

Why Do a Needs Assessment?

People often ignore recommendations because the recommendations are not suitable, not profitable or too risky. A good needs assessment helps you develop a relevant program (which helps you deliver a better service and product to your clientele and helps with your Performance appraisal)

What are the Basic Steps of A Needs Assessment?

A good needs assessment understands the actual needs and circumstances of the target group; resulting in recommendations that are more relevant to people’s resources and circumstances.

Considerations:

1. **Audience.** Identify areas and groups representative of your zone of work and your target audiences.
2. **Collect secondary data** such as demographic information and social issues. For Ag, compare crop or animal requirements with factors such as topography, rainfall and soils.
3. **Key stakeholders.** Map out (simple network analysis) who is active and key in the area. Ask them about needs, work-to-date and opportunities.
4. **Plan the assessment.** Identify who will help with the survey or meetings (include researchers, extension and target group members). Consider formal and informal approaches.
5. **Visit** the field and/or community and talk with your audience members: Use participatory methods to see what they perceive as problems. Visit sites to diagnose problems (e.g., In Ag, talk about production, postharvest, marketing and price issues, etc.).
6. **Prioritize problems.** Use site observations and input from discussions to assess and prioritize problems (What offers the best return? How many people are affected? What is the cost in terms of lost yield or profit? etc.). Allow the different groups to prioritize differently. See note below on “Perceptions versus reality”.
7. **Identify the true cause of problems.** Viable solutions depend on correctly identifying the true cause of the problem. For example, a problem of field water could be caused by poor land leveling rather than water availability.
8. **Develop solutions with your audience.** Your target group need to accept proposed solutions. Discuss options with them and see how possible solutions might (or might not) fit with their systems.



Good Needs assessment build off people’s realities, their interests and needs to result in more appropriate solutions.

“Perceptions versus reality”: Sometimes, a factor may be perceived as a problem when it is actually not a problem. Further, people may not be aware of a problem or they may identify the wrong cause of a problem. Knowing their perceptions is important as this represents their “reality”. The following table summarizes these factors and shows the appropriate response to each.

	Person perceives a problem	Person does not perceive a problem
Factor “really” is a Problem	OK – Jointly look for solutions	Raise awareness, then discuss
Factor is not “really” a problem	Help change understanding	OK – no action required.