

# Maps



To present local information, problems and opportunities in a clear, visual way.

A basic map of a local area can be overlaid with information on any pertinent local issue, such as natural resources, public services, sources of livelihoods, or land use. Maps can be developed to show changes over the years, and to anticipate changes or expectations for the future.

## Steps in the process

1. The group may wish to begin the exercise by taking a walk around the area to note key features they wish to represent and analyse.
2. Initially, a map should be created on a large scale on the floor or any large surface, so that all participants can actively contribute and clearly see what is going on.
3. The first things to be put down should create a basic framework for the space. The community centre or college where the group meets could be used as a starting point, for example. Important features such as main roads and public buildings help people to orient themselves and therefore participate more actively.
4. Many different materials can be used to represent the various elements on the map. These could be anything that is easily available and easy to move, such as sticks, stones, etc. The meanings of the symbols should be selected and agreed upon by the whole group. Movable objects are crucial, as everyone needs to be able to go back, change and add elements as the map develops. Less assertive participants find this particularly helpful.
5. Once all the physical things relevant to the purpose of the map are in place, more qualitative judgements can be considered, for example to indicate

positive or negative perceptions of what is represented. Participants may choose to highlight their favourite places on a map or indicate problem areas.

6. Then the group can reflect on the map as a whole, drawing out insights or conclusions to stimulate discussion. The completed map often enables people to see issues or phenomena in a new light - as they are removed from daily reality whilst simultaneously gaining new perspectives of it.
7. In some cases the "real" map may then be used as a starting point for developing an "ideal" or "visioning" map, showing future changes, whether practical and achievable, or idealistic and visionary. In some cases such maps can become practical planning tools.
8. For the map to be recorded on paper or card, participants need to identify pictures, symbols or words with which to label key elements on the map. Once down on paper, participants may wish to make their own, smaller copies.

## Suggestions for use

- A household or **social map** can be used to identify all the dwellings in a community, the number of people in each house and other relevant information depending on the aim of the group. For example, if the focus is on the right to education it would be appropriate to find out exactly how many girls and boys are living in each dwelling, their ages, whether they are going to school, whether they have any special needs that might impact their access to education, etc. If the focus is on disaster preparedness the group would want to look at the building materials used for each dwelling, their location in relation to rivers that are likely to flood, etc. See Reflect Mother Manual, p. 89-90.
- A **human resources map** could be developed on the basis of the household map, identifying everyone in the community who has a particular skill or expertise, such as herbalist, traditional birth attendant, bee keeper, builder or carpenter, for example. The discussion might focus on how people developed these skills and how the skills might be passed on to others, for example. See Reflect Mother Manual, p. 218-219.
- Maps can be used with groups of women, young people and children to plot safe and unsafe places in the community. For example, children and youth can be asked to draw a map of their local community, highlighting key landmarks and important buildings and places. They can then draw

smiley faces next to the places or areas where they feel safe, and unhappy faces next to those areas where they do not feel secure. The findings can be used to minimise risks in programming. See [urban safety map](#).

- A map could be used to identify public services that are available and accessible to young people. After the mapping, they ask the group of young people for suggestions for services that youth need to access but cannot. As a next step you could collect these suggestions and use them to develop an 'ideal map', which highlights all the services youths should have access to. This 'ideal map' can be used to guide advocacy or campaign activities relating to young people's access to public services. See [public services map](#).
- A map could be used to explore **opportunities for work** in the area, including full time employment, day labouring, business, trading, etc. See p. 220 Reflect Mother Manual.
- A **communications map** could be used to analyse where in the community people access information. How is that information available (notice board, newspaper, word of mouth, radio, etc.)? Does everybody in the community have equal access to that information?

## Related tools

- [Community power map](#)
- [Ideal future map](#)
- [Mobility map](#)
- [Natural resources map](#)
- [Public services map](#)
- [Social map](#)
- [Urban safety map](#)

## References

- Communication & Power, ActionAid International, 2003.
- [Reflect Mother Manual](#), ActionAid International, 1996.