

Contents

Needs Assessment

5.1	Introduction	81
5.2	Objectives	81
5.3	Importance of Needs Assessment.....	81
5.4	Felt Needs vs Unfelt Needs.....	82
5.5	Needs Assessment Procedure	82
5.6	Needs Assessment Model	82
5.7	Needs Assessment Methods	85
5.8	Activities	90
5.9	Self-Assessment Exercises.....	90

5.1 Introduction

Needs assessment is one of the critical and basic step in extension programme development. The whole extension programme consequently is build upon this step. It can be regarded as a process of establishing 'where are people' before starting extension programme. It also serves as bench-mark. This unit exclusively focuses on clarifying the concept of needs assessment, its importance, various techniques used for this purpose and their applicability. At the end, certain activities are also suggested for the students to perform the task of needs assessment practically.

5.2 Objectives

After studying this unit, students will be able to:

1. conduct needs assessment as and when required.
2. identify and prioritize the needs of a farming community.
3. describe the necessity to prioritize needs.
4. describe different techniques to be used for needs assessment.

5.3 Importance of Needs Assessment

The significance of needs assessment is well established and this step can not be overlooked in building a realistic extension programme. Because, planning can not be and should not be left entirely to guess, hunches and views of experts. An extension worker must understand that there is no short cut to this step and it is a right thing to do. The determining-gap between the existing situation and the desired set of circumstances is called as need assessment and provides justification for extension programme development. Hence, extension worker must have necessary knowledge and skills for assessing the needs of his target clientele.

5.4 Felt needs vs Unfelt Needs

Before discussing the techniques of needs assessment, it looks better to clarify the concept of need. Generally, need is regarded as the problems, wants, aspirations, interest and wishes of the people. In development literature, the term need is defined as a discrepancy between "what is" and "what should be". The term 'what is' represent "the current state of affairs" in a farming locality and 'what should be' is the "desired situation". Needs can be classified into two categories:

5.4.1 Felt Needs

Those needs which are recognized by the clientele themselves are called felt needs.

5.4.2 Un-felt Needs

Those needs which are not recognized by the clientele themselves are called unfelt needs. But these need may be as much important as felt needs.

5.5. Needs Assessment Procedure

Extension personnel involved in extension programming must assess the needs of farmers in a systematic way. It is a process of establishing that who needs what. A model for needs assessment developed by Gajanayake and Gajanayake (1993) is presented below for the benefit of the extension workers. As the figure 5.1 indicates, this model consists of 4 steps as follows:

5.5.1 Identification of Needs

According to this model, identification of needs is the first step toward needs assessment. Identification of needs be done with the maximum involvement of farmers. Let them speak. Needs must emerge with the articulation of ideas presented by the farmers. A number of techniques can be employed for the

identification of needs. It must be remembered that selection of technique or a combination of techniques has to be guided by the contextual factors in a particular farming community. One of the techniques—as an example— for identifying needs of the farmers is presented in the following lines:

Suppose, an extension worker is required to identify the needs of the farmers concerning cotton crop. It is suggested that he may proceed for identification of needs of cotton growers in his area as follows:

Prepare two charts/posters separately. One chart/poster showing cotton crop in excellent condition while others should exhibit poor cotton crop. Visit a village along with the charts/posters. Cotton growers be gathered at some common place. Display the chart/poster showing cotton crop in excellent condition. Ask questions to the participants, what they see in the picture. Then, display the second chart/poster and ask questions what they see in the picture and encourage them to point out reasons for poor crop and suggest what should be done to improve it. Ask the participants to write down individually as many suggestions as possible. Then, divide participants into the group of five and instruct them to share their individual list and prepare a group list including the most important ideas. Repetitions should be deleted and ideas could be modified or reworked to reach a consensus. Get a spokesman from each group to present its list. Time may be allowed for discussion. When all lists are presented, then prepare a master list. This list shows the needs of the cotton growers as identified by them.

5.5.2 Prioritization of Needs

Prioritization of needs is second step in needs assessment. A number of methods or techniques can be used for ranking the needs of the farmers. One of the method which can be employed for this purpose is presented in the following lines. Let us

continue with our last example of cotton crop. After the preparation of master list of needs for cotton growing, multiply its copies and distribute it to the participants. Make sure that each and every participant gets a copy of it. Ask the participants to review the master list individually and select the items which he considers important for getting good crop of cotton by putting a cross (X) against that item (i.e. need). Then, again ask participants to go through the list and put check mark against the most important items amongst the ones already selected by him. Make it clear to the participants that a cross mark (X) is equal to one score and check mark (✓) is equal to 10 scores. Again ask participants to write down their score against each item in the list. Then, record the needs score on the needs prioritizing sheet by asking each participant one by one for each item in the list. At the completion of this process, calculate the total score to get the group score for each need statement. The items receiving highest score are the needs receiving highest priority.

