



# Practitioner's Guide:

## Activity Mapping



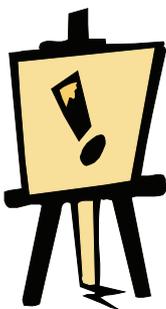
Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Technische Zusammenarbeit  
(GTZ) GmbH



Bundesministerium für  
wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit  
und Entwicklung

# Activity Mapping

### Brief Description



Targeting of project funds often starts with the question: **Where does a new project have the most impact?**

In a world with a multitude of state, donor and non-governmental organizations implementing projects, the picture is often unclear, where and how much activities are carried in a location or the entire country.

Activity mapping is a quick and feasible way to identify gaps in the coverage of services by inventorying all stakeholders' activities and locating them geographically. The mapping exercise gives all organizations a clearer picture of where work is being done, and where demands for services or support are still remaining.

Depending on the given situation and resources, a grid can be developed, which collects information on predefined series of activities, their implementing agencies, their target groups, their outreach coverage and their time frame. The definition of fields of activity and the planning level that is referred to determines the precision and resolution of the results. Additional parameters can quantify the intensity of the activities.

Results of the analysis can be used to target activities based on the questions:

- ▶ Which areas are mostly underdeveloped or least supported by development projects' or government services?
- ▶ Which (project) staff has to be (re-) allocated into another area to provide better services to the people?
- ▶ How is the coverage of services in respect to the number of beneficiaries, family income, indicators reflecting the seriousness of a problem, etc.

If data can be assigned to administrative units, GIS or mapping tools (e.g. a simple web mapper) can visualize the survey results in maps.

An important outcome for this exercise is, that a complex project landscape can be easily grasped through maps produced according to specified activities in the predefined grid.

This can lead to a fruitful discussion among stakeholders thus promoting further cooperation and coordination. Once stakeholders cooperate, resources can be used more efficiently. This method helps stakeholders to align to an overall objective, while not duplicating each others efforts.

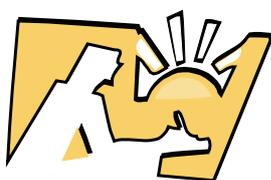
### Activity Mapping

#### Proposed Main Users

International, Governmental and non-governmental development agencies, line ministries in charge of development issues.



#### Purpose of the Method



Targeting and planning of activities and services starts with the question: Where is the highest demand or where can we reach the most people? Activity Mapping is an approach to take quickly the right decision or choose the right area with optimal ignorance. When major and minor players in a selected scope of activities have been identified, their geographical outreach is inventoried in order to identify gaps and target future development activities. Furthermore, the entire development community working in one area has the opportunity to identify its own service portfolio, its coverage as well as overlaps with other related organizations and institutions. This transparency helps all stakeholders to discuss their current/future role showing the overall picture. Future activities and projects can focus more optimized on sharing and complementing work and can create an atmosphere of discussions and dialogue, where often competition amongst development organizations/institutions is perceived as a driving force. As a result, an ongoing development dialogue can be triggered by this activity mapping exercise.

The inventory is merely a snapshot of ongoing development activities. The quality of information on coverage depends on the pre-defined activities and their quality standards, in case they can be defined. Finally, results of inventoried activities can be processed and visualized and set into relation to demographic, social or economic parameters.

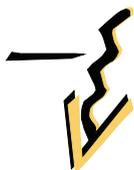
# Activity Mapping

## Advantages



- ▶ In many developing countries, information is scarce, many organizations collect data and information individually. Few agencies have a clear picture of an overall nationwide or regional situation, or what the neighboring organizations are implementing.
- ▶ While many NGOs and sub-national government departments work in smaller administrative sub units, the national government is often working parallel to development organizations. The mapping of activities gives a clear picture of gaps and overlaps of activities.
- ▶ Visualizing all activities by mapping and correlation or arithmetic combination leads to a clearer understanding of demands, linkages to other problems and targeting the right areas.
- ▶ Timely disclosure of the results from the mapping exercise supports a platform dialogue and planning of joint or complementing activities. A web mapping tool can be suitable to quickly publish the results of the activity coverage and help to maintain the confidence of all organizations providing information.
- ▶ This mapping tool can be used to quickly measure the progress of service coverage and prioritizing target areas, if the results are compared to a previous baseline survey using the same methodology.

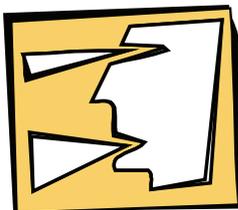
## Limitations



- ▶ There has to be a clear definition on which problems and issues are mapped, and on the level of administrative boundaries being used to identify activities. It is important, that all stakeholders of this exercise can agree on a set of terms and definitions.
- ▶ It is difficult to identify all stakeholders, organizations and development workers within a limited period of time. Therefore, it is important to inform the major stakeholders at an early time in order to ensure a rather comprehensive picture of the exercise.
- ▶ Not all staff of all organizations has a sound knowledge of geographic units. A unique naming is not given on all planning levels and for all administrative units. This can have an influence on the result.
- ▶ Since projects life spans are often scheduled for a certain time frame, it is impossible to use the result of such a mapping exercise for a long period of time. Therefore this mapping can be an exercise initiating a dialogue, by doing a snapshot of current ongoing activities.
- ▶ A heterogeneous group of organisations has different definitions of services and activities provided. The quality of service coverage can only be defined if certain minimum standards for providing service can be agreed upon. Only when an ongoing dialogue between development organisations has established quality standards, an assessment of quality can be achieved.

