

Identification of and listening to the most vulnerable children

What is this tool?

This tool provides guidelines to facilitate dialogue with the most vulnerable, to learn about the local experience of vulnerability for children, to identify those groups or families with the most vulnerable children, and to analyse the information gathered. The exercise provides information about the capacities, problems, and resilience of the most vulnerable children and their families. This information can be used for programme planning.

objective

To develop a shared understanding of the key problems, capacities, and resilience of the most vulnerable children

product

A summary of the problems and capacities of the most vulnerable children for project planning

who facilitates

DF co-facilitates with select members of the starter group or stakeholders involved in working with the most vulnerable children

who participates

Children, ages 10 and up

time span

approximately 1 day

materials

- notebook paper
- pencils

Introduction

Development facilitators, starter group members, and local facilitators can use this tool to gather more in-depth information from the most vulnerable children. While the earlier steps in the Critical Path included the participation of a wide range of people in the community; this exercise focuses on discussions among the most vulnerable children and their families.

To gather information about some of the vulnerable children in the community, refer to the lists of vulnerable children developed by the starter group during the workshops in Step 3 of the Critical Path, as well as the results of the Social Mapping tool developed in Step 4.

Some vulnerable groups may include children who:

- are orphaned
- are living without the basic necessities
- are not going to school
- are suffering from some type of abuse or exploitation
- are facing discrimination (such as a particular ethnic group), or
- are involved in exploitative labour.

For the purposes of this exercise, use the methods listed in the ‘recommended process’ to explore the problems, capacities, and resilience of the most vulnerable children and their families.

It is useful to use tools which focus on “assets” for children. Sometimes this step can be a research initiative conducted by youth.

Recommended Process

Use a variety of methods to explore the key questions listed below, including focus group discussions, role plays, PLA exercises, free lists, drama, games, artwork, photovoice, mapping, walk-about, or interviews with children. Also consider using a game, such as **Take a Step**, to start the discussion with youth. Match each facilitator with a notetaker to capture the discussions and information shared at each exercise.

Choose two or three of the following questions:

- How would you describe a child in your situation that is good or doing well?
- How would you describe families like yours that are doing well?
- What makes life difficult for children? or What are the problems and troubles of children in your situation?
- Which children have the most difficult lives in this community?
 - Where do they live?
 - In what ways are their lives more difficult?
 - How do these children most want their lives to change from what they are now?

- Who are the children that are not able to participate in community (or project) activities? What are the reasons?
- What causes children to end up in situations like yours?
- What do children in your situation do when you face troubles and problems? (Refer to the problems listed above.)
- Where do children in your situation go for help when you face troubles and problems? (Refer to the problems listed above.)
- What are some good things in families and the community for children in your situation?
- How do you stay safe? What factors, assets, or resources in the community help protect you from danger?

After each exercise, ask the children for the names and contact information of other children or local people who they think are knowledgeable about their situation, particularly persons who come from the local area (in contrast to professionals, such as health care providers, social workers, or ministers who work in areas but often come from elsewhere). These will become the key informant interviewees in the next step.

Key informant interviews

After analysing together all the notes from the discussions above, make decisions about which specific problems to focus on for the key informant interviews.

- 1) Choose issues that are not yet well understood; and
- 2) Choose issues that could feasibly form a focus for programming in the community.

Conduct in-depth interviews to explore the problems, capacities, and resilience of the most vulnerable children. Focus on the nature of each problem, its causes, effects, differences, and similarities between boys and girls, as well as capacities and resilience associated with the problem. Match each interviewer with a notetaker to capture all of the interviews. Synthesise and analyse all of the information collected during the interviews. Use this information for project planning.



Tips for Facilitators

- The process is most effective when community stakeholders have developed a shared understanding and definition of what constitutes vulnerability.
- These are sensitive issues, and require careful facilitation—balancing out the importance of asking hard questions and opening up difficult issues, with the sensitivity to recognise that the community may not be ready to discuss some issues.
- Be careful in the translation of terms like vulnerability, resilience, “bright future,” etc. Translation of the meanings behind these words is challenging, and must be checked and corrected throughout the process. Sometimes local phrases communicate the meanings better than dictionary translation of terms.