5.5.3 Leveling of Needs

Levelling of needs is a process to reach a consensus or compromise on needs through the discussion and negotiations between the target group and Govt. officials. Needs assessment is a joint function of local people and the representatives of the Govt.(the extension worker) or officials of sponsoring agencies. Govt. officials have their own agenda and they are supposed to follow the Govt. policies. Situation may arise that what the Govt. official(s) perceive important for the farmers may not be considered important by the local representatives of the farming community. In this particular situation, if the views of the local people are not listened and incorporated in the plans, then there is high probability that people would not cooperate with the extension worker. Hence, leveling of needs is essential to promote legitimacy and ownership for the extension programme in the farming community.

5.5.4 Deciding on what Needs to be Addressed

Again, it is a joint decision taken by all those in the process of needs assessment. It is a mutual agreement between farmers and the extension worker, regarding the pressing needs of the community which needs immediate action.

5.6 Needs assessment Model

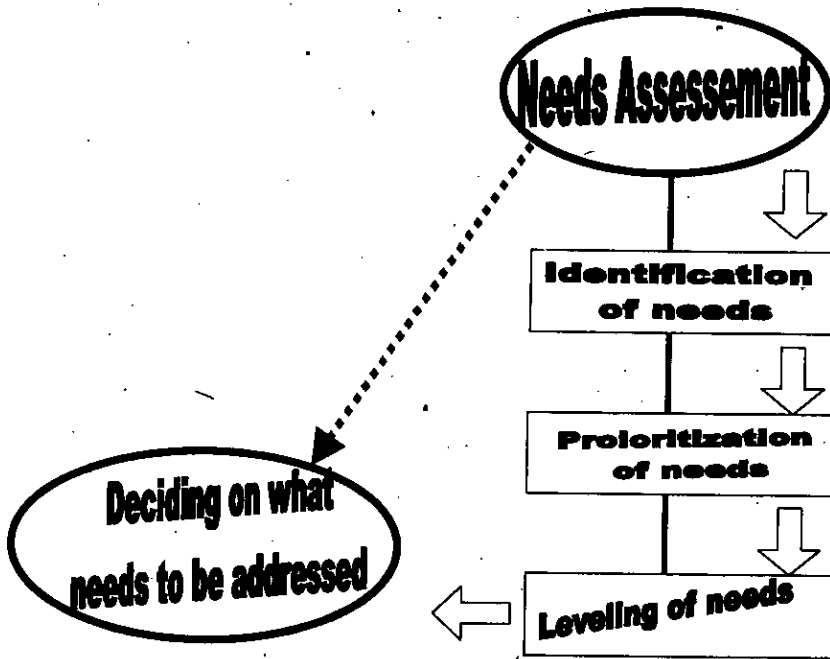


Figure 5.1 need assessment model adopted from Gajanayake and Gajanayake (1993, p.41)

5.7 Needs Assessment Methods

There are a number of techniques which can be used for needs assessment. The methods of obtaining evidence must be appropriate to the kinds of information being collected. Questions must be worded carefully to obtain reliable unbiased data. A pre-test of questionnaire is most desirable. A brief review of these techniques is presented in this section.

5.7.1 Mail Questionnaire

The evaluator develops a questionnaire. It is then field tested for its validity and reliability. Then after this it is mailed to the members of the selected sample along with a self addressed stamped envelop. It has the advantage of being a reasonably responsive method of data collection. However, it has the disadvantage that questions may not be understood as there is no opportunity to explain theme, returns are fewer, and follow-up is necessary. It is impracticable in situations where people are illiterate or where mail service is unreliable.

5.7.2 Face to Face Individual Interviews

The evaluator develops an interview scheduled. It is then field tested for its validity and reliability. Interviews are conducted in individual settings. This method allows the evaluator/interviewer to explain the questions and to keep the interest of the respondents for a considerable period of time. Reasons for resistance may be discovered and overcome. The personal contact offers the interviewer many opportunities to establish friendly relations, observe personal reactions, and to secure fairly complete answers. However, it has got the disadvantage that it is relatively expensive, and the interviewer's bias may become a part of collected information.

5.7.3 Telephone Interviews

In this method the evaluator/interviewer interviews respondents through telephone. In advanced countries the use of telephone in interview studies has greatly increased in recent years. It has many advantages. Subjects from a much broad population can be selected. It is relatively less expensive method. However, it has many disadvantages such as many people do not have telephone facilities. Limited information may be found through telephones.