# Activity Mapping

### Principles & General Procedures



### Step 1: Definition of the Research Question

At the beginning of the Activity Mapping Exercise, an organization plans to start a project in order to improve a situation. It focuses, on which activities are planned to target and what kind of information is required to target those services or activities in order to achieve an optimum impact.

Planned activities are reflecting the solution to problems perceived in the targeted area. Baseline surveys have identified a number of projects and have given clues to the reasons, why the problems still exist and what are the basic activities that would improve the current situation.

Additionally, many development organizations and projects are currently combating part of the problem, often knowing only partially what other related organizations are doing at the same time. That is where activity mapping starts to clarify existing activities and services.

The questions are:

**What do I want to do?** and

**What do I need to know to quickly achieve my goal with great impact?**

### Step 2: Identification of existing information and a grid of subjects to explore

In many cases, a lot of information is already available, but not always easily accessible. Background information is always important to understand the problem of a developing issue. In order to thoroughly understand particular details of an issue within a limited time frame, basic thematic areas have to be defined, in which problems are currently tackled by a number of organizations. These thematic areas do not yet state which activities are currently ongoing in order to solve these problems. The "Problem Tree" methodology can be helpful to identify core causes for an existing problem or deficit. As a result, a list of core issues to be inventoried and discussed has to be developed.

Table 1: List of Core Issues

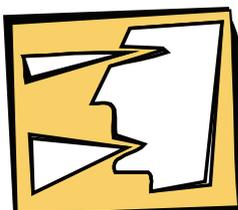
Core Issue/Problem:

1. Problem 1
2. Problem 2
3. Problem 3

Problems defined in a broad scope, can be for example: "Insufficient Water supply", "Too many traffic accidents", "Families' incomes are insecure", or "High rate of Domestic Violence"

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### Step 3: Define a grid of activities that are commonly applied to tackle the identified core issues

A list of target activities / services to improve the core issues in a previously defined area has to be developed, using simplified and broad terms in order to allow all contributing organizations and service providers to find their activity in a predefined grid. This is the crucial step that determines the quality of the result.

Table 2: Core Issues and Activities

| 1. Core Issue 1   | 2. Core Issue 2   | 3. Core Issue 3   |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Activity 1.1</li> <li>▶ Activity 1.2</li> <li>▶ ...</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Activity 2.1</li> <li>▶ ...</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ ...</li> </ul> |

Two extremes of defining a grid of activities should be considered:

- ▶ Activities are too detailed and specific, no organisation can identify its activities in the predefined grid.
- ▶ Activities are outlined too broad and generalised: almost every organisation says it is carrying out a particular activity. The resulting information is useless, as the quality of activities is too heterogeneous.

There is a trade-off between high details of defined activities and the number of responses to be expected. In case development institutions have agreed to apply quality standards before an exercise, the minimum quality standard of an activity can be defined.

Additionally, it is important, that the language of described activities is broadened to the point that all participants have a joint understanding of the activities and their contents. Development Organizations often tend to develop their own language, therefore a grid of activity has to be often checked with the wording of other organizations or institutions.



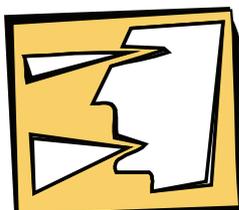
### Step 4: Identify the planning level, on which activities are carried out

Geographical areas have to be identified, in which the provision of activities and services will be located. All organizations will be asked, how many activities/services they provide in which geographical unit. Depending on the size of survey, there is a trade-off between too detailed geographic units like villages or communes (which development organizations often do not keep track of), and too broad geographic units (e.g. provinces or national states).

Additionally, it has to be identified, if inventoried activities can be only counted in numbers or also quantified (e.g.. in person months, or number of beneficiaries, number of workshops, etc.)

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### Step 5: Identify the target organizations to be invited for an activity mapping exercise / workshop

All relevant organizations working in the particular field of interest or related fields have to be invited for the activity mapping exercise / workshop or have to be involved by sending them a questionnaire. It often ends up in a mix both ways to approaches due to unavailability of one or another participant. Questionnaires can be better filled when there is room for discussing questions not reflected by a questionnaire, and a better atmosphere for cooperation and trust can be created in a workshop that integrated activity mapping as one component.

If the results can be immediately visualized (e.g. with a web mapping tool), discussions can lead to further questions:

- ▶ which strengths does each organization have?
- ▶ which problems are not (yet) resolved?
- ▶ how much overlap exists between organizations in terms of content and geographic extent?
- ▶ how can organizations have a better impact in the future by complementing each other, instead of competing with each other?
- ▶ how can the quality of service provision be improved or even quality standards defined?

