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## Participatory basic needs assessment with the internally displaced using well being ranking

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### • Introduction

This paper reports on a study by the International Childcare Trust (ICT) that took place in 1994, after the disturbances in the early 1990s in Trans-Nzoia, Western Kenya. A total of 2,944 households participated in an exercise that took just over one month. It had two objectives: firstly, to develop a methodology that allowed displaced people to develop their own strategies for rehabilitation; and secondly, to identify appropriate interventions for agencies to work in a co-ordinated, genuine partnership with communities.

The methodology adapts well being ranking to undertake participatory needs assessment with displaced people. This approach showed that there were distinct rehabilitation strategies amongst the displaced, depending on their current access to land and the gender of the head of household. This highlighted the importance of disaggregating data from apparently homogenous camps of displaced people and recognising the social categories within them.

### History

With the political turmoil of 1991, certain regions of Kenya started to experience sporadic ethnic clashes. These were widespread in the Rift Valley and Western provinces. The disturbances have their roots in the conflict between alleged pre-colonial tribal boundaries and post-colonial private land tenure, with some tribes claiming traditional ownership of large tracts of what are now private farms. One of the results of these clashes was the displacement of individuals

from their land for prolonged periods or, in some cases, permanently.

Repeated clashes over a period of two years, caused large scale movements of people into camps, followed by a drift back home by those whose land had not been taken over. Initially emergency relief was provided at the camps, but gradually ICT realised there was a range of different circumstances among the clash affected communities. Some needed assistance in restarting their farms, whilst others needed to find alternative means of supporting themselves. It was clear that any 'blanket approach to aid' would be poorly targeted. Furthermore, other NGOs were becoming involved and the collective assistance needed to be appropriately directed and co-ordinated.

### • Needs assessment during conflict

Conducting a needs assessment exercise where conflict is sporadic and recurrent causes specific difficulties. In particular, the speed of the assessment is of great importance. This enables a quick response to the findings, but also maximises the periods during which there is sufficient security for staff to work in the field.

During conflicts, communities are in a vulnerable state of shock; their traditional systems of support have been disrupted and in many cases their livelihood systems lost. They can easily become dependent on relief. It is important to 'kick start' their coping strategies through encouraging them to identify, by themselves, appropriate resources and skills to rebuild their lives. Yet with a more traditional approach to needs assessment, external agencies identify the appropriate interventions

for rehabilitation. This can reinforce the dependency created during the provision of emergency relief.

Due to the nature of this type of unrest, trust is lost between neighbouring communities. So as not to aggravate the conflict, it is essential that the exercise is conducted openly and equitably between the groups. Also, where possible, the exercise should contribute to the management of conflict. Thus, a participatory assessment was chosen so that groups knew what details were being given about each other. This enabled them to reach consensus amongst themselves about what action should be taken and who were the vulnerable groups that needed prioritisation.

### Why participatory well being ranking?

Tools used in planning for relief work, such as the UNHCR's Framework for People Orientated Planning in Refugee Situations (Williams, Seed & Mwau, 1994) or the Capability and Vulnerabilities Analysis (Anderson & Woodrow, 1989) are improvements on traditional socio-economic surveys because they highlight differential access and control over resources and benefits between men and women. They also use a broad definition of resources, including protection and social organisation.

However, due to their complexity, these tools are likely to be used by external agencies, rather than allowing the communities to assess themselves. Thus, whilst they may highlight areas of strength that can be used in regaining self-sufficiency, the communities will not decide this for themselves and thus will not gain a sense of control from the analysis.

Well being ranking usually involves a few key individuals ranking the households in their community using locally selected criteria. Here it was adapted to form the basis of longer discussions on rehabilitation strategies and to involve members from all households. It was chosen because it enables households to define the criteria for basic needs assessment including the factors and resources which contribute to their livelihood systems. This information is then analysed as a group, which allows them to identify their strengths and weaknesses. The strengths form the basis for

opportunities to change their situation, whilst the weaknesses are areas to be minimised. The group then ranks the households in terms of vulnerability. This discussion gives extra information about the household that might otherwise be overlooked. This was especially important for culturally sensitive information, such as disabled individuals, alcoholism and traditions relating to differential resource access.

