

The International Humanitarian Foundation

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IHF Needs Assessment
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A needs assessment can be conducted for a variety of health, technical, development, or economic interventions and in many geographical, cultural and historical contexts. It is, therefore, difficult to provide a universal checklist. The framework outlined below should represent the start of collecting data and evidence upon which humanitarian action may be based.

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If the task at hand is implementation of a technology (i.e. smoke-free stoves in a rural village) we would want to consider the overall need of the target community (number of dwellings perhaps), the communities willingness to implement the intervention (previous health campaigns), and the availability of resources (is there a supply of potters and clay).

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Director

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In some cases our public health interventions are multi-faceted or involve multiple areas of expertise. In these cases a needs assessment should be conducted that encompasses the many dimensions of the proposed work; conducting many pre-intervention assessments are discouraged as doing so may distract from the goal of taking action. Interdisciplinary interventions such as the construction of houses in a rainforest village may be tied to micro-finance/enterprise for development works, likely a health education campaign, and the launching of a community health program. Together these interventions, when constructed with the community, represent an approach to confronting the challenges our partners face.

One overarching message should be kept in mind while conducting a needs assessment: we need **information for action**. It is often difficult to reconcile the merits of a full academic study (such as one we would publish in a journal) versus a quick needs assessment to guide our work. Some key aspects of a needs assessment are:

- ◆ What is the highest priority within the community?
- ◆ What will have the greatest (health) impact?
- ◆ What interventions can engage community partners?
- ◆ What resources (material, talent, labor, etc) are available locally?
- ◆ What is the best use of limited time, money, or enthusiasm?
- ◆ What pieces of the historical/cultural context are important?

By examining this list we can see that is far different than the priorities of an academic study. We'd likely discuss sample sizes, measuring effects, establishing baselines, using validated surveys, and many other tools to form a high-quality publishable piece of science. In the case of needs assessment, our goal is to get the work done with minimum impact and with minimal resources as the overall goal is partnering with the community to make change.

A Basic Framework

- ◆ Conduct quick interviews/surveys to document:
 - What are the needs and priorities of the local population?
 - What areas/groups have the greatest unmet need?

- How do we target these groups, what interventions are recommended?
- What is the best use of resources?
 - Efficiently – making limited resources go a long way
 - Efficaciously – make sure what we do actually works
- ◆ These findings should be presented quickly and briefly in a format that allows for a) starting the work proposed or b) digging a little deeper into a specific aspect (what else do we need to know to get started)

A Formal Needs Assessment

- ◆ Scope
 - Who is the population?
 - What is the problem?
 - How big is the problem?
 - Who are the stakeholders?
 - What is currently being done to address this problem?
 - Who is currently involved?
- ◆ Intervention
 - What does the population want?
 - What do local leaders want?
 - What do other NGOs/government/volunteers/etc want?
 - What are the best practices for this type of work?
 - What does the scientific literature say?
 - What is the most cost-effective solution?
- ◆ Impact of the Intervention
 - What will intervening mean to the local community?
 - Who will be benefited, who harmed?
 - What specific resources are available locally?
 - What non-local resources are needed?
- ◆ Recommendations
 - What is the recommendation for action?
 - What are the steps in implementing this action?
 - What milestones are important, what key decisions are important?
 - What are the important outcome measures (so we know what success is)?

Resources

Wright, J. *Health Needs Assessment in Practice*. BMJ Books. 1998

Pencheon, D., et. al. *Oxford Handbook of Public Health Practice*. OUP. 2003.

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