### Step 6: Develop and pretest a questionnaire

A series of questionnaires has to be developed, showing each a pre-defined target activity and listing the number of geographic units, where the activity is carried out. This questionnaire will be handed to every organization in order to identify their service coverage. If the services are quantified by numbers, an explanation should be give to which number should be filled. For qualitative surveys, a check box is sufficient to see, whether the organization is active on a selected activity in a particular area.

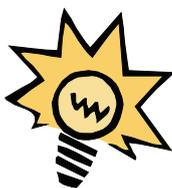


Figure 1: Simplified Activity Mapping Questionnaire

Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Core Issue 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Activity 1.1 : \_\_\_\_\_

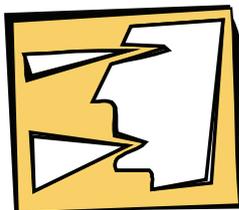
Carried out in (Tic Check box, or Unit \_\_\_\_\_):

District 1 \_\_\_\_, District 2 \_\_\_\_, District 3 \_\_\_\_, District 4 \_\_\_\_....

The questionnaire requires a pretest with a heterogeneous selection of representatives from various organisations in order to make sure the questionnaire is well understood and does not consume too much time. Additional information demands can be discussed and integrated.

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### Step 7: Activity Mapping Workshop: Data collection

Collection of data can be best done in a workshop, that brings the representatives from all organizations working on the core issues together. Besides introduction to the workshop participants, presentations, exchange of experiences, and discussions, the workshop explains the activity mapping exercise methodology, its expected results and limitations. In order to collect an amount of data which reflects the current situation, it is highly important, that representatives from organizations carrying out a high number of activities and services are available.

Finally, questionnaires will be handed out to locate and identify activities from all organizations. Instructions are given, how to fill the form, and the organizers provide personal assistance.

### Step 8: Data processing and -analysis

All questionnaires will be entered in a database in order to calculate the absolute coverage of organizations and identify their overlaps and coverage. As all information was collected in reference to geographic units, the database must contain a geographic identifier (e.g. a code for the district), in order to be able to map the coverage of activities and services accordingly.

Summarizing statistics and maps can now be developed, that can show the geographic coverage of the sum active organizations working for a particular target activity / service, or even summarize the coverage according to a core issue. Additionally, each organization can map their own coverage, and identify overlaps with related organizations. This contributes towards harmonization of donor activities.

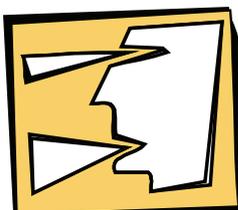
Additionally, the coverages can be correlated with all kinds of socioeconomic or demographic statistical data in order to address questions:

- ▶ How is the provision of services / activities according to the distribution of the population?
- ▶ How is the provision of services / activities according to the extend of the observed problems?
- ▶ How is the balance of different aspects within one core issue?
- ▶ Which areas are neglected and why?

If data has been collected according to quantitative surveys, a quantitative analysis can give more detail on the current situation.

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### Step 9: Visualization and redistribution of results

A huge number of maps can be processed and produced with the information acquired in the activity mapping exercise:

Table 3: Qualitative and quantitative Mapping Surveys

|  | Qualitative Survey  | Quantitative Survey   |
|--|---|---|
| Question:  | Result for each geographic unit:  |   |
| Which coverage density do all organizations have in a particular core issue?         | Number of all activities/ services provided by all organizations clustered by a core issue. | Sum of quantitative coverage as defined, e.g.: #staff, #workshops, #beneficiaries |
| Which coverage density do all organisations have in a particular activity / service? | Number of all organizations active in a particular service or activity.                     | Sum of quantitative coverage as defined, e.g.: #staff, #workshops, #beneficiaries |
| Which coverage does a single organization have in a particular activity / service?   | Coverage: Yes or No   | Quantitative coverage as defined, e.g.: #staff, #workshops, #beneficiaries        |
| Gaps and overlaps between organizations?   | Can be determined, if they exist.   | Can be quantified   |
| Relation to other socio-economic data?   | Example: #active organizations per household  | Example: # of workshops per household   |

Statistics and maps by this activity mapping survey are a good starting point to plan and target future activities and services. A wide range of Information products can be developed from the mapping activity. It is important to feed back all collected information to all organizations that contributed the information as soon as possible, in order to maintain the atmosphere of dialogue and discussion, instead of merely exploiting the contributors of information as a competing actor. In order to speed up this process, the use of Information Technology can support to shorten the time between data acquisition and analysis of the results. Tools like web mapping databases can help to keep the database open and transparent to all users.

### Step 10: Discussion of Results / Policy Making

Finally, results will be discussed with all organizations interested in maintaining a dialogue for donor harmonization as well as with counterparts involved in planning future activities. At this point in time, it is useful to jointly develop a coherent policy / donor strategy and a strategic action plan to:

- ▶ avoid overlaps,
- ▶ reach full coverage of activities / services,
- ▶ complement each other more efficiently, and to
- ▶ define quality standards

in the future.

# Activity Mapping

### References and Sources Used



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