The openness of the discussion often led to the management of conflict by, and between, the participating households. Furthermore, as the households themselves targeted the interventions of outside agencies, potential conflict due to the selective provision of aid was minimised.

### • Methodology

The first day was spent training the teams in the PRA approach and in the adapted well being methodology. Three teams of two people were trained, one person to act as facilitator of the discussion and the other to note the key information. The individuals most successful with this approach were those that felt comfortable with the communities. Whilst the extrovert team members were often entertaining, the quieter approach generally provided more detailed information.

Women were targeted because they are often responsible for the provision of food and other basic needs to the household. Thus, they are able to report on the intra-household allocation of resources. This may have caused a bias in underestimating the income provided by the men. However, that which is earned but not spent on the household, was not considered to contribute to household food security.

Eight to twenty household representatives were brought together with two field staff (usually including a woman). People were asked to come from a particular neighbourhood; sometimes it represented just one ethnic group, but it was often mixed, although the conflict had made the neighbourhoods a little more homogenous. The households themselves decided upon the representative to attend, although women were specifically asked to come, as they are generally the providers for household

dependants. Due to the tradition that men have their own houses on the family farm, households were considered as a shared hearth. If there were dependants in that household (children, disabled or elderly relatives), they were eligible for relief and therefore, to take part in the needs assessment. Where a household did not have an adult woman, a man was chosen to represent the household's interests. Only households with dependants were considered in the exercise.

First household details were gathered, such as the names of those in their household, their ages (to assist with the provision of clothing etc.) and their relief card number (if they were already on the agency's books). One field officer then led a discussion on key topics covering the basic needs and resources of the households. Table 1 shows the main topics covered and the common issues arising from their discussion.

As each participant related their situation, one field officer noted the details for the NGO's records, whilst the other assisted in making a visual representation in front of them.<sup>1</sup> For example, if a household owned 1 acre, this would be represented by an appropriately sized clod of earth near the participant. If, however, the land owned was 2 acres, one of which was rented, one clod would be placed near and another at a distance to show the insecurity of tenure. Similarly, the numbers of people in the household able to provide an income would be represented by, for example, a corn cob. If, however, one did not actually contribute to the household, the cob would be moved away from the participant. The visualisation created discussions that outlined complexities in household dynamics that might have been obscured in more traditional data collection.

With a physical representation of their livelihood system in front of them, the participants were asked to rank the households in terms of their well being, starting with the least secure household. This led to discussions on what made a household secure and what

coping strategies were most appropriate to their new circumstances. Sensitive issues, such as alcoholism, domestic violence and disabilities were frequently mentioned at this point as this explained why one household was worse off than another when they had similar access to resources. Cultural causes of insecurity were also highlighted, such as the elderly living with relatives who would not have the right to bury them or women staying where they had no access to, or no control of, household resources. These hidden dynamics are often of great importance in deciding a household's resilience, but frequently fail to emerge from more traditional methods of needs assessment.

The issues were discussed as a group as it was in this forum that a better understanding of conflict issues took place. The exercise lasted about 3 or 4 hours. Using 4 teams of people, the exercise was repeated with other small groups until all households had been consulted. Groups were kept small to ensure that each person was able to contribute to group discussions and also to minimise demands on people's time. The complete survey, providing information on what support families needed and their existing coping strategies, was completed within one month.

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<sup>1</sup> The informants did the visual representation themselves, but were assisted by the field officer in making the coding on the graphic uniform to the group, thereby enabling a comparison with others' experiences to be made.

**Table 1: Key topics discussed during interviews**

Topic	Issues
Land	Gender differentiated access, control and labour. Land titles, debt, political security. Loss of access to building materials.
Recent Harvest	Household food security. Lack of seeds, draught power and inputs. Labour requirements. Gender differentiated control of marketing.
Livestock	Cattle rustling. Small livestock diseases. Lack of draught power. Falling soil fertility.
Off Farm Incomes	Available skills. Lack of, or loss of access to, materials. Lack of markets. Seasonality of farm labour. Gender differentiated wages.
Education	Costs. Insecurity of household. Reduced incomes.
Local Groups and Social Networks	Skills. Insecurity of household (post trauma psychology). Group strategies. Traditional savings co-operatives.
Water & sanitation.	Vandalism. Time spent. Loss of containers. Loss of access.
Illness & Health Care	Lack of access. Lack of medicines. Increasing disease with poor housing and lower incomes (for soap and for nutrition).

