

# Pairwise ranking matrix



To compare a set of issues and find out which is the most important to participants. Known as a pairwise or preference ranking matrix.

## Steps in the process

1. Ask participants to select five or six issues/concerns/desired changes etc. from those emerging from their previous mapping exercises and discussions. Ask participants to write the same issues on new cards twice or to select objects that can represent each of the issues (e.g a pencil for education).
2. Ask participants to construct a matrix on the ground, using string or other available materials, or to draw a matrix on large paper.
3. Ask participants to give the matrix headings, by placing one set of cards or objects along the top of the matrix. They then place the second set of cards with the same headings and in the same order down the left-hand side of the matrix.
4. Ask participants to discuss, through comparison, which problems are more important and why. First ask e.g. “can we compare drugs with drugs”. We cannot compare two things that are the same, so ask participants to put a line through the box, using a stick or piece of string or marking a big cross. They can also the put a line through boxes that are repeated (e.g. land/education, education/land) so that half of the boxes in the matrix will be crossed out, as in the image above.
5. Now ask participants to compare two different things, e.g. drugs and HIV and AIDS. Encourage them to discuss the two issues (or desired changes etc.) and give reasons for why one is more of a problem/priority than the

other is. Make sure that someone is taking notes of the reasons given - the discussions around the creation of a tool are just as important as the tool itself.

6. Once participants have finished discussing the two issues and have agreed which one is more of a problem/priority than the other, ask them to write the selected problem/priority on a piece of card and place it in the matrix.
7. Continue in this way until participants have compared all the different issues.
8. When the matrix is complete, ask participants to count how many times each issue/concern etc. appears in the matrix (not including the matrix headings). The issue/concern that appears the most is the one of most priority, the one with the 2nd highest score is the next level of priority and so on.

## Suggestions for use

- A pairwise ranking matrix could be used to prioritise a particular **rights issue** to focus on when starting work in an LRP.
- A **pairwise ranking of crops** could be carried out to compare the advantages of different crops. Participants list the major crops grown in the community (perhaps drawing from the [agricultural map](#) or [calendar](#)) and place cards representing each crop along the top and left hand sides of a matrix. Following the steps outlined above, they then compare each pair of crops indicating which one they prefer and giving a positive reason for each preference. To deepen the analysis a separate matrix can be created with the names of each crop across the top and the preference criteria that emerged down the left hand side. The participants can then give a score for each crop based on the criteria. See Reflect Mother Manual, p. 141-145.
- A **pairwise ranking of illnesses** could be carried out to compare the severity of different illnesses. Participants list the major illnesses that affect people in the community (perhaps drawing from the [health calendar](#) or matrix) and place cards representing each illness along the top and left hand sides of a matrix. Following the steps outlined above, they then compare the illnesses indicating which one is most severe and giving a reason for their decision. It may be necessary to have two columns for each illness to indicate a mild or severe case (a severe case of malaria is worse than mild diarrhoea but a severe case of diarrhoea can be just as dangerous as malaria). See Reflect Mother Manual, p. 182-183.

# References

- Communication & Power, ActionAid, 2003.
- [Reflect Mother Manual](#), ActionAid International, 1996, p. 141-145, 182-183.