

TOOLSEVEN

CHOOSING THE PROBLEM OR FOCUS AREA/S TO WORK ON



What needs to be in place before you use this tool:

You need to have already worked on the risk factors, and identified problem or focal areas. It is helpful to have identified which organisations and institutions are active in which fields in the community, their potentials and expertise, as well as opportunities for co-operation. If a study has been conducted, then the information will be shared among the participants, so that all existing information can be taken into account.



Objective:

To specify which of the problem areas (that is sometimes also called focus areas) should form the target of the measures to be planned.

Aspects of Data Collection/Analysis:

Problem or focus areas and related aspects, potential boundary partners and their expertise, potential for co-operation.



Material needed:

Flipchart paper, markers with different colours, glue dots with different colours if available, or beans of different colours.



Preparation:

Prepare a matrix on a flipchart like the one shown below (leave the cells for later evaluation empty). Ensure that the participants have all relevant information with regard to an analysis of organisations or institutions working in the area. Participants would have information about organisations' as well as their expertise and capacities.



Procedure:

The participants will form a collective decision by means of (1) a discussion, followed by (2) a decision-making process. In preparation, it is important to determine how many problem areas will be addressed - and for how many problem areas it is possible and realistic to plan measures.

To keep the planning process and the project manageable, a good number is between one and three. If you are developing a safety plan, there might be more than three areas, if enough organisations and institutions will be implementing the measures.

This tool is part of:

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1. The discussion should deal with the following questions for each of the problem areas identified in previous steps. (We also call each of the questions (a) to (d) the criteria that we are using in our process of making decisions):
 - (a) How urgent is the need for action in this problem area?
 - (b) How realistic are the chances of achieving long-term social change in this problem area by using appropriate measures?
 - (c) What *expertise* and *potential for achieving results* do prospective implementing organisations possess for this problem area?
 - (d) What are the prospects for co-operation?

As facilitator you will lead the group to ask these questions in relation to each problem area. Note key conclusions for each focus area on flipcharts.

By asking these questions, you will decide which problem areas the group wants to work on (when starting to plan measures). If participants cannot reach agreement, you can go on to 2. below.

2. If no consensus is achieved during the discussion, a decision-making process should be started. For a prioritisation of problem areas, consider the above-mentioned criteria. Additional criteria may have arisen from the discussion and can be added. The criteria are inserted in a matrix. Now, every participant receives three glue dots per criterion and focus area. If you have three focus areas you need three different colours. With three criteria, every participant receives 9 glue dots in green, 9 in black and 9 in red. With four criteria, every participant receives 12 glue dots in green, 12 in black and 12 in red.



Task 1:

Assess each focus area according to each of the shown criteria, and award between 0 and 3 points (dots) for each criterion and focus area.

0 dots means: not urgent, not realistic, no expertise and capacity, no potential for co-operation

3 dots mean: very urgent, completely realistic, much expertise and capacity, high potential for co-operation.

As facilitator you can point at one of the cells in the matrix and give an example.

The figure shows a fairly complicated example. Focus area 1 is seen as the most urgent. But participants think there is little prospect of achieving long-lasting changes in this area, and the expertise and capacity of potential partners is still low. This might lead to the conclusion to not favour this area. = Participants see focus area 2 as more urgent than area 3, but in area 3 there is more expertise, and the possible implementing organisations have a higher capacity.

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As facilitator you can point to the matrix below and discuss it as an example.

Once the participants have finished posting their dots, you ask the participants to have another look at the results. Check what conclusions can be drawn, and facilitate the final decision-making.

**Task 2:**

All these insights facilitate a second, shorter discussion round. If again a decision cannot be made, then every participant receives another three glue dots. Participants must allocate these to the focus areas (overall). They can put their dots around the words Focus Area 1, Focus Area 2 or Focus Area 3 on the matrix.



Figure 9: Matrix for Selection of Focus Areas

You have received three glue dots. Please award them directly to the focus areas. If you favour one area specifically, you may allocate all three dots to that area. You may also award two dots to one area, and one dot to another area, leaving the rest without dots.

After a final count, the decision is made according to the total points awarded.

**Observations:**

In deciding whether to work in one, two, three or more focus areas, it is good to keep in mind that it's often better to put quality before quantity, meaning it's often better to complete one or two projects successfully than to finish five without major impact, or start five and not finish them.

**End Product:**

By the end of the exercise, the objective, namely "To specify which of the problem areas should form the target of the measures to be planned," would have been achieved.

In the process of achieving the objective, participants have:

- Based on discussion and the use of clear criteria, selected one or more focus areas for subsequent planning work.

