject to abuse or insecurity (physical, sexual, gender-based, psychological)	Numbers, details of vulnerable groups
P7	Are some individuals/ groups subject to discrimination (physical, psychological)?	Numbers, details of vulnerable groups

ANNEX 2.4/SEC

SECURITY

Information sources: Local authorities, humanitarian organisations (local and international), community

	Information	Indicators
SEC1	Existing or potential security threats	e.g. conflict, crime, land-mines
SEC2	Is it safe to travel to all areas?	Details of security threats and locations
SEC3	Communications	Existence of telephone and radio systems?

ANNEX 2.4/LOG

LOGISTICS AND PROCUREMENT

Information sources: Observation, community, transport companies

	Information	Indicators
LOG1	What is the status of roads connecting the region with main supply centres?	Description of condition, including seasonal factors, travel times, and appropriate vehicle types
LOG2	Are there some areas that cannot be reached by road?	Locations, transport options
LOG3	Where is the nearest airport?	Location, condition
LOG4	Commodities available locally	Fuel, construction material, food (including estimate of quantity that can be procured)
LOG5	Prices	See “market” indicators

ANNEX 3: TECHNIQUES

ANNEX 3.1

RANDOM SAMPLING

The scope of most RC/RC assessments is limited by constraints of time and access. It is rarely possible to achieve statistical validity. The sampling procedure described below is intended to provide a reasonable compromise between representation and practicality.

Step 1: Define the social structure of the community

You will need to have a reasonable understanding of the social structure of the community. This can be achieved through secondary information sources and/or key informant interviews within the community. Gain an idea of the main socio-economic groups and their locations (the *sub-communities*).

Step 2: Decide which groups to interview

Ideally you should talk to some representatives of all the sub-communities. This may not be possible for reasons of time or access. In this case, investigate those who you think are poorest or most vulnerable.

Step 3: Decide how many households to interview

This will depend on the number of sub-communities identified and the time available. As a minimum, carry out 3 household interviews in each sub-community; if you have time, carry out more interviews. Allow one hour for each interview, with 30 minutes between each interview.

Step 4: Identify the households to be interviewed

Stand in the centre of the sub-community. Spin a bottle on the ground or throw a pen in the air and see where it lands. Walk in the direction indicated until you reach the edge of the sub-community, counting the number of houses that you pass. Divide this number by the number of households that you wish to interview; this gives the interval between households. For example, if you want to interview 3 households and you count 47 households on your walk, the interval is $47/3 = 16$. Choose a number at random between 1 and 16; this is the first house that you will visit. After this house, walk in the same direction and count another 16 houses; this is the second household to be interviewed. Finally carry out the same procedure to choose the last household.

Step 5: Re-assess assumptions about community structure

Having carried out Step 4 in all the chosen sub-communities, you may realise that the original analysis of the community structure was incorrect. In this case, repeat Steps 1-4 for the “new” sub-communities that you have identified.

ANNEX 3.2

OBSERVATION

- Observation is often under-rated as an information source. Through observation we can gather an enormous amount of information very quickly. Crucially, it gives us a “feel” for the situation (sounds and smells and visual impression; this, after all, is the point of going to the field).
- It is a good idea to start the assessment with a walk around the community. During the assessment take the opportunity to *observe* as much as you can. If you are discussing crops, ask to see the fields. If people describe a food-stuff that you do not know, ask to see (and taste!) it.

- Observation is useful for cross-checking. For example, you are told that *all* the livestock have been lost in the recent drought. Soon afterwards you see a large herd of goats. *This does not necessarily contradict the previous information* – many explanations are possible – but it does provide the basis for the next line of questions: “Who do these animals belong to? How did they survive the drought?” And so on.
- Walking through the area with local people facilitates discussion. The atmosphere is informal and questions are prompted by sights that you see. This is more natural than referring to a prepared check-list. Very importantly, walking and observing are an excellent way to come upon **unexpected information** (issues that we have not predicted during the preparation for the assessment).
- Observation is the most straightforward approach to assessing infrastructure and logistics. Driving along a road is a sure way of finding out if it is passable.
- Ultimately, one piece of advice covers all situations: **Be curious!**

ANNEX 3.3

INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE

Pre-interview preparation

Prepare well for field interviews. Be clear about the information that you need and gather as much background knowledge as you can (secondary information review and baseline information).

