

**THE ETHICS OF NEEDS ASSESSMENTS IN DISASTER SITUATIONS:
ENSURING THAT YOUR NEEDS ASSESSMENTS INTERVENTIONS DO NOT CAUSE HARM**

For the Consultant/Advisor

- Do check with other agencies whether they have conducted a needs assessment on the same topic and where they have done so.
- If a number of similar needs assessments have been done in the same area, ask yourself the following questions:
 - Is it completely necessary to do another similar needs assessment on the same topic in the same area?
 - How does this needs assessment differ from or build on the ones that have been done before?
 - Are we targeting a group of people not covered in the previous needs assessment?
- Encourage the organisation for which you are working to share their assessment reports with other agencies and individuals as soon as possible.
- One way of making information accessible is to complete the form attached at the back and send it to the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies. This way, people will know where to find information about ongoing needs assessments.
- Ask yourself and others involved in the same technical field, whether the conceptual framework you are using in the assessment is contextually and culturally appropriate and sensitive.
- Do set up an information security system by which personal information of participants and any identification details are kept secure and confidential. The system should include a time frame for how long this information will be kept, who will have access to the data and why, and who will be responsible for destroying the information after the relevant timeframe.
- In designing the needs assessment, make sure there are opportunities for rapport building, and for ending the needs assessment interaction in a supportive manner.
- With any question or activity included in the needs assessment, ask yourself the following questions:
 - What information am I hoping to get out of this, and how will that be useful?
 - Is this a question or activity that may distress someone further? If so, should I keep it, and why?
 - How does this question or activity relate to the direct mandate of this organisation? Will this information help them/us to design the appropriate interventions?
 - Have I left enough space for people to set their own priorities or state their own experiences? Or am I working on the common assumptions about what is happening at field level?
- Stress that those who design and carry out needs assessments are responsible for creating the information and therefore, are culpable for any misuse or abuse of the information subsequently. Instil a sense of responsibility for the ethical handling of information amongst the organisational staff.
- Do make sure that the staff of the organisation at management, district and field level are aware of the concepts of '**informed consent**' and '**confidentiality**'.
- As far as possible, avoid lengthy questionnaires.

For the Manager/Supervisor

- Do make sure that the people who you employ to carry out the needs assessments know the following information:
 - Objectives of the needs assessments
 - Expected outcome of the needs assessments
 - How the information will be used
 - Who will be processing the information (not names but designations)
 - The contact details of the people responsible for the needs assessment (including names and designations)

- Do make sure that you say the following to those implementing the needs assessment.
 - 'It is important that people are not forced to participate in this needs assessment. Let them know they have the right to refuse to participate or give information. This is OK.'
 - 'If it is an inconvenient time for people, you can set another time and come back to interview them. Your expenses for this will be covered.'
 - 'If people are uncomfortable with any one question or activity, it is OK that they do not answer it. Get the information that they would like to give.'
 - Clarify with people whether you have accurate information. Do not believe that you know what they need or want to tell you. .
 - 'Don't get quantity over quality. Obviously, this is urgent, but it is better to have accurate information.'

- Do make sure that the people who are selected to carry out the needs assessment are supported themselves. Give them the following information.
 - They may experience some distress themselves whilst carrying out the needs assessment because of the stories they have to listen to or because they have to witness the damage left by the tsunami. This is normal.
 - They may feel irritated or angry with people who refuse, or who make requests for other more convenient times. This is normal, but they have to keep in mind that the purpose of the needs assessment is to help people. Therefore, they should respect the wishes of the people.
 - They may feel helpless when people cry, are upset or angry because of what has happened as a result of the tsunami. They may have to listen in a caring manner to people having such emotions, but they do not have to 'make things better' for people. Respecting people and showing concern may be all they can do at this moment.

- Do let those who are carrying out the needs assessment know whom to call, if they encounter any situations where they need clarifications on how to proceed or if they have any questions or concerns about what is happening at field level.

- Do provide any documentation that the field-level workers will need for identification purposes. This may include a letter from the organisation, describing the nature of work for which the person is employed, and whom to call at the office for further clarifications. This may be particularly important in situations where security is a concern.

- Where possible, ensure that you bring the attention of relevant authorities or agencies to the concerns and difficulties of participants in the needs assessments.

For the Field-Level Worker

- Do make sure people are properly informed. Provide the following information to people before carrying out the needs assessment.
 - Your name
 - The name of the organisation conducting the needs assessment
 - Objective of the needs assessment, including which sector it falls into (livelihoods, psychosocial, medical, etc)
 - How much time the activity/survey will take
 - What kind of activity/survey it is (there are 20 questions; we will be drawing a map, etc.)
 - What will or will not happen as a result of the needs assessment
 - How will the information from the needs assessment be used
 - Who are the people who will see and/or use the information
 - Contact details of the organisation conducting the needs assessment, including the name of a contact person

- Do not inconvenience people. They may already have many important things to do. Ask them the following questions and respect their answers.
 - Would you like to contribute to this type of needs assessment?
 - Is this a convenient time? If not, what would be a convenient time?
 - Do you have adequate time to spare?

- Do not force people to participate. They may not want to talk about some of their experiences and events. Remind them that they can let you know at any time
 - If they do not want to answer any question
 - If they do not want to participate in any of the activities
 - If they feel they have something to add to the question/activity that was not covered
 - If they want to delete any of the answers they have given previously

- Do learn about some of the available services in the area, including names of service providers and contact details. This may come in handy if you meet someone having a particular difficulty.

- Do keep notes of the difficulties people share with you that are not covered in the needs assessment/survey, including in which area these difficulties seem to be present. This can then be shared with or given to the organisation conducting the needs assessment.

- Do not make promises you cannot keep. They may lose trust in people and organisations if you do not keep the promises you make. Say to them 'sadly, I am not in a position to do that for you'. This is better than saying 'I will see what I can do'.

- Do thank them for their time and for sharing their experiences with you. Let them know that the information will be useful in designing interventions for different people, even if it does not help them directly.

Form for Assessments

Title of assessment, including which sectors it covers

Shortly describe how the assessment will be done

Which geographical areas will the assessment(s) cover?

What is the sample size of this assessment?

Who is/are the targeted group/s?

When is the assessment report expected?

Where can one find a copy of the assessment?

Name and contact details of the organisation funding the assessment

Name and contact details of organisation implementing the assessment

Name and contact details of main person in charge of the assessment