

Accessing information

Identifying and evaluating participants' strategies and resources for accessing information.

WHY?

Information is a valuable resource, and lack of access to it is an important element of people's poverty. In order to tackle marginalisation and misinformation, participants need to identify which types of information they have access to, which information sources are available, useful or reliable and any barriers to accessing such sources. That analysis can then form the basis for strategies and action points for better information and communication, and reducing marginalisation.

WHEN?

This section builds on the work done from previous sections looking at the value of information and the differing importance and impact of information from different sources.

HOW?

In this section, groups will need to identify the types of media they use to convey and receive information, the reliability, control and accessibility of these, potential resources which are not accessed and the reasons for this, and possible means to improve communication practices.

Media matrix: Different types of communications media and technology are relevant for different activities and in different circumstances. A first exercise might be for a group to use a matrix tool to list all the types of media and tools that they know of and use in relation to different types of communication. They could show different types of communication - spoken, written, images and numbers - across the top; and different processes - capture, store, share and retrieve - along the side to bring out all the different tools and media they use for each function (i.e. rhyme, tape recorder to capture the spoken word, television to share images etc). A sample matrix is shown below covering some of the main media that the UK coordinator (Hannah) uses.

	Written	Spoken	Images	Numbers
Capture				
Store				
Share				
Retrieve				

Sample media matrix – Hannah

... control of communications media: It is important at this stage for groups to examine power issues and the control of communication and information resources. The matrix could be further divided by gender and where appropriate age to show issues of control over different types of media and technology. Each box should be filled in according to what women use and what men use, and where appropriate what boys and girls can or can't use. This will bring out discussion of who has control over different media and equipment or who has the time and skills to access information in different ways.

... analysing accessibility: Once the matrix has been completed, separate lists of tools and media can be drawn from it - for men and for women (and if appropriate for girls and for boys). Groups can then work together to rank each item on each list for usefulness and accessibility. This will encourage discussion of accessibility issues such as the roles of language, literacy, physical accessibility, ease of use, efficiency etc. It will also enable investigation, with a strong gender element, of the types of tools and media people don't use and the reasons why.



Who can access new information and communication technologies?

Building on existing roles: The obstacles to accessing good information resources, and disadvantages of particular tools, have begun to be identified in the previous exercise. Based on this discussion, the group can look at potential ways of overcoming such barriers, whether language, distance, cost or literacy. One way to structure such a discussion might be to map out community resources which can help to overcome such obstacles – perhaps teachers or facilitators who speak English; traders who travel regularly to nearby towns where internet kiosks are located; community radio stations etc. In this way, using a map or systems diagram, alternative means of access can be identified and action points established.