## BOX 1

**TWO EXAMPLES OF WELL BEING RANKING**

Mrs. Matumbe has 4 children and her elderly parents staying with her; 2 children go to school. Her husband is a teacher, who has a second family where he works in town. He sends some money occasionally. Her eldest child is now old enough to work, but can only find work as a labourer. She trades in vegetables when she produces any surplus. She owns 1 hectare but has not received the title yet. She managed to harvest 3 bags of maize (270 kg) and 70kg of beans, but had to sell half to pay off school fees and other debts. She could produce more if she had enough seed (her granary was burnt in the clashes). She is part of a woman's group who work together in trading and with a savings co-operative, but they lost their stock, and now only sell vegetables so their profits are small.

Mrs. Kitui lives with her parents-in-law, who allow her and her husband to use 0.5 ha. They both work as labourers when they can, but her husband often drinks the days' earnings. She is interested in business, but has too little surplus to join a woman's group. Only 1 of her 5 young children attends school. She harvested a sack and a half of maize (135kg), the rest was eaten green from the fields. She managed better with the beans, getting 60kg of good quality beans, much of which she will use as a seed for a second harvest - which may give her enough to sell for school fees.

## • Results

The exercise developed a partnership between the communities and ICT, promoting appropriate, well targeted interventions. Furthermore, it allowed communities to begin to repair the damage caused by conflict and to identify areas where group activities would be more effective than individual action. This raised people's confidence in re-establishing livelihood systems (see Box 1).

At the end of the exercise, ICT had a wealth of detailed information on each household in the clash affected area, as well as proposed rehabilitation strategies for the communities and sectors where outside assistance would be of greatest value. These formed the basis for

'community summaries'<sup>2</sup>.that were also available to other NGOs, allowing swift, community directed, focused and well targeted intervention.

It became clear that the apparently homogeneous groups into which the communities had formed themselves, were in fact heterogeneous. Some of the permanently displaced groups had acquired access to land through renting or relatives. On the farms, where the majority had returned to their land, lived displaced families. Post conflict, the

<sup>2</sup> Community summaries are 1-2 page briefings of critical issues, including areas in which the communities had decided to take action (such as reforming groups) and areas for which they had requested assistance, such as access to health posts or support in reprotecting springs.

main focus of the households had been to secure access to land, even though many had no hoe or seeds.

In terms of rehabilitation for the displaced, it became clear that women and men had distinct skills. Women were more interested in trading and cottage industries and thus needed materials. Men were in need of specific tools for more formal skills, such as mechanics. Those with common skills and interests formed groups and co-operatives and pooled their resources.

### • Value of the participatory approach

Due to the speed of the exercise, it was possible to implement some projects within weeks of the discussions, for example, the 1 acre Growers Package (supplying a hoe, maize, sorghum/millet, vegetable and bean seeds and fertiliser for 1 acre) was provided to those communities with access to land. As the interventions had been directed by the communities, the limited funding was well targeted and appropriate, with gender differentiated assistance where necessary. Institutions for managing common resources were formed, reducing the need for externally negotiated group formation.

Participation meant that the discussions were inclusive and open. Individuals were unable to exaggerate their need, instead they became aware of others in greater need. The participatory nature of the discussions also contributed to the revitalisation of the community through raised awareness of under exploited or non traditional skills and resources. Traditional community activities that had been disrupted through the disturbances were evaluated and, where appropriate, restarted. These were particularly important for the female headed households

that had relied on traditional savings co-operatives to accumulate capital. Income generating activities were initiated through pooling of skills and resources. It also became clear from the discussions that participating in group activities was not a possibility for the least secure households, who could neither contribute labour nor resources. In some cases these most vulnerable members of society, were given additional support.

Neighbours that had been in conflict due to their different tribal origins became aware of the common effects of the disturbances and their shared needs. In many cases it was a matter of great surprise to the 'attacked' tribal groups that the 'aggressors' were the worst off in the group discussion. This process of reconciliation had started through having to queue together for relief food - but through discussion became more openly acknowledged, leading to the first stages of resolution.

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