Semi-structured interviews

Most interviews are generally of the “semi-structured” variety. This means that we have specific issues that we want to investigate but also remain open to hear about other things (we encourage people to bring up things that *they* want to talk about).

The style of the interview is conversational. Many of our questions are complicated, and a questionnaire format is unlikely to give reliable answers. For example, one of the main aspects of our assessment is the analysis of community and household capacities to withstand problems. This is usually a complex issue requiring a lot of probing. Direct questions will only provide part of the answer.

The central core of all interviews is the problem analysis (Annex 2.1). This is crucial because problems, and people’s ability to withstand them, are the basis for RC/RC action. *However* we should not lead straight into questions about problems because:

- This sets the wrong tone for the interview. We want to hear about positive as well as negative aspects of the community.
- Exclusive concentration on problems gives the impression that our objective is to find out “what we can give”. This encourages people to present “shopping lists” of material requirements.
- People will, inevitably, bring up problems without prompting from us.

Start the interview with some general questions about life in the community. Set an informal tone; we want people to be relaxed.

When people bring up problems, encourage them to explain the details in their own way. Steer the discussion gradually towards the key issues: the people who are

vulnerable to each problem and their capacity to withstand the problem. *It is normal for people to be reluctant to explain all aspects of their coping strategies.* There are numerous reasons for this:

- Some aspects are so integrated into their lifestyles that they do not see them as “strategies”. For example, sharing resources between households.
- Individual components of the coping strategies may contribute very little and people do not think it important to discuss them. However, often when all the “small” components are added up they make a significant contribution to livelihoods (if the activity was not significant, people would not indulge in it).
- Activities may be illegal and people are reluctant to divulge details to strangers. For example, people may carry out small-scale trade without a license. At a more sinister level, people are understandably reluctant to go into details of activities such as prostitution and theft.
- People may purposefully withhold information in order to make their situation seem worse than it actually is in the hope that this will encourage us to bring aid to their area.

These factors further emphasise the need for a subtle approach; questionnaires are not appropriate to the probing necessary to understand this sort of issue.

Interview tips

When discussing sensitive subjects (e.g. sources of income) it is often easier to talk about the community in general rather than the personal circumstances of the people being interviewed. For example, ask “What do people do when their crops fail?” rather than, “What do *you* do when your crop fails?” We are interested in the *typical* household in each community (or sub-community).

It is important to recognise the dynamics that exist within focus groups. These affect the way in which different people contribute to the discussion.

- Some people are naturally more out-going than others.
- Some people comfortable expressing themselves in a group situation because of their status in the community (for example the chief). Others (for example poor women) may be reluctant to express their views, particularly if they are controversial.

Try to understand the dynamics and organise the group accordingly. Make an effort to “draw out” the shy people: encourage a relaxed, informal atmosphere; seek the shy people’s opinions; “control” the more confident people.

In a mixed group there will always be power differences between the participants. If the local society is very hierarchical there will be limits to the amount of difference that can be represented. If there is *no* chance that people will speak freely, or if their free participation may cause problems for them or others, it is better to convene separate groups in which status is more balanced (or interview people separately). If power differences are to be accommodated within a group:

- Make sure that all understand that everyone has equal status within the group and that all should be free to express any opinion that they may hold.
- Actively encourage “less powerful” participants in the ways described above.
- Emphasise the constructive nature of the discussion, we are not trying to find someone to blame for problems, but looking for ways to address these.

ANNEX 3.4

FOCUS GROUPS

A focus group involves bringing people together to discuss a subject of common interest. This fulfils several functions:

- A lot of information can be gathered in a short time.
- Information can be cross-checked if group members are encouraged to contribute (and contradict!) freely.
- Different perspectives can be debated and assumptions challenged.