5.7.4 Nominal Group Process

Nominal Group technique is a process, which helps a group identify problems and solutions and establishes priorities. Generally, the group brainstorms and then votes to decide which issue has the greatest priority. This technique is most commonly used for problem identification, solution exploration, and priority setting. Following is the procedure to be adopted for the application of nominal group process for assessing the needs of the farmers:

- Assemble a group of farmers willing to participate.
- Ask each farmer to prepare a list of his own ideas considering the fore hand problem.
- Prepare a master list incorporating all the ideas of the participants one at a time.
- Clarify the items on the master list.
- Each participant is supposed to select 5 items from the master list with out discussion.
- Each participant ranks 5 items and accords score points (i.e. 5 for first, 4 for second, 3 for third, 2 for 4th and 1 for fifth).
- Each participant 'votes' or accords value points for each items on the master list.
- Needs/problems/solution receiving most scores are discussed.

5.7.5 Focus Group Interviews

A focus group interview is an interview with a small group – of people on specific topic. The participants are generally a homogeneous group of 6-8 people who are asked to reflect the questions asked by the interviewer. They hear each other's responses and make additional comments. The focus in this interview is getting high-quality data in a social context when people can consider their own views in the content of the views of others. Focus group interviews are considered very

efficient qualitative data collection technique.

5.7.6 Participatory Appraisal Techniques

It is a set of participatory and largely visual techniques for assessing, identifying and prioritizing the problems faced by a group of people or farming community and appraising strategies for solving these problems.

Participatory appraisal techniques are relatively new technique which are used for the assessing the needs of the farmers. Following are some of the characteristics of participatory appraisal techniques:

- Participatory appraisal techniques encourage farmers participation at every step of programme development right from needs assessment to implementation and evaluation.
- One of the key features of these techniques is that the information is presented in highly visual form using pictures, symbols, etc.
- The data thus collected is displayed. All members are free to comment on it. They can also criticize it to revise it. It also helps in cross-checking and verifying the collected information

There are many techniques which can be used for participatory appraisal. Some of the most commonly used techniques are a follows:

5.7.6.1 Participatory mapping

As the name indicate participants are supposed to create or develop a map— resource map, social map, etc.- to be used for assessing needs of the participants/farmers. Participants are asked to :

- create a wall or ground map with group participation. Members should do the marking, drawing and coloring with a minimum of interference and instructions by the extension personnel,

- use pencils, pens, or local materials and members should be asked to draw maps that depict/ illustrate certain things. Each group member is then asked to hold a 'stick' to explain the map or to criticize it or revise it.

5.7.6.2 Matrices

These are grid formats used to illustrate links between different activities or factors. They are useful in information gathering and analysis. An example is 'problem –solving matrices' where a series of problems affecting a group of farmers are placed on the vertical axis and their possible causes placed on the horizontal axis. This technique is especially useful for identifying and prioritizing problems, etc.

5.7.6.3 Venn Diagrams

A diagram drawn by a group of farmers to pin point the farming problems being faced by them. They may be asked to draw a circle representing a particular crop and other circles to represent the problems related to that particular crop. The distance between the circles indicates the strength of links between the problems and their size denotes the relative importance of the problem.

5.7.7 Key-Informant Interview

This is a kind of ethnographic data collection technique. The key informants are people having special knowledge or perceptions that are not otherwise available to the evaluator. They have generally more knowledge, better communication skills, or perspectives different from other people.

5.7.8 Observation

The method requires keen observation and then describing the evaluation object. The purpose of observational data is to describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place in that setting, the people who participated in those

activities, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspective of those observed. It has the advantage that the first hand information may be obtained through these methods. The disadvantage is that it requires sufficient amount of time and money to train observers.

5.8. Activities

Situation

You are assigned the task to plan an extension education programme for the uplift of the farmers of your own village. Keeping in view the situation, perform the activities given below:

1. Keeping in view the situation above, develop an interview schedule to identify the needs of the small farmers in the situation. Interview at least 15 small farmers. Then, identify and priorities their needs using Likert Scale technique.

2. Considering activity no. 1, do the following:

- **Select the most important problem as identified by the farmers.**
.....

- **Suggest alternatives for solution.**
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.....
.....
.....

- **Select the best possible solution in consultation with the stakeholders.**
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5.9 Self-assessment Exercises

1. What do you understand by the term needs assessment? Enlist various methods used for conducting needs assessment.

2. Describe how would you identify and prioritize the needs of your clients?

3. Discuss how would you ensure the maximum involvement of local people in the process of needs assessment?
4. Discuss the importance of needs assessment for extension programme development.
5. Define and distinguish between the following:
 - a). Interview schedule Vs. mail questionnaire
 - b). Key informant interview Vs. focus group interview
 - c). Nominal group process Vs. Observation
 - d). Participatory mapping Vs. Venn diagram