There are 2 types of focus group:

- **Heterogeneous** (participants are different). We intentionally pick people from a variety of backgrounds to gain diverse perspectives. This is useful when we need to get a broad view of the situation in a short space of time. We must be careful with the power relationships within the group. Those from “dominant” sectors of the community (wealthy men, for example) will probably be more inclined to speak their minds than relatively marginalised people (poor women, for example). Careful facilitation is required (Annex 3.3).
- **Homogeneous** (participants are similar). The group is made up of people who come from similar back grounds; for example a “livelihoods” group (Annex 2.2) or a group of women. Homogeneous groups are used if we want to investigate an issue in detail from the perspective of one group (normally those most poor or vulnerable).

Usually one or more heterogeneous focus groups are held at the beginning of the field assessment. This helps us to understand the overall situation and the structure of the community. From this information we are able to decide which types of *homogeneous* groups we want to interview. For example, if we discover that some families live from a combination of agriculture and trade whilst others are solely dependent on wage labour, we may decide to interview a group of people from each category separately.

The **selection** of group participants needs to be done with care.

Heterogeneous group: We are looking for a diverse group of people with different backgrounds and opinions. For example we might include local health-workers, government administrators, traders, and teachers (with a good balance between men and women, and old and young people where possible). There are 3 ways to compile this group:

1. Nomination by the Community Leaders. Might work in small communities or where there is little incentive to manipulate information. This approach should be avoided as it is biased towards those who hold power.
2. Random selection. People are either selected by “spinning the bottle” or through an ad hoc gathering (a discussion begins and people join in of their own accord). The latter will only work in very small communities; otherwise numbers will soon become unmanageable. The former can be effective, but it will not result in the “group of experts” suggested above.
3. Key informants. The preferred approach. Participants are identified through local institutions (clinics, water boards etc.) or via local community organisations. If possible include some “anti-establishment” figures to balance against the perspectives of the authorities; obviously common sense and local knowledge need to be applied here!

Homogeneous group: Identify one person from the group that you wish to interview. Ask him/her to invite 4 or 5 friends with similar backgrounds to join the discussion.

ANNEX 3.5

KEY INFORMANTS

Key informants are people who have specific knowledge about certain aspects of the community. They help us to collect information rapidly and in a focused way. They are, therefore, useful in rapid-onset emergencies where time is limited. Typical examples include farmers, government officials, women's groups, local NGO staff, and traders but **anybody** who has an interesting perspective and is able to express it well can be included. No guidelines can be provided for the identification of such people; look out for people with interesting or well-articulated views throughout the assessment.

Key informant interviews are orientated around the specific knowledge and experience of the informant. If the interviewee is a doctor, the discussion will probably be focused on health issues; this is obvious! However, certain considerations need to be borne in mind:

- The fact that the informant is a doctor (or engineer or ...) does not mean that s/he is knowledgeable about all aspects of his/her subject; a hospital surgeon may have little knowledge about primary health issues in the rural areas. This is not necessarily the case; some individuals take a well-informed interest in subjects outside of their direct responsibility.
- Conversely professional people, because of their social position and contacts with other professional people, may have good knowledge of the political and social environment and may be able to provide information that goes beyond their field of work.

Judgement is required in order to decide what sort of information the informant can usefully provide. It is usually best to use a semi-structured interview approach, starting with general topics (Annex 3.3) then moving to specific areas of interest.

Cautions

It may be difficult to spend sufficient time with key informants as they tend to be busy. Key informants are a vital source of information but their own interests, and the influence they wield must be taken into account and balanced with opposing perspectives wherever possible. Avoid relying too much on very "accessible" informants (those who speak good English, have a western education etc.).

ANNEX 4: TOOLS

Much of the information in this section is adapted from the ALNAP publication: "Participation by crisis-affected populations in humanitarian action: A handbook for practitioners".

ANNEX 4.1

Daily calendar

These help us to understand how different members of the community spend their time, and ways in which this is changing. They can also help us to design programmes. For example, if people are spending 5 hours per day collecting water there may be scope for the development of an improved water supply. Comparing current daily schedules with previous ones we can identify trends. For example if

people are now walking 2 hours to find firewood whereas previously they could find it within half an hour, we can conclude that there may be a deforestation problem and a project to promote fuel-efficient stoves might be useful.

- Daily calendars should be constructed with homogeneous groups (Annex 3.4) or with individuals. It is often interesting to carry out separate exercises with different members of a household (e.g. men, women, and children).
- Ask participants to describe a typical day, giving as much detail as possible about the activities they carry out and the amount of time each takes.

ANNEX 4.2

Seasonal calendar

A seasonal calendar can help us to understand whether or not something is normal (happens every year) or new. For example, in some agricultural areas there has always been a “hunger gap” just before the harvest. This is a difficult time but people have developed systems for coping with it. Limited food availability at this time of the year is much less significant than it would be immediately *after* the harvest. Seasonal calendars also help us to plan our activities so that they fit in with local schedules. An obvious example is the timing of a seed distribution. Another example would be the distribution of food, which may be affected by the state of roads at certain times of the year. We can also take into account people’s workload and plan joint activities accordingly. For example, during planting and harvesting times people tend to be very busy so we should not plan too many large participatory events at these times.

- The calendar can be compiled with a mixed group containing representatives from all the livelihood groups or with separate livelihoods groups and individuals.
- Ask participants to identify events that take place at particular times of a normal year. These should include climate (e.g. rains, cold weather); economics (e.g. planting); cultural (e.g. religious festivals); other events significant to the community.
- Plot all events together with unusual (new) events on a calendar.

ANNEX 4.3

Historical timeline

The aim is to understand the recent history of the area and its people by identifying the main events that have affected the lives of the people. The exercise can be done with a “homogeneous” focus group (Annex 3.4); this will help you avoid manipulation of history (people emphasise events that *they* consider to be important). Historical timeline can be used with “homogeneous” groups or with individuals if we are interested in particular perspectives.

- Draw a line and locate 2 or 3 important events that have occurred within living memory. Place them in chronological order on the line.
- Explain that the objective is to fill in the gaps on this line with other events.
- Ask people to think about significant events (both positive and negative) and to locate them on the line. Ask them to explain the causes of the events and their impact.

ANNEX 4.4

Proportional piling

This helps us to estimate quantities and proportions, especially when working with people who are not used to quantifying data. For example, we may need to know the

proportion of the community that is in each of 5 livelihood groups, or the amount of income that a family receives from several different sources.

- Collect 100 dried beans (or pebbles or anything similar; they just have to be the same size as each other).
- Explain to the people the objective of the exercise. Taking the example of the income sources, you could ask them to explain each source in turn. List these and then ask them to divide up the beans according the relative importance of each income source. They may receive income from selling milk and producing wheat, with wheat providing twice as much as milk. In this case, the “wheat” pile would contain about 70 beans, while the “milk” pile would contain about 30.

In addition to helping us to quantify issues, proportional piling is a good facilitation tool. In a group, giving people an activity of this kind can break down barriers. It can also act as a focus for discussion. Typically there is a lot of debate about the relative size of the piles and this encourages participation and enhances accuracy.

ANNEX 4.5

Pair-wise ranking

This is a good way to analyse the relative importance of different factors. For example, we are trying to decide which problems people consider to be most severe. They have identified 4 major problems: poor health services, lack of employment, lack of interest from the municipality, and crime. Insert each problem in a grid. Fill in the cells along and below the diagonal, as shown (otherwise you will be asking questions twice). Then compare each of the factors in turn and note the response on the grid:

Q. Which problem is more severe, health or education?

A. Education (write “E” in the relevant box)

Q. Which problem is more severe, health or municipality lack of interest?

A. Municipality (write “M” in the next box)

And so on ...

A completed grid looks something like this:

	Health	Employment	Municipality	Crime
Health		E	M	C
Employment			M	C
Municipality				M
Crime				

Count up the results. In this case these are as follows:

Lack of interest from the municipality: 3

Crime: 2

Lack of employment: 1

Poor health services: 0

This indicates that, according to this group, “lack of interest from the municipality” is the most serious problem whilst “poor health services” is the least serious. *The fact that “health” has a score of zero does not mean that it is not a problem; just, that it is less severe than the other 3 problems.*